AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

WRITING THE REVOLUTION:
EGYPT AND THE STORY OF TAHRIR

by
DEEMA AHMAD NASSER

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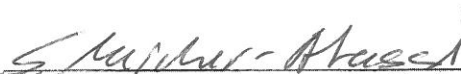at the American University of Beirut
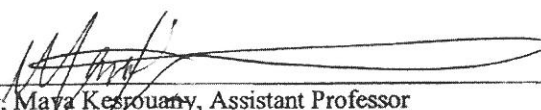
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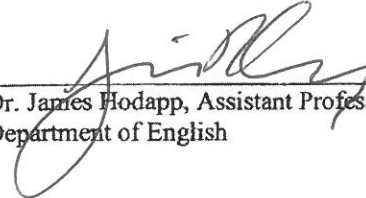January 2016

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It is because of professors like Dr. Atassi, Dr. Kesrouany, Dr. Hodapp and the host of wonderful faculty members at AUB's English department that the humanities still has a fighting chance in our world today.

But the reaches of the mind are invariably cut short without the sustenance of the heart. No matter how far my intellectual endeavors may take me, they will always be indebted to the unfailing love and support of my family – my mother, father, sister, and brother. They are the life source from which I draw the strength to walk into the world each day with firmer footsteps than the day before. I thank God for giving me such understanding and giving parents and such driven siblings to learn from. It is the sole objective of my life to make them proud.

This past year has been particularly challenging and momentous. Its beginning was marked by two journeys that unfolded along parallel lines: my venture into the world of Egypt and its revolutionary past coinciding with my grandfather's difficult battle with cancer. At year's end, I found myself with a thesis written but without a loving grandfather. I cannot measure in words the depth of his courage, the gravity of his acceptance, and the unwavering faith he held on to throughout the battle for his life, but I am humbled by the force with which he charged on till the very end. And so, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my grandfather whose valiant passing has changed my life forever.

CONTENTS

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Deema Ahmad Nasser   for   Master of Arts
                               Major: English Literature

Title: Writing the Revolution: Egypt and the Story of Tahrir

This thesis interrogates three works of modern and contemporary Egyptian literature on revolution to validate the field's need for a nuanced reading method, one that celebrates close reading for cultural specificity in an attempt to challenge politically and culturally reductive readings of Egyptian narratives in a world-literary context.

"Popular intellectuals" have responded to the 2011 uprisings in Egypt across various genres; their local-global reception verifies that modern Egyptian writing retains culturally-specific voices. This study highlights cultural nuances in contemporary Egyptian literary texts from three genres – Naguib Mahfouz's novel *Awlad haratina* (1959; translated in 1996; republished in 2011), Magdy el-Shafee's graphic novel *Metro: A Story of Cairo* (2008; translated in 2012), and Ahdaf Soueif's memoir *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution* (2012) – by evaluating their representations of revolution through narrative voice and heteroglossia; situating them as narratives of resistance to ideologies of social injustice; and challenging simplified global readings of these local texts circulating in translation.

With the assistance of Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981) ideology of form, this study uncovers a resistance ideology carried by each text's representations of polyphony and heteroglossia in a pre-revolution context. The term heteroglossia, coined by Mikhail Bakhtin, is expanded beyond the novel to delineate a text's ability to include rather than stifle voices of dissent. The more heteroglossic a literary text is, the more representative of revolution it thus becomes.

The purpose of conducting this study is to ascertain which, if any, of the aforementioned genres better represents popular revolt, a phenomenon that demands free and uninhibited speech as well as resistance to forms of intellectual and physical state oppression. By doing so, these texts move towards a culture of voice and visibility in modern-day Egypt, and assert themselves as literary forms of local activism in a globalized context of translation and circulation.

ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Writing the Revolution: Voice and Visibility in Egyptian Narratives

*"No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which
the far greater part of the members are poor and
miserable."*
--- Adam Smith[1]

*"Once again we are witnessing the 'empire' painting the
picture of the 'fringe' and within this fringe the subaltern –
'the fringe of the fringe' – are being outcast."*
--- Rabab el-Mahdi

"Will the Arab Spring in Egypt be the dawn of a new age?" This and similar questions

about the "end of postcolonialism" in Egypt and other Arab nations have been raised by

writers, literary critics, cultural theorists, and political analysts since the first wave of

popular protests erupted in December 2010 in Tunisia. Few have stopped to uncover signs

of revolution and counter-revolution in literature and questioned the so-called

unprecedented nature of revolution in the 21st century. Before delving into 21st-century

Egyptian literature, however, it is crucial to locate symptoms of voice and revolution

throughout the long and transformative history of Arabic prose narrative in Egypt for it

posits what Caroline Rooney in "Egyptian Literary Culture and Egyptian Modernity:

Introduction" (2011) and Rita Sakr in *Anticipating the 2011 Arab Uprisings: Revolutionary*

Literatures and Political Geographies (2013) both deem is a prospective role played by

intellectuals qua writers through narratives that are imbibed with revolutionary language.

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[1] Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) as quoted by Hamid Dabashi in *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (2012), 53.

Drawing parallels between past revolutions and the recent moment of social transformation in Egypt can prove fruitful in terms of tracing nationalist legacies and patterns of postcolonial revolutionary thought. However, it is also necessary to shed light on the specificities that distinguish the different popular uprisings in order to engender a discourse that defies the wealth of Orientalist knowledge production by North American, Western European, and Israeli propaganda, which is predicated on a reductionist paradigm of categories and terms iterated to no end for over half a century to make the Arab and Muslim world seem inherently backward, vile, violent and incompetent – an economy of knowledge production also known as postcolonialism as Hamid Dabashi explains in *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (2012; 25-26). In other words, the circumstances that once governed anticolonial struggle in Egypt against British occupation at the turn of the 20th century, manifesting in the nationalist revolutions of 1919 and 1952, are certainly not the same as those which determined the people's demands for bread, freedom, and social justice in 2011.

In order to avoid what Muhsin al-Musawi calls "fossilized colonial referentiality" in post-independence rhetoric in *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* (2003), we must recognize the historicity of postcolonial and more contemporary Egyptian narratives, but we must also transcend this historicization and situate them in the more recent context of world literature, especially in relation to the continuous translation and circulation of older narratives in the new century (49-50). As David Damrosch has observed in *How to Read World Literature* (2009), world literature is often thought of in terms of literary works that reach readers beyond national literary borders through the mediation of translation into foreign languages as well as their widespread dissemination

by circulation. In other words, it is the phenomenon of a literary work making a voyage out into the world whether or not its writer had intentionally adopted an international mode of writing. However, literary worldliness is also achieved when a work makes a voyage into and an impact on its own literary culture as writers incorporate styles and forms of writing from other literary cultures into their own works, not to imitate foreign models, but to expand the horizons of their local literary culture, as Damrosch elaborates in his 2011 article "World Literature as Alternative Discourse" (316). While the notion of a globally circulating text can conjure up utopian perceptions of its free and borderless outreach enabled by the forces of globalization and transcultural contact, we must be alert to the fact that the emergence of world literature occurred as part of Euro-imperial expansion in the 18th century and today involves "an unequal process of [cultural] appropriation" as Aamir Mufti argues in "Erich Auerbach and the Death and Life of World Literature" (*The Routledge Companion to World Literature* 75). It is precisely these forces of colonialism, globalization, and neoliberal capitalism which have enabled literatures to overcome their national borders that simultaneously compromise the very notion of freedom, cultural inclusiveness, and equality in the exposure and transcendence of voice across world literary texts.

This literary and cultural "exchange" is very much a reality in the Egyptian literary sphere today, which, in turn, is involved in the dynamics among a variety of local, regional, and global factors. Between literary globalization, neoliberalism, revolution, and online social media platforms, new and unexpected spaces for sociopolitical expression have been created and harnessed by young and previously unknown writers who have emerged through generically experimental works to raise the voices of ordinary people in their

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narratives. This is the context in which two contemporary Egyptian narratives are discussed

at length in this study: the pioneering Egyptian graphic narrative *Metro: A Story of Cairo*

written by Magdy el-Shafee (2008; translated, 2012) and the political memoir *Cairo: My

City, Our Revolution* written by Ahdaf Soueif (2012). The surge in "newer" forms and

media of literary expression has imposed new ways of retroactive reading and seeing on

more traditional novels produced in 20th century Egypt, which arguably draws a

postcolonial narrative from the past into the present as is shown in the analysis of Naguib

Mahfouz's allegorical novel *Awlad haratina* (1959; translated as *Children of the Alley*,

1996). We need to embrace and interrogate these transformations in writing, reading, and

representation if we are to critically partake in the debate on whether the postcolonial has

come to an end in the second decade of the 21st century, as Dabashi argues, or if we are still

dealing with its deceptive "lingering legacies," as Robert Young points out in his 2012

article "Postcolonial Remains" (21).

      One of the fundamental questions this study deals with is that of voice and its

representation in narrativized form as heteroglossia and dialogism, terms Mikhail Bakhtin

uses in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981), to denote the heterogeneous variety

and interaction of individual voices within a text and the layers of culturally-specific voices

that operate simultaneously within the diegetic world of the narrative (264). Although

Bakhtin bases his theory of voice and dialogism almost exclusively on the form of the

novel, the Western model at that, I aim to extract the essential meaning of heteroglossia and

study its applicability not only to the novel, but also to other literary genres that

contemporary Egyptian writers have turned to, namely the memoir and the graphic

narrative. Reading for the existence or inexistence of heteroglossia in these genres and

forms of writing will expose the limits of postcolonial representation and evince a turn

towards highlighting local culture as a vehicle of resisting global hegemonic tendencies to

assimilate works of world literature into universal grand-narratives. Voice, in turn, as Nick

Couldry explains in *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism* (2010), is

a consequence of whether or not subjects are allowed to give account of themselves, speak

for themselves, tell stories, provide narratives that build on one another and above all, are

heard. The question of voice – whether it is present, threatened, or silenced altogether – is

critical especially in light of neoliberalism's repressive mode of operation.[2] Though it may

not seem to be an apparent universal problem, the guise of freedom of expression that so-

called democratic societies provide masks the underlying "*crisis* of voice, across political,

economic, and cultural domains, that has been growing [on a global scale] for at least three

decades" (Couldry 1; emphasis original). What Couldry calls a "culture of neoliberalism" is

epitomized by an institutionalized hegemonic rationality and a market-oriented functioning

that essentially take no account of voice and force national economies the world over to

succumb to global market forces, creating great inequality among and within countries and

undermining cultural complexities that confront the normalization of neoliberal doctrines

(5-10).

In Egypt, neoliberal discourse began rearing its head in the aftermath of the

nation's defeat in the 1967 June War against Israel, which gradually dismantled the

revolutionary socialist regime that Gamal Abdel Nasser had instigated after the 1952

revolution, making way for Anwar al-Sadat's pro-American government which culminated

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[2] Couldry explains at length the repressive ways in which neoliberalism operates to favor the global centers of political power and economic wealth by way of disenfranchising a faceless labor force made up of minority groups and postcolonial nations.

in the 1978-9 Camp David Accords as well as the *infitah* (open-door) economic policies in the early 1980s. Contemporary Egyptian society still lives with the longlisted repercussions of this sociopolitical organization, namely with the inflation of the population's majority living in (mid to high) poverty, unemployment, a lack of education, and the economically taxing multinational corporations in metropolitan areas, as opposed to the extreme wealth of an upper class that is in alliance with the regime. Voices of protest have risen in anger against the status quo time and again since the late 1970s in the street and in narrative form, climaxing in the latest series of uprisings in 2011-2013. This study, therefore, interrogates narrativized representations of resistance to domestic (despotic Egyptian *ancien regime*) and global (neoliberal and capitalist) forms of oppression through revolution. Going beyond Couldry's assessment of voices marginalized by neoliberal discourse, however, the analysis of the first work in this study – Mahfouz's *Children of the Alley* – will reveal that even regimes before neoliberalism in Egypt (namely, Abdel Nasser's) operated by silencing and threatening voices that resist. This study also aims to interrogate the role of Egyptian literature across the aforementioned genres as instances that resist the formal dictates of genre, but also liberate oppressed voices through textual representations of revolution, an event in which disenfranchised subjects become once again visible, or as Alain Badiou in *The Rebirth of History* (2012) calls it a restitution of existence to the inexistent – returning voice to the silenced (56).

Fashioning a nuanced model out of the visceral, on-the-ground popular movements which have been a staple of modern Egyptian history, requires a definition of revolution, one which is informed by a negotiation between Western leftist theory, Egyptian and Arab intellectuals, the Egyptian street, as well as the literary works

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themselves. Modernity has conditioned man into whole-heartedly believing the myth of novelty and putting faith in what appears to rupture the teleological grand-narrative of History in a late capitalist world. Hannah Arendt's historical and philosophical text *On Revolution* (1963), considered foundational among Western theories of revolt, studies modern revolution with particular emphasis on two watershed moments in the 18th century – the American (1776) and French (1789) Revolutions. Arendt claims that novelty and singularity, notions often attached to perceptions of revolution, were never the driving force that propelled revolution (46). In fact, most revolutions were meant to re-establish previous modes of government rather than bring about an unprecedented change in political life: "The revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which to us appear to show all evidence of a new spirit, the spirit of the modern age, were intended to be restorations" (43). Revolutionaries are not necessarily champions of deliberate newness and calculated radical change in political life; they are merely popular agents and activists who realize they have arrived at an impasse with the forces of oppression weighing down on them from above, and that they are at a point of no return (41). The Western model of revolution posited by Arendt might help illuminate the anticolonial struggle and historical victory of Abdel Nasser's sweeping socialist revolution from a postcolonial standpoint, but it clashes with the way in which the leaderless and web-mediated revolution in 2011 unfolded, which further highlights the importance of attending to the voices of the revolutionaries in narrative form.

While Arendt attributes the birth of modern revolution as we now know it to the aftermath of the First World War – and wars in general – I would like to point out that while it did change the course of history in the Arab world irrevocably, WWI makes more

of an adequate foundation for evaluating Western revolts. When it comes to Arab nations,

Egypt in particular, the post-war French and British colonial mandates in the Arab world

(Sykes-Picot Agreement), which nevertheless are the geopolitical repercussions of WWI,

along with the emergence of the state of Israel in 1948, the nationalist sensation post-1952,

and the Arab defeat (*hazimah*) in 1967, are all equally pertinent turning points that have

informed the literary and political expressions of revolution in Egypt. While some general

history is shared among postcolonial Arab nations, each has its own distinct and

multivalent narrative of nationalism, popular revolt, and uprising. In Egypt, there is a

language of *tahrir* (liberation) that Sakr claims spans decades of resistance to different

forms of neo-imperial and authoritarian exploitation:

> At this moment of huge historical energy and uncertainty in the Arab world, it
> seems too early to expect a "literature of the revolution" that would be a mature
> product of the 2011-13 events to emerge in the near future. (19)

What we do have, however, is a corpus of Egyptian literary texts that unravel years of

injustice and popular discontent, with origins in the late-19th and early-20th-century *Nahda*

narratives of nationalism and anticolonial resistance (usually and misleadingly translated by

Orientalists as an Arab Renaissance intellectual movement that gave birth to Arab

Modernity which problematically ruptures Arab history into a pre-modern era and an

enlightenment-seeking era),[3] that arguably precipitate or imaginatively envision the change

manifested in the 2011 uprisings. The result is a renewed critical interest in the relationship

between Egyptian, more generally Arabic, literature and revolution.

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[3] For more details on the works and influence of *Nahdawi* intellectuals in Egypt and the rest of the Arab
world, like Muhammad Husayn Haykal, Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, and Muhammad 'Abduh, consult Richard
Jacquemond's *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt* (2003; translated, 2008)
or Musawi's *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel*.

For this reason, when interrogating the novelty of the uprisings in Tahrir Square, which began on January 25, 2011 and lasted for 18 days, we need to locate the agency to self-liberate, self-represent, and resist among Egyptian subjects, but not be so hasty as to presume their presence in reality and narrative form signifies the end of the postcolonial, as is manifested by political waves of Islam challenging the West's economy of postcolonial knowledge production about Egypt and yet insisting on remaining within the postcolonial society from which they have organically sprung. It is also necessary, as I have already mentioned, to distinguish between the historical materialist circumstances under which Egypt's earlier revolutions took place and the age of late capitalism, digital new media, and political participation in which the Tahrir Revolution came about in January 2011.[4] We need to utilize Arendt's theory as a foundation, but move beyond it by factoring in the specificities and idiosyncrasies that characterize Egyptian culture and society, the young revolutionaries or *shabab*, and their demands for liberation from Mubarak's authoritarian regime. Using the organic, leaderless, and cross-class nature of the Tahrir Revolution as paradigmatic of a "new" revolution challenges Arendt's critique of modern revolutions as inherently doomed to failure since the lines of communication between the social and political spheres are severed, and the significance of people creating a communal public space for self-expression is undervalued.

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[4] In *An Introduction to Arabic Literature* (2000), Roger Allen details a comprehensive history of several Arab nations' popular nationalist uprisings against the colonization policies of the mandate powers represented by the Sykes-Picot agreement after World War I. Egypt has a long history of nationalist movements against foreign powers of intervention and occupation. The 'Urabi Revolt (1979-1882) was led by the eponymous general and sought to depose Khedive Ismael and end British and French influence. The 1919 revolution led by Wafd leader Saad Zaghloul protested the British occupation of Egypt (and Sudan) and called for national independence, which Egypt gained in 1922. In 1952, after the Second World War, Abdel Nasser's military coup d'état led to a nationwide revolution that overthrew Mohammad Ali's dynasty in Egypt, represented by King Farouk, and effectively ended British imperial influence over Egypt (Allen 29-33).

Badiou, in turn, hesitates to call the 2011 uprisings in Egypt a revolution in stark

opposition to how Egyptian writers and people identified them, elucidating a critical and

telling discrepancy between the perspective of the European left on Egyptian

transformations and the view from within the revolution. For Badiou, the case of Egypt

demonstrates all the characteristics that constitute a *historical riot*: It was grounded in a

central urban public space that symbolizes the state's capital and power, Tahrir Square; it

was a "unified representation in mosaic form of all the people" – women and men, young

and old, intellectual and uneducated, rich and poor – and; they were all assertively chanting

the same shared demand without waver – "الشعب يريد إسقاط النظام" or "The people demand

the overthrow of the regime" (Badiou 35). While the successful overthrow of Mubarak did

find the early Tahrir uprisings victorious, the complex chain of political events that have

followed since 2011[5] demonstrates that although the people do possess the power and

weight needed to affect political change, a new political organization that is liberated from

global neo-imperial power relations has yet to transform Egyptian society and government.

Badiou argues instead that it is much too soon to ascertain the long-term outcome of

dissenting nationalist movements and civil unrest in Egypt. But these rallying movements

in Egypt, similar ones across the Arab world, as well as several transnational riots and mass

protests in the late-20th and early-21st centuries suggest the beginning of a rebirth of History

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[5] Shortly after Mubarak's downfall, government was left in the hands of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) for a transitional period. Egypt's first democratic elections were held in June 2012 with Muslim Brotherhood representative Mohammad Morsi elected as President. His disregard of the judicial system and move to instate an Islamic national constitution led to his forced ousting by the military in a counter-revolution (some would say coup d'état) led by the military on behalf of the people in July 2013. The interim military government violently clashed with Islamist sympathizers on several occasion, leading to the imprisonment and sentencing of thousands of MB supporters and members. In 2014, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was elected by popular vote. For more information on political developments in Egypt since the initial Tahrir uprisings, see the introduction to *Egypt's Tahrir Revolution* (1-7).

and an awakening to the need for a reformulated ideology that might replace the current world political order (42).

On the other hand, several academics, writers, and critics have adamantly reified the uprisings as the "Tahrir Revolution," echoing a vast majority of the people's social and political positions. Going beyond just giving it a name, intellectuals and writers such as Dabashi, Soueif, Samia Mehrez, Ayman el-Desouky, and Alaa al-Aswany have argued that the uprisings have demanded a reworking of the Western model according to which revolutions are measured: Al-Aswany has observed that the wave of strikes and protests in the 21st century are at a scale unknown to Egypt since 1952 and are suggestive of inevitable "change" (*On the State of Egypt: What Made the Revolution Inevitable* 9). Dabashi similarly detects an embryonic pulse for global change starting from a local point of origin, and believes that "we are moving – almost imperceptibly perhaps but nevertheless consistently – towards the discovery of a new world" (22). His conviction that the Tahrir Revolution has marked the end of postcolonialism in Egypt and the rest of the world stems from the same reason for Badiou's reluctance: Its unprecedented leaderless nature[6] and the fact that people across social class, gender, religious background and political affiliation, all shared the same demands for freedom, social justice, and bread (لقمة عيش). The revolution's iconicity has surpassed its warped international representation on mainstream news media; its sensationalized global effect suggests resonances beyond the domestic Egyptian sphere. Rooney attributes "the revolution's striking dynamics of attentiveness, reciprocity and mindfulness towards others" to a specifically Egyptian and simultaneously

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[6] This is in contrast with previous postcolonial revolutions that were led by heroes and leaders born out of an anti/postcolonial ideology, such as Zaghloul, Abdel Nasser, who arguably have made us postcolonial (see Dabashi 56).

more general North African transnational phenomenon of solidarity and radical common ground that pertains to our collective humanity in her 2015 article "Egypt's Revolution, Our Revolution: Revolutionary Women and the Transnational Avant-garde" (140). "The people demand the overthrow of the regime" indicates a moment of oversaturation with social injustice, of *kifāya* (signifying both the Arabic word for "enough" and the pre-revolution social movement based on ideological resistance) being oppressed by a dominant mode of knowledge production about the Middle East, the Arab and Muslim world through a colonial and Orientalist imagination – postcolonial ideology (Dabashi 18 and 60). It suggests the people's reclamation of their right to self-representation. With that comes the right to assertively self-define revolution as breaking the barrier of silence through voice (in the street and in narrative form).

Despite the fact that counter-revolutionary forces symbolized by the US, Israel and their regional allies (Saudi Arabia and militant Islamists) have and will continue trying to thwart the trajectory of political events in Egypt to prove the people are anything but unitary, the revolution has arguably been successful in calling attention to the people's self-legitimizing presence. It is necessary, thus, to restructure the model of revolution in such a way that foregrounds how the people organically identify with social and political upheaval in Egypt. This can be done by looking at the language in which Egyptian writers, who should be the people's most faithful representatives, depict voice and revolution in narrative form. A case in point would be Soueif's repetitive and assertive use of the word "revolution" in her memoir from its title, *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, to its epilogue to describe the complex chain of events that transpired in 2011. In addition to that, she

possessively calls it *our* revolution in a gesture to take back the right of the Egyptian people to define and represent themselves.[7]

Furthermore, a distinction has to be made between the people's demands for freedom and social justice, and Western-oriented mainstream media outlets that have persistently tried to identify the popular uprisings in the entire Arab region as an "Arab Spring" or (Re)Awakening, much in the same vein as the so-called 20th-century Arab Renaissance, which Orientalists have portrayed as an intellectual rebirth from an alleged period of decadence. In an article entitled "Orientalising the Egyptian Uprising" (2011) from *Jadaliyya*, a progressively independent and revolutionary online magazine created in collaboration among Arab-American scholars and activists that rivals the globalized centers of mediated knowledge production about the Arab world in the West, Rabab el-Mahdi astutely points out that while Western poles have consistently tried to manufacture a vision of the uprisings that is middle-class, educated, secular, youth, nonviolent, and adopts Western social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to call for so-called Western democratic ideals, there is a vast majority of unrepresented revolutionaries who consist of poor, unemployed, older generation, possibly uneducated, religious, conservative, analogue (as opposed to digital) protesters, all of whom share the same demands for a regime change, social justice, bread, and freedom.[8] That is why slowing down the analysis, letting the subjects speak for themselves, and closely reading for voice in Egypt's multivalent works on revolution since the 1950s – a period of complex history seen from multiple

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[7] Soueif's particular stake in reintroducing herself in heat of the revolutionary moment in the Egyptian literary sphere is discussed at length in Chapter IV.

[8] For more on the conflicting representations of the "Arab Spring" in Egypt, see the article in *Jadaliyya* at http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1214/orientalising-the-egyptian-uprising.

perspectives – is urgent in spite of the hyper-mediated and short-attention-span world in which we exist.

Following the chronological order of the literary narratives' original publication dates, this study juxtaposes representations of voice and revolt across Mahfouz's novel *Awlad haratina*/*Children of the Alley* written in the late 1950s and banned under Abdel Nasser; el-Shafee's graphic narrative *Metro: A Story of Cairo* produced before the 2011 Tahrir Revolution and banned under Mubarak; and Soueif's memoir *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, which addresses a global audience in the wake of the 2011 revolution. I will be working with the English translations of Mahfouz's novel (Peter Theroux; 1996) and el-Shafee's graphic narrative (Chip Rossetti; 2012) and will refer back to the original works for translational analysis that serves the identification of heteroglossia in their respective chapters, as opposed to Soueif's memoir, which is originally written in English for an Anglophone readership, a distinction that already sets it apart from Mahfouz and el-Shafee's works. My reading of revolution in Egypt attempts to uncover an ideological meaning of voice that lies beyond what al-Musawi calls reductionist representations in postcolonial Arabic narratives (69). But in order to do so, this understanding of revolution, which battles impulses of being at once specific to the Egyptian context and universal in works of world literary concern, has to be informed by theories of nuanced interpretive reading and responsible resistance writing.

Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981) presents a methodology of reading individual works of literature across three horizons of interpretation in order to avoid a reductive understanding of texts: the structural and semiotic, the socio-analytical, and the historical ideology of form. Jameson's method is key for confronting reading

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strategies which project the illusion that any one reading of a text can be self-sufficient, complete, and correct (Preface x). Alternatively, texts ought to be approached as objects that have always already been read through calcified layers of previous interpretations, reading habits, and assumptions that are inherited through various cultural codes (ix). Jameson's methodology presents itself as an attempt to redress a central problem of universal readership and interpretation acts – that is, how do readers from different cultures, whose interpretive capabilities are hardwired to master cultural codes and traditions, read and understand texts written in different historical and cultural contexts translated into languages beyond their original without running the risk of essentializing them according to their own cultural presuppositions and biases?

For Jameson, Marxism seems to lie at the heart of the answer because it recognizes that men and women are agents of change and are not simply subject to historical circumstance as the historicist method assumes. Upon realizing that, it becomes difficult not to acknowledge that texts, the manmade literary products of a historical moment's conflicting ideologies, are constitutively politically-charged. All texts, even the ones that seem to be simply about cultural or private narratives (Soueif's memoir, for instance), are unconsciously political at the final horizon of interpretation. They can be stripped down to the bare-boned struggle that is at the core of Marxist ideology between forces of oppression and the classes of men and women that are oppressed (Jameson 1 and 4). It is important to note, however, that Jameson's proposed methodology of textual analysis and interpretation, which is adopted as the backbone of this study's theoretical framework, is on the one hand an improvement on his older and much-debunked argument in his 1986 article "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," which reductively asserts that all

non-Western literary texts must be read and interpreted as national allegories of the political status quo at the expense of both the social and the aesthetic, leaving little room for novelty and change (66). On the other hand, Jameson's political unconscious theory has seldom been put in conversation with modern and contemporary Egyptian literary texts, not to mention those rendered in translation and read globally as instances of world literature. Engaging the representational narratives of Mahfouz, el-Shafee, and Soueif with Jameson's and Damrosch's (aforementioned) critical interventions on how to read postcolonial and world literature should reveal universal concerns for world readers and private cultural specificities at once.

A line of contention similar to Jameson's is evoked by Edward Said in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983). Said argues that texts are worldly events that are contingent on the specific historical and political moment of their production. The reader of the text, who is also its critic, approaches the text with a preassigned set of worldly assumptions, biases, and considerations. This exchange evokes a set of complicated relationships between the figure of the intellectual, who is the ultimate voice of a text, and the reading public which is summoned and engendered by the text to receive and respond to it (Said 35 and 39). It also suggests an even more complex interplay between literary production and political reality, one which lies at the very heart of textual interpretation and is the final horizon with which a text can be engaged. This highlights the active political role texts play as they propagate narratives of neo-imperialism, in the contemporary form of neoliberalism, and resistance to it – two phenomena which are neither monolithic nor deterministic, but rather contingent on each other. Said further develops an argument that contains Jamesonian inflections in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), in which he advocates

a contrapuntal and polyphonic method of reading texts in order to tease out the voices that are excluded or silenced, and take account of both processes of neo-imperialism and resistance which are always at play within a text (66 and 67).

Rendered in more simplified Marxist terms, Said, like Jameson, argues for a method of reading a text that allows room for negotiating the ongoing and historically-specific forces of tension and conflict between the oppressors and those who are oppressed. The political undercurrents of a text, or its unconscious, does not emerge as though from a vacuum because the text is always part of a complex, slowly unfolding network of worldviews and politics that come to define people's attitudes and expectations (*Culture and Imperialism* 75). That is why imperialism has often been regarded as the driving force that enables cross-cultural contamination, and the European novel became the model that influenced the emergence and development of the modern Arabic, specifically Egyptian narrative (69-71). It thus follows that the narratives of resistance to imperial and neo-imperial forms of rule written by Egyptians have adapted the form of the European novel to local resistance themes, tropes, and motifs. It would be reductive, however, to assume that such narratives are homogenous. Their forms, genres, and themes vary across individual works, and it is in many ways the purpose of this study to look for and highlight the differences and particularities in the forms of the novel, graphic narrative, and memoir which exist despite the common trope of popular revolt.

The theoretical framework put together thus far comprises discourse that makes interventions in the scope of postcolonial studies. While it is important to recognize that narratives of resistance began as reactionary responses directed against foreign colonizing powers in anticolonial struggles, it is also significant to acknowledge that in technically-

independent, postcolonial nations such as Egypt, contemporary resistance narratives speak

out against the native forces that oppress and subjugate marginalized subjects and produce

narratives that actively exclude certain factions of society, such as women, Islamists,

Communists, secularists, etc. It is also pivotal to question the voice of the intellectual

within the text and the extent to which it is confrontational and resistant. In the following

chapters, it will become more evident that the voice of the intellectual belonging to the

1950s-1960s generation of writers, such as Mahfouz, delivers a couched, submissive, even

passive social critique of injustice in comparison with the seemingly apolitical and self-

deconstructionist style that characterized writing in the 1970s-1990s (post-1967) like

Soueif's, as opposed to the more politically-engaged, aggressive voice of the younger

cogent generation of writers like el-Shafee. It is necessary thus to be critical and point to

the lacunae and holes in the all-inclusive theories of resistance propounded by postcolonial

studies.

      In her collection of critical essays on postcolonial theory entitled *Postcolonial*

Studies: A Materialist Critique (2004), Benita Parry, a prominent Marxian critic of

postcolonial theory, stresses the importance of addressing the social question in

postcolonial nations and puts forth a materialist critique of monolithic essentializing

resistance theory which lumps the different experiences of colonized people into one

category. In order to have an accurate understanding of popular dissent and resistance in

Egypt from a Marxist perspective, we need to be attentive to the

> inscriptions and sign[s] of resistance [which] are discernible in official archives
> and informal texts, and can be detected in narrativized instances of insurrection
> and organized political opposition. (38)

Therefore, a textual analysis of each narrative from a historical materialist standpoint is in order, not one which simply highlights the nonetheless crucial role of the "third-world intellectual," which Parry deems a Eurocentric invention and el-Desouky qualifies as a figure of political imagination in *The Intellectual and the People in Egyptian Literature and Culture: Amāra and the 2011 Revolution* (2014). If immigrant "transnational" intellectuals like Soueif are Europhone, then their call to cultural nationalism in narrative literature should be called into question; as they inevitably participate in an ideology of alienation by attempting to speak *to* and *for* the people and confining the image of the masses to an objectified and idealized abstraction (8 and 9). Writers qua intellectuals may shine a light on the unjust misrepresentation of marginalized subjects, but they do not liberate them, which el-Desouky claims is a "rift in communication" that occupied intellectual debates on the role and inefficacy of committed literature in Egypt in the 1950s, intensifying further in the defeatist aftermath of the 1967 war.[9] From this rationale, questioning whether the voices of oppressed subjects in the 21st century can speak for themselves becomes even more crucial in relation to literature that precedes and intervenes in the 2011 revolution.

In *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction* (1994), Samia Mehrez points to the important role that responsible literature ought to perform, that is producing counter or alternative narratives to the discourses of power produced by the state in Egypt and

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[9] The idea of literature of commitment (adab al-iltizam) is broached by several critics like el-Desouky and Jacquemond, who argue that the dovetailing of realist modes of expression with the revolutionary and exclusive nationalist project in the 1950s led to the general feeling of ineffectiveness among writers and intellectuals because Abdel Nasser's nationalist policies placed a hold on writerly ideologies and visions. In its attempt to communicate with the people, social realism fell short because writers often spoke to them in an elitist and authorial voice which widened the rift between intellectuals and masses and failed to effect social and political change (modernization). This failure was epitomized by the 1967 defeat, which mirrored the intellectual's crisis of voice and representation, and called for a shift towards experimenting in narrative form in a way that allows for the voices of the masses to come to the fore.

elsewhere (6). But at the same time, Terry Eagleton reminds us, in an implicitly Jamesonian air, that it is never productive to assume any literary text's representations can be whole, unbiased, or complete. On the contrary, it too contains its own silences and lacunae as it operates within an ideological framework that we, as world readers and critics, must interrogate in relation to the different meanings and conflicts contained within and surrounding the text itself (7). The position a *responsible* writer therefore occupies, as Said, Eagleton, Jameson, Parry, and Mehrez all would concur, is liminal as "underground historian," political activist, resistance fighter with particular interests, rather than innocent storyteller. If one qualifier could sum up the efforts of contemporary Egyptian writers, men and women, it would be rewriting historical narratives in relation to the national collective (Mehrez 10-11). Although Mehrez's argumentative scope ends with writers in the early 1990s, encompassing the transformative work of writers like Mahfouz, Soueif, Sonallah Ibrahim and Gamal al-Ghitani as distinct from the early 20th-century *Nahdawi* generation of writers, the legacy of her thoughts have transmigrated into the new century with the emergence of what Tarek el-Ariss argues are politically recommitted writers like el-Shafee, al-Aswany and others, who unabashedly confront social and political injustice in their generically-revolutionized narratives.

This leads us to drawing connections between the performativity and reception of the text as a revolutionary narrative in relation to the position of its writer among local Egyptian and international literary circles: No literary critic can deny the iconicity and influence of Mahfouz's repertoire on the development of the Egyptian and Arabic novel through its larger phases – historical romanticism, realism, and experimental modernism. His status as an esteemed cultural and literary figure, deemed by critics as father of modern

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Egyptian and Arabic literature, was elevated most especially for being the first Arab writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988. His works were thus catapulted into literary canonicity, acquiring world-literary prominence with the massive efforts to translate and circulate them worldwide. While he always identified himself as strictly Egyptian, his works have become products of many intersecting civilizations as Adnan Haydar and Michael Beard portray him in their introduction to the essay collection *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition* (1993).

The youngest among the writers chosen, el-Shafee exemplifies the more nascent generation of "new writers" who are not necessarily literary intellectual figures or academics by trade. El-Shafee's debut on the Egyptian literary scene came as a result of publishing his gritty adult Arabic graphic narrative *Metro* in 2008. The consternation it stirred caused his charged arrest by Mubarak's police for its candid portrayal of blatant social and political corruption in Cairo, which led to banning its publication in Egypt. But that only intensified the hype surrounding el-Shafee's status as truth-teller and revolutionary writer. Authors like el-Shafee redefine what it means to be a writer and artist in the digital age, how necessary it has become to be innovative and fearless, explore new media and make use of online channels for circulation and self-publication as vehicles to combat state censorship and other forms of physical, intellectual, and creative oppression.

Soueif's status as an Egyptian writer, last but not least, cannot be measured with the same yardstick. Sherine Mazloum discusses in "To write/to revolt: Egyptian women novelists writing the revolution" (2015) how Soueif's transnational position as an Arab-British postcolonial intellectual and her avant-garde role as a politically-active feminist writer lend her works an interstitial, ambivalent, possibly hybrid quality of being (213). The

fact that Soueif, who belongs to a generation younger than Mahfouz but older than el-Shafee, writes about Egypt for a Western market makes her authority as an "authentic" Egyptian writer-intellectual controversial and her acceptance among Egyptian feminists lukewarm, especially in comparison with more "patriotic" or "nationalistic" Egyptian feminist fighters such as Hoda Shaarawi, and more contemporary feminist writers such as Nawal al-Saadawi, Salwa Bakr, Laila Abou-Saif, Miral al-Tahawi, and many others (Mazloum 211-212). In other words, we cannot react to Soueif's hybrid-autobiographical-meets-political narrative in the same way that we approach Mahfouz's novel, even in its translated form.

The position of each author, therefore, does factor in the way each text in this study ought to be approached, but the author's background does not solely inform the analysis of each text and the evaluation of its performance as a symbol of resistance and liberation. Even though the three chapters in this study discuss literary works from different genres and decades of Egyptian history in which distinct literary and sociopolitical transformation and changes have occurred, they share similar stakes in the revolutionary and empowering-beyond-postcolonial knowledge they produce which Mehrez eloquently illustrates:

> The texts are denuding, insightful, subversive, and are guaranteed to induce change, not necessarily in the form of political action but certainly in literary sensibilities, aesthetics of taste, and ideologies of reading, all of which *are* political changes. (11; emphasis original)

It is safe to then say that all narratives, especially resistance narratives are socially symbolic, politically unconscious statements that resist the formal dictates over cultural and literary legacies, which mirror the oppressiveness of daily life. The semiotic analysis of

resistance narratives from Egypt must transcend the textual and social levels in order to

uncover the unconscious gestures they make toward systems of conflicting historical

ideologies so that we may offer alternative, non-standardized, non-ethnocentric readings of

literature from Egypt, which will eventually create space for the possibility of change,

progress, and movement towards a culture of voice and visibility in modern-day Egypt.

CHAPTER II

Voices of Revolution in Naguib Mahfouz's *Children of the Alley*

*"My political position springs from my being a novelist.
Insofar as I am concerned, politics and the novel are an
indivisible case and I can categorically state that I became
politically committed because I am a novelist, not the
opposite."*
--- Ghassan Kanafani[10]

This chapter looks at representations of heteroglossia in the form of popular revolutionary

voices in the 1959 novel *Awlad haratina*. It questions the integrity of such representations

in light of the novel's generic limitations in carrying a Jamesonian ideology of resistance

through its form, representations which come across in this allegorical novel as couched

rather than explicit in their endorsing of revolution on Mahfouz's behalf. The novel, which

exists under the translated titles *Children of Gebelawi* (Philip Stewart; 1981) and *Children

of the Alley* (Peter Theroux; 1996), is one of the most controversial works of literature in

Egypt in terms of its publication history and yet, its translated presence is well-established

in the canons of world literature, especially since Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize for

Literature in 1988.[11] Despite its authorized and unauthorized translation into many

languages, and its unremitting global circulation, the analysis of the narrative as a

politically charged symbolic act that unconsciously advocates popular revolution and

liberation in a new century leading up to the 2011 Tahrir Revolution in Egypt has yet to be

undertaken seriously. I argue that despite its textual representation of chronically-

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[10] Ghassan Kanafani, interview in *al-Siyasa* (Kuwait). Cited in Samia Mehrez's introduction to *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction*, 8.

[11] Peter Theroux's 1996 *Children of the Alley* translation is the one used for the purposes of this study.

unsuccessful, cyclical revolts, revolution, nevertheless, is the vehicle of a resistance

ideology in the text that the people of the alley irresistibly gravitate towards time and again.

It is fashioned after a postcolonial model of resistance against a domestic and auto-

reproductive patriarchal system of thugs which manifests in the narrative on two levels: the

thematic, in giving voice to popular riots and uprisings led by postcolonial heroes against a

recurring reign of tyranny; and the formal, in breaking with the dictates of its very genre,

the novel, in Arabic literature and being brought to the attention of the world reader by

virtue of its circulation in its original form since the 1960s and in its translated forms since

the 1980s and '90s.[12]

Despite Mahfouz himself advocating a political reading, *Children of the Alley* has

frequently been accused of being an extended metaphor of humanity and an audacious

imitation of religious chronicles by the literary and religious scholars of al-Azhar, Egypt's

and the world's most powerful and prestigious center of Arabic literature and Islamic

scholarship (Mehrez, *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction* 21).[13] In a revised

edition of *Literature Suppressed on Religious Grounds* (2006), Margaret Bald cites the

novel's censorship history, the staunch antagonistic campaign led by Islamic

fundamentalists against its circulation at several instances since its 1959 publication in

serialized form in *Al-Ahram*, which had been backed by Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal,

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[12] Theroux offers us a deeper look into the novel's publication and circulation history, from its unauthorized translation into Hebrew, underground reproduction in Arabic, and finally commissioned translation into English in his 2001 article "Children of the Alley: A Translator's Tale."

[13] Azharite scholars banned the novel's publication on the grounds of Mahfouz's allegorical, albeit controversial, representation of the death of the God of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. They condemned the novel as blasphemous and its author as a heretic of Islam.

then editor-in-chief, and the complex relationship Mahfouz shared with Egypt's Islamists[14] (34-35). Religious bans on its publication in Egypt, however, did not prevent the underground circulation of copies in Cairo, Jerusalem, and Beirut after a pirated edition had been published in 1967 (Theroux 667). The Egyptian reading public's three-decade-long amnesia of *Children of the Alley* was reawakened in the aftermath of Mahfouz being awarded the 1988 Nobel Prize, culminating in frenzy among Islamic fundamentalists and an attempt on Mahfouz's life in 1994 (Bald 35). It is important to note that the Egyptian government, led by Abdel Nasser at the time, never openly opposed the novel's publication. Given his standing as Nobel Laureate, Mafhouz found himself in the privileged position of having his novels commissioned for translation in an attempt to "liberate" and "universalize" his work for the world literary canon, which meant that Western-influenced Egyptian presidents Sadat and Mubarak stood in its "defense" under the banners of "freedom of expression" and the "free market policy," a phenomenon that has consistently and continuously outraged the local Islamic-oriented press. Mahfouz himself was caught in the middle of this particular novel's publication tug-of-war: In his attempt to appease religious forces of opposition, Mahfouz called on the Egyptian monthly *al-Yasar* to stop its serialization in 1989, and later asked to postpone the novel's publication when the ban was officially lifted in 1994 by the government (35).

As Richard Jacquemond points out in *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt* (2003; translated by David Tresilian, 2008), Mahfouz refused

[14] Although many literary critics of Egyptian literature claim Mahfouz always had a humble religious disposition, he was not always on the best terms with Islamic fundamentalists, especially due to his support of the Camp David Accords in 1979, which enacted a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel under the presidency of Anwar al-Sadat, as well as his defense of Salman Rushdie's freedom to write *The Satanic Verses*, which had him condemned to death by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini.

the state's move to publish the novel in Egypt without first securing al-Azhar's approval and having an intellectual close to the Muslim Brotherhood pen an introductory note (228). The serialized Egyptian text published after the attack on his life in 1994 omitted certain references deemed too religiously direct with Mahfouz's approval (Theroux 667). These acts are among many that obscure Mahfouz's position in relation to the different intellectual factions of Egyptian society in the 1950s and early 1960s; garnering Mahfouz much criticism for his non-confrontational manner and unclear affiliations (Mehrez 29). The uncontainable publicity of the 1994 stabbing carried out by militant Islamists arguably prompted the Western-oriented government to publish the novel in book form officially for the first time in Egypt in 1994, incurring the appearance of an imposed (Western) victory of world literature over a substantial portion of a conservative local reading public that refused to receive the novel as a respected instance of national literature.

In light of these complicated circumstances and the implications surrounding its author's local, regional, and global recognition in addition to the perceived dichotomy between Islam and the West over freedom of expression and postcolonial liberation studies, Mahfouz's literary repertoire and the analysis of this novel in particular cannot be restricted to a mere textual analysis. Rather, politicized readings of the novel come into play, and it is in this context that Jameson's ideology of form can be useful. In order to see how the text can redeem itself from constricted global readings (the West versus Islam; secular reform versus religious conservatism), we need to accentuate gestures of heteroglossia and locate a specificity of voice in its original Arabic and translated English versions – beginning with the voice of the intellectual within the novel's diegetic world. We ought to interrogate the performance of symbolic resistance – to generalized readings, the novel's formal

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conventions, and sociopolitical oppression – through the novel's genre and through a

Bakhtinian heteroglossic representation of popular voices that demand revolution out of a

vicious cycle of terror and oppression, which has been grounded in Egypt's political reality

since the second half of the 20th century.

Popular revolt and rebellion are a significant theme that underlies any allegorical

interpretation of *Children of the Alley*. The novel was written at a time when Egypt was

witnessing the tail end of one of its most effectual and game-changing uprisings to date: the

1952 Free Officers Revolution against British occupation. The nationalist revolution

ushered in a reign of extreme socialism under Abdel Nasser's presidency. Against this

political backdrop, Mahfouz's novel, a product of fiction with roots embedded in reality,

exposes the cruelties and injustices of an age of tyranny from the multifocal and multi-

vocal perspective of its intra-diegetic local public. Although critics have historicized the

novel's representations as echoes of Abdel Nasser's unforgiving, extremist regime whose

modus operandi was silencing oppositional parties, especially the Islamists and

Communists, this chapter attempts to uncover a silent ideology of resistance underlying the

novel, one which allows it to exceed the historical context of its production and speak to,

almost precipitate the 2011 revolution because of its world-literary relevance. To better

contextualize *Children of the Alley*, a brief excurse on Mahfouz's literary output at large is

helpful.

Mahfouz's Oeuvre: Writing from a Position of Calculated Intent

Mahfouz (1911 – 2006) is a highly-regarded and controversial cultural and literary

titan of modern Egyptian and Arabic literature. His prolific literary career consists of

Arabic novels and short stories written in diverse literary styles that have been adopted and adapted by the Egyptian literary *doxa* through translation, beginning with historical romanticism,[15] moving on to social realism in the mid-1940s, which culminated in the monumental Cairo Trilogy[16] (written before 1952 but published between1956 and 1957), and later experimenting with shorter self-reflexive modernist works from the 1960s onwards (Hafez, "Obituaries: Naguib Mahfouz; Innovative Novelist and Author of the Cairo Trilogy who won the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature"). In *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition* (1993), Adnan Haydar and Michael Beard point out that the sprawling Cairene cityscape, the contrast between the closed quarters of old Cairo (where Mahfouz was born and raised), and the early 20th-century urban transformations of new Cairo, occupy the central imagination of most of Mahfouz's works. The interpretive parallels drawn between his diegetic microcosms and the national metaphor have prompted rather reductive readings of Mahfouz's works as allegories of nationalism and the Egyptian nation, a much-debunked argument that Jameson subscribed to, believing that all postcolonial writers invariably end up constructing national allegories in their narratives.[17] The rich economy of Mahfouz's production, however, was not without pause; silences interspersed his career due to what Haydar and Beard call a "sensitivity" to politics.

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[15] His first three novels, *Abath al-aqdar* (1939), *Radubis* (1943), and *Kifah Tibah* (1944) were historical works that revitalized Egypt's pharaonic past and connected it to its modern present in order to construct a national identity rooted to a glorious historical legacy.

[16] The Cairo Trilogy (*Thulathiyat al-Qahira*) is composed of three titles – *Bayn al-Qasrayn* (1956; trans. *Palace Walk*, 1990), *Qasr al-Shawq* (1957; trans. *Palace of Desire*, 1991), and *Al-Sukkariyya* (1957; trans. *Sugar Street*, 1992) – that follow the life of a middle-class Cairene family across three generations. It constitutes Mahfouz's most exemplary realistic work reflecting social transformation of urban Egyptian culture in the first half of the 20th century.

[17] See Fredric Jameson's 1986 article "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism."

Mahfouz's self-conception as a writer was irrevocably affected by the dramatic

sociopolitical changes engendered in the aftermath of the1952 revolution, namely the end

of British occupation and commencement of socialist agendas, leading to a seven-year

silence that was broken by *Awlad haratina* in 1959 (Hafez, "Obituaries: Naguib

Mahfouz…"). In addition, Egypt's defeat in the 1967 June War against Israel greatly

impacted the trajectory of his writing as well as his personal and professional outlooks

(Haydar and Beard 7). It is essential to situate *Children of the Alley* within a period of

history that is framed by the two momentous turning points: 1952 and 1967. The narrative

portrays a symbolic post-revolutionary world as a "betrayal of its own principles," but it

has not yet been embittered by the shattering disillusionment of nationalism which

characterizes many Arab authors' works after 1967 (Haydar and Beard 4). It is also

important to note that Mahfouz enjoyed a position of literary privilege due to his close

relations with Abdel Nasser's government and the public service position he occupied until

his retirement. Patronage saved him time and again from censorship and detainment. As a

result, he developed a calculated political position regarding what he wrote and when he

published it. His translator, Theroux, justifies Mahfouz's acceptance of the ban on *Children

of the Alley*, saying that "Egypt was not ready for the book at the time" (668).

How does a work that was produced out of such specific and intricate historical,

political, and social circumstances remain relevant today in light of its overdue hibernation,

translation, digitally-enhanced circulation, and the Tahrir Revolution? How is it read by

critics and readers of this century from different cultural backgrounds, who partake in a

new worldly and hyper-mediated context, without risking deploying reductive readings and

over-emphasizing the text's *post*-coloniality in the sense of resistance that addresses merely

the remains of a colonial ideology? Jameson's amended interpretive method in *The Political Unconscious* invites us to focus on the dialectical tensions and bifurcations of voice intrinsic to the text's structure and uncover an ideology that can speak a universal language of *tahrir* but is still grounded in an Egyptian context.

With a literary corpus as massive, experimental, and diverse as Mahfouz's, it is difficult to not consider his portfolio as symptomatic of the development of the modern Egyptian narrative in tandem with the phases of Western writing styles, as done by Salma Jayyusi in her essay "The Arab Laureate and the Road to Nobel" (published in *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*, 1993). For the current generation of Egyptian writers and intellectuals, Mahfouz has become something of an institution or legacy for new writers to springboard postmodern narratives, as Tarek el-Ariss says in his article "Fiction of Scandal" (516). However, in "Naguib Mahfouz and the Arabic Novel: The Historical Context," Roger Allen, relying on Edward Said's discussion of the origins of the Arabic novel, convincingly argues that while the genesis of the modern Arabic novel owes much to Western models, it is not bereft of influence from classical Arabic narrative and linguistic traditions:

> Arabic literature before the twentieth century has a rich assortment of narrative forms – *qissa, sira, hadith, khurafa, ustura, khabar, nadira, maqama* – of which no one seems to have become, as the European novel did, the major narrative type. (Said as quoted by Allen 33; emphasis original)

Mahfouz himself was educated in both Arabic and Western literary traditions, but in global readings of Mahfouz, emphasis problematically presides on his admiration of the Western canons of fiction (Allen 35).[18]

Western critics and scholars of the modern Egyptian novel, chief among them Jacquemond, concur that *Children of the Alley* ushered the Arabic novel into a nativized literary modernity due to its self-reflexive nature and use of self-quotation techniques (2). However, Mahfouz's turn to symbolism and layered representation directed at political and social corruption is a literary transformation he adopted in the post-1952 world not to match the direction taken by the Western novel's development from social realism to modernist experimentation, but rather to distance and protect himself, if unsuccessfully, from implication, detainment, and state censorship. In contradistinction to the dictates of the Western novel's evolutionary genre, Theroux describes the narrative style of this particular novel as simultaneous mediator between realist and fabulist (671).

In *Children of the Alley*, Mahfouz constructs a fictional microcosm of a timeless Cairene alley called Gabalawi Alley, which straddles the line between the real (what appears to be drawn from history) and the imaginary (what appears to be fictive), as Mehrez argues is characteristic of fiction (4). The alley's reading as a symbol of Egypt might be obvious in several interpretations, but it is an experimental inverted symbol nonetheless, as the literary "norm" is to have the nation symbolize the universe, whereas Mahfouz inverts the metaphor to shield himself unsuccessfully from accusation and censorship (Mehrez 21). The novel is a retrospective historical account told from the

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[18] Allen cites Mahfouz's admiration of "major early figures of Egyptian fiction, such as Taha Husayn, Tawfiq al-Hakim, Yahya Haqqi, and Mahmud Taymur" (35).

perspective of one of the alley's inhabitants who happens to be a professional writer. This scribe-narrator attempts to chronicle a series of unsuccessful historical revolutions led by tragic heroic men descendent from Gabalawi, all of whom try to restore social justice and equality to the people who are victims of a state run by thugs and criminals. The most striking formal aspect of this allegorical novel is the cacophony of riotous voices heard within its overarching narrative – voices that belong to the disenfranchised subjects who are literally beaten down by the alley's tyrannical gangsters and its system of class differentiation. In other words, the novel partakes in a counter-narrative of historical and political consciousness as Mehrez points out is the theme that underlies most modern Egyptian writers' works from a sociological standpoint (12). Jacquemond in turn posits that writers and intellectuals reflect – as the title of his book suggests – the conscience of their nation; their literary works thus constituting "the mirror of society" (5). That might have been true of *Children of the Alley* had it been released into the social and literary milieu in which it was written. However, the novel's controversial publication history has allowed it to "jump" the national Egyptian public it initially would have addressed and engage a regional and international readership from Beirut instead, only to have it re-enter the Egyptian social and literary sphere not long before the series of Arab uprisings broke out, allowing the text to perform the dual function of retrospection and prospective anticipation of political change.[19]

 Children of the Alley shares a publication history with many other censored works in Egypt and the Arab world, censorship being one of the forms of oppression the state

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[19] The term to "jump" a reading public is borrowed from Brian Edwards' 2014 essay "Jumping Publics: Magdy El Shafee's Cairo Comics," and signifies a narrative's capacity to retain cultural inflections specific to its local context and resist efforts to homogenize its language in translation.

exercises against writers. But that does not stifle the power of its voice to transcend reading

publics and historical contexts, establishing itself as a novel that on the one hand,

challenges the conventions of genre and canon in its allegorical versatility, and on the

other, defies a unilateral interpretation and unveils moments of social and political

injustice, thereby partaking in resistance on its own terms, arguably in an unconscious

manner. By approaching the text with attention given not only to what the voices are saying

in its diegetic world, but also to what is left out or unsaid, as Eagleton and Jameson

encourage us to do, we may be able to locate the novel's politically unconscious mode of

resistance in spite of Mahfouz's relatively distant position, which is the vehicle that makes

it significant to the 2011 *shabab* uprisings in Egypt.

Representations of Heteroglossia in *Children of the Alley*

The Arabic novel is indebted to dominant Western models of the novel due to

translation and increased cross-cultural encounters between Egypt and Europe since the

late-19th and early-20th-century *Nahda*, but autogenetic influences from the Arabic literary

tradition bear equal significance to the modern Arabic novel's development, as

Jacquemond, Allen, and al-Musawi reiterate. Although *Children of the Alley* is written by a

postcolonial writer and is rooted in Egyptian history, it is nonetheless helpful to address the

novel's performance of revolution on the level of language by means of theories of the

novel, as developed within a European and Western context after WWI. In *Theory of the

Novel* (1971), Georg Lukács argues that unlike all other genres of literature "whose

existence resides within the finished form," the novel's form is dissonant in and of itself

(72). As an instance of form, the novel is a medium capable of setting up a totality that

contains cacophonous, discordant voices and unresolved tensions. The novel's philosophical and aesthetic meaning is never final; it presides in the delicate balance between being and becoming (73). In that sense, the novel is the art form that most authentically mirrors life itself, because it is never final or finished. It functionally replicates life's complexities, tensions, and unremitting existence or being.

Although Lukács references novels written specifically in the verisimilar style of socialist realism, the essence of his argument about the novel's form is reiterated and expanded by Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981). In his fourth essay, "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin demonstrates that what sets the novel apart from other literary genres is its ability to retain and include the stylistics of other genres without losing its status and heterogeneous functionality as a novel. It can thus be defined as "a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (261). By novel, Bakhtin refers to the literary genre that constantly attempts to break the artificial confines of canonicity in its literary system through its incessant experimentation with style and inclusion of a living mix of language variations, as opposed to other genres that necessitate a rigid set of stylistics and a fixed form, such as the poetic and epic genres. In other words, the novel's very form is a testament to the spirit of revolution, newness, difference, and change, which makes no two novels identical as "it is the nature of novels to resist" (xxviii).

What enables the novel to carry out its function of self-conscious resistance to imperial literary dictates is, according to Bakhtin, "social heteroglossia and the variety of individual voices" (264). Defined as the linguistic centrifugal force that draws the language of the text away from unitary, authoritative speech, heteroglossia within the novel's

language is the most immediate semiotic symptom of polyphonic voices that signifies the recognition of varying, sometimes opposing opinions and ideologies, which then creates possibilities for popular revolt against forces of oppression. This textual gesture of inclusion and loudness manifests itself in Mahfouz's *Children of the Alley*, making the novel ripe for revolutionary purposes on the levels of content and form.

After the 1952 revolution deposed the monarchy which was ventriloquizing British imperial interests in Egypt, the novel under the socialist presidency of Abdel Nasser became imprinted with anxieties about sovereign nationalism and independence from Western influence. The national imaginary under Abdel Nasser; however, came into being through policies of exclusion and silencing of dissident voices, such as the Muslim Brotherhood but also secular reformists. As the novel was the most complete form of socially-realistic representation and a platform for polyvocal democracy as Caroline Rooney argues, it began to engage the voices of the masses and the politically-oppressed factions in Egyptian society, thereby critiquing the state apparatus through dialogism and heteroglossia. The figure of the intellectual, nevertheless, generally occupied a position of omniscience and omnipresence in the novel's diegetic world, seeking to construct a unified totality that is mimetic of reality. Despite the relatively distant stance authors such as Mahfouz assumed in their works, modern Egyptian novels were rarely exempt from the scrutiny of state and religious censorship and publication bans. Following the Arab defeat against Israel in 1967, a prevailing sense of disenchantment with the failed Egyptian nationalist project set in and an even stricter state censor cracked down on publication (Mahfouz as quoted by Mehrez 27). Tarek el-Ariss retrospectively describes the defeat as a *fadīhah* (scandal) which exposed a political and ideological system that already was

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vulnerable and unstable to begin with in his article "Fiction of Scandal" (2012). The Egyptian public and intellectual sphere associated the debilitating *hazimah* (defeat) with the downfall of Arab modernity, "the advent of political and cultural paralysis, complicity (Camp David Accords), totalitarianism (Mubarak)," and literature's failure to effectively engage social and political reality, ushering in a wave of "authors of defeat" that is self-deprecating and fixated on the moment of national loss, humiliation, and defeat (el-Ariss 521-2). Intellectuals, in effect, revolutionized the literary expression of this sentiment through experimentations with narrative form, which Jacquemond denotes is a turn toward "modernist realism" and away from direct political confrontation, more toward the representation of lamentable individual experience and inward examinations of the self (96).

The Egyptian novel in the late 20th century, therefore, matured into a genre of social and political expression that wed native themes of social paralysis, nostalgia, and ruin with Western genres and styles which are selectively adapted for a local political contingency. Sakr also picks up on transformation in writing styles that are linked with Egyptian novels written in the 1990's. Her study searches for evidence of a buildup toward revolution in contemporary Arabic literature that precedes the uprisings which began contagiously spreading across the Arab world in 2010. In the case of Egypt, Sakr argues from a geo-spatial angle that the possibility of recreating and rearranging Egypt's social geography as a public space that is fair among all Egyptians has been unconsciously embedded as a vision or theme in contemporary novels (45). These works have thus participated in presenting a "literary [re]vision of historical change" (44). In this way, novels about resistance and revolution "[anticipate] a possible trajectory into 'Tahrir'" in

the literal sense, denoting the square in which the sit-in took place, and in the philosophical sense of liberation, which manifested in the "popular dynamic of revolution" (45).

Mahfouz's *Children of the Alley* is arguably pre-symptomatic of this literary experimentation in form. Organized according to a unique structural principle, the novel is divided into 114 chapters, as the number of *suras* in the Quran, under five larger units that mirror the successive lifetimes of its revolutionary heroes: Adham, Gabal, Rifaa, Qassem, and Arafa. Although each unit spans a generation's worth of people living in the infamous Gabalawi Alley, they are not cut off from one another. In other words, references to the alley's predecessors are constantly pulled into the present; the past is never laid to rest.

The literary motif of having a dominant and omniscient male-inflected authorial voice gives way to the emergence of popular voices throughout the course of the novel. The figure of the scribe-narrator in the preface is one of the novel's more concrete manifestations of unconventional storytelling. Bakhtin qualifies this type of compositional-stylistic unity as "direct authorial literary-artistic narration," one of the five basic unities that can fall under the novel's flexible linguistic makeup (262). The narrator's voice in the novel is one of a multitude of voices, a symptom of heteroglossia itself, one which is simultaneously a part of the diegetic world and set apart from it. The narrator uses first-person speech, as though conversing informally with a listener more so than a reader, and informs whoever is on the receiving end that he is a member of Gabalawi Alley. The preface sets itself up to be a declaration of intent and purpose to chronicle the alley's convoluted history through the oral stories its denizens have told over generations. The narrator's voice initially comes across as authoritative, one whose significance lies in the act of mapping out and writing down the stories of the alley in a teleological historical

narrative for "they've never been told in the right order" (Mahfouz 3). His feat, however, is not completely successful, as the narrative's unfolding assumes a cyclical trajectory in some parts; the act of announcing its undertaking thus contradicts the nature of periodic storytelling and the way history seems to repeat itself in the alley. In other words, the narrator's voice is representative of the *attempt and failure* at normalizing and unifying language, speech, and narrative into one arch. While Jacquemond reads this intellectual-narrator-writer combination as a reflection of Mahfouz's persona in his 2003 article, " ثورة التخييل وتخييل الثورة: قراءة جديدة في أولاد حارتنا" ("Revolutionary Fiction and Fictional Revolution: A New Reading of *The Children of Gabalawi*"), el-Desouky calls it an act of resistance on the narrative's behalf in his 2011 article "Heterologies of Revolutionary Action: On Historical Consciousness and the Sacred in Mahfouz's *Children of the Alley*." The logic behind el-Desouky's argument is the fact that the narrator relies solely on the fragmentary and discontinuous oral version(s) of history as told by the popular masses rather than any form of official and state discourse promulgated by the alley's gangster leaders:

> Everyone in our alley tells these stories, just as they heard them in coffeehouses or as they were handed down for generations – these sources are my *only* basis for what I'm writing. (Mahfouz 1, emphasis added)

Sakr in turn recognizes this symbolic act as sign of a narrative's defensive powers. Though the state's oppressive regime may harass its subjects and intellectual figures socially, economically and politically, it cannot break them intellectually and spiritually: "[The] imaginative rewriting of long histories … marks most of the novels that 'anticipated' the 2011 uprisings" (Sakr 16). Thus, *Children of the Alley* in its own right rivals the authority

of historical narratives, offering an alternative to them, because its narrator oscillates in a liminal position between traditional, omniscient storyteller and carrier of the voices of popular activism.

The narrator also acts as an intellectual spokesperson for the disenfranchised people of the alley; his profession as writer and civil scribe is in the service of others – "the oppressed and needy" – and it does not bring him respect or wealth, rather "much contempt and mockery" (Mahfouz 3). As such, the narrator strikes a pact with the reader to deliver a narrative which serves neither his interests nor the state's, but one that belongs to the public, one that is of the people and for the people. Jacquemond recognizes the narrator's dual identity as "an omniscient being who is able to adopt an all-encompassing point of view on the social world" of the novel on the one hand, and "a social actor with a precise function, an intellectual worker who is responsible for communicating the words of the dominated to the dominant classes" on the other (*Conscience of the Nation* 4).

The middle-man position the narrator occupies resonates with the tricky yet crucial role Said argues any intellectual figure ought to play in his 1993 Reith Lecture "Speaking Truth to Power," that is, confronting power and authority with "the truth." Although intellectuals are rarely free agents and almost always are subordinated or attached to larger systems of power, it is their responsibility to be as unbiased and "objective" as they can – even though total objectivity is a myth – in their discourse on neocolonial and imperial power and those subjected to it. Although Said speaks in his lecture on behalf of world politics and advocates for human rights in the grand scheme of the US-Arab conflict, his basic premise is very much applicable to the function the scribe-narrator performs in *Children of the Alley*. Said says,

> I believe there is a special duty to address the constituted and authorized powers of one's own society, which are accountable to its citizenry, particularly when those powers are exercised in a manifestly disproportionate and immoral [way], or in a deliberate program of discrimination, repression, and collective cruelty. (98)

The oppression Said speaks of is manifested in the real political sense by Abdel Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak's regimes, and in the literal sense by the state of gangsters and criminals on the people of the Gabalawi Alley. The intellectual figure of the narrator-scribe in the novel thus initiates a rhetorical movement of resistance, and the task he undertakes represents an attempt at speaking truth to power through written discourse, which is "no Panglossian idealism" for he factors in as many popular voices of discontent as possible (Said 102).

The narrator, however, only succeeds at calling attention to the stories that need to be told without telling them himself. Instead, he takes a step back and metaphorically hands the pen over to the alley people and each of the revolutionary heroes. The act of resistance he initiates is undertaken by the marginalized subjects themselves; they narrate their own accounts of themselves as Couldry would say. By retelling stories of their past, the people recapture the power of legitimation and self-determination over several generations, combining two of Bakhtin's basic types of compositional-stylistic unities: stylization of various forms of oral every day narration with stylistically individualized speech of characters (262).

These centrifugal linguistic gestures can also be interpreted as inflections of an autobiographical nature at a subgeneric level in the novel. In other words, *Children of the Alley*'s form allows it to encompass more than one distinct genre by including colloquial speech spoken directly by individual characters, a select few of whom are more prominent

and span the length of the entire novel such as Adham, Idris, Gabal, Rifaa, Qassem, and Arafa, while other subjects' voices fall in and out of the diegetic world as though a microphone were picking up sound waves from different directions.

The stylistics of storytelling are made even more complex upon realizing that oftentimes the discourse of characters in direct dialogue with one another carries within it the quoted speech of other characters in absentia. For instance, in the chapter on Adham's generation, his son Qadri and niece Hind are speaking to each other about her fate and how cruel a man her father Idris is. In mid-dialogue, Hind directly quotes large chunks of what her father had said on different occasions:

> One time I saw him look up at our grandfather's house, and say, "If he wanted his children and grandsons to live in disgrace, does he want the same for his granddaughter? The only proper place for Hind is in that locked mansion." And one time he told my mother that a man from Kafr al-Zaghari wanted to marry me. My mother was really happy, and he got furious and yelled at her, "You slut, you stupid thing, who do you think this person from Kafr al-Zaghari might be? The lowest servant in the mansion is better than he is, and probably cleaner." My mother sighed and asked him, "So who is good enough for her?" and he shouted, "The dictator hiding behind the walls of his house knows who. She's his granddaughter, and there is no one on earth who's good enough for her! I want her to have a husband like me." My mother couldn't help herself, and said, "Do you want her to be miserable like her mother?" He pounced on her like an animal and kicked her hard until she ran out of the hut. (54)

Upon deconstructing this instance of heteroglossia, we realize that Hind is telling only part of the story of her personal life through the filter of her memory, embeds it within the framework of a conversation that is far removed from the time of the narrator-scribe's writing or telling of the larger story, and even further removed from the present time of our reading. The temporal layering and depth of the stories told within stories is evidence of the novel's metaliterary and generically differentiated nature. Its coherence and totality are not bothered by *who* performs the fragmentary acts of storytelling; on the contrary, it

accommodates multiple and fragmentary storytellers. The focus instead is on the stories themselves. The multiple levels of narration taking place and the distance separating the prefatory narrator from each subject speaking at different moments in time may be problematic when it comes to concerns of veracity and reliability. In other words, how can we know for sure whether the stories are true? The narrator could not possibly have been a firsthand witness to this many levels of history; therefore, the stories may all be utter lies. Nevertheless, Mehrez reminds us that the novel form purposefully blurs the distinction between what is "real" and what is "imaginary" to the point that we must no longer ask whether the representations are "real," but rather "*why* and *how* the 'real' is constructed and transformed within [the] text" (5; emphasis original). *Children of the Alley*'s experimental and heterological form reminds us that it opens the post-revolutionary period (post-1952) by delivering exactly what it promises the reader in its preface – a people's story told by the people themselves. Readers are thus forced to suspend their disbelief and listen to the stories of struggle, injustice, and resistance, which is the central purpose of the novel to begin with.

The revolutionary and incendiary power of voice is emphasized even further when the gangsters repeatedly strive to abet the spreading of "news … like fire throughout the alley" and silence the "waves of chanting [that is] as loud as thunder" (Mahfouz 146), mimicking the "real" act of state censorship that writers and activists constantly confront. Even the visibility of the public as a goliath body of spectators and witnesses to spectacles, crimes, and acts of brutality is a visual derivative of heteroglossia that constitutes a palpable threat to the abusive power of the state: the security forces rush anxiously to disperse the crowds and prevent their congregation. After a bloody confrontation in a

public courtyard between Gabal, the second-generation leader of Al Hamdan, and Zalqut, a gangster overlord, backed by his mob of bloodthirsty criminals, an encounter which ends in the murder of Zalqut and the victory of the masses, Gabal approaches the overseer's gate and demands to speak with the overheads of the neighborhood, Effendi and his wife. But the gatekeeper's voice whimpers from behind closed doors, "The people – the people," in fear of their pent-up and undiluted rage (Mahfouz 147). Another visual representation of a crowd gathering in public is evoked in the unit covering Rifaa's lifetime. A scandalous moment descends over Al Gabal neighborhood when Yasmina, the town flirt, is exposed for her dishonorable love affair with Bayoumi, a neighborhood gangster, and the public demands Khunfis, the master protector of Al Gabal, punish her for committing adultery:

> The men of Al Gabal were streaming from their houses and crowding into the courtyard and the alley in front of the House of Triumph, making Khunfis' position even more difficult. (187)

Aside from the inferior position women occupy in various instances scattered throughout the narrative – a significant dimension that nevertheless lies beyond the analytical scope of this chapter – the highly repetitive textual visibility of the crowd gains currency as a motif on the novel's formal level, but also as a public popular force that authority figures genuinely fear on its thematic level. In *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (1995), W.J.T. Mitchell points out the impossibility of separating the textual elements of speech and discourse from visual imagery, arguing that the pictorial and visible nature of texts is as equally evocative and vulnerable to misinterpretation as the textuality of images (14). From the standpoint of visual culture studies then, *Children of the Alley* is as much a traditional novel as it is a pictorial narrative susceptible to culture-bound visual interpretations by its readers. In other words, it is a novel that defies the limits of its

word-based representational capacity and extends itself to the realm of the visual. It is worth noting, as Sonja Mejcher-Atassi points out in *Reading across Modern Arabic: Literature and Art* (2012), that Mahfouz's literary narratives have had a longstanding relationship with the film industry in Egypt, lending themselves almost naturally to the visual industry, and suggesting that verbal and visual forms of artistic expression are far from autonomous and separate; they share integrational and referential qualities (18).

The image of congregating masses conjured in our reading of *Children of the Alley* resonates in a very real way with the public spectacle of revolution. Badiou, in turn, would say that the image of throngs of people gathered for a common purpose constitutes the restitution of existence to the previously, or "normally," inexistent factions of society. The people of the alley recurrently reappropriate the power to be seen and heard, and they reclaim the right to hold the state accountable for its transgressions and acts of oppression. They suddenly destabilize the power relations and dynamics of a social organization held together by antagonizing the masses and protecting overhead "interests."

The novel's representations of voice and struggle against oppression are in the sense of a convening crowd, not only relevant to political and social reality in Egypt under Sadat and Mubarak, they also demonstrate that the politics of silencing and stifling voice are tactics used by Abdel Nasser's regime which Mahfouz was critiquing at his time of writing. Nevertheless, the redemptive and hopeful power of the people's voice, in its audible and visual forms, is an interpretive socially-symbolic act that seems to transcend the text's historical context and speak to the revolutionary *shabab* of the new century, a reading that is arguably enhanced by the translational choices which relay modern visions of revolt to the local and global reader simultaneously.

Translating Text and Revolution in *Children of the Alley*

The politics of difference in translation often take place outside the boundaries of

the text, but translation is a process that on the one hand, leaves repercussions on the acts of

interpretation which arise from the ensuing product and on the other, recreates the process

of interpretation in an interplay between the reader (who stands for the recipient culture)

and the translator, rather than the writer (who is a local cultural mouthpiece). In parallel

with the novel's commissioned translations by Stewart and Theroux, an ongoing movement

has risen since 2011, one that is interested in globally translating revolution and the

narratives that have come out of the uprisings in Egypt and across the Arab world. In her

revolutionary concept of compiling collaboratively-translated texts that were produced

around the 2011 uprisings entitled *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir*

(2012), Mehrez speaks about a decidedly cultural turn in postcolonial translation studies

away from a purely linguistic orientation that has taken place over the past three decades or

so. She argues that,

> Translation is not simply a linguistic process of exchange or transfer between two
> individual texts but rather a contextual operation that requires mediation and
> negotiation between texts within their cultural contexts. Translation is therefore
> engaged and undertaken as a perpetual process of decoding and recoding in which
> the translator transcends the purely linguistic level to one of creative transposition.
> This liberating understanding of the processes that lie at the heart of translation
> problematizes and questions the notion of "full equivalence" between language
> systems. Further, it is informed by what Roman Jakobson argued more than half a
> century ago: synonymy between languages is never possible, for signification and
> meanings are always culture-bound; hence the impossibility of sameness in any
> translation. (4-5)

In a sense, the method of Mehrez's edited compilation performs a kind of resistance act

itself: it debunks the myth of transparent language and resists the use of hegemonic,

universalizing abstractions. Theroux's 1996 translation of *Awlad haritna* occupies a liminal

position between the nuanced movement in translation studies, which foregrounds the role

and visibility of the translator that Mehrez speaks about, and the impulse to produce a

translated text that appears homogenous and "clean," thus rendering the translator invisible.

On the one hand, *Children of the Alley* is bereft of any marginal notes and references that

point to the text's original language or the specificity of its cultural context, projecting the

illusion of a smooth or pure narrative. No Arabic words are transliterated besides the

character's names and place-names. On the other hand, a close inspection of Theroux's

translation reveals that his choices are not "innocent;" on the contrary, they expose a

process of negotiating meaning that has taken place between the novel's cultural context

and the produced translation, which can be problematic in terms of generating unilateral

and orientalized readings of the novel's social, political, and cultural context.

For a local and international reading public to whom an English version of the text

is made available, it is crucial to interrogate the modern political connotation of certain

words in Theroux's particular translation, which may not necessarily have the same

contextual meaning in the original Arabic. Nathaniel Greenberg adopts a similar method in

"Naguib Mahfouz's Children of the Alley and the Coming Revolution" (2013), tracing the

historical connotation and use of the word *futūwa* in the novel in a politically unconscious

yet suggestive manner. Greenberg bridges the gap between textual use of the word and its

contemporary socially-circulating meaning that is relevant to the 2011 uprisings. Although

he does not consider the meaning and use of *futūwa* rendered in translation, and how

readers' interpretations are informed by translational choices, the Jamesonian method he

espouses is, nevertheless, enlightening as regards drawing viable connections between the aesthetics of an older-generation novel and recent political upheaval and change.

In a previously-illustrated example of Hind's voice as she relays to Qadri the words of her father, Idris, Theroux uses the word "dictator" on behalf of Idris to describe Gabalawi's austerity and how he has turned his back on his children and subjects: "The dictator hiding behind the walls of his house knows who" (54). In the original Arabic manuscript, the word "الطاغية" (52), which is also the translational equivalent of "tyrant," is a word that evokes despotic qualities, but has less suggestive connotations in terms of modern systems of political aggression. Theroux's use of the word "dictator" in his translation suggests a more direct political reading that draws quite vivid connections with the successive rulers of Egypt. Another instance of politically-charged translation is the use of the word "insurgency" to describe the people's rebellion (94) when in the original text, Mahfouz uses the term as an adjective to describe the day as "نهارًا ثائرًا" (93); which could simply mean a "day of distress or rage." An "insurgency" however indicates a violent, organized rebellion against a constituted authority. The word "الحانة" (248) in turn is rendered as "bar" (254) instead of tavern; "الوقف" (262) is translated as "estate" (269) which signifies ownership and property in its modern, capitalist usage, when it usually retains a religious or spiritual connotation in Arabic (an endowment or property affiliated with a religious party). The literal translation of the word "estate" in Arabic would be either "منزلة" or "ملكيّة" or "ممتلكات".[20] The transliterated form of the word as "waqf" or its plural,

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[20] These translations are retrieved from *Ad'Dalil: English-Arabic Dictionary* by Muhammad Abdel Raziq Manna', page 305.

"awqaf" could have been used instead of "estate" to indicate a closer meaning that would keep the original cultural connotation of the term intact. However, Theroux chooses to translate the word from Arabic into a meaning an undifferentiated global readership would understand in capitalist neoliberal terms: '' إنّما نريد الوقف لنستغلّه وبذلك تصير الحارة امتدادًا للبيت الكبير" (264) is problematically translated as, "But we want the estate in order to capitalize on it, and that way the alley will be like an extension of the mansion!" (271).

In these and several other examples from the novel in translation, the critical reader can detect a slow crescendo-like progression towards modern forms of violence, revolution, and resistance. The language of *tahrir* (liberation) is sharpened to a modern sensibility through Theroux's translation, allowing the text to come across as more politically direct and relevant to the 2011 revolution in Egypt and the global wave of popular uprisings in the 21st century, because the language used is consistent with modern political terminology regarding the clash between democracies, dictatorships, and revolutions. The original Arabic text, however, befuddles Mahfouz's position as a writer with respect to his readers as he walks a fine line between "sincere political commitment and an amazing disengagement from politics" (Mehrez 18). It is precisely this position that has garnered Mahfouz much criticism, especially among the younger generation of Egyptian writers who regard him as a model and yet have the understandable impulse to articulate their writerly positions more clearly in their texts and represent political oppression and the desire for liberation with a greater sense of urgency as will be revealed in the following chapter.

Revolutionary Momentum in *Children of the Alley*

The state's performance of oppression on the level of free textual representation and daily life is not limited to consistent acts of censorship and silencing, which the novel's depictions of revolutionary voice and heteroglossia have proven resilient to. State oppression and resistance to it also operate unconsciously in the text on the level of the alley's aesthetic and visual architecture. In spite of Mahouz's allegorical representation of Gabalawi Alley as imperceptibly located in the Egyptian desert, or perhaps because of the alley's symbolic nature, the critical reader is given leeway for interpreting and drawing connections with contemporary socio-spatial paradigms in Egyptian urban centers. Sakr observes that the policies of urban planning in Cairo under Mubarak have propagated an atmosphere of isolation and exclusion through the placement of physical walls and barricades as well as the establishment of gated communities, privatized clubs, and amenities (25-6). The result was an exodus of middle and upper class citizens from the city center to the peripheral desert.

A similar movement underlies the relational positioning of the privileged in juxtaposition with the marginalized or dispersed in *Children of the Alley*: The novel's structural layout can be visually interpreted and envisioned through the organization of the alley itself. It commences from a singular point – Gabalawi mansion, the ancestral home where the first father lives with his sons – and centrifugally expands out into the desert, gradually bringing the alley in its compartmentalized form into existence over time. As each generation grows, the alley's dimensions become larger, assuming the form of a hierarchical chain with the most affluent and powerful people living in communities closest to the mansion and the poorest, most unfortunate of the population living in outcast groups

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at the alley's outermost extremities at the bottom of the metaphorically capitalist chain. The people of the alley are all nevertheless tied to Gabalawi, the symbol of a central starting point, in the same way that Egyptians are tied to the state by citizenry. This takes the form of indirect coercive displacement and repression enacted by the state under capitalist motivations, which makes the revolutionary heroes and the people's decisive acts to repeatedly storm the gated walls of the overseers' homes similar to the 2011 revolutionary *shabab*'s congregating movements that flooded and occupied Tahrir Square – the center of power and legitimacy in the city – until they deposed Mubarak.

This is not to say that Mahfouz's novel directly lent the 2011 revolution its movement strategies and maneuvers as the very model of leader-based anticolonial resistance in the novel is different from the leaderless form undertaken by the 2011 revolution. But the resonance between the literary and political worlds and the similar motive for revolution – liberating marginalized subjects – is uncanny and speaks to Sakr's metaphor of Egyptian writers since Mahfouz "unconsciously" behaving as architects of revolution in a sense, for despite their inability to predict the outbreak of revolution, their raison d'être by writing in the revolutionary genre of the novel is to persistently seek political change. It is not inconsequential that the novel was republished by the Naguib Mahfouz Centennial Library in 2011, a century after its author's birthdate coinciding with the year the revolution broke out in the streets of Cairo as the *shabab* began calling for the same timeless themes articulated by the novel: social justice, freedom, and an end to the reign of tyranny. This novel, relic of an older generation of intellectuals, publics, and representational forms, has managed through circulation to transcend its own temporality and engage in a culture of instantaneous publicity this new generation of writers and

(physical and virtual) publics have espoused, alongside other more popular narrative genres that have resurfaced in the 21st century.

Conclusion

This chapter on conscientiously unveiling the political unconscious in Mahfouz's *Children of the Alley* questions the process of translating, communicating and miscommunicating, and applying the more philosophical understandings of modern revolt and popular uprisings in a text that is not just a text. It is rather an endless rhetorical, pictorial, and political dialogue between traditional and contemporary Egyptian literature on the one hand, and between Egyptian and non-Egyptian, non-Arab, global, and predominantly Western-centered world literature on the other. This dialogue is informed first and foremost by the culture-informed ability of readers to interpret and imaginatively see and hear the voices that were previously unseen and unheard. As I have mentioned in my analysis of this novel, the past is constantly being brought back into the present on two adjacent levels: in the diegetic world and in the real world.

The novel's presence in its English and Arabic versions in the Egyptian literary sphere in the 21st century in an age of information technology, almost un-censorable exposure, and instantaneous publicity parallels the internal cyclical and restless structure of the novel in which the people's voices cannot be stifled, and their stories constantly bring their collective past back into their shared present, which in a philosophical sense is what characterizes a revolution. Although republished in 2006 and 2011, *Children of the Alley* may not be part of the opportunistic wave of branding texts as novels that predicted the 2011 revolution, but it certainly is a novel about revolution and the potentiality of social

reform. As shown in this chapter, the novel's very form and multivalent genre partake in a local tradition of literature as resistance to dominant ideologies of novel writing. At the same time, in translation it acquires new meanings and interpretations in light of its global circulation among world literary texts. Reading the novel against the historical and political backdrop of its production, as Jameson encourages critical readers to do, is useful: Its publication history attests to the complex negotiations between Mahfouz's novel as a subtle critique of the socio-political status quo and the state institutions that aim at silencing any voices of dissent which constitute a threat to political and religious authority.

CHAPTER III

Heterologies of Voice in Magdy el-Shafee's *Metro: A Story of Cairo*

"With comics, readers are sovereign over their thinking…"
--- Abdelghani Jbara

"By no stretch of the imagination can comic book stories be called great literature."
--- Gary Wright[21]

Historically speaking, scholars and critics agree that comics and graphic narratives have been marginalized by the literary and artistic cultural scene as substandard mediums both in the Arab world and the world at large.[22] When measured against the traditional and canonized genre of the novel, many cultural theorists and literary critics, such as Paul Thomas, critique the widely held academic belief that the graphic narrative is inherently doomed to failure as an adaptation of the "original" novel ("Adventures in Genre!: Rethinking Genre through Comics/Graphic Novels" 188). Juxtaposing its formal structure and bimodal form of representation through word and image with the so-called purely verbal form of the novel carries the same kind of reductionist prejudice that Orientalist literary criticism generally holds against postcolonial narratives. Comics and graphic narratives should instead be regarded as independent mediums with their own strengths and weaknesses in representation. It is worth mentioning that the term "graphic novel" has developed for specifically marketing purposes since the second half of the 20th century and

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[21] Gary Wright as quoted by Paul Thomas in "Adventures in Genre!: Rethinking Genre through Comics/Graphic Novels," 189.

[22] See Charlotte Bank's article "Swimming against the Tide" (2012), translated by Charlotte Collins, from the German online platform *Qantara.de* as well as Paul Thomas' article "Adventures in Genre!: Rethinking Genre through Comics/Graphic Novels" (2011) from the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 2.2.

is a more common identification of the graphic narrative form, as Hillary Chute points out in her 2008 article "Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative" (453). By using the term "graphic novel," therefore, critics and readers must be alert to the limitation in genre the term implies, and be aware of the fact that graphic narratives can in fact feature a number of genres (fiction, nonfiction, autobiography, etc.) and styles of representation (realistic and experimental).

As a medium of writing with a long history in Egypt and the Arab world, it is difficult to speak about Magdy el-Shafee's graphic narrative *Metro: A Story of Cairo* (2008; translated by Chip Rossetti, 2012) in isolation from the larger tradition in the Arab world. The earliest comics in Egypt date back to the 1950s with works such as *Sindibad* and *Samir* dedicated to children's entertainment, as Lina Ghaibeh points out in her 2015 article "Telling Graphic Stories of the Region: Arabic Comics after the Revolution" (324). The roots of comics writing in general, are also associated with ancient Egyptian symbolic painting and hieroglyphics, as Abdelghani Jbara argues; these drawings consist of visual narratives relating stories of events which had transpired in ancient pharaonic times ("Using Comics in Development in the Arab World: Prospects and Impediments" 226). Scott McCloud would concur with this genealogy as he posits an open-ended definition of comics as a medium of sequential art that is not restricted to a singular genre, representational form, subject matter, materiality, or reading public in his theoretical work disguised as a graphic narrative, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993). Chute, on the other hand, offers a more specific definition of graphic narratives as "a hybrid word-and-image form in which two narrative tracks, one verbal and one visual, register temporality spatially" (452).

The very idea of a differentiated duality between a strictly visual medium and a strictly verbal one, however, is itself called into question by visual culture theorists like W.J.T. Mitchell, who argues in "There are no Visual Media" (2005) that "all media are, from the standpoint of sensory modality, mixed media" (257). In other words, even at its purest state, visual imagery instantaneously evokes verbal language for its expression and depression. Similarly, textual discourse invariably triggers a pictorial and even tactile imaginary in representation. The "impurity" that thus constitutes the comics medium is a unique representational asset that demands a nuanced method of consuming pictures and words at the same time.

In *Reading across Modern Arabic: Literature and Art* (2012), Mejcher-Atassi emphasizes the importance of breaking with conventional ways of reading as well as seeing by advocating an interartistic approach to studying modern and contemporary Arabic literature and art that vies for the centrifugal and limitless spirit across and within literature. Referring back to Laurie Edson's method of "reading relationally" within, between, and across texts and visual media, Mejcher-Atassi highlights the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue and challenging homeostatic understandings of visuality and textuality, especially in the novel. It is from this "democratic" standpoint that we must approach the representation of voice and revolution in *Metro*, subjecting neither the narrative's words to the meaning of its images nor the latter to the former, but rather allowing both systems to voice themselves freely.

It was not until the 19th century that comics in its current verbal-visual structural paradigm came to light in the West, which suggests, as Jbara holds, that the medium owes its current form to an "originally" Egyptian culture of representation (226). The medium

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then began to develop in modern Egypt through the importation and translation of

American, French, and Belgian comics in the 1960s and 1970s, followed by the circulation

in Egypt of regional and pan-Arab comics initiatives such as the UAE's *Majed* and

Lebanon's *Ahmad* series in the '70s and '80s (Ghaibeh 324). But even as the Egyptian

market sold translated copies of Western comics, there always was a circulation of locally-

produced characters and comics such as *Ibn Battouta* and *Antara Ibn Shaddad* (Jbara 228).

Although their content was mainly didactic and concerned children's education and

entertainment, there have been several attempts at writing comic strips about adult social

and political issues, such as political cartooning which has been featured in Egyptian

newspapers, magazines, and dailies since the 1920s.[23] Comics about more serious social

and intellectual concerns aimed at adults have rarely been published due to censorship

restrictions and the lack of non-commercial or independent publication opportunities for

young writers and artists.

In the 21st century, however, the Egyptian literary scene appears to have taken an

altogether different direction in writing, reading, and circulating (publishing) graphic

narratives. When in the 20th century, platforms that carried comics were limited to

magazines, newspapers, and other print publications that were mainly monitored by the

state; in the 21st century, the Internet and social media platforms have created new

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[23] As its title suggests, John Lent's article "Egyptian Cartooning: An Overview" (2007) provides an overview of the rich history of Egyptian cartoonists and their contribution to/satirical critique of local and regional political situations (especially World War II, the 1948 *Nakba*, 1952 Revolution, and the 1967 Defeat) in print publications like *Rosa El-Yossef*, *Megallet Al-Ithnayn*, *Akhbar Al Yom*, *Sabah El-kheir*, *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Akhbar*, etc. Two pioneer Egyptian cartoonists, Mohamed Abdel-Moneim Rakha and Zohdi al-Awadi, set the bar in the '20s for political expression via cartoons, and as decades rolled by, cartoonists themselves agree that though there is relatively more freedom in expression now, especially among opposition papers and media, the quality of work is down in comparison with their predecessors' ingenuity in creating social archetypes (150). Alternatively, consult Gameel, Muhib. "Egyptian Comics: A History with a Revolutionary Flavor." *Al Akhbar English* for a history of comics production in Egypt.

possibilities for self-publication and widespread, instantaneous dissemination of comics with reduced control from state and private censorship apparatuses. Public and open-access platforms for circulating comics in Arabic and in translation are being created and expanded online, such as "arabcomics.net," which Yazan al-Saadi describes in "Arab Comics: Creating Communities, Archiving History" (2013). Al-Saadi reports on the invaluable breadth and freedom which characterize the corpus of comics translated and archived, providing a young generation of writers, artists, and consumers a sense of Arab comics history as well as the possibility to engage freely in discussions and voice opinions on their web-based platform, virtually embodying the essence of democratic expression to an extent. In a June 2013 Stanford Report written by Alessandra Aquilanti, Alexander Key similarly notes a change occurring in the very scope which defines literature in Egypt and the Arab world at large, as it has come to encompass new forms of web-based and popular culture writing used in social media platforms such as blogging, Facebooking, and Tweeting. But even beyond the forms of writing which are now subjects of serious study in literary, cultural, and political circles, the style of writing itself has changed as well. Contemporary narratives in Egypt and the rest of the Arab world have gradually become heedless of the Western models of modernist and postmodernist formal structure, which 20th-century authors seem comparatively adherent to in retrospect, and have gravitated more towards a "single, clear, programmatic position" that articulates powerfully resistant stands against social and political injustice (Key as quoted by Aquilanti 2). Ghaibeh agrees, saying that "young artists challenged the 'old' mediums of expression and brought the fresh artistic language of the street and popular culture to the fore" (325; emphasis added).

The comics and graphic narrative medium has risen to the forefront in this century as one of the more combative and resilient forms of literary expression, especially in light of the 2011 Tahrir Revolution. El-Shafee's graphic narrative *Metro: A Story of Cairo* emerged in 2008 as part of a burgeoning visually-dominated popular culture that utilizes nonsynchronous word-and-image discourses of instantaneous publicity in Egypt and the Arab world. El-Shafee is considered patron of the graphic narrative in the Arab world much as Naguib Mahfouz is regarded as father of the modern Arabic novel.[24] Originally published in Arabic in 2008, *Metro*, which depicts conditions of social and political malaise in Egypt under Mubarak, was censored by the state upon its release. Its author and publisher were arrested and heavily fined for their considerably daring work. It was then translated by Chip Rossetti into English in 2012 and today circulates in German and Italian translations among an international readership. Its insightful subject matter and provocative publication history have boosted el-Shafee's now prominent status as writer and revolutionary activist to global recognition, especially among Western scholars, critics, and mainstream media conduits, all of whom are interested to promote Egyptian popular voices of discontent as appeals for an American model of democracy as though it epitomizes freedom of speech, social justice, and universal human rights values. *Metro*'s reintroduction into the literary scene in its translated form in 2012 was not without opposition from religious parties as well, especially after 2013 when the Muslim Brotherhood, represented by former president Mohamed Morsi, came into power (Ghaibeh 326).

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[24] Although Lina Ghaibeh cites the existence of several adult comics that undertake serious social, political, and intellectual concerns in Lebanon in the 1980s before el-Shafee's *Metro*, such as *Carnaval* and *Freud* from the publication *Min Beirut*. Such adult-focused publications witnessed a revival in the 2000s with Egypt's *TokTok*; Lebanon's *Le Jeu des Hirondelles*, *Samandal*, and *Malak*; Kuwait's *The 99*; Morocco's *Skef Kef*; Syria's *Comic4Syria*; Tunisia's *Spark*; and others, all of which have paved the way for el-Shafee's *Metro*. See "Telling Graphic Stories of the Region," 324 and 325.

Egyptian production in the comics medium has indisputably been very prolific since the mid-2000s, but questions of narrative interpretation in light of recent socio-political changes in Egypt have just begun to scratch the surface. It is vital not only to celebrate the "liberation" of this medium through regional comics workshops, initiatives, literary and journalistic reportage, but also to draw attention to the ways in which comics/graphic novels are being read on a local and global scale. This is where Fredric Jameson's and David Damrosch's methods of interpretive reading and critical analysis come into play as useful tools for considering *how to read* the representations of people, voice, and revolution in el-Shafee's *Metro*, especially since readers from various cultures around the world are involved in the creation and circulation of the text's meaning. Jameson's methodology in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) will be placed in conversation with el-Shafee's *Metro* in order to tease out a politically-charged ideology of resistance and revolution that the form of the graphic narrative performs by identifying instances in which the writer represents downgraded subjects as agents of subjectivity with the self-wielding power to revolt, define, and narrate themselves.

On the one hand, the narrative cannot help adopting domestic postcolonial concerns the manner in which James Hodapp describes is a writer's task of representing oppressed postcolonial people from an ethical and humanitarian standpoint in his article "The Postcolonial Joe Sacco" (2015). But on the other hand, the inevitable global circulation of the original work and its translation(s) has forced them to transcend the boundaries of national literature and become objects of literary concern for "world readers." In other words, the depictions of revolution in *Metro* are not just socially and historically symbolic events for Egyptians; they function on the level of a global revolution

against a neoliberal and capitalist world order that oppresses a disenfranchised and under/misrepresented majority. Jameson's method of reading such texts in translation in the 21st century bridges the gap between their position as postcolonial writing and their active role as catalysts of change in world literature. This chapter will thus engage Jameson's method of reading and interpretation in order to demonstrate how the graphic narrative uses both its form for the political purposes of resistance and liberation and its content for the humanitarian representation of disenfranchised subjects.

Some academics, critics and mainstream media have imagined the literary surge in Arab comics/graphic narrative writing as a "comic renaissance" that dovetailed with the "Spring" of the Arab world's awakening to democracy courtesy of Western and European nations much in the same Orientalist light that the early 20th-century Arab *Nahda* movement has been rationalized as an intellectual and literary enlightenment that came to the Arab world through the translation and imitation of Western narrative models. This chapter seeks instead to situate *Metro* along with the recent developments in Egyptian comics/graphic narrative literature in the wider context of postcolonial historicization that meets the global turn in 21st century Egyptian writing through a close examination of voice and heteroglossia in the graphic narrative, which will reveal a revolutionary ideology of self-representation and *tahrir* (liberation) in the underbelly of the narrative. I also argue that heteroglossia, a concept coined by Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) for the study of novels, can in turn transform itself as a register of voice from a textual medium into a representational "mixed" system made of both words and images as Mitchell claims. This in effect allows the graphic narrative to expand the space for literary expression and through its form, actively resist the global tendency of world literature to homogenize

cultural differences through translation and mainstream readings in revolutionary ways that

are beyond the scope of a traditional novel.

Revolutionary Representations of Heteroglossia in Word and Image

      Metro is an urban fiction story from Cairo told in graphic format about Shehab, a

young Egyptian software programmer, who finds himself indebted to Hagg Ghareeb, a

local mobster, after his software company goes bankrupt. Shehab and his friend Mustafa

are eventually forced to resort to theft to come up with the money: They opportunistically

commandeer millions of dollars the bank was going to "loan" a government "big shot,"

which might have cleared their names with the loan shark had they not witnessed the

murder of Hagg Misbah, a contractor who covers up illegitimate projects with higher-ups in

the government. The story is set in Cairo in the early years of the 21st century when the

nation was still under the Mubarak dictatorship, and it is told from a perspective that is

identified in postcolonial terms as "below" (Hodapp 319 and 321). In other words, the daily

plight of marginalized subjects like Shehab; Wannas, an old Sa'idi beggar[25]; and Dina, a

young liberal female journalist and social activist; is the subject of the narrative, and their

struggle to reclaim agency in a society that spays them (and people like them) of power is

the graphic narrative's central concern.

      Identifying representations of heteroglossia merely on the level of the narrative's

verbal content while disregarding the cultural language spoken within and between its

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[25] The term "Sai'di" refers to an Egyptian from the Sa'id or Upper Egypt who is generally more agriculture-oriented, more conservative, poorer, and less educated than the people who live in Egypt's metropolitan urban centers. In his translator's note, Chip Rossetti says Sa'idi people are considered hicks and are usually made fun of by other Egyptians.

images makes for a limited understanding of the narrative. As McCloud elaborates, closure is a phenomenon of observing the parts of an image but perceiving the whole. In comics, the gutter between the panels is the space that most involves the reader/viewer in a collaborative effort for interpretation. Panels consist of images and words that are frozen in time and space, and the gutter is the space – the silence, the omitted, and the unsaid – where movement in time and space occurs. It is where meaning is made and gaps are bridged; where closure happens and the reader actively participates in the act of interpretation (63-66). Studying the pictorial representations in the panels of *Metro* and the gutters in between is just as necessary as studying the verbal language of the narrative. Form and content are both pivotal and function together to bring revolutionary representations to light. The images can communicate cultural specificity and heteroglossia just as powerfully as the words, arguably even more so when considering the narrative in translation where the context and connotation of the words in Arabic are compromised in English, but the pictorial elements remain relatively untouched.

The visual representations of poverty in the case of Wannas manifest at several instances in stark opposition to the forces of oppression on the one hand, and the cosmopolitan Cairene crowds on the other. As Shehab is getting his shoes waxed at the shoe-shining shop by the metro, he converses with the poor old man who is almost like a father figure to Shehab despite the difference in their socioeconomic backgrounds. In three consecutive panels, Wannas is depicted from the perspective of Shehab's gaze, as though one is looking down at him from a position of superiority, and Wannas appears to be hunched over in a quasi-supplicatory stance at Shehab's feet (Figure 1).

Fig. 1: El-Shafee trans. Rossetti 8. Image cropped.

Wannas' thin, bristly face is downcast and his white *galabeyya* is all he has to wear, and he refers to Shehab as "Sir" and "Mr." although the latter is younger than he. In Arabic, the term he uses is "يا أستاذ" which is a title of respect (el-Shafee 12). Wannas complains to Shehab about the inept welfare system and the exorbitant tax payment he owes the government for his little shop which will inevitably be foreclosed. What is more, the forces of oppression which are after Wannas' only source of livelihood are represented verbally as "they" in English and "دول" in colloquial Egyptian. The government apparatus is projected as a goliath other and the particular oppressive parties in the government remain unnamed throughout the narrative. References with a sinister "they" or "them" are among the ways in which the subaltern subjects of the narrative and the writer identify the state's oppressive factions in an effort to distance themselves in order to dehumanize them and resist their

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influence over their lives. Other verbal portrayals of prosecutors include the police: " وبعدين

بوليس ايه اللي ح تبلغيه يا دينا!! ده تلاقيهم همّا اللي زاقينهم"/"And who are you going to tell,

Dina? What police? They probably sent them [thugs to harass Dina] in the first place" (20;

el-Shafee trans. Rossetti 16); as well as "big shot government types" or "المسؤولين الكبار"

(25; el-Shafee trans. Rossetti 21); and "the men upstairs" or "أسيادك" (27; el-Shafee trans.

Rossetti 23).

El-Shafee also offers readers a brief glance at Wannas' home environment in the

Sa'id (Figure 2).

Fig. 2: El-Shafee trans. Rossetti 18-19.

The bland rural background is contrasted with a bustling urban cityscape in the panel

before, mainly through the quintessential mud hut and straw roof that Wannas himself lives

in. The reader also sees a different stratum of Egyptians than those who live in Cairo; the

women are dressed in loose-fitting, monochromatic, and conservative *abayas* and *hijabs*;

the men similarly in *galabeyyas*. Not only does el-Shafee visualize Badiou's inexistent –

those who are considered as lower-class Egyptians, he also draws the reader's attention to

the fact that social spaces like Wannas' home in Ezbet al-Batt are not found on a map when

detailed maps of the city are otherwise stamped across the narrative (see 22; el-Shafee

trans. Rossetti 18). This is a highly significant moment in the narrative for what el-Shafee

does here, in effect, is visualize for the reader, local and global, people who are ordinarily

unseen and unrepresented in Egypt. In Cairo, however, the reader is exposed to a visual

mélange of people especially in panels depicting a crowded metro platform or public

square, from men in suits to Hawaiian and Nike shirts (like Musatafa) to men in official

uniform; and from women in conservative clothing to women in skirts and tight pants (9;

el-Shafee trans. Rossetti 5).

In spite of Wannas' unfortunate circumstances, he performs a crucial symbolic

role in the narrative: His constantly mobile position on the street allows him to witness

many truths when it comes to scandalous events that transpire and are covered up or hidden

from the public eye. Wannas is the one who sees Hagg Misbah being murdered in a dark

tunnel and though he cannot do anything about it, he quickly relays this information to

Shehab rather than ignore its importance (see 26; el-Shafee trans. Rossetti 22). In addition

to that, in a later panel where Wannas and Shehab are having a private conversation,

Wannas tells the boy that he knows he and Mustafa robbed the "big shot" at the bank, and

he admits that he knew Hagg Misbah was involved in illegitimate dealings with "higher-ups" in the government, which was why he was murdered. Wannas caps it off by confidently declaring to Shehab when the latter tries to undermine him: "I know plenty" (el-Shafee trans. Rossetti 60) or "...أنا عارف حاجات كتير" (el-Shafee 64). Wannas' position, therefore, seems to ascend in terms of agency and power to change the course of events or at least make socially superior people listen to him and acknowledge him as an active agent in Cairene society. This is bolstered by the irony of his pretend blindness while begging: He pretends he cannot see so that people would pity him and hand him money when in fact, it is because he is not accounted for and rendered invisible by the forces of oppression at large in Cairene society that he is granted access to a number of events which are meant to stay hidden from public view. From a helpless shoe shiner at the opening of the narrative to a street roaming beggar who is privy to the secrets of people from all walks of life, Wannas seems to draw power from the public and uncontainable nature of the street itself.

The Egyptian street, in turn, retains a highly symbolic function in the narrative. Aside from offering realistic and verifiable representations of the urban spatial sprawl in today's Cairo, which legitimizes and credits the story with sociopolitical plausibility, it acts as a site of protection to Shehab, Mustafa, Dina, Wannas, and other ordinary individuals in the city, shields them from the oppression of state apparatuses, and imbibes them with strength and resilience on several occasions. This is seen when Shehab and Mustafa find Hagg Ghareeb, the loan shark, raiding their office, and quickly dash out of his sight, disappearing into the crowded street (24; el-Shafee trans. Rossetti 20): "We're back on the street again/So what else is new?"

Another moment in which the street and the people on the street come off as visible and powerful individuals to whom the parties that have usurped power in Egypt are held accountable is represented in the panel where Shehab kicks the "big shot" out of the bank onto the street and shouts out to random people (Figure 3),

دلوقتي.. إنتو الحكومة.. وآدي العالم اللي سارقينكم واخدين فلوسكم ومجوعينكم قدامكم زي الفرخة اهه. (38)

All of you! You're on top now! This guy here has been robbing you, ripping you off and leaving you starving! He's all yours… (34)

Fig. 3: El-Shafee trans. Rossetti 34. Image cropped.

They then run off with the money and Shehab reassures Mustafa that "we're invisible now. Relax," because of the crowd enveloping them (34). A scene which at first glance seems humorous to its readers and viewers, takes on a more serious and threatening ideological undertone upon further interpretation in relation to the context in which it was originally written and attempted to be published. It can be read as the writer-artist's veiled way of

inciting people to act out against a government that oppresses them on a daily basis for which the double-chinned, greasy-haired "big shot" is only a mere symbol. In a talk given by el-Shafee at the Arabic Comics Symposium: Personal Narratives and Memoir at the American University of Beirut in November 2015, the writer and artist presents this particular scene from his work to his audience and vaguely mentions that it was representations like this that led the Egyptian government in 2008 to bar his work from publication on account that it was not "the right time" for such ideas to circulate in public.

The social and political context on the street that *Metro* is born out of and witnesses was indeed volatile and subject to either overly broad or simplistic ideological interpretations. Representations of the early 21st century grassroots secular Egyptian movement *Kifāya* (also known as Enough!) feature in the graphic narrative, suggesting el-Shafee's advocacy of the popular movement's domestic reformist, anti-Mubarak agenda.[26] From this standpoint, claims of a quasi-premonitory aura hovering about narratives from the 2000s such as *Metro* become more understandable. Egyptians beating up a corrupt government official did not occur per-se – in fact, the opposite happened: Police and armed officials have tortured and detained hundreds of protestors since the beginning of the revolts in 2011 without charges or trials and sexually harassed protesting women, in line

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[26] *Kifāya* (a.k.a. The Egyptian Movement for Change or "Enough!") was born in 2004 and cross-cut ideological currents by including members with different political and religious affiliations (nationalists, leftists, Islamists, Nasserists, communists, etc.). Its initial agenda was to protest Mubarak's fifth term as President, refuse hereditary rule, change the authoritarian political regime, revoke the state of emergency and long-term staying power Mubarak had by amending the constitution, and generally introduce internal reforms to Egypt. It has received praise as well as criticism from politicians, media analysts, and academics for being the first openly transparent movement that mobilized Egyptians across social classes, age groups, professions, religions, and genders, in a peaceful manner on the street and through a heavy online presence on audiovisual platforms like YouTube, blogs, and their own website. For more detailed information on Kefaya's origins, successes, and reasons for its decline, see the study Oweidat, Nadia et al. "The Kefaya Movement: A Case Study of a Grassroots Reform Initiative." *RAND National Defense Research Institute*. Santa Monica and Arlington: RAND Corporation, 2008.

with Mubarak's ordered arrest of secular activists, journalists for oppositional media outlets, non-government organization members as well as Muslim Brotherhood members and radical Islamists since the 1990s (Oweidat et al. 9 and 28). The notion that justice is returned to people on the street and by the street, however, is very much a prominent theme in the narrative and it also manifested during the January 2011 revolution when Egyptians stood their ground in Cairo's streets and Tahrir Square until Mubarak stepped down.

A third decidedly revolutionary image in the narrative is the visual representation of masses of people crowding the streets protesting the national regime. Visualizations of angry Egyptian men and women, young and old carrying signs recalling the Kefaya movement that read, "كفاية حكم البلطجة" (69)/"Enough with rule of thugs" (65), and chanting with raised fists "المظلوم يروح لمين والغلبان ياكل منين" (70)/"No justice on the street! Nothing for the poor to eat!" (66), as well as "طب ليه ما بنشيلش ليه بنشيل المظلوم... الظالم" (71)/"Why turn on the victim? Why not the oppressor?" (67). Other slogans carried by people are left untranslated such as, "كفاية ظلم" ("Enough injustice;" my translation) in reference to the aforementioned Kefaya movement. In the spirit of a budding popular movement that values social equality among participating citizens, even Wannas is depicted being carried on the shoulders of marching activists in his *galabeyya* badmouthing the National Democratic Party (NDP).[27] But any hope of their voice gaining significant momentum is squashed when the party thugs are sent in to dispel the revolutionary crowd

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[27] The National Democratic Party in Egypt was originally founded by President Anwar al-Sadat in the late '70s and was inherited by Mubarak. The general consensus is that it is an authoritarian power-wielding party that rigged state elections and had supreme political control over the Egyptian Assembly.

by starting fights, beating the protestors with clubs, and chasing and harassing women like Dina.

El-Shafee envisions a phenomenon that had been unfolding in the street regularly since the early 2000s: the people's struggle for freedom of expression with a state that in very violent ways consistently silences and mutes their voices and their presence in public platforms (the street, squares, the media, etc.) under Mubarak. But that did not stop the popular phenomenon from gaining ground and evolving into a full-fledged revolution in 2011, making el-Shafee's work seem prophetic in retrospect. I would argue, however, that el-Shafee is simply faithful to the realistic representation of his society in its own day and age and through his honest approach, the truth is revealed and the marginalized is redeemed. His literary and artistic work comes across as resistant to narratives in Western mainstream media that frame the 2011 revolution as it provides irrefutably real evidence of the domesticity of Egypt's uprising.

Ever the object of harassment by thugs, Dina manages to circumvent the unfortunate reality that targets many Egyptian women in Cairo, a reality which el-Shafee chooses not to suppress in the narrative. Her representation in visual and verbal form, however, breaks the stereotype surrounding female conservatism in Egypt, albeit not in a feminist light. Dina is an educated, young female journalist who values ethics in a generally male-dominated profession and is hungry for the truth in a corrupt news media cesspool. She fearlessly participates in regular protests held on the street despite Shehab telling her not to and despite the constant risk of thugs tailing her and women like her (whom are objectified as "tail" or "مزة" by hooligans like Mustafa's brother who are hired by the

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NDP). Furthermore, she is depicted as a sexually-liberated woman who enters the closed

quarters of young men in Shehab's home and engages in premarital relations with him,

which is considered taboo in Egyptian and other Arab societies. No mention is made of her

family or the nature of her upbringing, but the reader gets the sense that she is a woman

living on her own. The qualities el-Shafee invests in Dina's strong-willed character

complicate assumptions of female subordination and conservatism in 21st-century Egypt.

However, she is not completely liberated from the fetishized purview of the male gaze,

especially in her love scene with Shehab in which her naked and voluptuous body is put on

display more emphatically than Shehab's is (el-Shafee 57; el-Shafee trans. Rossetti 53). In

addition, Dina remains dependent on male protection as Shehab rescues her twice from the

same thugs and finally engulfs a tear-stricken Dina with his protective muscular arms (el-

Shafee trans. Rossetti 74-75). Nonetheless her representation as a subject who aspires to be

autonomous is an important verbal and visual instance of heteroglossia in the narrative as it

undermines the generally Orientalist perception of women in Egypt.

El-Shafee's illustrations and culturally-inflected dialogical registers in the

narrative are thus teeming with heteroglossia and the potentiality of voice. In fact, scenes

from Egyptian popular culture come across as particularly vocal in the narrative as its

subjects unceasingly fight for the possession of agency and control over their lives from the

forces that seek to suppress them, be it mobsters, government higher-ups, thugs and

baltagis, or the state-controlled media. This in itself represents an ideology of resistance to

oppression on the level of content and is embedded into each subaltern subject; the spirit of

revolt is palpable within them.

On the level of form, *Metro* displays a tendency to operate on an ideological plane beyond the scope of the traditional novel's representational capacity and it is also considered innovative in its own medium. Its form, therefore, partakes in an ideology of revolution; it resists the conventions and strict reprimands of the novel and graphic narrative in their Western models, and asserts its own right to be called Egyptian literature. One such revolutionary instance of form occurs when the style of visual representation suddenly becomes experimentally more abstract and cartoonish in a scene in which Wannas tells Shehab a metaphorical wives' tale about a great king who promises wealth, power, and women to the one who can bring him 100 rats – a seemingly impossible task for all men except one who is able to accomplish it by thinking "outside the box" (Figure 4). In *Picture Theory* (1994), Mitchell calls this modernist metanarrative style of visual representation the "metapicture;" pictures that refer to themselves, other pictures, or the historical and material conditions of their production (35-36). The self-referentiality in el-Shafee's cartoonish pictures within the larger picture panels performs the dual role of transitioning without words from the realistic representation of society to a symbolic illustration of the cage that has Egyptians imprisoned which Shehab wants to find a way out of, and simultaneously pays homage to the long and rich tradition of symbolic political cartooning in Egypt which is discussed at the beginning of the chapter.

Fig. 4: El-Shafee trans. Rossetti 61-62.

Another innovative representation on the level of form is made manifest through the map motif, which at times occupies the space of a single panel and at others stretches across the entire page. The metro route and its stops are stamped against a dark background, and significant stations are marked with the names of historic and iconic Egyptian figures, such as Anwar al-Sadat station, Saad Zaghloul station, Gamal Abdel Nasser station, Sayyida Zaynab station, Mohamed Naguib station, and others. Spatially mapping the stations suggests that the weight of the nation's postcolonial historical consciousness persistently bumps up against Shehab's technologically and visually-mediated 21st-century present. The nation's past victories of *tahrir* hang ironically as constant reminders for Shehab and most Egyptians of their disillusioned state under

Mubarak on the one hand, and nostalgically for a past retrospectively viewed by Egyptians as triumphant with respect to a frustrating present on the other. This analysis further justifies the narrative's underlying ideology of revolution in the sense that the people harbor a collective desire to return to a previous reality or mode of political organization. The temporal past is constantly involved in the daily present every time Shehab tells Mustafa to meet him at Naguib station for "in the world of comics, time and space are one and the same" (McCloud 100); past, present, and future projections of time can overlap in the same panel (Chute 453). But more than that, the recurrent spatial stamping of the metro track evokes a sense of fixedness and caged predictability in spite of the facilitated movement the metro stands for. In other words, the metro symbolizes the cage which Shehab wants to escape, a perpetual reminder of a neoliberal system at work in a postcolonial society, offering its subjects the illusion of change and motion inside a cold, predetermined reality imprinted onto a map that is difficult to veer away from or change in spite of Shehab's and other young Egyptians' struggle to revolt and "break the system."

Lastly, the form of the graphic novel communicates resistance ideology through the very mobility of the illustrations and words outside the restrictive frame of the panels themselves. Once again, el-Shafee actively jars the comfortable division between the word and image tracks, unleashing the sensory mediums of touch and sound through the dynamic outburst of their visual element, verifying Mitchell's claim in "There are no Visual Media" (2005) that the term "visual" is restrictive and does not relay the full depth of its mixed nature unless shaken out of its traditional form of representation as el-Shafee does. On several occasions, the reader gets the sense that the subjects and events depicted take on a life of their own and are too big to fit within the panels, bursting out of parameters that in

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turn suggest the stillness of a portrait. This is especially true of scenes depicting confrontation between Shehab and the thugs (18-19, 73 and 75; el-Shafee trans. Rossetti 14-15, 69 and 71) as well as the *Kifāya* social protest scenes which almost contain too much "noise" in each panel (72; el-Shafee trans. Rossetti 68). The scene of Hagg Misbah's murder on the other hand depicts some panels that are tilted and others without borders (27; el-Shafee trans. Rossetti 23). This compromises the integrity of the gutter and asks the reader to participate in an even more attentive and slower reading of a medium which in the first place necessitates readers to actively perform non-linear reading and meaning-making (Chute 452).

Images are not the only elements that assume agency on a formal level; certain words, especially onomatopoeic phrases, also break out of their bubbles in order to take the form of sound waves, such as the vertically winding Arabic typography that suggests a playful interplay between textuality and visuality as Shehab sets off different people's mobile ringtones simultaneously at the metro station (Figure 5). These subtle artistic choices challenge a conventional sense of storytelling and illustration and, in themselves, point to the deceptively rigid framework that defines the qualities and standards of work considered literary.
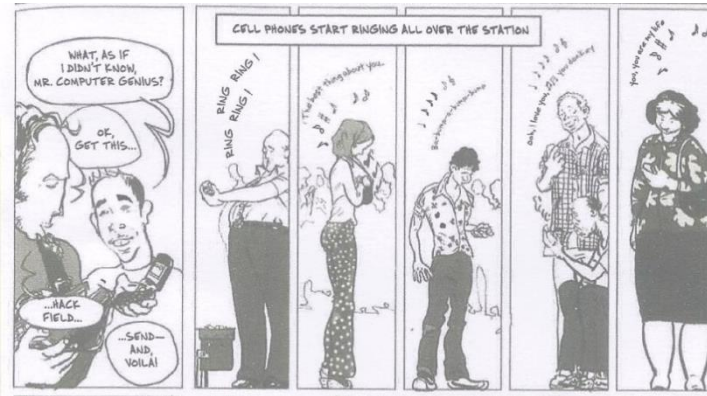
Fig. 5: El-Shafee trans. Rossetti 5. Image cropped.

Potentials and Pitfalls of *Metro* in Translation

Metro's translation in 2012 has allowed for it to globally circulate among culturally diverse readers in a moment when Egypt was still experiencing social and political upheaval in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution under a global media microscope. But the translational choices made by Rossetti in the text, the narrative's sensitive original subject matter, and the sociopolitical context from which it originated are factors that have made *Metro* susceptible to culturally and politically reductive readings of 21st century Egyptian popular and literary culture. In other words, critics have retrospectively interpreted el-Shafee's revolutionary work in line with a fabricated and false Egyptian desire for a Western style of democracy. But one way for critical readers to resist such culturally reductive readings is to compare the original text with its translation. This, however, raises a series of concerns about linguistic and cultural fidelity which are subjects of debate in global translation studies and world literature.

Knowing that no translation is ever complete, contemporary translation studies have taken a liberating turn toward foregrounding the visible role of the translator and the choices made in a process that is not simply about linguistic exchange, but also requires mediation and negotiation between an original and a receiving cultural context. Samia

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Mehrez summarizes the main transformations that have occurred in postcolonial translation studies and emphasizes the importance of challenging the archaic notion of translation as equivalence between language systems and "theorizing translation as an act of rewriting" in her collaborative 2012 work *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir* (6). Damrosch in turn contextualizes the problems and pitfalls of translation in the general question of whether a translation should read smoothly as though it were originally written in that language or whether it should retain "some unusual verbal flavor, respecting the original's foreignness" in *How to Read World Literature* (66). But he does not provide insight on the choices translators make when dealing with the bimodal system of verbal and visual representation in graphic narratives, and in turn how world readers of the produced translation (which is a new text on its own) should go about interpreting it.

For this reason, my analysis of Rossetti's translation of *Metro* not only addresses what Damrosch calls verbal paraphrasing, but also the almost untouched pictorial level of representation which communicates, as I have previously mentioned, a culturally specific Egyptian language, leading to two inharmonious registers of language in the translation. This demands critical readers not only look for Jameson's political unconscious in the original work, but also compare it with the ideology of form that ensues from the translator's political choices of omission, insertion, and modification. The ideology of resistance that has thus far been prominent in el-Shafee's original work is inevitably compromised and altered by the ideological framework with which the translator approaches the narrative.

Because of the lack of an operative framework through which we can understand literary production in the digital and globalization age, Brian Edwards usefully suggests

addressing this gap by focusing on the logics of a text's circulation in "Jumping Publics: Magdy el-Shafee's Cairo Comics" (2014): Critics should seek to achieve a balance of attention between moments of transnationally inspired cultural encounter and that which remains local and difficult to translate" in order to avoid the overly-celebrated generalizations about literature of globalization in terms of hybridity, diffusion, and cultural appropriation (68). Edwards' claim is similar to the notion of preserving cultural specificity and celebrating the local inflections of language and culture in transnationally mobile texts that Damrosch is concerned with in a 2003 article entitled "World Literature, National Contexts" (527). But in order for a graphic narrative to have a unified language system, its pictorial and verbal elements need to operate on co-harmonious levels (McCloud 49). The economy of words and pictures should complement each other and not suggest different cultural connotations. In *Metro*'s translation, the critical reader can sense a discrepancy between the undertones of the translated text, which is stripped of its "Egyptianness" in an effort to assimilate the language into the codes of American popular culture, and the specifically Egyptian spatial and cultural contexts which are retained through the images that remain unchanged and untranslated except for their inverted ordering from left to right for Anglophone readers. In the original Arabic, el-Shafee emphasizes variation in the levels of language in the narrative, using a classical and standardized register to indicate a change in setting and mood [كلمات أخيرة لضحية سفاح " and (22) "المعادي.. صباح اليوم التالي" "المعادي (14) and "داخل البنك.. في غرفة المدير" (34)], as opposed to a vernacular Egyptian dialect that celebrates its own heteroglossic dialogism among characters. This is the national public Edwards speaks about, which el-Shafee seeks to address in his

representation but is totally effaced by Rossetti's free adaptation of the language into a Western context. Colloquial Egyptian, which is unlike any other spoken colloquial dialect in the Arab world in its cultural idiosyncrasy, is equated across cultures with English used in American popular culture. For instance, the first time we see the thugs corner Dina in a dark alley, one of them says to the other and then to Dina in Arabic, "يا استنى شش ش ش غبي.. يا جميل.. عاوزين نتعرّف" (17). Rossetti loosely adapts this into, "Shh – wait, dumbass. Hey baby! How you doing?!" (13). The use of the words "dumbass" instead of "idiot" or "fool" suggests a particularly American style of conversational slang. The same logic applies to using "How you doing?" instead of the more literal translation of the original as "Let's get to know each other," for example.

Moreover, the writer demonstrates a cultural phenomenon in the spoken Egyptian dialect that is overlooked in translation when Shehab explains to Mustafa certain words in English while he is speaking to him in Arabic: "الساعة دي الكمبيوترات بتاعة البنوك بتسلم فيها" (30) "ح نجيب الفلوس Directly" (33) and "المعلومات وبتبقى فيها نقطة عمياء.. نقطة Blind Point" even though he could have said them in plain Arabic. Not only does this phenomenon suggest Shehab's educated bilingual position in society, but the act of unconsciously integrating words from a non-native language into speech in one's native tongue also unconsciously exposes Egyptian subjects as products of an imperial legacy of cultural exchange and the imposition of English as a universal language (and the language of colonialism in Egypt) onto an Arabic-speaking Egypt. In translation, the "Blind Point" phenomenon is eliminated entirely and the concept itself is paraphrased as, "There's a moment when we can get into the system and make a transfer…" (29). As for the

"Directly" incident, it is left as is but the nuances of Shehab's mixed speech are effectively tarnished and flattened.

On the other end of the linguistic representational spectrum, in the original narrative the writer intentionally uses foreign words like "system" and "password" but transliterates them into Arabic as "السيستم" (52) and "باسوورد" (33) in an effort to preserve the cultural origin of the terms rather than translate their meaning into Arabic, which would respectively be "النظام" and "كلمة مرور/ سر" – both terms that are used in everyday spoken Arabic, but are less popular among young Arabic readers and viewers. Furthermore, there are instances in which Rossetti omits certain Arabic content entirely, such as in one whole-page panel of a map of Anwar al-Sadat station with rhyming colloquial content that reads, "دي مش انتفاضة شعبية... دي انتفاضة حرامية" slapped against a map with French and English place-names (Le Nil; 6th October Bridge; Kasr el Nil Bridge) and an Arabic title (محطة أنور السادات) – thereby orchestrating the effect of a visual and cultural-linguistic medley. In translation, the map is entirely changed to resemble previous ones in grid-like layout; its title is translated into English as are the place-names; and the rhyming sentence is completely left out (Figure 6).

A final instance in a list that could expand well beyond what has been mentioned, Rossetti chooses to translate "مصر" into "Egypt" when Shehab is on a phone call with his uncle to tell him he is calling from "مصر" and ask him for a loan. Egyptians usually refer to Cairo as "مصر" which would make more sense considering the setting of the graphic narrative. Rossetti choosing to generalize the reference to the whole of Egypt suggests a

lack of interest in spatial, cultural, and linguistic specificity of voice. Had the title in English not indicated that this is a story from Cairo, the reader would not easily have picked up on a specifically Cairene sound in the translated dialogue.
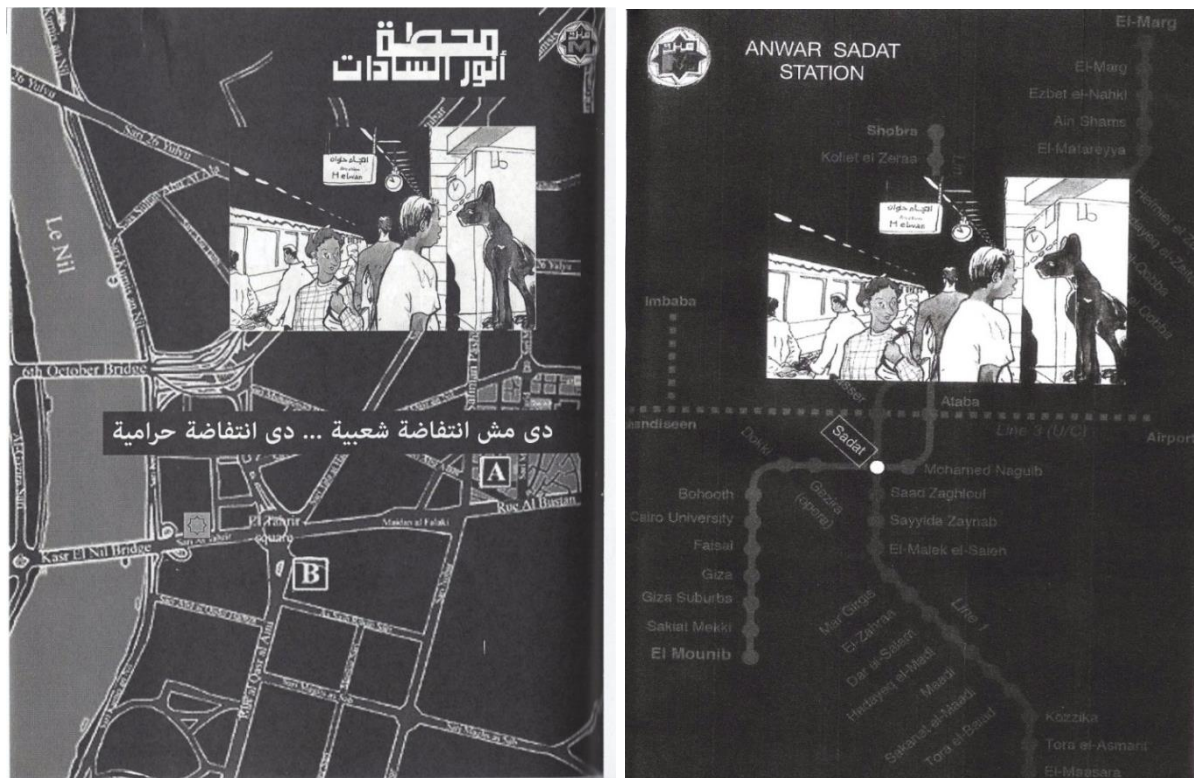
Fig. 6: El-Shafee trans. Rossetti 37 (right); el-Shafee 41 (left).

The free adaptation of the narrative retains the spirit of a liberated translational turn, and the translation does acquire the feel of a rewritten narrative, which is the translator's prerogative. However, the vulnerability of the narrative toward hegemonic readings and politically distorted understandings of Egyptian popular culture is heightened by the translation, necessitating a slower and more inquisitive pace of reading that refers back to the original and does not take the language style and word choice for granted.

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Perhaps the only element that maintains cultural "authenticity" in the translated text is the pictorial representation of urban Cairo. Some signs on buildings and streets are left untranslated in the panels, and the representation of visual heteroglossia among social subjects in their appearance – from veiled women to men in suits, liberally dressed women to *galabeyya* donning men – is not disturbed.

However, this does not mean that el-Shafee's representations are innocent. In his 2003 essay "The Commitment to Form; Or, Still Crazy after All These Years," Mitchell critiques the diminishing importance of the question and concern with form as it has been replaced by the notion of "structure," which suggests the use of the narrative's structure as a subservient tool for reinforcing the thematic content (322). In a sense, this is apparent in the aesthetic makeup of the subjects in *Metro* which commits its form to the creation of a hierarchical system of class consciousness among the characters. It is not lost on the critical reader that Shehab and Dina have more Western-looking complexions than their friend Mustafa for example. While Shehab's thin nose, clean-shaven face, and thin lips match Dina's thin nose and glossy straight hair, they contrast sharply with Mustafa and his brother's bristly eyebrows, buck teeth, plump lips and large noses. Although the images are generally rendered in shades of black, white, and gray, making it difficult to discern differences in skin tone, their facial features and physiques suggest a subtle racial profiling and stereotyping that el-Shafee commits in an effort to highlight the hero and heroine of the narrative in contrast with the rest of the "less important" or even villainous subjects (who are depicted as bulky and bulbous fat cats). When rendered in translation, the already pronounced phenotypical distinctions serve the Orientalist trope prevalent in American culture's preconceived perceptions of Egyptians, thereby abetting the integration of

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Egyptian voice and heteroglossia (in their verbal and visual forms) into an American pop cultural context.

Conclusion

As an instance of literary and artistic representation that has only recently been reintroduced to Cairo in Arabic while it has been globally circulating in English, German, and Italian since 2012, *Metro* is able to account for heterological – as opposed to homologous and unitary – voices that emanate from diverse factions of Egyptian society in the 21st century in a democratic manner through a hybrid verbal and visual system of representation. This chapter has shown that the graphic narrative form of writing in Egypt, pioneered by *Metro*, is able to achieve a revolutionary function that is twofold: wielding a narrative form that in the first place demands a rethinking of genre and ways of consuming conventional representational media, and relaying vocal, textual, and pictorial representations of under/misrepresented Egyptian subjects, a revolutionary act in itself.

Pushing the analysis even further, it is safe to say that this highly marginalized and relatively young medium mirrors the revolutionary direction literature has taken in 21st century Egypt, as the opening survey conveys, especially among new writers like el-Shafee who face overbearing criticism when compared to such canonical authors as Mahfouz. The traditional novel will always have its place in Arabic and world literary canons, but new forms of writing have created room for expansion and variation in the parameters that qualify literature in Egypt and the Arab world. Reading for voice is arguably the method that is most crucial to adopt in the 21st century, as is the contrapuntal method of reading texts that Edward Said advocates in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994). If we approach the

emerging body of literary works in Egypt with this open-ended critical methodology, the floor would be open to discuss the possibility of having the Egyptian novel and graphic narrative exist side-by-side, marinating in a liberal and creative exchange between their forms. The result would produce polyphonies of co-existing voices across genres and media in a liberated and dynamic Egyptian cultural scene that allows hybrid forms, like the graphic narrative, the room they need to flourish and represent direct social and political concerns and be regarded as autonomous works of literature in their own right.

CHAPTER IV

Voices of Youth and Tahrir in Ahdaf Soueif's *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*

"Now, we novelists all seem to have given up – for the moment – on fiction."
--- Ahdaf Soueif

The early years of this century have found the Egyptian literary scene looking quite different than it did in the 20th century due to changes in writers' perspectives on the politics of stagnation and oppression which largely characterize the relationship between the state and the people, genres and styles of writing, as well as digital modes of publication, circulation, and reception – all of which are factors that have been reshaping literary creation in Egypt since the 1990s. Several critics agree on labeling contemporary works "new writing," an economy of literary production that takes place vis-à-vis an age of political participation and activism, new media, and world literature. What sets the literature that is now coming out of Egypt apart from modern literature since the second half of the 20th century up until the 1990s is the so-called new generation of writers, who have transformed literary expression from being a mild social critique of state oppression to explicit frustration with a dystopic, repressive regime that openly renders subjects powerless, speechless, and invisible. These young writers, Tarek el-Ariss argues, have grown more candid in expressing their fearlessness and intolerance of social injustice out of the 1990s "I've-got-nothing-to-lose" generation of defeatist and self-deconstructionist

writers-intellectuals since the 1967 June War, or what most Egyptians refer to as *al-Naksa*.[28]

Moreover, there has been keen interest in recent years among Arab and Western readers, media, and publishing houses in what Sakr calls "*democratizing* the revolutionary 'republic of letters'" by publishing previously unknown authors who foreground popular voices as literary resistance to acts of social and political injustice, especially since the 2011-2013 events in Cairo have been globally mediatized (12; emphasis original). In other words, literary works that represent the youth's popular revolt, push-back against state despotism, and affirmative demands for so-called democratic values such as freedom and social justice, are part of a culture of instantaneous publicity and belong to the public space just as much as they do to their writers by virtue of the online media in which they circulate. There is already a substantial body of work written on the uprisings in Egypt; however, very little fiction has been attempted, which writer and activist Ahdaf Soueif correlates to "the immediate truth [being] too glaring to allow a more subtle truth to take form" in a piece written for *The Guardian* in 2012. Roger Bromley picks up on a similar note in his article "'Giving Memory a Future': Women, Writing, Revolution" (2015), saying that "many of the writers have spoken about the difficulty of writing fiction during the uprisings, and of the need to participate actively in them by other means" (222). Aside from a decent work of fiction that reflects on the complexity of Egypt's recent uprisings needing time, distance, and perspective to formulate, the young generation of authors saw within the moment of the 2011 revolution an opportunity to reaffirm their political

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[28] See Tarek el-Ariss' article, "Fiction of Scandal," in the *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43.2/3 (2012) for more information on the new generation of writers as opposed to the generation of defeatist authors and the ideology of *hazimah* (defeat) which informs their writing.

commitment as action, and rewrite the history of the people's liberation as it was unfolding, thereby historically legitimating it from the people's perspective and challenging official discourse.

This act is reminiscent of the subjects in Mahfouz's *Children of the Alley* who harness the quasi-autobiographical power of orally storytelling their collective past, as discussed in the Chapter II. A hybrid autobiographical genre of writing with elements that combine the memoir, autobiography, and diurnal form, which communicates a sense of immediacy, comes to the fore among the current generation of Egyptian (and Arab) writers when it was not as prominent among Egyptian writers of autobiography from previous generations, as Dina Heshmat explains in her 2015 article "Egyptian Narratives of the Revolution: Diary as a Medium of Reconciliation with the Political" (68-69). This form of writing justifies the turn away from fiction toward a style that is simultaneously personal yet public, honest, quick and direct, bordering on journalistic reportage in order to personalize the political and capture the feverish moment of uprising. It is within this loud and unpredictable context that Soueif's political memoir *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution* finds a voice of its own in 2012 after the Tahrir Revolution was already a year old.[29]

Previously commissioned by her UK publishers to write a story about Cairo, Soueif had no idea at the time that she would find herself in the midst of an uprising organized by a younger generation of Egyptians including her son, niece, and nephew, and that the story she would write for primarily Western readers would be of her experience in what she identifies, from the onset, as a revolution against the Mubarak regime, as is

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[29] The US edition is entitled, *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed*. The book also appears in a third edition under the name *Cairo*.

pointed out in the introduction to this study. What is at stake in her text is a palpable

Couldrian threat to the protestors' ability to have their voices heard and their presence felt

in Tahrir Square, a threat enacted by the state's physical and intellectual violence and its

manipulative media. Soueif's struggle is to find or create an effectual medium or form of

writing that will, in Said's terms, "speak truth to power" more immediately, and relay the

stories of the uprisings as they are, yet paradoxically, from the author's own perception;

hence the turn to memoir-writing, not in its traditional structure, but in one which combines

multiple layers of mediated discourse and creates space for heteroglossia rather than the

singularity of the author's voice and experience. With a more obvious political undertaking

at its thematic horizon than in Mahfouz's novel and el-Shafee's graphic narrative, the *Cairo*

memoir appears to be more explicit and representative of revolutionary voices than fictional

genres: It is grounded in real time and space and strikes a pact with the reader that warrants

an open understanding more faithful to "the truth" than a fictive novel is, a subjective truth

nonetheless, despite how realistically verisimilar said novel may be. However, the

memoir's participation in an ideology of resistance and *tahrir* through its genre and form

warrants a closer analysis and interrogation of *whose* voices Soueif chooses to accentuate

over others, situating it in at the interstice with respect to a long tradition of Egyptian

women's revolutionary writing from a feminist, gender-based, and family-oriented

perspective. On the one hand, this analysis will allow Soueif's memoir to resist the Western

confines of its own genre and compete with other forms of literary and non-literary writing

currently circulating in the Egyptian sphere. On the other hand, it will grant world readers a

more poised judgment of its eligibility to be the optimal genre for democratically writing about revolution.[30]

The Memoir as Genre: Representations of Heteroglossia in *Cairo*

Critics would agree on classifying Soueif's *Cairo* narrative as a memoir on account of the novelist telling personal stories from her family's past in Cairo as well as her experience of the 2011 uprising she deems a revolution. However, the scope of storytelling grows horizontally on a temporal plane beyond personal experience in the present moment to include stories from the nation's collective history as well as interjections into a future unknown to her at the time of writing. It also stretches vertically past Soueif's physical experience in Tahrir Square to encompass that of the Egyptian population for whom she speaks, making it an atypical, untimid memoir that revolts against the conventions of memoir-writing's closeted subject matter.

The question of defining the characteristics of a memoir in terms of its generic conventions, however, is a subject of debate in and of itself. Philippe Lejeune's classical theoretical text *The Autobiographical Pact* (1974; translated by Katherine Leary, 1989) revisits his formalistic definition of autobiography, allowing for more variation: A "*retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality*" (4; emphasis original). The author and narrator have to be identical in the case of autobiographical narratives. Memoir, retaining certain elements of the autobiographical genre, presents

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[30] By democratic writing, I am only referring to Rita Sakr's use of the term, which entails listening with equal measure to all parties within the revolution and those that oppose it.

characteristics that are mostly identical to the definition given above except for the subject matter; it may go beyond the story of an individual life (4). Where one genre ends and another begins is sometimes difficult to distinguish, because personal literature can also include social, political, and historical chronicles. But the figures of the narrator, protagonist, and author must be identical regardless of how this identity is expressed in pronominal form (5).

This is the case in Soueif's memoir: Although some rare cases of autobiographical writing make use of the second and third person to "mask" the identity of the author/narrator, Soueif's *Cairo* memoir is clearly autodiegetic from the outset. Contrary to the trend of "veiled autobiographies" that was popular among Arab novelists in the early 20th century, in which writers "distance themselves while simultaneously criticizing party politics in its patriarchal formations," Soueif's explicit, politically-engaged memoir breaks down the traditional barrier of authorial and intellectual detachment (al-Musawi 53).There is no confusion or renunciation of her own identity as an Egyptian woman, writer, journalist, mother, and activist; in fact, her appeal to her readers relies on her compound identity being clearly demarcated from the start. She is both writer and citizen, and bears the responsibility of both roles, which explains the transformation in her literary style as well as subject matter from previous fiction novels with concerns about coming to terms with ambivalent intercultural identities (*In the Eye of the Sun*, 1992 and *The Map of Love*, 1999) to a locally-contextualized and hard-hitting memoir with inflections of a diurnal form that is not concerned with having a beginning, middle, and end plotline (Heshmat 68).

In the preface, Soueif explicitly announces her identity as writer of the memoir is selfsame as her identity as activist in the revolution, and throughout the course of writing the memoir she moves back and forth between both:

> [I]n February 2011, I was in Tahrir, taking part in the revolution, and reporting on it …. It proved impossible to sit in a corner and write about the revolution …. So I tried to "revolute" and write at the same time. (xiii and xiv)

By doing so and in keeping with the conventions of memoir-writing, she effectively collapses the distance between her selves as narrator and protagonist, which is usually protracted in novels, and does not aim to tell a whole life story – only the story of the revolution unfolding in time and space.[31] Soueif, therefore, strikes a contract with her readers, which allows them to expect a level of fidelity to the course of events because of the complex identity she evokes with her undersigned proper name as well as the time stamps, mimicking the form of diary writing, and references to real places and people – all verifiable facts (Lejeuene 19). Although Soueif collapses the temporal and spatial gaps between herself and the revolution, her time of writing does not completely coincide with events as they occur, which means it cannot be called a "pure" diary though it may seem to retain the appearance of one. The author's physical presence *in situ*, not needing distance or much time to process things before putting pen to paper, does communicate an urgency of expression that the "traditional" novel cannot comply with.

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[31] Recall for instance that the narrator in Mahfouz's *Children of the Alley* announces in the preface that although he is a member of the alley, his role is strictly chronicler of stories and historical events that are not his own to tell; they are the people's stories. He does not even belong to the same temporal planes in which the stories exist. In other words, he creates distance in the diegetic world between himself and the unfolding stories within his narrative. The same is true of el-Shafee with respect to the fictional microcosm constructed in *Metro: A Story of Cairo*. Soueif, on the other hand, is anxious to capture in her own voice the revolutionary moment in the present before it passes her (and the world) by. She expresses this anxiety by saying, "I could not write what was fast becoming the past without writing the present" (xiv).

What essentially matters, nonetheless, is how the reader perceives the contractual genre for although Soueif's prefatory statement of purpose elicits a sense that her writing is a distilled representation of the revolution in the present time and space of its unfolding, she nevertheless uses the term "story" to describe what the reader is about to embark upon reading: "This story is told in my own chosen order" (xiii). And indeed, Soueif purposefully structures her memoir in a peculiar non-rectilinear way, stretching the present moment as much as she can from within. Her present-time narration begins in *medias res* during the uprisings on Friday, January 28, 2011 – a day that has been retrospectively called the Day of Wrath[32] – then pauses the eyewitness reportage on the 18-day sit-in with a lengthy reflection she writes eight months after the uprising in a style more sober and critical, only to return at last to the spontaneity of reporting on the revolution's final days. More to the point, the timestamps on each entry in the first and last parts of the memoir are not in chronological order, either. Soueif manipulates the temporal frame of her writing, at times going back and forth between the hours of the same day, and at others jumping back and forth across several days. Her instincts as reporter take over, caring less for assembling events in a linear fashion for the reader's comfort than for the urgency of articulate representations of her own voice and the revolutionary people's voices alongside hers.

True to her words of this being "the story of *our* revolution," which recur in the memoir's title and preface, Soueif orchestrates representations of polyphonic voices that ebb and flow depending on the intensity of action on the street versus the silence in the

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[32] On this day, tens of thousands of protestors gathered in public squares all over Egypt in support of the sit-in in Tahrir Square. Armed police were ordered to open fire on the civilian protestors, killing over 62 Egyptians and injuring more than 2,000 in clashes. See report by The Sun at
http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/3378537/Troops-battle-rioters-in-Egypt.html

privacy of her home. It is worth noting that the compositional unities Bakhtin outlines as possibilities for heterogeneous types of discourse existing within a novel rework themselves into unities of voice that exist in Soueif's memoir. In fact, we may find articulations in Soueif's text of all the constituents Bakhtin lists, beginning with "direct authorial literary-artistic narration (in all its diverse variants)" (262). The main voice of narration throughout the memoir is Soueif's from beginning to end, except in the epilogue where she relinquishes her authorial voice to allow voices from the revolution, interestingly also family members, to speak their own minds in separate entries in the first person – Mona, Alaa, Sanaa, and Omar Robert –

> And because it was the shabab who made this possible, because it was they who changed the world, and it now belongs to them, I want to leave you with some of their voices; the young Egyptians, the young Cairenes, who are working and living our revolution as I put down my pen. (Soueif 187)

The pronominal forms "I," "my," "our," "us," and "we" refer throughout the text to Soueif's voice as she narrates and, in fact, gives herself the authority to speak for the entire Egyptian nation when she says, "[e]ighty million of us feel this way right now" (183), knowing that "however big a demonstration is, it is always a tiny minority" compared to the whole populace (Badiou 58). The movement's localization, intensity of presence, and passion give readers the illusion that it represents *all* the masses, and Soueif's authority as an intellectual figure, Bakhtinian narrator, and active citizen gives her the confidence to make such sweeping generalizations.

Bakhtin's second rhetorical component in the novel, "stylization of the various forms of oral everyday narration," takes shape in Soueif's memoir in the form of heterological colloquialisms chanted by the Egyptian public during the uprisings that she

records in transliteration from colloquial Egyptian Arabic, such as "'Mesh hanemshi /Enta temshi!'" and then translates into English for foreign readers: "We're not going /You go home!" (160). Aside from the interspersing of "shabab," "khalas," "habibti," "habibi," "Allahu Akbar," etc. which are Arabic idiomatic words and expressions that adopt their meaning from local context and lose meaning in translation, Soueif makes no apologies for transliterating Arabic sounds in Latin characters using the Arab blogger system. She in fact prepares her non-native Arabic-speaking reader for these textual idiosyncrasies in a note on spelling before the book's acknowledgments and preface. We may even see it as an attempt to cater to a local and global reading public simultaneously, rather than "jump" certain publics entirely, to use Brian Edwards' term.[33] "Tal3at Harb" is the name of a street where she and others march against the arrest of Alaa, her nephew (186). Instead of rendering the place-name in an orientalized form of Arabic transliteration that most international readers are familiar with, "Tal'at Harb," she tips her hat to the unique intercultural language developed by young Arab bloggers and social media users, because it is part of the everyday digital and spoken language of *tahrir* (the square and liberation) that culminate in the revolution.[34] Soueif also renders other liberation slogans chanted by the young people, the revolutionary *shabab*, in the original crossover internet jargon in which they circulate online and on banners in the streets: "'Al-sha3b yureed isqat al-nizam!'", "'Eish! Horreyya! Adala egtema3eyya!'" (17), "'El-shar3eyya m'nel-Tahrir'" (14), and "'IRHAL!'" (49).

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[33] Brian Edwards uses the phrase "jumping publics" in an article on Magdy el Shafee's 2008 graphic narrative *Metro: A Story of Cairo*, which is discussed in the third chapter of this study. It essentially refers to a writer or translator's deliberate decision to exclude a certain faction of readers through the choice of diction and language.

[34] Soueif also does the same with other proper names, mainly of streets or state apparatuses: "Mesa7a Street" (48), "The Dakhleyya" (Interior Ministry; 54), "Gala2 Bridge" (22), "Qur2anic verses" (32), etc.

The third stylistic component that contributes to novelistic unity and makes several appearances in Soueif's memoir is "stylization of the various forms of semiliterary (written) everyday narration (the letter, the diary, etc.)" (Bakhtin 262). In her last entry before the section entitled "An Interruption" written in October, eight months after the Tahrir Revolution, Soueif metadiegetically weaves in an excerpt about the military forces' daily oppression against Egyptian people from another novel she had been working on before the revolution erupted:

> "Mada" is talking to "Aysa" about the Museum: "You know," says Mada, "it's unbelievable. It's as if the city doesn't even belong to us. A soldier stopped me walking near the Museum in Tahrir the other day. In the centre of Cairo. He said it's forbidden to walk here. I couldn't believe it. 'How d'you mean forbidden?' 'It's forbidden.' I pointed at a whole load of people walking into the Museum. He said they're foreigners. I said so I'm forbidden because I'm not a foreigner? Are you serious? What if I want to go to the Museum? He said why should you go to the Museum? I said haven't you noticed it's called the "Egyptian" Museum? And haven't you noticed this square is called "Liberation" Square? Do you know who it was liberated from? It was liberated from the foreigners, for us: the Egyptian people." "And what did he say?" "He said: 'You'll have to speak to the officer.'" (58)

Had it not been for Soueif pointing out that this scene is a work of fiction stitched into the larger fabric of the memoir, the reader would not have been able to tell it apart from the rest of the real encounters she depicts from Tahrir Square, because it is so verisimilar to the theme of state abuse and exemplifies the prime reason why people are revolting against the regime. In addition to that, there is the undeniable stylistic choice stamped across the entire work, and that is heading each entry with the date and time of writing, resembling daily journal or diary entries that reflect the author's own unapologetic positions written for private use (Hashmet 69). On the one hand, it redeems a sense of sequential grounding to an otherwise temporally unpredictable narrative, and on the other, it delivers – as promised

– representations of the publicly lived experience of the confrontation between the *shabab* and the armed forces, as well as those of the private enclosures of Soueif's Cairo home from her perspective.

And yet there are also other instances of novel-stylistic integration via the "various forms of literary but extra-artistic authorial speech" in the memoir, the grand scheme of which can be safely described as patchwork at this point (Bakhtin 262). Soueif intertextually brings in the voice of the 20th-century Egyptian poet Amal Dunqul in his poem "The Stone Cake" about the 1972 student movement in Tahrir Square against Anwar al-Sadat's regime alliance with Israel. The poem's placement in the text both evokes a long history of steadfast popular resistance in the face of foreboding state forces in Egypt and highlights the centrality of Tahrir Square as a public politically-charged space of confrontation and liberation that resonates with the same momentum as 2011's revolution (Soueif quotes the translated version of the poem on page 13). In an article for *Al-Ahram Weekly* entitled "Students in Revolt" (2014), Mohamed Bassiouni points out that depicting students as protestors belongs to a history of student movements in Egypt that have fought for liberation and political change under the influence of European revolutionary thought (especially the French Revolution of 1968) and a strong nationalist zeal (epitomized by a leader, such as Saad Zaghloul). Therefore, assimilating this poem, an emblem of modern Egyptian resistance literature, into the larger scale work not only attests to the memoir's flexibility of form and the heightened level of executive subjectivity that go into its assemblage, it also demonstrates how the legacy and ideology of revolution is passed down from Soueif's generation of activists to the current "technologically-enhanced" generation. When Soueif is not operating at meta-literary levels, she uses a different style of writing

that is concise, referential and observational, bordering on news journalism, as when she

documents the meeting of the revolutionary people, noting their actions, words,

dispositions and appearances in staccato phrases with the air of a journalist:

> Six young men, all in their twenties. They're like a football team; they huddle and
> confer quickly, they "pass" to each other with a nod or a look. They're concise,
> self-deprecating, firm and courteous. They say that if they claim any credit it
> would be for the 20 per cent of the people who came out on the 25th; the rest has
> been spontaneous, organic – as surprising to them as it was to everybody …. They
> are about three hundred and, no, they don't all know each other. They won't give
> information about how they operate but they want to put it on the record that, were
> it not for all the protests and writings and activism of the older leadership, they
> would not have been able to do what they're doing now: "We've learned from
> you," they tell the room, "and we're building on what you've accomplished."
> There's a silence, and then one of the older people says simply: whatever you want
> us to do, we'll do. (47-8)

Furthermore, she includes part of an interview she had done, which seems to forecast the

event just days before its launch, and it is full of her own extra-diegetic political and

historical insights, as an intellectual, of factors that have led to a state of perpetual civil

unrest in Egypt:

> … For a very long time now, our perception is that [Egypt] is not being run in the
> interests of the Egyptian people …. We've never had as much civil unrest in Egypt
> as we've had in the last five years. And that is good …. But, how will it coalesce?
> And what shape will it take? (7-8)

This is not to mention the plethora of instances in which Soueif interweaves the private

memories of her family's past with facets of public historical accounts that seem to overlap

in the same public urban centers in Cairo; its quarters, streets, and allies. One such instance

occurs in her description of Tahrir Square, its historical significance, and how political

leaders and groups have over time appropriated this public space and re-inscribed their

authority and legitimacy of power over the nation through Tahrir Square, such as Abdel

Nasser, whom she quotes, without revealing her sources, having said, "'How come I've never seen this amazing sight before? Look at it. I'm buried alive out in Heliopolis'" (12).

Despite translating the random conversations she has with local Egyptians from the idiomatic Arabic spoken by Cairenes into English, Soueif maintains parts of their "stylistically individualized speech" (Bakhtin 262) with certain vernacular Arabic words like "baltagis" (thugs) in the conversation she has with Karima, her downstairs neighbor, whom she refers to as "K":

> "They drove round and collected all the guards from the embassies and the banks," she says, "and it's not only that; they've turned their baltagis loose on the streets. How can we live without security?" "Don't tell me you're afraid?" I joke. "Of course I'm afraid." "Well, seriously, don't be. You could take on a hundred baltagis." (Soueif 36)

Soueif's main authorial and intellectual voice prevails over the narrative, grounding its retrospection of, what is to her position, the almost immediate past and her own private past, both of which are embedded in a larger alternative narrative of national history, as Mehrez holds in *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction* (7).

However, there are occasions when she lends a rhetorical voice to chosen people couched within her own voice without necessarily attributing them to a particular social class, religious, or political party, enveloping her identity with theirs until they meld into one giant collective being: the people; referred to as "we" or "us." This is manifested in her recollection of a new wave of protests igniting after Friday prayer on January 28, 2011, from a square she was at with her friend, the celebrated civil engineer Mamdouh Hamza (whom she thereafter refers to as MH):

> [T]he young man's arm is in the air, his hand reaching to the sky, and there comes the loud, carrying *voice*: "Al-sha3b yureed isqat al-nizam!" There it was, no lead-

up, no half-measures; the young man on the shoulders of some fifteen young people. (17; emphasis added)

The intensity of solidarity among popular voices dissenting against everything Mubarak's regime symbolizes is further established with Soueif's sweeping heteroglossic illustration of countless martyrs who died fighting for this revolution, for liberation: "Some of us died" (23). She counts herself among those people from whose ranks some had fallen. In another instance, we hear the voice of the *imam* at the mosque in Tahrir Square who calls for prayer time and peace through his loudspeaker, and "pleads angrily with the army [to] open a path for the shabab" (84). Mona Mina's words, from Physicians Without Rights, are rendered verbatim: "'Two weeks ago they were scared to report that their boss was bullying them. Look at them now!'" (33), in addition to a nameless voice Soueif vocalizes saying, "'This is a house of God. A house of God and a hospital. There are wounded people here and doctors trying to help them. You must not attack this house…'" (31). We hear from MH once again telling her: "'Don't go to Tahrir,' he warns, 'go home and stay there' …. 'They're going to do dirty things, terrible terrible things. It's going to be over in two days. Please believe me'" (49). Then again, there are her observations of random people, without identifying their social class, religious background, or political affiliations, making grand patriotic statements such as, "'Ya Masr,[35] it's been a long time. We have missed you'" (9), projecting the illusion of a unitary coalition among the masses.

These and many other instances are manifestations of heteroglossia, but not in the same distanced manner a novel might represent different voices of dissent. In this case, there is always the sense that Soueif is orchestrating the voices and they all tie back to her –

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[35] It is important to note that for most Egyptians, the word "Masr" designates Cairo, the city, and Egypt, the nation (Soueif 9).

speaking to her or near her. Her voice speaks for the revolutionary people; she is their vehicle unto the global sound stage; their voices and actions in turn embody what her deconstructionist generation had not been able to accomplish since the student movements in the '70s.[36] However, if she does not register them, they are not invisible, but neither are they heard. In other words, her pronominal authorial voice gives others a voice by extension for she oscillates between representing herself among the collective solidarity of revolutionary people (the inclusive "we"), and standing apart from them, taking note of their voices, observing them as "they; the shabab." This wavering between self-integration and occlusion from the revolutionary crowd both, mirrored in the fluctuation between using the third-person plural (they) and the first-person collective (we), uncovers the self-isolating quality of the writing of the 1990s generation, to which Soueif belongs (Hashmet 69-70), but also attempts to overcome in the spirit of more engaged political and personal writing in the 21st century.

It has become clear at this point that the biggest weight of representation is reserved for the secular liberalists and the *shabab* on the author's side of the revolution, not any state officials or institutions, such as the Security Council of the Armed Forces, the Dakhleyya's Chief of Intelligence of Prisons, and the National Democratic Party. Most governmental discourse and press releases on its position with respect to the people and their demands before and during the January revolution are in fact synthesized into abrupt, indirect, and minimalist speech, which indicates a sense of despondence with the

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[36] Soueif explains that the armed military forces have cracked down on every potential popular movement since the student movement in 1972 against Anwar al-Sadat's Israeli-sympathetic policies. The people have been unable to take back Tahrir – both figuratively and literally – from the state and the police until 2011. See page 11 of the memoir.

regurgitated state narrative. Even the Islamists, who constituted an active participant body in the early uprisings, are not given much verbal or visual weight in the memoir. In the interruptive mid-section, which is closer to the reader's present than her records from the 18 days, the debate among the revolutionary parties over a draft of the people's demands in July 2011 is, interestingly enough, rendered in abstracted terms: Soueif refers to large camps of people as "the Liberals," "the Islamists" and "the Ikhwan," mentioning only briefly and without historical context that the source of conflict has to do with "past experience and what each group suspects of the other's intentions" (94). She leaves it precariously open-ended with a statement on the following page that reads, "[T]he Islamists will double-cross us," distinguishing thus between the collective "us" fighting for the people's liberation and the Islamists whom in this statement, she does not perceive as part of "her/our" revolution (95). The image she therefore constructs of the revolution wants to be inclusive and lay claim to all Egyptians, but it is in fact fractured in itself. The "our," in other words, is tainted. Her prerogative as author of her own memoir is to de-emphasize the "other" voices from the revolution – which belong to groups that also had substantial popular following and a stake in fighting against the government for their own liberation – so as not to detract from the homogeneity and totality of the secular *shabab* force fighting for liberation and social justice. These so-called double-crossers are never free-speakers with full-fledged agency and a command of self-expression.

The belabored point of locating Bakhtinian inflections of novel-writing and heteroglossia within Soueif's text is to demonstrate that there is an intermingling of verbally and visually evocative genres between the memoir and the novel, allowing *Cairo* to resist the expectations of a single genre, and occupy the space at the intersection between

the private and the public, the subjective impassioned citizen and the objective, responsible

writer. A combination of factors, from heteroglossic representations of *certain* popular

voices to an autobiographical pact with the reader that promises to deliver a personal yet

collective account of the uprising, therefore suggests that this particular text resists the

structure of a conventional private memoir as Lejeune describes it, and embraces a

hybridity of generic forms which allows it to be a revolutionary genre in itself, and

simultaneously, a platform for revolutionary voices from the 2011 Tahrir revolution. That

being said, it becomes more crucial to interrogate the nature of the voices represented – and

not represented – by Soueif, whether it stems from a history of Egyptian feminist writing,

and what implications that might have on the reliability of her perspective as well as the

text's nuanced participation in an ideology of resistance to an essentializing postcolonial

discourse of power and antagonistic nationalist movements. In other words, is Soueif's text

a democratic platform for the representation of various women's voices and concerns?

Masr: The Nation as Woman; Gender Politics of Resistance and Liberation

The analysis of heteroglossia and representations of revolutionary voices in

Soueif's *Cairo* memoir would not be complete without a close look at the gender politics

governing the narrative(s) of popular resistance and the language(s) of *tahrir* (liberation) in

the text. In order to do so, the text ought to be situated within – or possibly at the verge of –

the history of female activism and memoir writing in Egypt. Before doing so, it is important

to note that the history and present placement of Egyptian feminist narratives belong to a

much larger discussion on the history and development of Arab and Islamic feminisms

which still occupies a central area of debate among critics and scholars of Middle Eastern women studies.

In her article entitled "Arab Feminisms" (2010), Anastasia Valassopoulos identifies several tendencies of reading and understanding the waves of feminist thought and ideological discourse in the Arab and Islamic worlds based on the historical, political, economic, cultural, and religious factors that have influenced their shapes, especially in light of the 1990's wave of Islamic fundamentalism.[37] Despite their problematic orientalizing framework of application, there still remain several postcolonial readings of Arab and Islamic feminisms, especially among Western scholars of the Middle East, which over-emphasize the historical, economic, and political role played by colonialism and posit Islamic feminism as a reactionary alternative to Western-informed models of modernity in the region (Valassopoulos 206-7). Similarly, al-Musawi places feminist politics and poetics in the Arab world at large within postcolonial theory because of the common arches of confrontation with patriarchy, the search for a legitimating origin or ancestry, and the manipulation of circumstances to establish identity as resistance to colonial contamination (221). On the one hand, this understanding of Arab and Islamic feminism homogenizes women's experiences in Islamic cultures among different nations in the region. It does not account for dissenting Islamic ideologies among women and the heteroglossia within Islamic feminisms that arises based on political and economic considerations specific to

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[37] The texts which Valassopoulos synthesizes arguments for and against are: Lila Abu-Lughod's *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, Margot Badran's *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*, Miriam Cooke's *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature*, Mona Mikhail's *Seen and Heard: A Century of Arab Women in Literature and Culture*, and Haideh Moghissi's *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis*.

each nation. On the other hand, it disregards other forms and expressions of Arab feminism that exist outside an interpretive Islamic framework.

In turn, Valassopoulos delineates readings of Arab feminisms that highlight the cross-cultural exchange between Arab and European feminisms which have doubtlessly been taking place since initial contact with colonial powers. However, it is necessary to nuance this approach with the understanding that the direction of influence is unpredictable, and "imported ideas fuse with local ones and then change and metamorphose, depending on the particular economic and political stance of the nation-state in question" (208). A third approach, which my study tends to sympathize with, stresses the "significance of listening to [women's] popular voice[s] in the Arab world for what [they] might teach us" as opposed to focusing exclusively on the voices of Arab intellectual women in the Arab world and the diaspora (209). While Valassopoulos credits different forms of technological visual media such as film, television, and online social media circles with being the democratizing platforms where popular women's voices are seen and heard, my analysis in this chapter has focused thus far on textual representations of popular women's voices in light of Egypt's 2011 revolution (the democratization of heteroglossia). The end is that looking at the voices and demands of women from different social classes, age groups, intellectual levels, and religious backgrounds in Soueif's memoir will reveal that "there are multiple voices clamoring for recognition" and that Egyptian (and more generally, Arab) feminism is far from monolithic (Valassopoulos 209). Lastly, there is the most recent turn to studying the rise of Islamic feminism on a transnational level as a counter-discourse to Western narratives of Islamophobia, which is nevertheless problematic because of the aforementioned practical differences in Islamic culture among societies in the Arab and

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Islamic worlds, but also because of limiting narratives of transnational Arab feminism to an Islamic framework. While all those varying and interesting approaches to studying feminisms in the Middle East attempt to find a balance between specific historical contexts and more general viable models for practical use, their scope lies beyond the limits of this study. Therefore, it would suffice to concentrate on the history and development of as many waves of Egyptian feminism as possible in order to have a more nuanced approach to analyzing popular women's voices in Soueif's *Cairo* memoir.

Margot Badran's now classical text *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (1995) identifies a grassroots Egyptian "feminist consciousness" that dates back to written discourse emerging in the late 19th century at the hands of cross-class women from various religious backgrounds, who are now considered foremothers to contemporary feminist movements in Egypt. It is crucial to note that the forerunners of feminist discourse in Egypt, such as Zaynab Fawwaz (d. 1914) and Aisha al-Taymuriyah (d. 1902), did not adopt the term "feminist" in their writings nor did they explicitly identify themselves as such. Hoda Shaarawi and Nabawiyah Musa, both keystone figures in 20th-century Egyptian feminist movements, also furthered women's empowerment for a long time before they labeled themselves and were labeled as feminists. The term "feminist writing" was therefore attached to their work and activism in retrospect.[38]

The common misconception Badran attempts to redress in her historiographic study is the view that Egyptian feminism emerged as a subtext of colonialism and

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[38] Badran uses the Arabic term "nisa'i" to denote the label "feminist" which was applied to the circulating works on women's liberational demands in the 1920's, especially after the establishment of al-Ittihad al-Nisa'i al-Misri (The Egyptian Feminist Union) in 1923 by Hoda Shaarawi, which was when they first used the term "feminist" to describe themselves (19).

modernization – or "Western discourse" – in Egypt during the 19th century (24). Condemning Egyptian feminism to a homogenous and essentializing narrative, this view is compatible with Western perceptions of Egyptian women as subjects with identities informed solely on the basis of their postcoloniality, classifying them into either conservative Islamists or liberal secularists, and confining them to polarizations like "reactionary" as opposed to "progressive." The story Badran tells suggests that burgeoning feminist discourse in Egypt in fact emerged organically out of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish middle- and upper-class women's gradual realization that their social and religious freedoms and rights in their personal and public lives had been largely inhibited by the patriarchs of their society. Before nationalist struggles, Egyptian women's first burden, therefore, was the institutionalized patriarchal hold on their daily lives.[39] Despite its inevitable ceiling, women's education in the early 19th century under Mohammad Ali Pasha's semi-autonomous rule played an important role in drawing their attention to the rights they were being denied – the right to have an occupation, to attend social functions without the company of men, to remain unveiled, to participate in political life, etc. Their initial expressions of anti-patriarchal struggle therefore took place in the context of home and family. It was not until the late 19th century, particularly after 1882 when British colonial forces occupied Egypt, and what meager rights women had towards education that feminist discourse wielded a nationalist dimension alongside intellectual men's discourse on Egyptian nationalism: "Colonialism rendered Egyptians, men and women alike, nameless and nationless, while together they were gendered female. It was no accident that

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[39] Muhsin al-Musawi attributes these patriarchal practices to a resilient Ottoman legacy in the early 20th century in *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* (44).

the recognition of 'Egyptianness' and of gender arose simultaneously" (Badran 12). The rhetoric of prominent male intellectual figures, both Muslim and Christian, secular and Islamic, the likes of Qasim Amin (d. 1908), Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), and Murqus Fahmi, called for the importance of women's education, empowerment, and liberation to further nationalist and anticolonial causes against British occupation.[40] The dominant view among these men was that "family despotism is mirrored in state despotism. Lack of family unity is reflected in lack of national unity" (18). In other words, the reason why Egypt was dominated by foreign colonial powers was because Egyptian women and mothers were underrated and subordinated in the hierarchy of power. While the nationalist feminist discourse, both Islamic and secularist, greatly benefited from the support of its male counterparts, culminating in the 1919-1922 confrontation between the Egyptian nationalist Wafd party under the leadership of Saad Zaghloul, and the British forces, in which women activists played a significant role, after Egypt won its independence the discourse of female equality and liberation diminished considerably once men started to compete among themselves for political power in Egypt.

It is important to note that while there are two large umbrellas under which the development of Egyptian feminist discourse took place, namely Islamic and secular, the different languages, class divisions, and historical periods among feminists resist framing the heteroglossic waves of feminism within a conservative Islamic – liberalist dichotomy. In addition, al-Musawi astutely points out in his chapter on "Women in Arabic" that in

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[40] A widely circulating name for such reformist Arab intellectuals is *Nahdawis*, pertaining to the late 19th- and early 20th-century *Nahda* (Arab Awakening and Modernity) intellectual movement, in which multiple and diverse narratives of nationalism, liberation from colonial powers, and modernization emerged in Egypt and other cultural-intellectual centers in the Arab world, like Lebanon and Syria. While some embraced a self-orientalizing stance subservient to Western liberalism and modernization, others referred back to a reformed religious identity as a springboard towards nationalism and modernism. See al-Musawi (37-41).

spite of the strong rhetoric of male feminism that supported women's liberation demands in Egypt (and the Arab world at large) in the early 20th century, Arab Marxists have also critiqued an equally strong pseudo-colonial counter discourse of the privileged and moneyed classes, which fetishizes and desires the female body and everything it symbolizes in the nation (211-12). Furthermore, the evolution of feminist thought in the late 19th century through a reformed Islamic lens does not coincide with the more contemporary wave of politicized populist Islam that has swept through Egypt since the 1970s, which Alaa al-Aswany argues is not inherent to Egyptian religious convictions and serves political interests in *On the State of Egypt: What Made the Revolution Inevitable* (75-6). The former emerged out of an advocacy of women (and men) to pursue the individual study of Islam, which encourages uninhibited interpretation and revision of certain previously-held social conventions and practices that were thought to be religious prescriptions, such as the domestication and veiling of women (Badran 11).[41] The latter, however, is the result of the growing influence of Gulf oil states, particularly Saudi Arabia, which led to the infiltration of Wahhabist ideologies into Egyptian society, an extremely conservative form of Islam that focuses on the externals of religion – the appearance and performative practices of piety – rather than the core values of ethics and morality (al-Aswany 104). Under this retrogressive interpretation of Islam, which coincided with the protracted term of Mubarak, women have been secluded behind much stricter social rules and treated as objects of sexual desire that must be veiled from sight, literally and figuratively.

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[41] The practice of individual study and inquiry of Islam (also known as *ijtihad*) is one of the arguments made by Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh, and for which he was highly criticized by conservative Islamists.

That is not to say that there have not been any conservative Islamic women in

Egypt before the 1970s; the multifarious religious sub-divisions in Egyptian society,

Islamic or otherwise, are beyond the scope of this study and the purposes of this chapter.

What is important to note is that the history of Islamic feminism in Egypt is not an

oxymoron as Badran explains in a recent interview for *France 24 News* on December 9,

2011.[42] Women's feminist and religious identities were not in conflict; they developed in

tandem with one another. Understanding the history of Egyptian women's feminisms as a

phenomenon that transcends religious, class, and language barriers among upper- and

middle-class women, and that has emerged in its own organic narrative(s) allows us to see

that "women's commitment to nationalism was, if anything, heightened by [not blinded by]

their feminism" (Badran 13).[43] Shaarawi's memoir *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an*

Egyptian Feminist, 1879-1924, describes the female activist's early adult life. It is a

crossover between her personal and political life in the early 20th century which culminates

in her experience organizing and participating in the women's demonstration against

British occupation in the 1919 nationalist revolution. In an article from *Al-Ahram*,

Mahmoud el-Wardani makes the point that "a century after the fight for rights, Hoda

Shaarawi's memoirs are a reminder that women are necessary for political fights - such as

Egypt's [2011] revolution" ("Re-published: Hoda Shaarawi Memoirs on Birth of Egypt's

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[42] The distinction between women articulating their feminist agendas through an interpretive Islamic framework (a.k.a. Islamic feminism) and the contemporary wave of extreme fundamentalist Islam in Egypt (Salafism, etc.) cannot be over-emphasized. In fact, it is one of Badran's arguments in *Feminism in Islam* (2009) that Islamic feminism can be seen as a contemporary cross-nationalist politics that opposes repressive fundamentalist Islam in Egypt and elsewhere.

[43] Badran explains that while most upper-class women were fluent in French, English, and German, middle-class women spoke and wrote mostly in Arabic.

Feminism").[44] The interesting fact here is that it was republished two years after the 2011 revolution in Tahrir Square, which indicates a surge of interest in personal literature (the memoir) to capture events that affect public national history (revolution).

It is in relation to this tradition of women's writing that we ought to visualize and interpret the representations of the revolution made in Soueif's *Cairo* memoir: Women are particularly vocal in Soueif's memoir and there is no denying that they play an active role in the street and in her narrative. But which women are being represented, and what is the nature of Soueif's most striking female imagery? The degrading treatment of women, which took the form of sexual harassment before the Tahrir Revolution in popular protest movements is represented in el-Shafee's *Metro* as discussed in relation to Dina's character being harassed by NDP thugs in Chapter III, but such realistic representations are left out of Soueif's utopian portrayal of female activism in her memoir. This is also the case with similarly themed autobiographical writings on the 2011 revolution, as Heshmat explains: "The dynamics of gender alienation and oppression are even muted here, making public space feel more open for women" (70).

Throughout the narrative, it can be argued that Soueif's revolutionary feminist rhetoric projects an image of women as strong, self-fulfilled, and independent activists; and inscribes them in traditional roles as mothers, sisters, and daughters, or as symbols of the nation, which evokes the nationalist patriarchal iconography of the early 20th century. In *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (2005), Beth Baron recalls the history of the iconic sculpture by Mahmud Mukhtar called *Nahdat Misr* (*The Awakening of*

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[44] See also Abdel Nasser, Tahia. "Women's Revolution and Tahrir Memoirs." *Al Ahram Weekly* for a history of women's activism in Egypt in the past century leading up to the 2011 revolution.

Egypt), an award-winning model that was transformed into a monumental work which

juxtaposes two figures – a Sphinx rising and a peasant woman unveiling. Baron explains,

> The Sphinx and the woman both represent Egypt: the Sphinx rising suggest a rebirth of Egypt's ancient grandeur; the peasant woman lifting her veil symbolizes the liberation of the modern nation. The linking of the two figures – the woman's hand rests on the Sphinx's head – connect antiquity to the present. (68)

Mukhtar's sculpture was unveiled in the public square of the Cairo train station in 1928,

captivating passers-by, local and foreign. It became the symbol of national struggle and was

inspired by the 1919 revolution in which women played a significant and active role (67).[45]

The downfall of contemporary feminists like Soueif rehashing nationalist

discourse in their representations of women, as al-Musawi argues, is that it always

collapses the nation and the woman's body: "In the nationalist discourse of war and

chivalry, land is equated to the female body, and both are held sacred" (212). The nation-

as-woman metaphor is a phenomenon that is not particular to Egyptian nationalism and

resistance to colonial powers, but one for which Baron finds origins in Egypt in the late-

19th and early-20th century *Nahda*. Baron speaks of the paradox between allegorizing the

nation as a woman in the elite male nationalist imaginary while restricting their

sociopolitical participation (1-2), a paradox which is only halfway resolved in the *Cairo*

memoir. As I have already mentioned above, women are particularly vocal and active in

Soueif's text; however, their mobilization is oftentimes framed within familial rhetoric.

Baron identifies the discursive practice of metaphorically associating the dynamics of a

nuclear bourgeois family with the hierarchy and structures of the nation-state to be a

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[45] For more detail on the historical context that brought *Nahdat Misr* into existence, going back to the controversy of unveiling women and Mustafa Kamil's statue in 1921, see "Monuments and Sculptures" in Baron 65-66.

universal phenomenon: "Once the nation was envisioned as a family, the concept of family honor could easily be appropriated as the basis for national honor," both very much modern constructs (7 and 40). In particular, the discourse on honor (*sharaf*) was initially a state discourse that nationalists in Egypt later appropriated to further their causes (42). As for the association of nations and homelands with the feminine gender, it is a phenomenon that stretches back beyond the age of empires and colonies. In the case of Egypt, the Arabic term *Masr* (*Misr*) is gendered female, as is the term for a collective community *Umma* (7). While feminists and female nationalists are two distinct concepts, their intersection is particularly intensified in times of revolution, especially when the fight against colonial oppression in 1919 necessitated female activists to serve their role as "Mothers of the Nation" charged with breeding the national youth who will liberate Egypt (Baron 39). Echoing this maternalistic sentiment, Soueif represents herself and her generation of Egyptians as activists, as proud mothers of the young generation of brave revolutionary *shabab* (itself a male-inflected Arabic term for youth) leading the 2011 revolution:

> [M]ost women are smiling, waving, dandling babies to the tune of the chants … Old women call: "God be with you [the *shabab*]! God give you victory!" (Soueif 17),

and as the mothers of the Egyptian nation at large:

> "Shoot us then," they say to the soldiers, "shoot the women. Shoot the mothers of Egypt. Shoot your mothers." (83)

On the Day of Wrath when the armed military forces are ordered to kill hundreds of protesting youths, the rhetoric of motherhood intensifies as the martyrs are portrayed as Egypt's young whose "families will spend months of heartbreak finding out and trying to prove how their children were killed" (28).

In addition, Baron locates a tradition of female nationalist writing in Egypt that made use of the family metaphor but avoided masculinist notions of national honor that are grounded in female bodies and their sexual honor (54). In *Cairo*, Soueif can also be seen as hailing this tradition with her representations of family-inflected, specifically private maternal sites in the city that she invariably transforms into public spaces to serve the revolution. One of the earlier women's images depicted in the narrative is that of Tante Nahed's home in one of the streets which turns into a confrontational zone between the people and the police. Her deceased uncle's wife's apartment comprises a site at which Soueif and other activist relatives regroup and convene to check up on friends and family members, a safe secluded space from where the noise of the public and violence of the revolution could be temporarily shut out (Soueif 19). It evinces a sense of maternal protection and security that characterize other places throughout the city as well, such as the luminescent safety of her home symbolized by the light left on at the balcony "at night so that I, coming home, or someone coming to visit, can glance up and feel an early welcome" (35).

Parallel to the sites within the city, Soueif presents from the outset a gendered image of Cairo at large, one which is reminiscent of early 20th century gendered nationalist discourse on the nation. "Degraded and bruised and robbed and exploited and mocked and slapped about: my city. I was ashamed of myself for not saving her. *Every one of us was*" (45; emphasis added). Not only is Cairo *her* city, it is also a silent, voiceless city; a feminine, subaltern city, one that is a helpless victim of abuse and must be saved. It is interesting that Soueif would juxtapose a strong feminist vibe about the female activists, such as Mona, Laila, and herself, with a deeply intimate, vulnerable and maternal symbol

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of Cairo and by extension, Egypt. But it is even more interesting to see that in the above image, the focus is on the beaten-down woman and not on the perpetrator who has committed the crimes against her. In other words, Soueif inverts the status quo which reserves speech to the powerful and casts the powerless in silence. She offers her city a platform to find its voice, timid as it may be, recalling how James Hodapp describes this formal act as a writer's stake in representing the postcolonial subaltern from below (321). In another striking image of the city, she renders it in feminine rhetoric once again, only this time a maternal link is forged between the city and its people just as it would between a mother and her child:

> The city puts her lips to our ears, she tucks her arm into ours and draws close so we can feel her heartbeat and smell her scent, and we fall in with her, and measure our step to hers, and we fill our eyes with her beautiful, wounded face and whisper that her memories are our memories, her fate is our fate. (Soueif 9)

When Soueif is not underscoring the revolution in Tahrir Square with family, particularly maternal metaphors on parallel personal and public levels, she builds a repertoire of images of strong women activists from various age groups, social classes, religious backgrounds, and intellectual levels, all of whom play significant, if not central roles in the revolution, not in the least because she represents them as vocal characters in the text. One early and prominent image in the narrative is of Soueif running through the streets of downtown Cairo with her nieces as they try to catch up with the revolution and escape the tear gas the police try to scatter people with (20). The girls' father, Soueif's brother, relinquishes the traditional role of patriarchal protector of his family and entrusts his sister with it, she coming across as a powerful, capable matron and activist: "My brother when I called him said his daughters wanted to join the action, and would I take them? This

would be their first protest" (19). Without further elaboration on her brother's role in the revolution, Soueif does, however, emphasize that her sister Laila and niece Mona are actively taking part in the marches and protests (14). One of the recurring impressions she gives the reader of her family is that it is comprised of a group of independent, progressive, nationally activist women. Furthermore, when Soueif takes note of faces she recognizes in the protests, she calls the women by their names and the men by the roles which relate them to these women, an example being her friend Lena *and her nameless husband* (21). The reader also hears from women on a lower intellectual and social level than Soueif and her family, such as Um Nagla, whom Soueif refers to as "our help," when she speaks about her son Ali's stance on Mubarak's criminal regime: "'Ali,' she tells me, 'Ali says of Mubarak and all his men: "Before they open their mouths they're liars; they breathe lies." And this,' she adds, 'is Ali-who-couldn't-speak'" (15). It is also important to note that Soueif identifies her as Nagla's mother ("Um" is the Arabic word for "mother") rather than refer to her with her real name or even as Um Ali, as it is customary in Arab societies to attribute parents' names to their son, if any. We also hear from women on the other end of the social spectrum, as has been mentioned above, Mona Mina, the physician and revolutionary activist is depicted as a tireless heroine saving the lives of young rebels whom the police had injured (33). Karima, Soueif's modest and conservative Muslim neighbor, also leaves the reader with the iconic image of "[taking] off her galabeyya and veil and [putting] on a loose trouser suit and a scarf" (37), indeed a reference to several Muslim feminists' iconic and historical gestures of "unveiling" as signs of resistance to patriarchy and women's emancipation, including Hoda Shaarawi. Another significant female activist in the memoir is none other than her niece Mona, whom Soueif portrays as one of the central actresses

who resists the state's enforced Internet blackout when she and the *shabab* succeed at reconnecting the revolution to the outside digital world and its media networks, again from "someone's mother's apartment," a site of protection and hopefulness (27). It seems as though Soueif is interested in documenting the opinion of women from a cross-class culture who speak the language of liberation and empowerment, as Badran posits the rhetoric of feminism in Egypt had always been a trans-class phenomenon.

Conclusion

The analysis of heteroglossic revolutionary voices in Soueif's text as attentive to both gender-inflected and family-oriented imagery situates her personal and political account of the 2011 revolution at the edge of a long tradition of women's resistance writing in Egypt. It simultaneously locates her narrative amidst a wave of hybrid autobiographical writing across many intertextual mediums, that has intensified since the beginning of the 21st century uprisings in the Arab world, revealing a need and urgency for the self-affirmation of voice and documentation/re-presentation of history from people's perspectives as revolution unfolds. In spite of the memoir's significant representation of women's political participation and vocalism, the bulk of heterological representation of revolutionary vanguards remains indebted to the *shabab* motif, a young class of both men and women. Soueif's transnational position as an immigrant writer, intellectual, and journalist writing about a deeply domestic revolution for a Western audience using feminist imagery has garnered lukewarm reception of her narrative, especially among local Egyptian feminist activists and writers, and yet a scrambling acceptance among global readers for she represents the Egyptian revolutionaries in exactly the way the West would like to perceive

them: young, middle-class, educated, secularists who utilize Western social media platforms to get their desire for democratization across.

However, we cannot deny that Soueif's transgeneric attempt at democratizing the voices of youth and *tahrir* in the revolution and coming to terms with her private past in Cairo has at some instances pushed the boundaries of postcolonial representation in her insistence on the uprising being a popular leaderless revolution, and its people's demands which fall neither in line with Western discourse nor religious fundamentalist discourse. When it comes to using feminist discourse to further the Egyptian cause beyond postcoloniality, we nevertheless find that Soueif falls back into the selfsame symbols and images which echo a fossilized postcolonial discourse as well as colonialist rhetoric of feminization of the land (al-Musawi 49-50).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Towards a Culture of Voice and Visibility in Egypt

*"Perhaps we should invest in making sense of our past in
order to find meaning in our present."*
--- Naila Kelani

*"[N]ew revolutions arise, because the spirit of revolution is
indefeatible. In the end, world-revolution must come
inevitably."*
--- Ethel Mannin[46]

The Tahrir Revolution in 2011 has established legitimacy by simultaneously drawing on its

own historical legacy of revolt in Egypt, and breaking with the West's expectations of

popular activism in the region. Inspired by the revolution's modus operandi, this brief

intervention in the world of Egypt's historical revolutions and narrative representations of

voice comes to a close by returning to the point of its departure while posing questions as

well as concluding remarks that can only be addressed in time. For this reason, it is

necessary to go back to the initial problematics raised by the social, historical, literary, and

theoretical frameworks that this study pulls together. What is essentially at stake in the

early decades of the 21$^{\text{st}}$ century in Egypt is a palpable struggle for voice, popular agency,

and political *re*-commitment which have been reclaimed by the intellectual qua writer and

the subaltern Egyptian people through the process of revolution. This process, which

effectively took off in an unprecedented manner on January 25, 2011 as far as local and

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[46] Ethel Mannin quoted by Caroline Rooney in "Egypt's Revolution, Our Revolution: Revolutionary Women
and the Transnational Avant-garde," 148.

world media is concerned, arguably traces its motivations back to Abdel Nasser's 1952 revolution as well as the 1919 uprising led by Saad Zaghloul and the Wafd Party, with even earlier connections to the 1882 'Urabi Revolt.

The phenomenon theoretically perceived of as restituting voice and visibility to Badiou's inexistent in Tahrir Square and other public urban spaces acquires critical literary significance when it comes to interpreting the layers of discourse and representation on behalf of intellectuals qua writers in narrative literature about revolution. Representing the subaltern has occupied central concern in intellectual debates over aesthetic and political issues in committed literature (*adab al-iltizam*) from the mid-1950s to the 1990s in a subversive, distant, and isolated manner, as Richard Jacquemond, Samia Mehrez and others have observed. But in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, we find that it is no longer sufficient for the subaltern to be represented and spoken for on behalf of the intellectual in contemporary literary works. The figure of the writer-intellectual has once again found inspiration from the protesting masses for political "commitment" and articulation in the late 1990s, even more explicitly so in the early 2000s, as Tarek el-Ariss, Dina Heshmat and other literary critics point out in *Commitment and Beyond: Reflections on/of the Political in Arabic Literature since the 1940s* (2015). Contemporary representations of the people depict them having assumed the agency for political speech; they must speak for themselves and new forms of writing that foreground their distinct voices have to be developed if we are to break with the confines of postcolonial and disillusioned representation.

This shift in representational paradigms, in which the figure of the intellectual begins to recede from sight, can be traced back to the fictional world of Mahfouz's

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Children of the Alley, as the writer-narrator gives way to the subtle spontaneity of popular voices from everyday life in the alley. Mahfouz's position as storyteller, as Haim Gordon calls him in *Naguib Mahfouz's Egypt: Existential Themes in His Writings* (1990) overpowers his stake in politically analyzing and critiquing an oppressive society in favor of narrating and describing a fictitious microcosm that finds some resemblance to the fatalistic external correlative in Abdel Nasser's Egypt. In other words, Mahfouz tells a story; whatever political interpretation we assign to the novel is a function of our reading of the narrative rather than "authorial intention." The impulse to tell stories that are not just stories, but stories that hope to make direct political interventions, intensifies further in narratives of the 21st century. In el-Shafee's *Metro: A Story from Cairo*, the intellectual voice disappears altogether and is replaced by the repressive totality of Shehab's world. The discursive channel constructed by the social sphere as it speaks to the political sphere is much more direct and unabashed in its critique of power. In Soueif's *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*, however, the author's presence and voice as an intellectual is foregrounded by the hybrid autobiographical nature of her memoir. Nevertheless, there is a tangible and self-expressed urgency to represent voices from the revolution – but only certain voices, as I argue – in a hybridized form of writing that combines the seemingly antagonistic styles of journalistic and "objective" reportage with personal and collective accounts informed by memory.

The urgency to create new spaces for public political expression in literary and cultural forms that exceed the novel in the early decades of the 21st century is mirrored by a similar resolve among *Nahdawi* intellectuals in the early decades of the 20th century for finding the novel as the appropriate representational medium to carry sentiments of

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revolution, nationalism, and modernization through its form. The main difference, however,

is that while the intellectual voices of the early 20th century took it upon themselves to

speak for the social; the social in the late 20th and early 21st centuries no longer feels the

need for the intellectual intermediary to speak to or understand the situation of political

fatalism and superfluity in Egypt. The social, represented by activists, artists, and "new"

writers (also referred to as "popular intellectuals"), who come from backgrounds that are

not necessarily literary or intellectual like el-Shafee, are capable of harnessing (digital)

platforms to render their voices visible while the "elite" intellectual is beginning to listen to

and learn from the social rather than speak to it from a position of superiority.

The preliminary outcome of this study, therefore, is to emphasize the necessity of

redefining the people's organic but volatile relationship with power and the intellectual in

the 21st century Egyptian sphere. In his recent volume entitled *The Intellectual and the

People in Egyptian Literature and Culture: Amāra and the 2011 Revolution* (2014), Ayman

el-Desouky points to a tension similar to what is at stake in my study: that is, the question

of representation, misrepresentation or complete absence of Egyptian popular voices in the

body of literary and intellectual work around revolution. While el-Desouky uses a social

and culturally-specific sign called *amāra* to address this problem, I instead use the social

and literary concept of heteroglossia to locate voice in select literary texts, and I interrogate

which of Mahfouz's, el-Shafee's, or Soueif's representations are the closest to being a

sounding board for what the people themselves demand. El-Desouky's analysis, however,

focuses more on the intellectual's position as mediator with respect to dominant ideologies

and discourses of state power and the people's cultural and collective agency in producing

an anti-discourse of resistance on the street. But he segregates Egyptian intellectuals since

the mid-1950s in a binary manner as either, those who "remain within the establishment, working with machinations of the state and its institutions and discourses, or [those who] remain absolutely unwavering in speaking truth to power and in doing so only and always embarrassingly, in [Edward] Said's phrases (1994)" (Preface ix). Abdel Nasser's revolutionary socialist policies in the mid-1950s placed an authoritarian hold over cultural productivity and institutionalized literary and intellectual visions and ideologies of representation, which is the main cause behind the intellectual rift in the 1960s, especially after the 1967 war and the national identity crisis it triggered (9-10). But in doing so, el-Desouky reiterates a reductionist postcolonial discourse of power and resistance which effectively patronizes the complexity of historical circumstance in Egypt and the economy of literary production it espouses.

My study, however, has demonstrated that there are factors beyond political allegiances that determine the positionality of the intellectual voice's within a text: while Mahfouz is the so-called paragon of the traditional novel in Egypt, his novel *Children of the Alley* almost imperceptibly evokes revolutionary action by drawing on an ethic of resistance as old as humanity and religion and by offering an alternative history of the nation from the people's point-of-view. As mentioned beforehand, he does so through a concealing shroud of fiction and allegory which obfuscates but does not depoliticize his liminal position as a writer from the people (al-Gamaleyya quarter) and for the people. His long-term occupation as a civil servant in an authoritarian government allowed him to nurture close and obscure relationships with state officials and censors, Abdel Nasser himself, authority-wielding institutions such as *Al-Ahram*, as well as the religious leaders of Al-Azhar and the Muslim Brotherhood. Soueif, on the other hand, seems to be speaking

"truth to power" in the "unwavering" way that el-Desouky espouses, making her political memoir seem open, unabridged, raw, and explicit in its accusations directed against the Mubarak state – its institutions and apparatuses – that abused its power and harassed its citizens in the years leading up to the Tahrir Revolution in 2011. But she in turn does so from a position of privilege allotted to her by her diasporic intellectual status, speaking to the international reader on behalf of the Egyptian people with considerations beyond el-Desouky's duality. She does not have an immediate stake in liberating the voices of the Egyptian masses because of the personal filter of the memoir genre. Neither is she concerned with relaying faithful representations of the different factions that constituted the body of resistance in Tahrir Square, vouching instead for a more unitary image of youth and *tahrir*. Therefore, the position an intellectual occupies in relation to discourses of power and anti-discourses of resistance, as well as the tension between the inclusion of voice and its occlusion, is never simple or straightforward as my analysis has shown.

The second outcome this study has presented is the significance of promoting new ways of reading and seeing Egyptian and world literary narratives from the 20th and 21st centuries. While it is important to historically contextualize literature on revolution and nationalism, it is even more vital to move beyond the question of history to address the social dimension, as Jacquemond and Mehrez hold, and to uncover within such narratives an ideology of resistance to state forms of oppression as well as traditional forms of writing that glorify the confines of conventional genres. In a relatively older article that discusses the unfolding of the Libyan revolution and its aftermath since 2011, "Genres of the 'Arab Spring': Narrating Revolutions" (2012), Naila Kelani poses thought-provoking questions about timeliness and honesty in literary representations of revolution which aptly apply to

the current Egyptian context post-Tahrir. The aforementioned duty and urgency felt by writers to capture the revolution in the present moment cannot be sequestered from narratives of the past. A historicization and an understanding of the nation's past is a crucial part of making meaning of revolution not only in the present, but for the sake of future representations of the nation's history as well. El-Shafee, therefore, should not be read without previous knowledge of the tradition of comics and political cartooning in Egypt. Mahfouz's literature in turn is much better contextualized in the social and political context in which he wrote; his Egypt, in other words, is not the same but also not so different from Egypt today. And reading Soueif without considering the Egyptian feminist tradition out of which her voice emerges, and from which it departs, would make for a limited understanding of both her memoir and the historical role played by women in Egypt's revolutions.

There is also a responsibility on behalf of the reader as well as the writer of Egyptian literature of revolution. The uprisings and revolutions that have occupied the Egyptian street and psyche since 2011 ought not to be cut off from the national and literary pasts; the latter is thus not a "before" to the present as much as it is a constitutive part of its being. The present should also not be regarded as "new" as much as it ought to be perceived as a continuation of a historical narrative with the nuanced inflections of a 21st-century context. The duty of producing responsible literature, therefore, lies not solely with constructing faithful representations of the revolution using the most accurate genre in the present, but also with future historical narratives that will influence the national consciousness. Consider, for instance, the motion in the Egyptian ministry to "erase" all representations of Mubarak that cast him in a positive light from future historical textbooks,

and to highlight the nationalist sentiment of the 2011 revolutions. The act of denying

certain truths for a political agenda constitutes another form of censorship and state

suppression of liberated expression. It silences aspects of the past that have played a

significant role in the way the present is perceived and the future is written. The question of

literary output across new and creative genres, hybrid verbal-visual forms, and digital

platforms is important to address, especially in light of the ineffectiveness of fiction at the

moment, which writers such as Soueif and Sonallah Ibrahim have addressed. As Kelani

aptly states,

> In writing too late, we run the risk of imposing our knowledge of what we now
> know happened upon the past; effectively imagining that we knew it all along. It is
> paramount that we don't delay building an archive, or even a factual historical
> narrative, that we produce and record now before the narrative is tainted or
> embellished by whatever happens next. (3)

This inevitably leads to questioning the all-too-familiar conventions of narrative genres and

demanding that works of world literature be conceived of outside the limiting frameworks

of genre by reading first and foremost for voice. The analysis of different literary genres

and media in relation to the Egyptian revolution elicits a specificity of voice in each text.

But the initial question at stake in this study, determining which genre is more suitable for

carrying through an ideology of resistance and *tahrir*, remains unanswered. In lieu of a

conclusion, therefore, we might say that there is not a better genre for such political and

literary purposes, but that the choice of genre and the intermarrying of verbal and visual

forms of media in graphic narratives, memoirs, and novels of the 21st century are an

ideological performance and act of resistance in their own right.

　　The last but not least important outcome of this study points to the importance of

redefining the framework within which we conceive of the people and revolution in order

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to accommodate a culture of voice and visibility in modern-day Egypt. El-Desouky argues that the discursive representation of the people has always been an idealized abstraction embedded within the already abstract figure that the intellectual him/herself constitutes (9). In other words, the intellectual has always been a figure of political imagination. The people, a product of the intellectual's vision, essentially are an even more abstract and theoretical conception that can only be visualized in literary and cultural representation. "The People" have been utilized as a discursive object for mobilizing political agendas and intellectual debates in the same manner that the youth and student protestors have been mobilized as a political force of change in revolts in the 1970s, as Mohamed Bassiouni points out in "Students in Revolt" (2014). Rarely have the people been perceived as self-fulfilled and heterogeneous subjects that can articulate a multifaceted vision from a social standpoint on their own. My study addresses this problem by highlighting the social dimension of the people's existence in literary representation and bringing to the fore instances of their speech, which alternatively casts the intellectual into silence and shocks the "political theoretical 'real'" out of patronizing assumptions about the people and calls for a new mode of knowledge production about the people and their substantive relationship to power, originating from the people themselves. In this regard, my analysis bears similarity to el-Desouky's call for attention to the different modes of knowledge production espoused by the people on the street in the 2011 revolution. The Tahrir Revolution in Egypt has been a slowly unfolding process that has rendered intellectuals and academics speechless and leftist theorists in intrigue, as it has demanded a reworking of both, the postcolonial and subaltern categories in which we conceive of the Egyptian people as well as the postcolonial framework of leader-led revolutions that rally the people

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blindly behind a political cause. This method of speaking the social to the political will eventually acknowledge the weight of local and culturally-specific expressions of such a universal phenomenon as revolution, and will realize Hamid Dabashi's explicit call for demystifying postcolonial terminology, which propagates a certain stunted knowledge about Egypt and the Arab world (*The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* 61).

While this study draws on several forms of literary production, intellectual and people's voices from within the Tahrir Revolution, in addition to a wide critical scope of modern Egyptian history informed by Arab as well as Western European and American theoretical and critical discourse, there certainly exist several other voices that could serve the narratives of revolution, liberation, and mixed literary forms that this study contributes to. But because of the priority of objectives this study sought to achieve in covering a breadth of literary genres and forms, transformations in writing on revolution, and the general attitudes of aesthetic expression in Egypt, voices not strictly relevant to the argument had to remain outside its predetermined scope. This very act of "exclusion," however, opens the possibility for expanding this research at a later stage in the direction of *tahrir* studies and what continues to be written and rewritten about the 2011 revolution in Egypt. In the spirit of literature's centrifugal movement beyond its confines within and across geographical and interdisciplinary fields, as Mejcher-Atassi holds, the opportunities are ripe for drawing nuanced comparisons between literary, artistic, and cultural productions in Egypt and other Arab nations that are also in the midst of social and political transformation, such as Syria and Libya. Writing, rewriting, and translating revolution are narrative processes still at the very beginning of unfolding, and will likely occupy critical debate and inspire literary and popular culture production in the region for years to come.

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