"The Privilege and the Curse" of the Cosmopolitan Consciousness: Redefining *Ūmmah*-gined Communities in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*

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ABSTRACT

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* both construct cosmopolitan figures, who through their narratives, attempt to reformulate nationalist constructions of nation. This study compares Rushdie and Soueif's configuration of the cosmopolitan global consciousness and its rootedness in the postcolonial local centers of Bombay and Cairo respectively. The comparison shows that the multiply determined identity of cosmopolitans can both impede, as well as allow for, the active participation in the social and political life of the country in which they inhabit and aim to represent. This thesis considers Rushdie and Soueif's journey back into postcolonial centers where the contested threshold between homogenous constructions of national identity and the heterogeneity of cosmopolitans has to be negotiated before productive critique and reform can begin at home.

RÉSUMÉ

Midnight's Children de Salman Rushdie et The Map of Love de Ahdaf Soueif créent des personages cosmopolites qui essayent, à travers de leurs narrations, de reformuler les constructions nationalistes d'une nation. Cette étude compare le profil de la conscience cosmopolite et planétaire et ses racines dans les centres post-coloniaux de Bombay et du Caire, respectivement. La comparaison montre que l'identité plusieurs fois déterminée des cosmopolites peut à la fois entraver et prévoir la participation active dans la vie sociale et politique du pays dans lequel ils habitent et ont pour but de représenter.
Cette thèse examine le parcours de Rushdie et de Soueif de retour dans les centres post-coloniaux où le seuil contesté entre les constructions homogènes d'identité nationale et l'hétérogénéité des cosmopolites doit être négocié avant que la critique productive et la réforme ne puisse commencer au pays.

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Introduction

Midnight's Children's Children

Impossible, as one turns these pages, not to think of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's teaching and of what was for him the essential philosophical task: never to consent to being completely comfortable with one's own presuppositions. Never to let them fall peacefully asleep, but also never to believe that a new fact will suffice to overturn them [...] To be very mindful that everything one perceives is evident only against a familiar and little-known horizon, that every certainty is sure only through the support of a ground that is always unexplored. The most fragile instant has its roots. In that lesson, there is a whole ethic of sleepless evidence that does not rule out, far from it, a rigorous economy of the True and the False; but that is not the whole story.

—Michel Foucault, *Power*[1]

The literary map of India is about to be redrawn [...] This is a book to accept on its own terms, and an author to welcome into world company. *Midnight's Children* sounds like a continent finding its voice. How Indian is it? It is slangy, and a taste for India obviously heightens the response [...] The myriad personalities of Saleem, imposed by the time, place and circumstance of his extraordinary birth [...] are reduced to a single, eloquent, ordinary soul [...] myths intact, history accounted for, and a remarkable character fully alive.

—Clarke Blaise, "A Novel of India's Coming of Age"[2]

The publication of *Midnight's Children* established Salman Rushdie as one of the most celebrated authors of Indian British Literature, elevating him also to critical prominence on the Western literary landscape. Since his debut novel *Grimus* (1975), Rushdie has published twelve novels and four works of non-fiction and criticism. But, it was *Midnight's Children* (1981) that made his name. In her most recent book *Colonial Karma*, Josna Rege, prominent scholar of modern Indian English Literature, observes that after its publication, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* "almost immediately became a kind of benchmark against which both writers and readers began to assess new novels" (Rege, *Colonial Karma* 108). For example, *Midnight's Children* won the prestigious Booker prize in 1981, and its regenerative influence was

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[1] Michel Foucault, *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000) 448.

[2] Clark Blaise, "A Novel of India's Coming of Age," *New York Times Book Review*, 19 April, 1981, 1.

subsequently acknowledged by the special 25th anniversary "Booker of Bookers" in 1993, an award not yet garnered by any other author.

The Booker Prize is arguably the most renowned literary prize in the English-speaking world and is open to citizens of the British Commonwealth and the Republic of Ireland. Along with monetary rewards, the prize promises widespread public and critical attention within the English-speaking world to both the winner and the short-listed authors. At best, the prize directs the reading public's attention to novels that reflect upon and portray states and culture after empire. At its worst, the Booker allows the British literary establishment to take pride in awarding monetary literary prizes to writers from countries it formerly colonized.

Early critical reactions to the achievements of *Midnight's Children* can be found in the comments of the British critic William Walsh in an essay titled "India and the Novel" published in 1983. Walsh describes *Midnight's Children* as "a novel unprecedented in scope, manner and achievement in the hundred and fifty year old tradition of the Indian novel in English" (Walsh 257). The attention to, and acclaim of *Midnight's Children* can also be credited for its key role in the boom of contemporary Indian and South Asian fiction in English. Anita Desai points to the significance of *Midnight's Children* by emphasizing the novel's unusual influence on an entire generation of Indian British writers. She claims, "it was a very ambitious and bold book. And partly because of the success of the book, it led to a whole generation of writers and gave them the confidence they might not have had otherwise. It may be said to have set free the tongues of the young writers—a tremendous influence upon their work" (Desai 163). *Midnight's Children* allowed writers from various postcolonial nations to be acknowledged by the publishing centers of London and New York; writers, who either won or were short-listed for a Booker Prize since its publication. In the words of Keith Booker, "earlier writers such as G.V. Desani, M.

Anantanarayanan, and even Raja Rao have gained retrospective prominence by being identified as Rushdie's forebearers" (Booker 2). *Midnight's Children* "opened up new spaces for a new crop of [Indian] writers in English" (*Colonial Karma* 108). But the influence of *Midnight's Children* extends well beyond writers from India and South Asia, drawing much needed attention to literature in English from various other former British colonies.

The novel helped introduce and validate the works of a varied and cosmopolitan generation of postcolonial writers, including Kazuo Ishiguro, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Michael Ondaatje, and Ahdaf Soueif. Almost twenty years after the publication of *Midnight's Children*, Egyptian British novelist Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* continues in the trajectory of expatriate writing in English set forth by Rushdie and can therefore be seen as one of *Midnight's Children*'s "children." Her novel, *The Map of Love* received similar literary recognition as *Midnight's Children* and was a Booker prize finalist in 1999 alongside writers such as J.M Coetzee and Anita Desai.

Ahdaf Soueif is one of the first contemporary Egyptian writers to rewrite Egyptian colonial and postcolonial history from Britain's metropole. Thematically, Soueif's literary corpus explores the political and cultural impact of the encounter between "East" and "West" in an attempt to remedy the schisms existing between Western discourse about the East, and Eastern misconceptions about the West. To date, Soueif has published two collections of short stories, *Aisha* (1983) and *Sandpiper* (1996), two novels, *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) and *The Map of Love* (1999), and most recently, a book of non-fiction, *Mezzaterra* (2004). Ahdaf Soueif has received rave reviews and much acclaim for her substantial body of literature in both the English and Arabic speaking world. Shortly after its publication, Annette Kobak of *The New York Times Book Review* describes *The Map of Love* as follows: "Ahdaf Soueif's latest novel

[...] is a wonderfully accomplished and mature work of fiction telling the intersection stories of three women – Egyptian, American, English [...] a key part of the novel's maturity is its ability to face up squarely to both politics and love" (Kobak 30). One of the Middle East's most widely read weekly journals; *Al-Ahram Weekly Review of Books* praised *The Map of Love* as "a work of historical, postcolonial awareness and postmodern literary finesse, Soueif's novel betrays an Egyptian sensibility and a profound understanding of the female psyche" (el-Wardani).

In contrast, Soueif's ability to straddle both Arab and English culture has made some reviewers uneasy. The boom of postcolonial literature in English over the past two decades, and the success of *The Map of Love,* has provoked anxiety about the 'decline' of the "English Novel" in Britain. This anxiety is best captured by a review of the 1999 Booker Prize's short list entitled "England, what England?" published in *The Guardian* by writer and journalist Andrew Marr. In this review, Marr outlines the six novels short-listed for the 1999 Booker Prize and deplores that "there is a central absence. India, Egypt, Ireland, Scotland, America, the Low Countries—where has England gone?" (Marr). The shocked Marr laments that, "the superstars of contemporary English literature aren't English, and haven't been for years." Marr's lament is engendered by the 'paradox' that "the English who virtually created the novel, are now being ventriloquised by others" (Marr). What's ironic about Marr's review is that he seems to be unaware of a running theme in postcolonial literature that seeks to investigate the dialectics between the culture of the former colonizer and that of the decolonized. That *The Map of Love* simultaneously explores the experiences of Egyptians, Americans and Londoners exhibits Soueif's own position against the consigned modes of authenticity and fixity. It further debunks the demarcations of national identity traditionally based on cultural and linguistically limited definitions of *ūmmah*[3]-gined

[3] Ūmmah., from Arabic, means "the nation."

communities. *The Map of Love* inverts fixed categorizations of national identity that view language and nation as primordial and natural.

But unlike Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatdje, Anita Desai, and Arundhati Roy, novelists whose work has been at the forefront of postcolonial discourse and debates on cosmopolitanism, and with whom Soueif shares a cultivated detachment from restrictive forms of identity, *The Map of Love* and Soueif's other publications have been largely ignored in the Western academy. To date, English translations of Arabic literature by writers such as, Naguib Mahfouz, Tayeb Salih, and Nawal el-Saadawi dominate Western perceptions of literature available from the Arab world, and as a result, little attention has been given to Anglophone Arab literature by publishing industries in the West. As in Western literary studies, language is politically significant in shaping the categorization of literature in contemporary Arab literary discourse. Thus, even in the Middle East, Soueif's work is not considered part of the Arabic literary canon because it is written in English. It is important to acknowledge that Soueif's use of the English language automatically places her at the crossroad between the barriers through which literary texts are studied in the West and in the Arab world.

Because Soueif's *The Map of Love* is written in English, it emerges as a prominent example of a literature that interrogates Egyptian and English national categories – investigating also, the possibilities of cultural dialogue between the culture of the former colonizer and postcolonial culture. In an attempt to create a dialogue between "East" and "West," Soueif writes in English, a language that functioned as a key systematic tool of oppression during colonialism, and that continues to monopolize the stage of intercultural communication in global culture. Notwithstanding English's colonial and neocolonial currency, for Soueif, like many other postcolonial writers, writing in English is not a matter of choice; for her: "it was a choice

between writing in English or not writing at all" (Massad 86). Born in Egypt into a middle-class Cairene intellectual environment, Soueif was brought up speaking in both Arabic and English. Both of her parents are professors at Cairo University; her mother, Fatmah Musa, is a well-known professor of English literature, and her father, Mustafa Soueif, is a professor of psychology. Between the ages of four and eight, Soueif lived in England while her mother completed her doctorate at London University. After obtaining an M.A. in English literature from the University of Cairo (1971), Soueif left Egypt for England to complete a doctorate in linguistics at Lancaster University. Ahdaf Soueif has lived in England since 1984, and while she is competent in both Arabic and English, she has chosen to write all of her novels in English, and her work has been published exclusively by Western publishing houses.

Soueif is one of the first writers of Egyptian heritage to depart from the Arabic literary canon that has traditionally remained immune to publishing in 'foreign' languages. But Soueif's novels do not merely explore Arab culture in English; rather, they question whether an Arab consciousness can be expressed in the English language. In *The Map of Love*, the narrator Amal al-Ghamrawi constantly pauses to reflect on and examine how the Arabic language translates into English. For instance, Amal considers the near impossibility of translating the Arabic term "tarab" into English to her friend/cousin Isabel:

> How do I translate 'tarab'? [...] without sounding weird or exotic, describe [...] that particular emotional, spiritual, even physical condition into which one enters when the soul is penetrated by good Oriental music? A condition so specific that it has a root all to itself: t/r/b. Anyone can be a singer – a 'mughanni' – but to be a 'mutrib' takes an extra quality (Soueif 332).

Soueif looks at Arabic from the perspective of an English speaker/writer and while there is no equivalent to 'tarab' in English, the very effort of rendering this term in English captures one of the major challenges in this novel: that is, not only to break down the language barriers between the conversations that literatures may have with one another, but also to translate historical specificities from one culture into another. In *The Map of Love*, Soueif provides the reader with extensive examples of how the Arabic language works: a language in which roots of words recur not just in a verb's conjugation but also in nouns and their reflection of masculine/feminine divisions. These exercises in language do not necessarily teach the reader Arabic; rather, Arabic's deconstruction points to the ways in which learning about how language functions is crucial for learning about other cultures.

Both Soueif and Rushdie examine national mythologies and culture in the home nation through the English language; this does not only encourage models of in-betweenness and hybridization but also empowers the modes of inversion through which nations are re-imagined. Describing the moment of India's "birth" in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie explicitly recalls what it means to imagine a nation:

> A nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will—except in a dream we all agreed to dream (Rushdie 112).

Communities, writes Benedict Anderson "are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (Anderson 6). That a nation is

"imaginary" and requires a nearly impossible or "phenomenal" collectivity to emerge as more than a mere fantasy is not to disregard the institutional power that nations possess. In both *Midnight's Children* and *The Map of Love*, the nation, India and Egypt respectively, is 'dreamed' and re-imagined through the cosmopolitan figure. What I mean by cosmopolitan is not a mere familiarity with multiple cultures or languages, but the ways in which the deracination from communities and cultures of origin provides the cosmopolitan with innovative possibilities for social change that draw from diverse ideas, traditions, and languages. In rethinking official narratives of nationalism that structure, assimilate, or exclude one or another version of history, cosmopolitanism allows postcolonial writers like Rushdie and Soueif to question the institutional systems of power in the "home" nation by looking "outside their situation for social or political models" (Malcomson 239). Like Rushdie, Soueif challenges neocolonial nationalist ideologies in local society that have come to characterize postcolonial formations of nation as both "inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 6).

The construction of the cosmopolitan figure in *Midnight's Children* and *The Map of Love* functions as a tool for rethinking the "deep horizontal comradeship" (7) and homogeneity of nation as a singular linguistic, cultural, and ethnic entity. In an essay titled "Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture" Ulf Hannerz writes that the perspective of the cosmopolitan "must entail relationships to a plurality of cultures understood as distinct entities" (Hannerz 239). In both novels, one of the key ways in which the idea of the grand narratives of nation and its common history are challenged is through the location of the cosmopolitan in a "distinct" local setting. The local struggles against stagnant and destructive forces of nationalism in *Midnight's Children*'s Bombay, and the struggle for justice against the hegemonic violence of colonialism and nationalism in Cairo/Tawasi in *The Map of Love* forces the protagonists to create new forms

of social activism that attempt to restore a sense of solidarity among nations and peoples. But as in the institutional forces that imagine nations through different *styles*, fictional representations of nation are also tailored differently. In *Midnight's Children* and *The Map of Love*, the cosmopolitan's struggle against, and attempt to reformulate, hegemonic constructions of nation are fashioned on different understandings of how this is achieved.

In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's experimentation in narrative and storytelling functions as a more effective strategy in the struggle against India's nationalist ideologies than does the act of creating points of contact with the people that the cosmopolitan Saleem claims to represent. In Rushdie's novel, the act of rewriting India's heterogeneity against its "inherently limited and sovereign" identity is enacted not through the "phenomenal collective will" and representation of India's multitudinous identities, but through the centrality of Saleem in the narrative and indeed, all of India: Saleem Sinai is *Midnight's Children*'s narrator, protagonist and the single bearer of the "ancient face of India which is also eternally young" (Rushdie 112, 121). Instead of actually connecting with the local communities that ground and partially define Saleem's cosmopolitan identity, Saleem merely uses the local setting to accentuate his personal struggles which, according to him, represent the experiences of the "six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous" Indians (37). While his narrative is very compelling, and while the fluidity of his cosmopolitan identity has the potential to provide global visibility to local struggles against nationalist autocracy, one must question the efficacy of Saleem's self-perpetuating narrative that draws upon various traditions, cultures and languages, at the same time, failing to deliver a point of connection to the people and struggles it aims to address.

Conversely, in *The Map of Love*, the act of re-imagining nations as determined by multiple cultures, languages and ethnicities is accomplished not through the centrality and

monologism of one character, but through the private and public histories of multiple characters. Soueif's *The Map of Love* is a tapestry of public and private voices in the form of letters, journals, and correspondences that are discovered, assembled and pieced together by the collective effort of characters from different cultural origins. Like Rushdie, Soueif situates her narrative in the local; yet the local in *The Map of Love* is part and parcel of the development of the cosmopolitan's sensibility towards the struggle for justice. The cosmopolitan, as figured in Anna Winterbourne, the novel's nineteenth century heroine, and Amal al-Ghamrawi, protagonist and narrator of the novel's contemporary setting, is not merely an outsider who accumulates the experiences of oppressed peoples in one organic narrative. Rather, the cosmopolitan figure uses the power and privilege of her ability to straddle two cultures in order to directly interact with the local on an equal footing. She is active in the social arena, committed to eradicating colonial and nationalist forms of subjugation as well as in the private process of transmitting the imbalances and distortions in historically produced images of the 'other' in colonialist and neocolonial nationalist discourses.

Genesis of Theoretical Framework

In his essay "On National Culture", Franz Fanon writes,

> A national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of the people. (Fanon 233)

In his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, where this excerpt appears, Fanon presents a paradox in the idea of "national identity." He claims that while "national identity" is vital to the emergence of an anticolonial Third World revolution, this identity limits efforts towards liberation because it

has potential to re-inscribe essentialist, totalizing and often ruling class conceptions of nation. Fanon's main argument is, unless "national identity" is consciously led with the goal of achieving national liberation as only a first step towards decolonization, then it will very quickly be re-absorbed into the apparatuses of imperialist domination. Fanon claims that a national culture and by extension, a national identity must represent "the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence" (233). Only then, will the struggle for national liberation articulate the specificities of an oppressed people's cultural heterogeneity across religious, ethnic and class lines. For Fanon, the "sphere of thought" cannot be disconnected from "a new reality in action" (223) both in the resistance against the conceptual and historical structure of European colonialism, and against the complexity of this legacy as adopted by nationalism vis-à-vis its institutionalization of the imbalances of power between indigenous peoples and the classes that dominate them.

Recent critics of postcolonial literary theory such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak, thinkers whom Robert J.C. Young once labeled "the holy trinity" of the field (Moore-Gilbert, 1), examined the politics of location and privilege that shape the experiences of culturally hybrid and often cosmopolitan writers and critics who attempt to negotiate the interstices between 'centre' and 'margin' or, as will be taken up by this project, between the local and the global. These critics recognize that beyond the dichotomies between colonizer and colonized, complex processes of cultural and national identifications and origins are at stake. The basis for the formation of diasporas and cosmopolitanism is movement, specifically forced or voluntary migration. Just as postcolonialism created the phenomenon of diaspora, exile, and displacement, cosmopolitanism characterizes contemporary forms of globalization.

Despite the complexity and considerable differences of their individual work, Said, Bhabha, and Spivak all interrogate the sites of power and agency in the metropolitan First World, at the same time they valorize exilic, hybrid, and cosmopolitan perspectives. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said appropriates the motif of the "voyage in," a journey often reserved for colonialist adventure narratives such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* to describe the movement and integration of the Third World thinker in the Western centers. The reversal of destinations or this "voyage in," writes Said,

> constitutes an especially interesting variety of hybrid cultural work. And that it exists at all is a sign of adversarial internationalization in an age of continued imperial structures. No longer does the logos dwell exclusively, as it were, in London and Paris. No longer does history run unilaterally, as Hegel believed, from east to west, or from south to north, becoming more sophisticated and developed, less primitive and backward as it goes. Instead, the weapons of criticism have become part of the historical legacy of empire, in which the separations and exclusions of 'divide and rule' are erased and surprising new configurations spring up. (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 244)

Similar to Said's motif that attributes privilege to the exilic intellectual, Bhabha describes the culturally hybrid as "being in the beyond" (Bhabha 7). For Bhabha, this is a space that creates a "transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities" (7). According to Spivak, the intellectual's agency and position as exile must also dovetail with insurgent practices particularly as it relates to the spaces separating the First and Third Worlds: "the space of difference inhabited by those who have no access to the lines of mobility within a society" (Spivak, "From Haverstock Hill" 26). In another essay, "Cultural Talks in the Hot Peace:

Revising the 'Global Village", she describes her work as one that "forages in the crease between global postcoloniality and postcolonial migrancy" (Spivak, "Cultural Talks" 334). What Spivak seems to be proposing is for postcolonial and cosmopolitan perspectives to also involve a nuanced investigation of postcoloniality not only in the Western metropolis, as Bhabha's focus seems to suggest, but more importantly an engagement with the struggles in decolonized spaces.

If, as James Clifford suggests, "the diaspora discourse and history currently in the air [is] about recovering non-Western, or not-only-Western, models for cosmopolitan life, non-aligned transnationalities struggling within and against nation-states, global technologies, and markets-resources for a fraught coexistence" (Clifford, *Routes* 277) then a few questions must follow: can the discursive spaces of hybridity and cosmopolitanism produce reality? In other words, how productive are the sites of resistance created by the hybrid cosmopolitan in connecting with the lived experiences and resolving the struggles of local communities in the "home" nation if a certain level of detachment from the local defines the very identity of the cosmopolitan? Where the possibilities for creative, progressive change projected on the aspirations of hybridized diasporic cultures seem limitless, what do we make of those coercive postcolonial identities that still exist in decolonized spaces, in states with rigid borders, autocratic ruling parties and authorities?

Cosmopolitan Politics

In his far-reaching article, "Given Culture: Rethinking Cosmo-political Freedom in Transnationalism", Pheng Cheah claims that a narrow focus on the migrant in the metropole and general theories of "transformative agency inevitably exaggerates the role of signification and cultural representation in the functioning socio-political life and its institutions" (Cheah 298). But Cheah seriously questions: "is it not obvious, from the start, that the paradigm for these

radical cosmopolitanisms is not really decolonized space but the metropolitan scenario of migrancy and mobility?" (300). I do not want to overstate *Midnight's Children* and *The Map of Love*'s political significance. However, I do want to take up Cheah's challenge. In this project I aim to call attention to the ways in which cosmopolitanism is invoked in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Soueif's *The Map of Love*. More specifically, I lend attention to both the limitations and the productive possibilities for social change that Third World cosmopolitans bring when they venture back into the local setting from which they had emigrated. I question what the models of cultural hybridization can offer 'back to the margin' in their struggles against the constraints of homogenous national identities and ineffective nation-states after cosmopolitans undertake the journey into the metropolitan West. In both novels, the cosmopolitan is employed as an antidote to traditionally construed forms of national identity that often dominate national consciousness. Rather than looking at the cosmopolitan figure as an example of what Bruce Robbins calls "actually existing cosmopolitanism", I want to show how and to what extent cosmopolitans enact different models of national identity in the localities they inhabit. Does cosmopolitanism in Rushdie and Soueif's novels construct difference? Or, does it reinforce the same power relations that it seeks to overcome?

To offer some provisional answers to these questions I locate Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* in the artistic trajectory of the cosmopolitan novel instigated by Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. In order to analyze the extent to which these novels are cosmopolitan, it is useful to first consider the nature of the concept, its development and multiple articulations in recent scholarship. It may also be worth noting that from the outset and beyond the adjectival sense of "belonging to all parts of the world; not restricted to any one country or its inhabitants," (OED) the word cosmopolitan evokes the image of a privileged person: someone who can claim

to be a "citizen of the world" by virtue of independent means, global mobility, and "worldly" tastes. In the concluding chapter of the collection of essays titled *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation,* James Clifford eschews universalist approaches to defining the ethics, morals and politics of cosmopolitanism. Clifford advocates for "nonuniversalist cosmopolitanisms" because they are able to "translate different histories, to cross narrow identities, to lend themselves to others' projects" (Clifford, *Mixed Feelings* 368). For Clifford, rather than transcending difference, as general notions of cosmopolitanism seem to suggest, cosmopolitans "must work *through* and *among* differences of culture and identity" (368).[4]

In discussing the significant trend of cosmopolitan writing in postcolonial literature promulgated by *Midnight's Children*, Timothy Brennan's characterization of "Third World cosmopolitans" can most usefully be employed. Some of the common themes in the fiction of this "creative community" are: "a harsh questioning of radical decolonization theory; a dismissive or parodic attitude towards the project of national culture; a manipulation of imperial imagery and local legends as a means of politicizing current events" (Brennan 35). According to Brennan, one essential feature "champion[ed]" by such writers is "cultural 'hybridity' – a hybridity claimed to offer certain advantages in negotiating the collisions of language, race and art in a world of disparate people comprising a single, if not exactly unified, world" (35). Yet, in an attempt to capture the "global juxtapositions that [...] force their way into [local] experience", Brennan claims that the risk of this "cosmopolitan embrace" is that it presumes that the complexities of historical specificity are experienced on the same level. Brennan says, that the

[4] Clifford's attention to difference and specific historicity contends with Arjun Appardurai's celebration of cosmopolitan universalism. In his essay, "Patriotism and its Futures" Appardurai opens with the declaration "We have to think ourselves beyond the nation" (Appardurai 158). While Appardurai's pronouncement has been thoroughly contested in contemporary cosmopolitan discourse, most scholars agree that one of the salient features of cosmopolitanism is that it transcends the localism and absolutism of homogenously construed racial, ethnic, and especially national identities.

collapsing of postcolonial experiences into one paradigmatic category involves "a flattening of influences, which assemble themselves, as it were, on the same plane of value" (52). Brennan's characterization of cosmopolitanism helps to explain the different ways in which decolonized cultures and experiences are represented through cosmopolitans in both *Midnight's Children* and *The Map of Love*.

Salman Rushdie and Ahdaf Soueif adequately capture Brennan's characterization of cosmopolitan writers because both are "interpreters and authentic public voices of the Third World." They are also "alien to the [Western] public that read them" but are "like that public in tastes, training, repertoire of anecdotes, and current habitation" (viii-ix). Rushdie and Soueif use their empowering positions within the global arena to make visible the multiple cosmopolitanisms working themselves out at different local sites.

The narratives in *Midnight's Children* and *The Map of Love* emerge out of the specificities of domestic settings: Saleem narrates his story to Padma in a Bombay pickle factory while Amal re-writes Egypt's history from her apartment in Cairo and her family's countryside home in the village of Tawasi. Thus, while both *Midnight's Children* and *The Map of Love* are written, published and distributed to western readers in England, by situating their narratives in the local setting of Bombay and Cairo/Tawasi respectively, Rushdie and Soueif enact what Clifford sees as the most crucial articulation of cosmopolitanism: "an ability to sustain and rearticulate a sense of who one is by appropriating, cutting, and mixing cultural forms" (*Mixed Feelings* 367). For Clifford, this is "a significant alternative to homogenizing, normalizing disciplines exercised at national and transnational levels" (367). I will argue, however, that in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie enacts Brennan's "flattening of influences" (52). Despite the locality of the narrative in a postcolonial India, the representation of Saleem Sinai as the

metaphorical embodiment of India occurs at the cost of indiscriminate historical specificity. Saleem, with his triangular "mapface" (the shape of India's geographical map) also embodies the injustices experienced by locals who are victimized by imbalanced institutions of power and nationalist formulations of nation in post-independent India. Indeed, Saleem's body, "buffeted by too much history" (Rushdie 37) begins to deteriorate as his narrative progresses. But Saleem's ambiguous representation of postcolonial India problematically assumes that all Indians experience the same level of injustice.

In *The Map of Love* on the other hand, the construction of cosmopolitans is based on a direct and active engagement with local communities. As such, the narrative provides a much more convincing possibility through which to overcome and resolve the injustices of decolonized spaces. To invoke Clifford's characterization of effective cosmopolitanism, Soueif lends her project to "others' projects" by showing how the hybrid's agency can be implemented to build sustaining relationships with local communities. A more in-depth analysis of how Soueif's cosmopolitanism is inextricably tied to local struggles will be explored in chapter two. My claim is that while Soueif as a writer may very well be situated within the tradition of "Third World cosmopolitans" as described by Brennan, her employment of cosmopolitanism, unlike Rushdie's, is not marked by a sensibility to 'flatten influences' at the expense of an indiscriminate representation of historical specificity and the different levels at which oppression and injustice is experienced in decolonized cultures. As such, Soueif's novel counters traditional postcolonial literature that subsumes the varied experiences and conditions of postcolonialism under a single rubric of postcoloniality.[5] Moreover, Soueif's *The Map of Love* works against Rushdie's

[5] With a particular emphasis on gender inequalities, Anne McClintock's essay "The Angel of Progress" explores the problems within postcolonial studies that have traditionally assumed all formerly colonized peoples live under the same conditions: "men and women do not live 'postcoloniality' in the same way or share the same singular 'postcolonial condition' (McClintock, "Angels" 92).

aesthetics that almost exclusively valorizes the importance of storytelling over the social and active involvement in the socio-political life of the country in which he represents. Soueif's novel encourages yet another revision of postcolonial discourse, which is by nature, constantly revising itself.

From its opening pages, the cosmopolitan narrator in *The Map of Love* does not assume agency to be everywhere present nor does she presume that oppression is experienced evenly. Upon returning to Cairo after living in London for the majority of her life, Amal al-Ghamrawi is not only faced with piecing together a century old narrative of Egypt's colonial history, but she is also forced to manipulate her power and privilege to assuage the predicaments of local peasants. Speaking about her task of rewriting Egypt's history, and by extension of her role as narrator, Amal says,

> This is not my story. This is a story conjured out of a box; a leather trunk that traveled from London to Cairo and back. That lived in the boxroom of a Manhattan apartment for many years, then found its way back again and came to rest on my living-room floor here in Cairo one day in the spring of 1997. (Soueif 11)

Amal's narrative does not submerge the details of her personal history into a paradigm that is supposed to represent the experiences of postcoloniality. Contrastingly, Saleem draws enormous attention to the ways in which his singular identity encompasses India's multitudes; he says "I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well. Consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside me" (Rushdie 9). My central claim is that the cosmopolitan consciousness in *The Map of Love* does not only subsist on the ideational level; rather, it is developed through active engagement with the local struggles

against colonialism and neocolonial nationalism. In other words, the cosmopolitan's potential and ability to enact change is not isolated or detached from the local. However, in *Midnight's Children* the reverse is true: the local functions to draw attention to Saleem's centrality and his artistic ability to encompass the ubiquitous experiences of postcoloniality. And to a larger extent, his cosmopolitanism is marked by a level of detachment from the locality that defines him. In this project, I seek to show how Soueif more effectively articulates a heteroglossic narrative of Egypt by centering her narrative not only on the struggles of one character and how these may reflect the struggles of an entire nation, but also how *The Map of Love* centers on the multiple stories and experiences of both cosmopolitans and non-migrants.

Chapter breakdown

Chapter one juxtaposes the nationalist project of postcolonial India's first leader Jawaharlal Nehru with Saleem Sinai's cosmopolitan constructions of nation. In this chapter, I will closely examine the absent connection between theories and practices of national liberation as demonstrated by Saleem. To do this, I will question whether undermining notions of national identities with examples of racial hybridity, indeterminate physical borders, linguistic pluralism, and a narrative emphasis on movement is enough to achieve national liberation. Chapter two takes up some of the criticisms of Saleem in chapter one to elucidate how cosmopolitanism in *The Map of Love* succeeds at providing an alternative national construction that represents the struggles of local peoples in Egypt. I will consider how Soueif rewrites literary postcolonial constructions of nation vis-à-vis Rushdie by focusing on the role of women in re-imagining nationalist discourses. Soueif's deconstruction of language as a main tool for overcoming intercultural barriers will also be discussed in this chapter. The conclusion will focus on the

productive possibilities of cosmopolitanism and the type of consciousness it creates for the future.

CHAPTER ONE

Midnight's Portentous Protagonist

You may speak about everything under the sun; but when you decide to speak of that unique thing in man's [and woman's] life that is represented by the fact of opening up new horizons, by bringing light to your own country, and by raising yourself and your people to their feet, then you must collaborate on the physical plane.

— Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*[6]

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* opens with the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, the precise instant that both the novel's protagonist, Saleem Sinai and India's formal independence are born. Within the magic-realist mode famously exemplified by Gabriel Garcia Marquez's, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), Rushdie mingles conventional realism with elements of dream, fantasy and the marvelous. In *Midnight's Children,* Rushdie also invokes the tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*, employing an ancient tradition of epic and story-telling. In the novel, India's Independence would also bear one thousand and one children endowed with magical powers, whose force increases the closer the child's birth occurs to the stroke of midnight. The most powerful among this peculiar group of midnight's children are Saleem and his changeling Shiva.

The stroke of midnight endows Saleem with the miraculous faculty of second sight and an over-large nose that allows him "the greatest talent of all—the ability to look into the hearts and minds of men"; to his changeling Shiva, "the hour had given the gifts of war" (Rushdie 200). In the first paragraph of the novel, Saleem views the portentous moment of his birth as an edict to intervene in India's political affairs. He also sees the process of nation-building as his birthright, he say "clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came [...] there were grasps. And, outside the window, fireworks and crowds" (9). Saleem begins his narrative by conflating the story of his life and his family history with that of his country: "I had been

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[6] Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove, 1963) 232.

mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades [the duration of his life] there was to be no escape" (9). For Saleem, the moment of his birth symbolizes his central role and further endows him with the responsibility of rewriting India's national narrative.

The travails of Saleem and his family metaphorically correspond to key events in India's post-independent history. Saleem reminds us that his story is also the story of India: "my private existence was shown to be symbolically at one with history" (238). In one instance, he recounts how the Indian government froze his father's assets during India's sectarian regional tensions with Pakistan; to "freeze a Muslim's assets [...] and make him run to Pakistan leaving all his wealth behind [....] I have heard about these freezings-only-well-off Muslims are selected" (137). He also describes himself as bearing "the burden" of India's history, and the "sum total of everything that went before [him]" (383). At first glance, the events of India's arrival at independence suggest the significance of the conditions of postcoloniality on its people. However, Saleem's narrative supplants this historical event with his quasi-autobiography and in turn, gives centrality to his own narrative.

A "Mirror of Our Own" and Saleem's Mirror

Rushdie's modern epic invents characters alongside historical figures. Among many other public and political figures featured in Saleem's narrative is independent India's first president, Jawaharlal Nehru. In recognition of India's first (and figurative) son, whose momentous birth coincides with the end of British rule in India, Nehru addresses Saleem with a private letter. In his letter, Nehru describes Saleem as the "newest bearer of [the] ancient face of India" and tells him that his life will be "the mirror of our own" (121). Yet, rather than fulfilling Nehru's wish, Saleem creates his own mirror through his narrative. His reflection of India breaks

away from Nehru's image of a heterogeneous nation and instead, reflects an image of his multi-layered identity. Saleem rejects being told what kind of India he will represent by reversing Nehru's "mirror" to reflect an India of his own making, one that includes cultural heterogeneity and defies nationalist notions of singularity and authenticity. Yet, to maintain his centrality, Saleem reconfigures the national narrative of India by conflating his life with its history to claim it as his own.

In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's narrative traverses a major swathe of the Indian subcontinent's history, reaching backwards to the early twentieth century under the Raj and forwards to Indira Gandhi's government and the Emergency years of the 1970s. Spatially, the novel crosses the subcontinent from Kashmir to Bombay and extends to Pakistan and the Sundarban forest in Bangladesh. Saleem's narrative provides linkages between the contemporary subcontinent and the epoch of European domination and also to the global/ Western world outside. In his quasi-biography, Saleem chronicles the riots and bloodshed subsequent to the independence and the divisions along religious, political and linguistic lines that result in the partition of the subcontinent into a mainly Hindu India and a Muslim-majority state of East and West Pakistan, as well as the creation of Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan.

Structurally, Saleem's narrative is loosely chronological beginning with his family history at the turn of the century under the Raj, and gradually leads up to the end of Saleem's life and the novel in 1977. Though roughly linear in structure, Rushdie's narrative technique allows for flashbacks, spiraling digressions, abrupt fast-forwards and narratorial interjections from both the narrator and Saleem. The novel is also consciously encyclopedic and its wide historical and geographical sweep metaphorically corresponds with Saleem's multitudinous identity. Saleem directly refers to his life story as an "encyclopedia—even a whole language" and that even

before he was born "the lump in the middle of my mother grew so large, and became so heavy" (100). Saleem's narrative reconfigures the ways in which India's national history is told and represented.

Critic Josna Rege observes that *Midnight's Children* anticipates the contemporary critique of nationalism and the social and political fragmentation of the universalizing notions of the nation-state. Rege writes that the novel, "preceded the worldwide explosion of ethnic and religious nationalisms [....] It also preceded the end of the Cold War, and the rise of the New World Order and the global economy of the nineties" (Rege, "Victim into Protagonist?" 252). She also claims that in the realm of scholarly debates on nationalism and postcoloniality, *Midnight's Children* preceded the seminal works of Partha Chatterjee, Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner and Homi Bhabha who "had not yet published their works on nationalism, colonialism, and the nation-state" (252). Rege also argues that *Midnight's Children* instigated "a discursive reconfiguration of the relationship between Self and Nation" (250). In an attempt to shape India's national identity in the "mirror image" of his own, Saleem consciously intervenes in the process of rewriting India's national history through storytelling. Saleem is worried that his life will end before he is able to narrate and document his story for his son Aadam.

The birth of Saleem's cosmopolitan consciousness takes place in Bombay and is born out of his local identity. At the same time, his hybrid Anglo-Indian identity is also an essential and component of his local cosmopolitan consciousness. Saleem's racially mixed heritage defined the rigid categorical separations between colonizers and colonized. His father William Methwold's seduction of his mother, a Hindu street performer named Vanita is a classic case of miscegenation between colonial and indigenous populations in the empire. The product of

Methwold and Vanita's clandestine relationship, Saleem symbolizes the continued presence of colonialism in post-independent India, despite the official termination of British rule. While not explicitly dealt with in the novel, Saleem's identity questions what constitutes "Indian" or "English" and further challenges the authenticity of national identity that is often based on ethnic and racial 'purity'. However, while the construction of Saleem's hybrid identity is significant in shaping the ways in which he re-imagines and re-writes national identity, it is important to keep in mind the implications of his middle-upper class status that are not explored in the novel.

Saleem's surreptitious Anglo paternity establishes the narrative's suspenseful structure. He withholds the detail of his English father from his faithful listener Padma in attempt to not only keep her in suspense, but also to conceal his Anglo 'roots'. Worried that Padma will question the legitimacy of his "Indianness" and dismiss his life story as not "his own", Saleem delays revealing the details of his paternal lineage. When Saleem finally discloses the secret that he is the son of the Englishman William Methwold who seduced Vanita, Padma reacts in horror, thus confirming Saleem's anticipated apprehension: "An Anglo?...What are you telling me? You are an Anglo-Indian? Your name is not your own?" Saleem defensively responds to Padma's charge and tries to validate his Indian identity by listing all the local slangs and slurs used to identify him, he says, "I am Saleem Sinai...Snotnose, Stainface, Sniffer, Baldy, Piece-of-the-moon" (118). Soon after, Saleem realizes that his Indian identity is 'authentic' enough to be considered the legitimate son of the Sinai's, and by extension, the son of the new India. He says, "there is something more important than that" because in the end it "*made no difference*! I was still their son: they remained my parents" (118). What Saleem deems more important is that his identity is determined by historical factors that shape it and not by the irrevocable markers of race and ethnicity.

The multiply determined aspects of Saleem's identity shape his development and quest for meaning. He explains that the one thousand and one midnight's children born in 1947 are "only partially the offspring of their parents—the children of midnight were also the children *of the time*: fathered [...] by history" (118). Padma responds to Saleem's secret by disregarding his paternal lineage; she does not accept him as an Anglo-Indian, instead, she focuses on his Indian lineage: "What thing are you that you don't even care to tell the truth about who your parents were? You don't care that your mother died giving you life? That your father is maybe still somewhere, penniless, poor? You are a monster or what?" (118) Padma erases William Methwold from Saleem's narrative and replaces Vanita's husband, the "penniless, poor" Wee Willie Winkie, as Saleem's father. In search of validation, Saleem does not correct Padma and leaves ambiguous his paternity by neither denying nor conceding that he is an Anglo-Indian. That Saleem fails to confirm his biological Anglo roots, suggests that he regards his local Indian identity as a key defining feature of his identity. Thus, both the affirmed vagueness and furtive certainty of his patrilineal origin are metaphorical expressions of how Saleem's history and lived experiences represent his multilayered identity. As Loretta Mijares suggests, "Saleem is supremely unconcerned with who his true father is – the narration of his life is spent not in an archaeological attempt to determine his origins, but rather in the obsessive proliferation of alternative origins through metaphorical fathers intended to structure and make sense of the events of his life" (Mijares 133). By recounting his family history Saleem conjures a list of possible "fathers", he inventories – William Methwold, Ahmad Sinai, Wee Willie Winkie, Nadir Khan, Hanif Aziz, General Zulfikar and Picture Singh who all represent different religious, cultural, political and class positions. The catalog of possible "mothers": Mary Pereira, Amina Sinai, Vanita and Pia Aziz, all allegorically represent the multiplicity of the re-imagined

heterogeneous India teeming into its son, Saleem. Saleem claims, "I have had more mothers than most mothers have children; giving birth to parents has been one of my stranger talents" (Rushdie 243).

Of all the possible parents that he conjures up, Saleem implicitly favours his grandfather Aadam Aziz, who most closely represents the cosmopolitanism that Saleem celebrates. After the momentous birth of Saleem, Rushdie opens *Midnight's Children* with the story of Dr. Aziz. In the novel's opening chapters, Aziz is represented as a hero whose legacy is ensured by Saleem, who names his own son Aadam. The details of Aziz's life are intermingled with Saleem's personal narrative. The characterization of Saleem's grandfather as a westernized doctor who returns to India after spending five years studying medicine in Germany plays a significant role in shaping Saleem's cosmopolitan identity. Despite the missing biological link between Aadam Aziz and Saleem Sinai, Saleem believes that he has inherited many attributes of Aziz's personality and physicality. For one, Saleem inherits his grandfather's over-large nose "comparable only to the trunk of the elephant-headed Ganesh" (13). Saleem derives his telepathic powers and insight from his large nose and this becomes the highest of special powers among the midnight's children. But, more significantly, it is Aziz's worldview and "altered vision" for the "narrowness" and the "proximity of the horizon [...] at home" that Saleem adopts in his revisionist construction of India (11). Saleem sympathizes with his grandfather who was rejected by the people in his village in Kashmir because they eschewed his education and travel to Europe as representing "Abroad; [...] the alien thing, the invader, [and] progress" (21). Saleem adopts his grandfather's visions of progress and secularism as the basic principle towards reform in India. His conception of a new India includes a state whereby "democracy and votes

for women" are a priority (245). Saleem derives his ideas of an alternative form of government in India from recounting the life and history of his grandfather Aadam Aziz.

Timothy Brennan describes Aziz as "a follower of European humanism and Western democracy" (Brennan 90). Having studied medicine at Heidelberg, Aziz returns to India unable to retain his Muslim faith. He struggles to "limit the influence of religious sectarianism" that defined India's politics and tries to instill "genuine progress, [and] a break from small-town prejudice and oppressive social practices," in his daily life. (90) But, Aziz's visions are met with resistance by his wife Naseem who sees his liberal worldview as a European import.

In one episode, Aziz insists that Naseem remove her purdah and "forget about being a good Kashmiri girl" (34). He implores Naseem to "start thinking about being a modern Indian woman" (34). Seeing this as a direct threat to her Muslim identity, Naseem replies, "what have I married? I know you Europe-returned men. You find terrible women and then you try to make us girls be like them! [...] You want me to walk naked in front of strange men" (34). The resoluteness of Naseem's retort alongside Aziz's failure to convert her into a 'modern woman' is allegorical of the battle between secularism and religion in India. Saleem claims that his grandparent's battle "set the tone for their marriage" (34). The battle between religious sectarianism and secularism is featured throughout Saleem's narrative and in that way, "sets the tone" of his own narrative. Aziz's secularism is crucial to Saleem's development as a cosmopolitan figure because it validates his own rejection of religion. While he's brought up by the Muslim Sinai's, Saleem does not affiliate with any of the myriad religious factions in India. In Saleem's narrative, Aziz is one of the few characters that are developed with complexity and breadth. The similarity between Saleem and Aziz is one possible explanation for the amount of narrative space that Saleem allots to his grandfather's life. The prominence of Aziz in the

narrative points to Saleem's propensity towards self-characterization. Indeed, much of his narrative relies on the reader to make connections between his personal life and that of the history and events that shape it. For example, Aziz's struggle to win the battle of secularism with his wife resembles Saleem's struggle to model the midnight's children conference on democratic and secular foundations. Aziz represents a classic definition of cosmopolitanism: he considers tradition and modernity, spiritualism and secularism to be diametrically opposed and believes that the west is the center of reason and progress. The similarities between Aziz and Saleem demonstrate that the proliferation of multiple parents in Saleem's story is not only about demystifying the authenticity of national identity. Rather, it shows that Saleem implicitly affiliates with a cosmopolitanism that represents the perceived ontological distance between the Western metropolis as the centre of "genuine progress" (Brennan 90) and the postcolonial periphery as its backward "Other." At the same time, Saleem insists that it is the local politics and history of India that 'ratify his authenticity' (9) as an Indian and by extension his cosmopolitan consciousness.

Saleem's "obsessive proliferation" of parents is similar to his overall project of rewriting India's nationalist narrative whereby he documents the array of events and issues that shape its social and national history. That he is heir to multiple and alternative genealogy shapes his role as creative imaginer of alternative realities and discourses of national identity. From the moment of his birth, Saleem's life was inextricably entwined with the birth of the new nation: "I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history" (9). Although Saleem explicitly claims to be "handcuffed" to India by way of its politics and history, his interpretation of that history is also seen through the lens of his multi-racial identity. While Nehru's letter of congratulation considers Saleem

"Indian," Saleem brings his own definition of national hero that highlights the collective efforts of the diverse identities that characterize India as a nation.

Saleem denounces Nehru and sees his letter as a function of state-sponsored discrimination; Saleem questions, "how in what terms, may the career of a single individual be said to impinge on the fate of a nation?" (238). He rejects the illusory nationalist politics of Nehru that imagine colonial influence as part of a bygone history that will be simply overcome by independence. Whereas Saleem understands that nationalist decolonization does not immediately translate into an end to injustice, poverty, and sectarianism, Nehru assures the newly independent India that "At the stroke of the midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India awakens to life and freedom [...] a moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new; when an age ends; and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance" (116). Nehru addresses the nation with a promising pledge of 'eternal' post-colonial bliss. Saleem views Nehru's India a "new myth- a collective fiction in which anything was possible" and as "a fable rivaled only by the two other mighty fantasies: money and God" (112). Saleem's narrative firmly condemns sectarianism and advocates for a social responsibility that acknowledges the injustices of India's nationalist government. For Saleem, the prospect of building a nation on notions of purity and sectarianism are absurd, particularly because his identity is a "carbon" copy of India's heterogeneity (211). This absurdity is captured by Saleem when he claims that there are

> So many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well. Consumed multitudes are jostling and

> shoving inside me [...] I must commence the business of remaking my life from the point at which it really began, some thirty two years before anything as obvious, as present, as my clock-ridden, crime stained birth (9-10).

Saleem narrates his story and rewrites India's national history in an effort to remind a "nation of forgetters" that a democratic and secular nation-state is comprised of multiple narratives and not by a single nationalist grand narrative of nation. (37) However, while Saleem purports to represent the suppressed narratives of India's history, his principles of social responsibility are limited. Despite his potentially effective narrative which provides models of social change and political engagement, Saleem does not succeed in delivering productive and practical ways in which his model of national liberation may be achieved.

From the first page of his narrative, Saleem scrupulously points to the ways in which the public influences his private life; he says, "I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well" (9). On the one hand, Saleem's creative reimagining of India as a reflection of his image suggests that he will fulfill Nehru's wish that its new son become the "mirror" image of the new nation. While the elements of that reflection may differ, what's similar is the exclusivity of Saleem's efforts in leading the nation towards liberation. On the other hand, Saleem emphasizes the importance of active interchange between self and nation for all people so that nationalist definitions of community can be dismantled. In one sense, Saleem promotes a move beyond an assumed comradeship between peoples of a single "imagined community" as invented by nationalist discourse. At the same time, the recreated India of his narrative reproduces a nationalist rhetoric characteristic of constructions of modern nations. Saleem's fictional creation is similar to the institutional forces that Ernest Gellner observes, "*invent* nations where they do not exist" (Gellner quoted in

Anderson 6). Anderson too claims that "nationality [...] nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts" (6). Saleem's idea of nation as heterogeneous and multiply determined by the diversity of its population diverts from the nationalist discourse of Nehru that is founded on homogenizing the complex formations of nations. However, Saleem's image of India is not wholly distinguished from the ideologies of nationalism. Saleem's India merely transforms the *style* in which nations are imagined and narrated. Both Saleem's and Nehru's image(s) of India adhere to similar schemes of representation: under one leadership. Yet, in contrast to Nehru's idea of nation as "limited and sovereign", defined by Anderson as the traditional model of national community, Saleem's image of India adopts the aesthetics of cosmopolitanism. As such, Saleem's notions of national unity underscore ambivalence, culturally hybridity and heterogeneity.

Self/Nation and Self over Nation

In her essay "Victim into Protagonist?" Josna Rege claims that prior to the publication of *Midnight's Children*, there had been "deadening dichotomies" in Indian English fiction between the private and the public realms. Rege stresses that the conflation of "Self" and "Nation" created "artistic fireworks" that influenced many writers from diverse backgrounds. She argues that *Midnight's Children* "neither denies nor seeks to transcend polarities, but embraces them as artistic method, rejecting nothing, celebrating the resulting chaotic multiplicity, even if it crushes the protagonist himself into a billion pieces" (Rege, "Victim" 250). While Rege's analysis of Rushdie has offered some very illuminating insights to my own reading of *Midnight's Children*, the celebration of Rushdie's artistic achievements often overlooks the irreconcilable tensions that emerge in the name of "multiplicity". Much of the scholarship on *Midnight's Children* has focused on Saleem's struggle to create a pluralistic and democratic nation in a religiously and

linguistically divided India. Rushdie's inextricable intertwining of Saleem's life with India's history has led many scholars to celebrate these modes of connection without questioning what they enable his protagonist to achieve. Moreover, critic R.S. Pathak describes the relationship between "personal and national histories" as "the most significant feature of *Midnight's Children*" (Pathak 123). For Pathak, the novel's coherence derives from "the interaction of historical and individual forces" and they make "the narrator what he is." Pathak sees Rushdie's re-creation of Indian history and his charting of the "interlocking and interdependent relationships of history and the individual" as restoring a "much needed sense of dignity" to the individual (123). Rege echoes a similar sentiment by interpreting Rushdie's conflation of the individual and the national profound as "open[ing] up possibilities [...] where there would seem to have been none" (Rege 260). She also points to the relationship of politics, history and the individual, as does Pathak by lauding Rushdie's achievement in the novel; Rege claims that "Rather than the individual being altogether obliterated by the Nation-state or matters of state being subordinated to the individual, it is the interesting space-in-between that is explored" (260). Rushdie's ability to represent the personal history of Saleem through India's national history is undoubtedly praiseworthy. However, while Saleem's narrative consciously attempts to represent the multiplicity of India's "(approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust" (37) it fails to achieve this mammoth task. Saleem's narrative does not explore the "space-in-between" the individual and the Nation-state, as Rege suggests. Rather, Saleem's quasi-autobiography is first and foremost about Saleem despite his conviction that "each 'I', every one of the now-six-hundred-million-plus of us, contains a similar multitude" (383). For Saleem, the multitude of stories and histories help to bolster the multiplicity of his individual identity. But, these stories are subordinated at the cost of making

Saleem's story more compelling to a Western audience. By focusing on Rushdie's narrative strategies and structural achievements in *Midnight's Children* critics like Rege and Pathak, overlook Saleem's failure to address the local peoples that make up the multitude of his identity. Rushdie's ability to intertwine the individual and the national doesn't achieve much beyond storytelling, particularly because Saleem chooses self over nation.

Saleem's disconnection from local communities is explicitly demonstrated in his encounter with the communist collective in India. Not surprisingly, the only example in the novel that exhibits a form of solidarity between local peoples is manifested through the communist movement. Saleem joins this movement temporarily: "[his] first sojourn at the magician's ghetto lasted only a matter of days" (387). After his long exile in Pakistan, Saleem escapes back into Bombay "without passport or permit" (381) through the sorcery of Parvati-the-witch who smuggles him in her "basket of invisibility" (385). Parvati is one of the 1001 midnight's children who joins the communist movement lead by the snake charmer Picture Singh. Saleem joins the communists because they adopt him when his own family abandons him. Speaking of the circumstance upon his return to India, he says,

> I tumbled out of a basket into an India in which Mrs. Gandhi's New Congress Party held a more-than-two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. In the basket of invisibility, a sense of unfairness turned into anger; and something else besides – transformed by rage, I had also been overwhelmed by an agonizing feeling of sympathy for the country which was not only my twin-in-birth but also joined to me (so to speak) at the hip, so that what happened to either of us, happened to us both. (385)

Saleem shows considerable sympathy for the communists and befriends Picture Singh, but he also treats them very parodically in his narrative. He describes the communists as illusionists who live in a slum called "the magician's ghetto." To heighten the parody of the movement, the chapter in which Saleem talks about the communists is titled "The Shadow of the Mosque" – the magician's ghetto is situated in a slum "whose ramshackle tin roofs created such a swelter of heat" but throughout the afternoon hours was protected by the shadow of a tall red brick and marble Mosque. The "reds" as Saleem calls them, were "insurrectionists, public menaces, the scum of the earth – a community of the godless living blasphemously in the very shadow of the house of God!" (397). The proximity between the mosque and the communist ghetto is ironic in that, while an adversarial distinction between Islam and communism cannot be overstated, Saleem seems to hint that even within the dark slums of the ghetto, communist godlessness is 'shadowed' by dogmatism and sectarian ideology. In fact, Saleem explicitly links the absolutism of religion with communism by saying, "the magicians were people whose hold on reality was absolute" (399).

When Saleem first joins the communist movement he says that he must renew and revise his efforts to save India from essentialist sectarianism. He says, "more revolutionary methodologies suggested themselves [...] full thought of direct-communication-with-the-masses" is needed (397). The single heroic occasion in which Saleem "spoke of the gross inequities of wealth distribution [...] the mime of a rich man refusing to give alms to a beggar [...] Police harassment, hunger disease illiteracy" (413), is undercut by his resolve to merely recount India's injustices. Indeed, he chooses to "return to [tell] the story of [his] private life" (400). Saleem tries to implement change as an individual and not by creating forms of solidarity through social relations. He claims that his "dream of saving the country was a thing of mirrors

and smoke; insubstantial, the maunderings of a fool" (413). Saleem's misreading that the mobilization of the poor is "insubstantial" leads to his failure in effectively employing strategies for social transformation that he deems crucial for overcoming the corrupt leadership of Indira Gandhi. Critic James Clifford claims that while the cosmopolitan identity is about "displacement and relocation" the challenge however, is for the cosmopolitan to endure the "experience of sustaining and mediating complex affiliations, multiple attachments" (Clifford, *Mixed Feelings* 369). According to Clifford, only then will the cosmopolitan be able to "articulate, not transcend, these aspects of identity in broadly defined democratic socialist coalitions" (369). In Saleem's case, the cosmopolitan identity hinders his ability to implement models for change through active means. Instead, his cosmopolitan perspective leads him to record his story in an alienated pickle-factory.

How does Saleem reconcile his cosmopolitan identity which is experienced and rooted in India's locality and history, while also isolating himself from local communities? Would the building of concrete relationships with those communities help Saleem overcome these contradictions? Saleem's cosmopolitan consciousness allows his narrative to continuously progress from the local into the national/global. Some of the ways in which this happens is through his telepathic contact with individuals from all parts of Indian society, the construction of the midnight's children conference, and through the use of the English language. However, while Saleem's narrative emerges from the local to the national/global, Saleem the cosmopolitan narrator figure evanescently retreats to the individual/microcosmic.

While many critics tend to discuss Saleem's narrative as a heroic failure to unify the regionally divided Indian nation-state, his inability to integrate into every community he encounters, including his own family is marked by a disconnection from the local realm. By

charting Saleem's journey from the local to the national/global, and back from the communal to the individual, it is possible to locate his journey within the contentious debates in cosmopolitan discourse. Saleem's cosmopolitanism, which is characterized by a transnational identity, is torn between two pulls. On the one hand, he possesses the privilege and mobility needed to effect productive change locally. On the other hand, he limits his possibilities to engage with and lend support to local peoples in order to actively intervene against the injustice and violence he laments. As a result, Saleem fails to effectively manipulate the politics of his position of privilege and power afforded him by his cosmopolitanism in the local communities who may lack the visions and possibilities that his identity brings to the fore.

Antisocial Space: The Pickle Factory

In the pickle factory where he is employed, Saleem tells his story to Padma, his passive listener and co-worker. At first glance, the pickle factory appears as a space of social activity. However, apart from Padma's presence, the factory is an isolated space whereby Saleem preserves India's history for the nobody who is there. Saleem views the active process of documenting his life story as integral for preserving his revisionist reading of national history and hopes that his son will continue in his footsteps. Saleem appeals to Padma (and the reader) to trust his version of history, claiming that because memory alone cannot be entrusted with transporting his life story, the process of writing it down will safeguard against the risk of its loss. He says,

> Please believe that I am falling apart. I am not speaking metaphorically; nor is this opening gambit of some melodramatic, riddling, grubby appeal for pity. I mean quite simply that I have begun to crack all over like an old jug – that my poor body, singular, unlovely, buffeted by too much history, subjected to drainage

> above and drainage below, mutilated by doors, brained by spittoons, has started coming apart at the seams. In short, I am literally disintegrating [...] I ask you only to accept (as I have accepted) that I shall eventually crumble into (approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust. This is why I have resolved to confide in paper, before I forget. (We are a nation of forgetters). (37)

The significance of the pickle factory in Saleem's narrative is multilayered. It is constructed as space that is antithetical to, and an antidote for, the "amnesiac" Indian nation because it is in the factory that Saleem preserves his story that is also the history of the multitudinous India. However, while the factory is located in Bombay and is the locale from which Saleem narrates India's national history, the factory is also isolated from the macrocosm of India. Apart from Saleem, only Padma occupies the factory. On the one hand, the pickle factory symbolizes the local in India. On the other hand, the double isolation of the factory and Saleem's alienation in it, coupled with its function as a place for pickling points to Saleem's individualist paranoia to protect his own story against its obliteration from the grand narrative of nation.

Saleem's initiative emerges out of a critical and ambitious energy to invert the slogans of a "myth ridden" nation that are based on essentialist and homogeneous nationalist ideologies. In his autobiographical reconstruction of India, Saleem condemns Nehru's version of a nation as a singular and sovereign entity ruled by the nationalist ideologies of a single government. For Saleem, the system of nationalism in India is reminiscent of leadership under the former colonial rule. Nehru's letter endows Saleem to 'mirror India' – a form of resistance with liberation from colonialist dependence in sight. However, Nehru's wishes risk reproducing the very discourses of domination under which India was oppressed. Rather than being an enactment of a collective

will, instead, Nehru's plan is a fulfillment of a dominant will and in effect, "nothing more than a continuation of imperialism by other means" (Deane 360). In his essay, "Imperialism/Nationalism" Seamus Deane critiques the contradictory elements of nationalism. He claims that this social phenomenon "secedes from imperialism in its earlier form in order to rejoin it more enthusiastically in its later form" (360). Deane argues that historically, nationalism constituted a step forward in the evolution of human societies toward ever-larger communities. But, in the course of asserting its domestic identity, nationalism "asserts its presence and identity through precisely those categories that had been denied them: through race, essence, destiny, language, history – merely adapting these categories to its own purpose" (360). The basic principles of Nehru's letter to Saleem are motivated by a newborn freedom in the independent nation to elect its own representatives. However, Saleem reverses the presumed singularity of India's national identity by appropriating India's heterogeneity as a quintessential marker of his own identity. At the same time, Saleem struggles to illuminate the contradictions of nationalism by positing his cosmopolitan identity as central for understanding India's national identity. Consequently, while Saleem's identity does not represent the 'essence' of Indian nationalism, he ends up reproducing its principles by asserting and focusing only on his 'destiny,' 'language,' and 'history.'

Saleem narrates his life story from a Bombay pickle-factory to his co-worker Padma. Throughout the course of his narrative, he criticizes the various political figures and parties who have shaped Indian nationalism, particularly Indira Gandhi and the Congress Party. Saleem recounts the direct struggles that he faces and how sectarian and nationalist conflicts ultimately lead to his family's death. Yet, despite Saleem's tribulations and struggles at the hands of the corrupt policies of Indian and Pakistani governments, there are no examples of his active

participation to oppose them. Rather, Saleem's project remains limited to preserving memory through the process of rewriting and recording history. Saleem only ever expresses his discontent to the members of the midnight's children conference on a few occasions and to his listener, Padma. In the early stages of his narrative, Saleem seeks to remind the "amnesiac" and "myth-ridden" Indian nation that economic brokers drive its nationalist ideologies. He also reveals that India is ruled by nationalist politicians who have no genuine interest in building policies for reform through anti-sectarian politics, eradication of poverty, and establishing unity among India's diverse cultures, religions and languages.

Prominent Rushdie critic Timothy Brennan observes that there is a tradition of cosmopolitan writers who try to balance their cosmopolitanism with an attempt to "go to the people". In Rushdie's case, his recreation of Indian national fiction demands an inclusion of "unquestionably 'native' and authentic national spokespersons in lower-class dress" (Brennan 100). In *Midnight's Children*, the character of Padma is an unsuccessful attempt at casting the

> role of plebeian commentator [...] Saleem's servant and mistress, Padma, who is not part of the story proper but occupies selected 'asides' in which she participates with Saleem in composing the novel we are reading. Her relationship is not with Saleem the character, but with Saleem the narrator and author looking back on the events of his younger self, the mirror of Indian history. (100)

While Brennan recognizes the minor role of the 'plebeian' in Saleem's narrative, he focuses solely on how Saleem's writing "becomes a process of imposing his vision" on Padma (106). Rather than questioning the subordination of the people Saleem purports to represent, Brennan merely claims that despite the imposition of his views on Padma, Saleem's craft in storytelling assures him "that Padma and the people will [still] believe him" (106). But, Padma and the

people will not read Saleem's narrative. In fact, there are many instances in the novel when Saleem silences Padma when she attempts to comment on his story (Rushdie 147, 266). Much like his negative portrayal of Shiva, Padma is represented as being crude, naïve and too gullible for Saleem's eloquent narrative. Her desire to simply know: "was it true" and her "bullying" of Saleem "back into the world of linear narrative" and "the universe of what-happened-next" symbolizes the fatal immaturity of her class and her naïve search for meaning. (38)

If one is to view Saleem's narrative project and its overwhelming subordination of other stories, as resembling the self-interested politics of nationalism, then R. Radhakrishnan's claim that "nationalist rhetoric makes 'woman' the pure and ahistorical signifier of 'interiority" (Radhakrishnan 86) is applicable in Saleem's treatment of Padma. Padma's preoccupation with "the universe of what-happened-next" stems not, as Saleem describes, from her naiveté, but from her pragmatism. In many ways, Padma is the "interiority" of Saleem's narrative, and by extension, India's interiority, because she is the only implicated listener in the narrative. And, if Saleem sees himself as the point of contact between the local and the global, then Padma is his only chance in making that connection. Thus Padma's keenness on moving the story forward and her concern with the logical order of causes and their effects is not so much a concern on the level of narrative; rather, it can also be read as a concern with the narrative's efficacy. Perhaps the numerous times that Padma urges Saleem to "move along" are the same moments that Saleem misses the opportunity to connect the power of his narrative with its potential to transform both socially and politically, the lives of the local peoples. The disavowal of Padma is another instance where Saleem fails to sustain and continue linkages with locals. Moreover, the inferiority of Padma points to Saleem's underlying nationalist ideologies. Drawing on Partha Chatterjee's essay, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question," Radhakrishnan

claims that in its failure to "break away from the colonial past", nationalism does not "achieve full and inclusive representational legitimacy with its own people", particularly in the ways in which the "subordination if not the demise of women's politics" is sustained (78, 85). Padma becomes a landmark for representation in Saleem's narrative because she is the only potential voice that the reader briefly encounters. Yet, apart from the few interjections and complaints regarding Saleem's digressions, it is Saleem who speaks for Padma. In this example, women and the underprivileged are victims of the collapsed representation of the specific experiences of peoples in local spaces.

The multiplicity of India that Saleem ostensibly represents is obliterated at the expense of his overwhelming centrality in the narrative and his singular role as recorder of India's private and public history. As such, Saleem eliminates a discursive space whereby the multitudinous voices of India speak and/or are represented. Despite the multifaceted aspects of India that shape Saleem's identity, his narrative is monologic because the voices and stories of other people that he claims to encompass is erased from the history he rewrites and records. What Rushdie seems to reinforce with Saleem's centrality and monologism in *Midnight's Children* is a common tendency in traditional postcolonial literature that posits patriarchal supremacy as an empowering counter-colonial force which, more often than not, eradicates rather than restores the collective memory of the communities it attempts to represent. In *Midnight's Children*, colonialist binaries between the Empire as all-protective "Mother" and the colony as daughter vulnerable to control and oppression is reinforced through Saleem's rewriting of nation through masculine centricity.

The male-centered saturation of Saleem's narrative in the context of postcolonial independence elucidates the re-examination of the position of women in official ideologies of nationalism and nationalist consciousness within postcolonial feminist theory. Numerous critics

have discussed Rushdie's deep ambivalence towards the representation of the feminine in *Midnight's Children.* Among these critics is Ambreen Hai who argues that Rushdie's narrative "undermine[s] [its] own (proto)feminist strains by regressing into reifications of stereotypes of gender and sexuality, or odd ways of asserting a beleaguered masculinity, and into replaying surprisingly parochial and patriarchal discourses of gender and sexuality" (Hai 18). According to Hai, Rushdie merely borrows what he sees as strategies of feminist revision to enable his own postcolonial narration. This process of pledging gender equality for the future of nations is not unique to Rushdie. Building on Partha Chatterjee's theory of rupture between the political programs of anticolonial nationalisms and their systems of knowledge, power, and ethics that are founded on issues of social reform and women's position in society, R. Radhakrishnan criticizes nationalism for its suppression of alternative narratives of gender and class. In his essay "Nationalism, Gender, and Narrative," Radhakrishnan asks why "the advent of the politics of nationalism signals the subordination if not the demise of women's politics;" he goes on to question why it is that "nationalism achieves the ideological effect of an inclusive and putatively macropolitical discourse, whereas the women's question—unable to achieve its own autonomous macropolitical identity—remains ghettoized within its specific and regional space" (Radhakrishnan 78). That official ideologies of nationalism "become the binding and overarching umbrella that subsumes other and different political temporalities" in the institutional realm, points to some of the failures in Saleem's imaginative reconstruction of India that collapses the historical specificities shaping the lives and struggles of "every one of the [...] six-hundred-million plus of us" into one singular history and identity (Rushdie 383). For Radhakrishnan, "the place where the *true* nationalist subject *really is* and the place from which it produces historical-materialist knowledge about itself are mutually heterogeneous" (85). The

tendency of anticolonial nationalism to create an "inner domain" as a sanctuary against alien domination influences the role of women in the struggle because it locks them within categories of home and cultural authenticity. As such, Saleem's subordination of Padma's story enacts Radhakrishnan's critical reappraisal of the "normative" criteria by which nationalism invariably entails the subordination of women's or other forms of "micropolitical" politics (85).

Other forms of subordinating the narratives of the 'plebian' take shape in the delay of the significance of the midnight's children's conference in Saleem's narrative. In accordance with the novel's major trope of India's heterogeneity, Saleem believes that he contains within himself "six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust" (37). Yet, in his attempt to rewrite India's heterogeneous national history, the story of Saleem's life remains central. Even when Saleem talks about the one thousand and one midnight's children, the supposed central subject and title of his narrative, he delays explaining their relevance until the middle of the story. In the chapter titled, "Tick, tock", Saleem consciously builds suspense around the midnight's children by saying, "I [...] feel the children of midnight queuing up in my head, pushing and jostling like Koli fishwives" (106). But, instead of introducing them in the chapter that highlights the expiration of his time to tell his narrative before he disintegrates, Saleem says, "I tell them to wait, it won't be long now; I clear my throat, give my pen a little shake; and start" (106). What seems like an introduction to the children's significance is postponed for another six chapters. Saleem conveniently interrupts the reader's suspense about the children in order to boast about his own magical properties of hindsight by recounting the details of his birth at the Methwold Estate. While Saleem creates the midnight's children's conference, he delays relaying to the reader its meaning, of whom it is comprised, and its purpose. The significance of the midnight's children conference and the ways in which it reflects

the multitudinous India that Saleem admires, is replaced with the story of Aadam Aziz, thus, further accentuating Saleem's centrality. Early on in the narrative, Saleem claims that the midnight's children's "voices will guide him" (87) however, the only sense the reader gets from the midnight's children is that they represent the multiplicity that Saleem claims to encompass.

When Saleem finally explains the significance of the midnight's children's conference, he also reveals that its foundations are rife with tensions, which are in part, due to his own narcissism. Saleem's vision for the midnight's children conference is established on the basis of remedying the corrupt nationalist agendas with democratic ideas. He says,

> Midnight's Children can be made to represent many things, according to your point of view: they can be seen as the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation, whose defeat was entirely desirable in the context of a modernizing, twentieth-century economy; or as the true hope of freedom, which is now forever extinguished; but what they must not become is the bizarre creation of a rambling [...] mind. (200)

Ironically, while Saleem recognizes that the worst outcome to befall the midnight's children conference is to merely "ramble" about their ideals; his own initiative of revealing the realities of injustice, poverty, religious prejudice, and the language rivalries defining the Indian nation-state is merely a ramble about what he opposes (200, 444, 460). Saleem fails to systemically and actively implement his visions for democracy through practical methods. He describes his vision as a "national longing for form" but instead of providing concrete means by which to achieve this, he resigns his efforts by saying that "New myths are needed; but that's none of my business" (300, 458). Perhaps what Saleem recognizes here is that the "new myths" need also be defined by social action and mobilization towards real change in India.

In the charting of the MCC's principles, Saleem claims that the conference will be a "sort of loose federation of equals, all points of view given free expression" (220). Theoretically, Saleem's concept for the MCC is democratic. However, the only voices that are represented in Saleem's narrative from the conference are his own and his rival Shiva's. Because Saleem and Shiva are the only two children born on the stroke of midnight when India gained its independence, they both assume positions of leadership among the MCC. For Saleem, the conference is a platform for expressing his ideas of democracy and pluralism. Also, the cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of the children allows Saleem to explicate his ability to telepathically communicate with them and show the flexibility of his own identity. On the other hand, his rival Shiva "the god of destruction, who is also most potent of deities; [...] greatest of dancers; who rides on a bull; whom no force can resist" conceives of the MCC as a "gang" which needs "gang bosses" (220-221). Shiva tries to seize control over the conference and tells Saleem that there is "one rule. Everybody does what I say or I squeeze the shit outa them with my knees!" (220). Saleem and Shiva's views clash as they vie for control over the foundations of the conference. But, whereas Shiva is much more explicit about his need to control the conference, Saleem implicitly controls the conference through his narrative. The reader does not learn that the one thousand and one children born during the first hour of midnight on August 15, 1947 were also endowed with magical powers until much later in the novel. The delay of the other children's powers bolsters Saleem's obsession in remaining central in the national history of India that he narrates.

The creation of the midnight's children conference corresponds with the triumph of the All India Congress in the 1957 national elections. Saleem constructs the conference to counter the sectarianism of the All India Congress. He's skeptical of how the Congress purportedly

represents all segments of Indian society because of its overwhelming Hindu majority. Saleem also questions the fraudulent measures by which the Congress party won the election, claiming to have seen members of the party (Shiva) on polling day "standing outside a polling station in the north of the city, some holding long stout sticks, others juggling with stones, still others picking their teeth with knives, all of them encouraging the electorate to use its vote with wisdom and care" (222). The treacherous acts of the Congress act as catalysts for Saleem's reconfigurations of the systems of government in India.

For Saleem, the number 1001 possesses magical features in his narrative: "1001, the number of nights, of magic, of alternative realities—a number beloved of poets and detested by politicians, for whom all alternative versions of the world are threats" (217). The number also invokes the ancient folk tale, *One Thousand and One Nights*, the number of nights through which the tale's heroine, Scheherazade, desperately tries to postpone her inevitable execution by her King husband. Historically, the number derives its elements of deliverance from Scheherazade's cunning ability to break King Shahrayar's vow to execute a young beautiful girl every morning to avenge his deceased wife's perfidy. Scheherazade narrates one thousand and one tales to the King and succeeds in distracting him from executing her. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem perceives the mode of fantasy in the magical powers endowed to the one thousand and one children on the midnight of August 15th 1947 as a potential for saving India from its corrupt government.

The MCC never actually meets but communicate through Saleem's mental transmissions. Through Saleem's telepathic powers, the children convene in the "headquarters [...] behind [Saleem's] eyebrows" (207). Saleem broadcasts his own messages, and the radio of Saleem's mind acts "as a sort of national network, so that by opening [his] transformed mind to all the

children [he] could turn it into a kind of forum in which they could talk to one another, through [him]" (227). Saleem describes the MCC as an "infant revolution" that must "show all kids that it is possible to get rid of parents!" (228) Based on the "philosophies and aims [of] collectivism", Saleem's revolution "refused to look on the dark side, and not a single one of us suggested that the purpose of Midnight's Children might be annihilation; that we would have no meaning until we were destroyed [...] the children, despite their wondrously discrete and varied gifts, remained, to my mind, a sort of many-headed monster, speaking in the myriad tongues of Babel; they were the very essence of multiplicity" (229). The distinct all-inclusiveness of the MCC whose members are "the true hope of freedom" of the new nation represents the reflection of India that Saleem tries to uphold (200).

After much debate and failed attempts to organize, the MCC degenerates into the 'Midnight-Confidential Club'. Saleem claims that "in this way the Midnight's Children Conference fulfilled the prophecy of the Prime Minister and became, in truth, a mirror of the nation; the passive-literal mode was at work, although I railed against it, with increasing desperation, and finally with growing resignation" (255). There are many reasons why the MCC regresses from an all-inclusive to an all-exclusive club. But the division of power among the children, and specifically between Saleem and Shiva becomes paramount to the collapse of the MCC. Indeed, not even Saleem was "immune to the lure of leadership" (227). When Saleem introduces the conference to the children, he makes a case for his leadership by saying, "Who found the Children? Who formed the Conference? Who gave them their meeting place? [...] Should I not receive the respect and obeisance merited by my seniority? And didn't the one who provided the club-house run the club?" (228). Ironically, Saleem works within the confines of nation-building that he purports to work against because he pushes for his role in the conference

to remain central in the same way that nations are often led by one leader. The conference finally disbands when Saleem and Shiva dispute over the purpose and control of the MCC. For Shiva, the conference is a congregation for "rich kids" like Saleem who are led by unrealistic imaginings of what constitutes a nation. Shiva's understanding of nation is based on the divisions between "money-and-poverty, and have-and-lack, and right-and-left [...]" (255). He scorns Saleem for believing in the "importance-of-the-individual" and the "possibility-of-humanity" saying, "the world is no place for dreamers or their dreams; the world [...] is things. Things and their makers rule the world [...] For things the country is run. Not for people [...] When you have things, then there is time to dream; when you don't, you fight [...] Today, what people are is just another kind of thing" (255). Shiva's portrayal by Saleem as a lower class bully whose intentions are criminal, his tongue rough and ideas crude discredits his views about the conference and ultimately make Saleem appear more civilized and enlightened.

Saleem believes that the MCC "must be here for a *purpose* [...] there has to be a *reason* [...] we should try and work out what it is [...] and then dedicate our lives to [it]" (220). While Saleem struggles to find purpose for the MCC, Shiva denies the world has purpose:

> For what reason you're rich and I'm poor? Where's the reason in starving man? God knows how many millions of damn fools living in this country, man, and you think there's a purpose! Man, I'll tell you – you got to get what you can, do what you can with it, and then you got to die. That's reason rich boy. (220)

Saleem blames the disintegration of the conference not on his rivalry over its control with Shiva, but because

> Children, however magical, are not immune to their parents; and as the prejudices and world-views of adults began to take over their minds, I found children from

> Maharashtra loathing Gujaratis, and fair-skinned northerners reviling Dravidian 'blackies'; there were religious rivalries; and class entered our councils. The rich children turned up their noses at being in such lowly company; Brahimis began to feel uneasy at permitting even their thoughts to touch the thoughts of untouchables. (254)

The polarities in the conflicting forces of the nation are represented through the various reasons why the political body of the MCC disintegrates. Socially, the conflict is between what Rushdie calls, "masses-and-classes, capital-and-labour, them-and-us" (255). But also on the level of narrative, Saleem is unable to give the MCC the amount of narrative importance that it may otherwise deserve especially since soon after the conference's disintegration he flees to Pakistan with his family.

While there are a few examples in the novel where Saleem tries to keep the conference together, his attempts to do so do not extend beyond "railing against" its collapse until he finally resigns to its demise (255). Saleem believes the children to be culpable for the break up of conference without considering his own failure to address how the "phenomenal collective will" can be enacted beyond the level of imagination and narrative. The disintegration of the conference and Saleem's withdrawal from the social are examples of his inability to make connections to, and function in, the social world of his own creation.

Glocalized Narratives, Localized Struggles

Saleem's cosmopolitanism while rooted in the locality of India does not bridge the divides between the local and the worldly (global). Saleem uses the local to strengthen his own cosmopolitan identity under the guise of nation-building. His cosmopolitan consciousness allows him to reimagine alternative realities for a democratic India, but his perspectives derive

from concepts of European humanism and Western democracy. Saleem does not consult local peoples about what they believe is best for an independent postcolonial India. That Saleem acknowledges the local injustices inflicted by India's nationalist government is crucial, but not enough to build a connection with those most affected by such injustices. Saleem's heightened perspective is one of privilege. His frequent travel in the subcontinent and his familiarity with more than one culture allow him the advantage of imagining different possibilities for heterogeneity. But the overwhelming population of poor and underprivileged classes in India does not have access to the types of alternatives that Saleem presents. Because a more attenuated cosmopolitanism is lacking in Saleem's reconstruction of India, his model is likely to be a very elite affair.

Saleem rewrites national history through defining his national identity by the multiplicity of linguistic, cultural, religious and national elements that determine India's national identity. However, Saleem does not manipulate the privileges of his cosmopolitanism to benefit the disadvantaged in the local. Moreover, his cosmopolitan identity exists separately from the local communities that shape it. The act of rewriting national history, recording, and "pickling" his memory of the injustices in Indian society, and the acknowledgement that national identity is multiply determined, is not enough to collapse the difference between cosmopolitanism and the local. Saleem fails to move beyond the factors of privilege and class even as his reconfigured model of nation provides compelling alternatives of nation-building. Saleem's conviction that national identity can be reconstituted through the mere process of storytelling irrevocably shapes the degree to which his cosmopolitanism can be useful for building local solidarities. Saleem the character and his narrative fail to deliver a point of connection to the people he aims to address. Saleem's version of nation-building lacks practical methods and instruments that could deliver

the types of social formations and functional apparatuses capable of addressing people's needs in practical ways. Clearly, Saleem does not possess state-level power to provide various apparatuses and institutions that can facilitate for cohesive and democratic societies. But, Saleem's narrative lacks examples of how internal organization among local communities can be conducted. For example, while living among the impoverished communists in the "magician's ghetto", Saleem had potential to manipulate his position of privilege in helping the movement work against "corruption inflation hunger illiteracy landlessness" (Rushdie 411). Saleem recognizes that in order to effectively implement social change, one must have a "roof over [one's] head or a family to protect support [and] assist" (388). Yet, he only acknowledges this need for himself. When he leaves the magician's ghetto, Saleem searches for his individual welfare, saying

> it struck me like a thunderclap that [...] here, in this city, I had relatives – and not only relatives, but influential ones! My uncle Mustapha Aziz, a senior Civil Servant, who when last heard of had been number two in his Department [...] Under his roof, I could acquire [...] new clothes; under his auspices, I would seek preferment in the Administration [...] I would perhaps be on first-name terms with the great ...! (389)

Saleem's strategies for national salvation take on a different form after his brief encounter with the communists. Eventually, Saleem retreats to the pickle-factory after his uncle refuses to offer him refuge, which results in his missed chance to achieve his "chosen career" (395),

Saleem's narrative portrays the power and privilege of cosmopolitan figures but not in a way that can help local communities reformulate their societies in order to oppose the oppressive state apparatuses of nationalism. Saleem's cosmopolitanism is attentive to India's diversity but

insufficiently shows Saleem's social engagements and connections with "the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me [...] everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine [...] anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come" (381). Saleem says that his relationships and commitments within and across groups of all sorts have shaped his identity, but there is no evidence of his participation that has allowed him to garner the advantages of diversity.

Conclusion

Despite the possibilities of a heterogeneously determined democracy that his cosmopolitan identity brings to the local fore, the destruction of the midnight's children's conference is caused by Saleem's inability to break away from the hierarchies of leadership. Beyond his birthright as national hero, Saleem's centrality in the narrative seems to suggest that the agency of hybrid cosmopolitans, and indeed, the cosmopolitan's very identity, should on its own stand for the efforts of achieving solidarity across ethnic, religious, linguistic, and class lines. India's history or the palatability of the different ingredients of its "chutney", serves the purpose of allowing Saleem to act out/indulge his cosmopolite culinary and narratorial experiments. Saleem's craft of "chutnifying" and containing "the most exalted of possibilities: the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time!" at its best exemplifies his skills, yet at its worst, is completely detached from the local communities her purports to represent (459). The act of "pickling" India's history against Nehru's "insidious clouds of amnesia" allows Saleem to appear heroically engaged with India's social politics and history. Saleem addresses the importance of 'pickling' with the hope that the generations after him will continue his legacy. But Saleem's legacy is one of self-perpetuation because what he

'unleashes on the amnesiac nation' is his own version of India's history (460). Thus, the defeat of the "infant revolution", a synonym for the midnight's children's conference, is not so much Saleem's inability to "show all kids that it is possible to get rid of parents!" (228) Rather, Saleem's narrative centrality and the single power of recording history hinder his involvement in struggles and efforts against oppression.

Of course, Saleem's cosmopolitanism allows him to create imagined new forms of national identity, such as "collectivism", but his own cosmopolitan identity isolates him from collective action. At the end of his narrative, Saleem withdraws from the local, and also from the world itself into the pickle factory, eventually deteriorating into "specks of voiceless dust" (462). Contrary to Saleem's belief, it is not the "four hundred million five hundred six" Indians that reduce him to mere dust, rather it is the "privilege and the curse" of Saleem's cosmopolitanism that annihilates the "whirlpool of the multitudes" (463) into an indiscriminate representation of the experiences of all Indians. Prior to his final departure Saleem says, "new myths are needed" (458). Yet, how productive are new myths when the root of the corrupt old ones is not uprooted? Rushdie's construction of the hybrid cosmopolitan evokes endless possibilities for change and can potentially disrupt homogenous narratives of nation; however, it also suggests that certain expressions of hybridity are more significant than others. While acknowledging the cosmopolitan hybrid's unique ability to criticize hegemonic claims to power, authenticity and authority, I want to leave open the criticism of the conceptual potential and celebration of the hybrid's "double vision" (Bhabha 8).

CHAPTER THREE

Creating New Maps, Overcoming Old Myths

The women are now moving to the center of my little stage... [T]hey, not the men, were the true protagonists in the struggle.
—*The Moor's Last Sigh* [7]

What does Rushdie achieve by the construction of his cosmopolitan narrator who is unable to engage with the public that he aims to represent and serve? How may the failures of Saleem to transform his reconfigured notions of nation from the aesthetic to the practical and social enable Rushdie to create productive methods of social engagement? Saleem fails to strategically manipulate his cosmopolitan consciousness and position of privilege to effect concrete change. But through Saleem's failure, Rushdie's success points to a new kind of consciousness – one that sees hope in failure as much as it does in success; Saleem's failed quest for national unity is thus a productive exercise for Rushdie. Among the new generation of writers influenced by Rushdie is Ahdaf Soueif, who also experiments with different methods of applying the aesthetics of cosmopolitanism into practical methods of social engagement. In *The Map of Love*, Soueif treats the aesthetic appeal of cosmopolitanism through a classic application of theory to practice. Almost all of Soueif's characters, particularly the narrator Amal al-Ghamrawi, possess a cosmopolitan awareness and create hybrid domains from which nation is rewritten and reconstructed. Unlike Rushdie's attempt to unify India through proliferating multiplicity in one centralized character, Soueif distributes the responsibility of national unity among diverse characters to emphasize that a "phenomenal collective will" literally involves the direct engagement of many people.

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[7] Ibid. *The Moor's Last Sigh* (New York: Pantheon, 1995) 33.

While Amal is a central character in Soueif's novel, her centrality does not impede the development of particularities and differences among other characters. Moreover, unlike Saleem, Amal's cosmopolitanism becomes a driving force for building solidarity with local peoples in Egypt and does not preclude her vision from addressing social injustices through real and productive means. In *The Map of Love*, the local is not merely a discursive arena whereby the cosmopolitan characters ineffectively "act out" their cosmopolitanism. Rather, through their cosmopolitan consciousness, the characters in the novel, namely Amal, productively engage with the local to create new visions of national identity and nation. In this chapter I will investigate Soueif's proliferation of the cosmopolitan figure as a key combatant of neocolonial and nationalist constructions of nation (shared history, defined territory, common ethnicity, and national language) and as a necessary bridge for intercultural dialogue and understanding. In *The Map of Love*, Soueif demonstrates how different forms of cosmopolitanism can provide productive alternatives for local communities through their active engagement with the locality that shapes them. As such, Soueif questions the narrow focus of writers like Rushdie who are drawn to the aesthetic appeal of concepts such as cosmopolitanism but are unable to address how such concepts can be useful for decolonized peoples in postcolonial nations.

The Cosmopolitan: Past and Present

Ahdaf Soueif's novel *The Map of Love* (1999) is a diachronic narrative and a textual tapestry that weaves together several stories. Through parallel narratives, Soueif investigates possibilities of cultural dialogue within and outside of the local setting. Situated in Egypt, the novel begins in the present (1997) and then "transports the reader into a series of back-and-forth temporal peregrinations between the last *fin de siécle* and the current one" (Massad 79). The novel is structured around two stories and divided into two time periods, each with its own

central theme. One is the story of Anna Winterbourne, a Victorian Englishwoman who is drawn to visit Egypt after the sudden death of her husband, Edward, an English general who dies shortly after returning from the Sudan where he witnessed the barbarities performed by the British bombardment in the battle of Umm Durman. The influences of her father-in-law's opposition to imperial expansion and her fascination with the paintings of John Frederick Lewis (1805- 1876), famous for his orientalist depictions of Egypt, become driving forces behind Anna's decision to travel:

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

Anna's receptiveness to liberal ideas thus finds its beginnings in England where she questions the orientalist perceptions of "the east" as a fantastic and supernatural no-place despite Lewis's notorious portrayal of Egypt as a place where life and habits are unchanged in the timeless Eastern world.

Although she only plans to visit for only a short period, the aristocratic Anna stays in Cairo for fourteen years and remarries to Sharif al-Baroudi, a lawyer and nationalist activist. The novel's trope of building intercultural relationships and dialogue is not only exhibited through Anna's unlikely marriage to an Egyptian, but is also shown in Anna's friendship with Sharif's sister Layla, who tutors Anna about Egyptian customs. In her journal, Layla describes her first meeting with Anna; the following passage highlights the differences these two friends must overcome:

> I found myself forgetting that she was a stranger. And what a stranger: the British Army of Occupation was in the streets and in the Qasr el-Nil Barracks, and the Lord was breakfasting in Qasr el-Dubara. Because of them my uncle had been banished and my father was cloistered in the shrine these eighteen years and now my husband was in jail. And here I sat with one of their women, dressed in the clothes of a man, snatched in the night by my husband's friends and imprisoned in my father's house–and we sat in my mother's reception room and felt our way towards each other as though our ignorance, one of the other, were the one thing in the world that stood between us and friendship. (136)

During her life in Egypt, Anna's narrative develops in the form of journal entries, correspondence, and the enclosure of newspaper clippings and statements by English colonialists and Egyptian officials.

The second story in *The Map of Love* which parallels Anna's narrative takes place almost a century later, beginning with a trunk full of Anna's belongings. Isabel Parkman, Anna and Sharif's great-granddaughter, inherits Anna's trunk from her mother. Isabel, an American woman living in New York, falls in love with Omar al-Ghamrawi, a renowned New York-based Egyptian-Palestinian musician. Before traveling to Egypt on a journalistic assignment to document people's reactions about the coming of the millennium, Isabel is encouraged by Omar, to whom she has revealed the contents of Anna Winterbourne's hundred-year-old trunk, to show it to his sister Amal in Cairo.

The two stories, past and present, are pieced together into parallel narratives by Amal. An Egyptian-British woman, Amal has recently separated from her husband and moves back to Cairo to recuperate emotionally from her broken marriage and her failure to convince her two

sons to move back with her. Following Omar's suggestion, Isabel shows the contents of the trunk, "old papers in English [...] and documents in Arabic [as well as] objects," to Amal, who agrees to translate them and piece them together (7). Anna's stories and experiences in Egypt are weaved together by Amal and narrated contemporaneously with her own narrative. Among the myriad things that Anna's journal reveals is a complex family genealogy that links Omar and Amal to Isabel, through the marriage of Anna and Sharif al-Baroudi, the great uncle of Omar and Amal. Anna's journals give Amal the opportunity to explore her ancestral links. Moreover, through Sharif and Anna's involvement with the anticolonial nationalist movement in Egypt at the turn of the century, Amal develops national ties to Egypt, its history and its people. Anna's journals not only provide Amal with access to her family history but also drive her to seek further knowledge of Egyptian history and politics through active research in Egypt's national archives: "Now I find myself once again in the thick of traffic, of bureaucracy and procedure, as I try to see for myself the country that Anna came to. I try to imagine it, to re-create it" (59). Similar to Rushdie's intertwining of the national and the familial through Saleem's reformulated narrative of India's past and present history in *Midnight's Children*, Soueif's narrator Amal re-narrates Egypt's national history by conjoining it with her family history. But unlike Saleem in *Midnight's Children*, Amal does not assume a central role in her recreation of national and ancestral history: "This is not my story. This is a story conjured out of a box; a leather trunk that traveled from London to Cairo and back. That lived in the boxroom of a Manhattan apartment for many years, then found its way back again and came to rest on my living-room floor here in Cairo one day in the spring of 1997" (11). Amal's historical research in the Egyptian archives and her reading and rereading of Anna's journals allow her to enliven the history, both national and familial, that she traverses in her narrative.

Anna's marriage to an Egyptian nationalist is central to the novel's chronicling of Egypt's colonial history. Their relationship also epitomizes the novel's trope of intercultural dialogue and Soueif's rewriting of traditional social codes that separate the colonial culture from the colons. Anna's marriage to Sharif does not only afford her the opportunity to transgress her role as a mere observer of a colonized culture, but it forces her to develop a new national consciousness. Thus, she is no longer simply a tourist but a participant in the national struggle towards liberation. The taboo love affair between an Englishwoman and an Egyptian nationalist becomes problematic for both the English colon culture in Egypt and to Egyptian figures of the local anti-imperialist movement. The English in Cairo ostracize Anna on account of her marrying an Egyptian; similarly, Sharif's nationalist loyalties are questioned on account of his marrying a colonizer. Yet what proves more problematic, particularly to English officials, are Anna's growing sympathies for the nationalist cause and her activism against colonial occupation.

Soueif situates her nineteenth-century female protagonist in the midst of Britain's Imperial control over Egypt, which began in 1869 during the official installations of the Suez Canal. British dependence on trade with Eastern countries was destabilized as London's relations with Bombay dramatically dwindled when Britain was unable to resist the upsurge and pressure from India's anti-colonial movement to establish major political and economic reform. As its colonial presence in India was coming to a close, Britain looked to Egypt for renewing its economic/colonialist enterprise, seeking to establish economic ties with the Khedive of Egypt who was in severe debt over the Canal's construction. Britain seized on the Khedive's economic difficulties as a perfect opportunity to become the controlling shareholder of the Suez Canal Company. The pretext of Britain's economic support for Egyptian debt paved the way for almost

half a century of British colonial rule in Egypt. At the turn of the century, Egypt witnessed immense political unrest as an upsurge of nationalist anti-British movements grew considerably.

Egypt's colonial history is not merely a backdrop in Soueif's novel but foregrounds the events that shape Anna Winterbourne's marriage to Sharif and her experiences in Cairo. Moreover, this colonial past provides the novel's narrator with threads by which to connect the political conditions of Egypt's present history. By piecing together the unlikely love story of Anna and Sharif, Amal also unravels a colonial past rife with nationalist movements, scandals and corrupt politics. In *The Map of Love*, history and politics play a significant role in shaping the lives of the characters, and the stories in the novel evolve within the context of real historical events. Anna Winterbourne's story begins with the British Empire's economic and military presence in Egypt and is paralleled with Amal's experiences in an Egypt shaped by globalization and America's neocolonial politics in the Middle East. Personal relationships evolve in the context of history and politics; in Anna's case, her love for Sharif perseveres against the complicated and fragmented dynamic between colonizers and colonized.

The consequences of Anna and Sharif's love story in the context of colonialism and anticolonial nationalism in Egypt are tragic. Amal provides a contemporary cultural bridge for the parallel love story between her brother Omar and Isabel through her re-writing and piecing together of Anna's journals and correspondences. As Amal investigates and unravels the contents of Anna's trunk, she fears that a tragic fate might befall her brother's relationship with Isabel in the context of neocolonial globalization. The intermingling of historical events with family history and cross-cultural relationships is crafted by Amal who, much like the other characters, is influenced by the history and politics of her contemporary context. Aside from her active researching of Egypt's colonial history, which has her "[going] to the British Council

Library, to Dar al-Kutub, to the second hand bookstalls…[writing] to [her] son in London and [asking] for cuttings from old issues of *The Times*" in order to "piece a story together," Amal's return to Cairo becomes crucial for her commitment to effect change in her contemporary society (26). As will be shown in the sections ahead, aside from allowing Amal to increase her knowledge of Egypt's history, the politics which shape Anna and Sharif's relationship and their active participation in the anticolonial nationalist movement inspire Amal to build linkages between her own local communities upon her return home to Egypt.

The parallel narratives between the early and late 1900s provide Soueif with tremendous historic scope. Both Anna's and Amal's narratives begin with an ambivalence towards their futures and their place in the world. Anna introduces herself in the first entry of her journal: "My name is Anna Winterbourne. I do not hold (much) with those who talk of the Stars governing our Fate" (7). This entry is followed by the beginning of Amal's narrative, which is conjoined with her 'unpacking,' 'unwrapping,' and 'unraveling' of Anna's history. Anna is humbled by her microscopic existence:

> Some people can make themselves cry. I can make myself sick with terror. When I was a child – before I had children of my own – I did it by thinking about death. Now, I think about the stars. I look at the stars and imagine the universe. Then I draw back to our galaxy, then to our planet – spinning away in all that immensity. Spinning for dear life. And for a moment the utter precariousness, the sheer improbability of it all overwhelms me. What do we have to hold on to? (10)

Despite their temporal separation and the hesitancy they each voice, both Amal and Anna begin their narratives by affirming a need to search for meaning, as well as the necessity of playing key

roles in how they fit in and shape the meaning of the world around them. The similarity of Amal and Anna's hunger for meaning functions within the text as a basis of common ground upon which they can meet. While more focused paths to intercultural understanding and cross-cultural dialogue are forged, the context in which they are developed is experienced differently. Anna initially travels to Egypt for leisurely fulfillment, but she is forced to reevaluate her status in Egypt as an aristocratic *colon* due to the political inflections that shape her marriage to a nationalist. Likewise, Amal's move back to Cairo in the context of Egypt's corrupt politics is crucial for ways in which her cosmopolitan identity and class consciousness force her to reexamine how her status can help build strong connections with local communities. While the question of how personal relationships exist in the macropolitics of history is one of the central themes in the novel, Soueif complements this with a host of universal human experiences that serve as a point of communion in the novel, namely, the common search for unity and the need for love.

The Search for Points of Contact

Soueif's *The Map of Love* is characterized by a process of 'writing back' not only to colonialist discourse, but also to nationalist ideologies in Egypt that are inevitably adopted from colonialist epistemology. In this process of rewriting, Amal assumes the role of cartographer who redraws a map of nation (proper) into a *map of love* that is not based on fixed and authentic stipulations such as limited borders, national identity, and/or language. The idea of nation that Soueif departs from is what Anderson outlines as being "finite [...] [with] boundaries, beyond which lie other nations" (Anderson 7). The nation often limits and partitions itself by defining and distinguishing itself from other nations and cultures in order to reinforce its authenticity, purity and unique character. The fact that nationalists are able to imagine boundaries suggests

that their understanding of the existence of partition by culture, ethnicity, and social structure, which distinguishes them from other nations, insists on authoritative, fixed and absolute definitions of a nation. While official maps of nations have legends that point to their geographical, ethnic and national constituent parts, Amal's narrative points to and accentuates the features that challenge the idea of nation.

In *The Map of Love*, women's artistic identity exists in a patriarchal society determined both by discourses of colonialism and nationalism. Women's narrative in the form of journals, correspondence, and Amal's weaving together of stories from the past into a creative rewriting of the present suggests that women have a distinctive oppositional creativity because women are the primary source of social and historical information. Nevertheless, Soueif's own postcolonial narration is recuperated within male-dominated discourses by situating women's stories not as appendages for men's stories, but as integral in themselves for the revision of nation. In *The Map of Love*, women's lives are not separated from the public sphere of men. Soueif self-consciously uses female artistry in changing and representing her own postcolonial artistic and political work. She questions patriarchal norms not only through foregrounding cultural and social injustices towards women, but she also seeks to transform the categories of both the feminine and the formerly colonized in colonialist and nationalist definitions of nation. As such, Soueif focuses on the prominence of the collective stories of women in rewriting history. The shared history between the novel's nineteenth-century characters: Anna, Sharif, and Layla al-Baroudi and the novel's contemporary characters: Amal and Omar al-Ghamrawi and Isabel, is brought to the forefront by the collective stories of women; women also ensure its continuity between the different generations in novel. But what seems to be the first and most crucial step in *The Map of Love* for cementing and reinscribing women's narratives in the global patriarchal

canon is the transformation of language to reflect women's experiences. This process of transforming language also goes hand in hand with one of the novel's main tropes of intercultural dialogue and relationships.

In the case of Anna and Sharif, one of the most effective ways in which they work against the essentializing tendencies of colonialism and nationalism is by communicating through French, a neutral language, because it is foreign to both of them. In one passage, Anna asks Sharif whether he finds it troubling that she cannot speak to him in Arabic, to which he replies "No. It makes foreigners of us both. It's good that I should have to come some way to meet you" (157). On a similar occasion, when Anna first meets Sharif's sister Layla, they attempt to communicate in Arabic, despite Anna's minimal knowledge of the language. Notwithstanding their ability to comprehend each other, they both prefer to use French: "We gazed at one another, then I said 'Vous parlez Français?' And her face was lit up by a wide smile of relief [...] 'Ah, this is most fortunate'" (135). It is in this instance that Anna and Layla find themselves able "to pull at the edges of conversation and to weave the beginnings of [their] friendship" (135).

As for Amal, the novel's mouthpiece and culturally-hybrid Cairene native, who spent half her life in the former colonizer's metropole, London, she breaks away from paralyzing social constructs by manipulating language. In *The Map of Love*, one of the primary questions that Soueif poses is whether the transformation of language is instrumental in cementing intercultural understanding. For Soueif, the flexibility of language to translate and represent "the feelings expressed in one language – to represent them in an idiom that is immediately comprehensible in another culture" (Massad 85) is one of the challenging methods through which she transgresses notions that typify traditional formations of nation such as homogeneity, fixity, and authenticity.

Critics in postcolonial discourse like Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o might see Soueif's use of the former colonizer's language, English, as an elite language of privilege spoken by the educated and urban few. Having abandoned English after 1978 for his own mother tongue, Gikuyu, Ngũgĩ in *Decolonising the Mind* popularized the contentious language debates in postcolonial theory by emphasizing the need for a "language of struggle, of transformation in our societies" (Ngũgĩ 26). In his view, the transformation of language among the formerly colonized relies on the extensive use of a native language because the use of English further entrenches and continues the uneven and violent hegemonic social relations of colonialism in a neocolonial setting. Ngũgĩ's Afrocentric notion of language was controversial and hotly contested by African writers and critics like Chinua Achebe. For Achebe, the postcolonial writer, while recognizing the clear disjuncture between the culture of the formerly colonized and the former colonizer, has a responsibility and "should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience" (Achebe, 61). This debate, of course, is not particular to the African critical context; rather, similar debates within the field of postcolonial studies provide a springboard for my argument on Soueif's use of English in her novel.

These debates find their root in the inventive impurity of native languages by British colonial control and its polemical systemization of English among native cultures. The infamous speech "Minute on Indian Education" by Thomas Babington Macaulay assumes that educated Indians should be British in everything but blood: "We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue" (Macaulay 428). The process of legitimizing colonial presence through the eradication of native language and culture is not particular to Britain's colonial enterprise in India; a similar imposition of the ideological

supremacy of English existed in Egypt as well. In his essay "The Anglo-Arab Encounter", Edward Said notes the systematic hegemony of English and the "length of British tutelage, as well as the estimable schools and English-language universities throughout [Egypt] and the Arab world" (Said, *Reflections on Exile* 406). He also observes that Soueif is one of the few culturally hybrid Arab novelists currently writing in English. The reception of *The Map of Love* in the West and more importantly in the East challenges Ngũgĩ's claim that "language is [...] inseparable from ourselves as a community [...] with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world" (Ngũgĩ 16). Soueif does not compromise her native culture at the expense of perpetuating neocolonialism by making her language more universal. Rather than propagating an inseparability of a common national language from a singular national identity, Soueif retains the authenticity of an Arab voice, an authentic Arab *wigdan* [inner soul, passion, or sensibility], by expressing it in English (Massad 89).

Soueif creates her "own particular, postcolonial brand of English" (Darraj 1) by appropriating the English language and making it the primary means by which she deconstructs "nation". Through Amal's carnivalesque intermingling of Arabic and English speech, Soueif reformulates the colonial language to reflect the postcolonial experience. The reader meets Amal by way of her familiarity with both Arab and British culture: she equally identifies with George Elliot's archetypal heroine Dorothea Brooke while also recognizing the latest hit in Arabic pop music (Soueif 26, 42). Amal interprets and transmits her experiences of both cultures by commingling the language of the two and making Arabic understandable in English. As Timothy Brennan suggests, one of the defining characteristics of the cosmopolitan figure is that they explore the local socio-historical issues in the 'home' nation not through the native language, but through English, the language of the former colonizer (Brennan viii-ix). But for Soueif, the

bendable quality of language is a tool that does not only allow her to express the experiences of local culture through a global language, but the intermingling of two idioms also more concretely reflects the dialectic between more than one culture and language.

The textual strategies and linguistic experimentations that Soueif employs in *The Map of Love* demonstrate the non-fixity of a common national language. Soueif deconstructs language as a defining/unifying force of national identity by writing in English about the fundamentals of Arabic, and by infusing English with (Arabic) idiomatic language and culture. For example, Amal tries to teach her American cousin Isabel how the Arabic language is constructed. As Amal explains, in Arabic

> everything stems from a root. And the root is mostly made up of three consonants—or two. And then the word takes different forms [....]. Take the root q-l-b, qalb. You see, you can read this?' 'Yes.' 'Qalb: the heart, the heart that beats, the heart at the heart of things. Yes?' [...] Then there's a set number of forms—a template almost that any root can take. So in the case of "qalb" you get "qalab": to overturn, overthrow, turn upside down, make into the opposite; hence "maqlab": a dirty trick, a turning of the tables and also a rubbish dump. "Maqloub": upside-down; "mutaqallib": changeable; and "inqilab": a coup...' So at the heart of all things is the germ of their overthrow; the closer you are to the heart, the closer to the reversal. Nowhere to go but down. You reach the core and then you're blown away. (81-82)

In order to deconstruct language from within the linguistic structures themselves, Soueif strategically uses what Helen Tiffin calls "language variance," a textual strategy in postcolonial writing that "abrogates the privileged centrality of 'English' by using language to signify

difference while employing a sameness which allows it to be understood" (97). Soueif enters into the discursive arena of the "stability" of Arabic by "overturning" its structures. By infusing the language of the former colonizer with native idioms, transformation and counter-discourse against colonialist and nationalist ideologies are allowed to emerge. In "Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse," Tiffin argues that counter-discourse is a process that invokes an ongoing dialectic between "hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them" (Tiffin 95). Similarly, in her explanation and deconstruction of the term "qalb," Amal summons an interchange between the former colonizer's language and her own postcolonial identity and cosmopolitan modalities in order to challenge assumptions of purity and authenticity in nationalist and colonialist discourse. This process is what Tiffin would call the 'blueprint' for creating a counter-discourse. She suggest that such practices are

> counter-discursive rather than homologous [...] the operation of post-colonial counter-discourse is dynamic, not static; it does not seek to subvert the dominant with a view to taking its place, but [...] to evolve textual strategies which continually 'consume' their 'own biases' at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse. (96)

By adapting the language of the former colonizer to explain and infuse Arabic idioms and etymology, Amal creates a new living language. Amal is not only concerned with transmitting the experiences of one culture to another, but she also transforms language into a dialectic that illuminates the fluidity and flexibility of the Arabic language as well as the former colonizer's language.

Anna and Sharif use a different linguistic strategy to bridge their differences rather than attempting to impose their respective languages onto each other. In *The Map of Love*, the

characters' possibilities and limitations are mapped out against their historical context. The colonial context shaping Anna and Sharif's relationship tests their ability to overcome the barriers and binaries separating colonizer and colonized. The political connotation of Sharif and Anna's relationship in the context of Sharif's nationalist principles and Anna's association with the occupying forces of his country is an attempt to embrace a wider context than the one which traditionally forbids such a relationship. Until her marriage to Sharif, Anna remains unaware of the severe rift between the Egyptians and English colons and has little contact with local peoples outside of the British Agency in Cairo. Arriving at the Agency to register her new marriage, Anna suddenly realizes the ever-widening polarization between the two cultures:

> the place, once so familiar to me, grew strange as I saw the consternation in the faces of the staff and how they avoided meeting my eye as we were ushered through and into the Lord's office [...] he [Lord Cromer] addressed himself to me and he spoke with such obvious distaste that I was stung and replied in French so that my husband could understand. (Soueif 320)

One of the fundamental ways in which Anna and Sharif transgress the social codes of their circumstances is their conscious use of French, a language that is native to neither of them. Their relationship diverges from a colonialist binary dynamic between oppressor/oppressed, colonizer/colonized and while they are attentive to their differences, they do not allow those binaries to hinder nor preclude their marriage. Anna's initial naiveté is quickly transferred into indignation at the injustices of the British. In her mind, British occupation, which "had the sad effect of dividing the national movement" is not limited to the segregation of elites, but "makes itself felt at every turn" by every Egyptian (383-4). Anna tries to overcome the rift between colonizers and colonized not only by marrying an Egyptian, but also through her use of French.

In the novel, the different languages used by the characters do not forestall cross-cultural understanding and love in the context of neocolonialism and nationalism; rather, language becomes the "germ of their overthrow," a mechanism through which the characters disrupt stifling notions of fixity and authenticity.

Soueif consciously uses languages that are foreign to the native culture of each of her characters vis-à-vis Anna and Sharif's use of French, Amal's hybridized vernacular of both Arabic and English, and Isabel's attempt to learn Arabic. The rejection of the mother-tongue is worth investigating beyond Soueif's objective of highlighting the mechanisms through which intercultural dialogue is cemented. It may be argued that Soueif questions each of her character's sense of belonging and their attachment to a prescribed homeland by creating a hybrid space that is foreign; at the same time, this hybrid space acts as a common point of unity between the characters and forces them to meet in the middle. In her article "Behind the Veil: Deconstructing 'Woman' in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*," Terri Miller observes that in this text hybridity figures

> as a state of being neither rootless (hence the importance of the ancestral archive), nor utterly bound (thus the danger of institutions of memory and discourse), of being capable of straddling two worlds at once, embracing some elements of both, denying all aspects of neither. (Miller)

Soueif brilliantly captures the hybrid's potential for transcending traditional notions of national identity in her description of a particular shade of blue in a rainbow colour card:

> where is the line between blue and green? You can say with certainty 'this is blue, and that is green' but these cards show you the fade, the dissolve, the transformation – the impossibility of fixing a finger and proclaiming, 'At this

> point blue stops and green begins.' Lie, lie in the area of transformation – stretch your arms out to either side. Now: your right hand is in blue, your left hand is in green. And you? You are in between; in the area of transformations. (Soueif 66)

This passage is exemplary of the transformative journeys that each of the characters undertakes in their effort to build intercultural relations against the contradictions of their political milieu. Rather than imposing English on Sharif and his sister Layla al-Baroudi, Anna speaks to them in French while also attempting to learn Arabic. In a letter to her friend and father of her deceased husband, Anna writes "I have conducted my new friendships in French, but I am now resolved to really learn Arabic, and will hope to impress you, soon, by signing myself off in that language as your most dutiful and loving, etc. etc..." (160). This passage further entrenches Soueif's commitment to creating a hybridized space because Anna's eagerness to learn Arabic is not grounded in a desire to "impress" Arabic speakers (Sharif and Layla); rather, she seeks to impress her English speaking friend. Moreover, her enthusiasm to learn Arabic challenges the supremacist ideologies of her colonial context that seeks to use the English language as a mechanism of oppression to delegitimize the native language of colonized peoples.

Collaboration and Difference

How does the individual domain of narrative actively intersect with communal/local sites of struggle and experience? What purpose does the alienation from, and lack of, a sense of belonging to a so-called Egyptianness, Englishness, or Americanness serve in Soueif's construction of cosmopolitans and hybrids? Considering the failure of the dominant colonialist and nationalist discourses, do Anna and Amal merely create narratives to accommodate their experience and consciousness as women or do these narratives function to effectively deliver a potential for social change beginning with women's struggles to create legitimatised spaces from

which to speak? By tapping into all of the available support systems afforded them, both Anna and Amal attempt to effect change in the local struggles of Egypt's colonial and neocolonial nationalist contexts. Amal and Anna's self-awareness of their privileged positions within their society does not preclude their active participation to effect social change nor does it stop them from overcoming as well as eradicating the hierarchies defining their social systems.

While much of the novel focuses on her protagonists' negotiation of the tensions between reigning colonialist/nationalist discourses and the non-essential nature of national identity, race, and class, Soueif also acknowledges that the degrees in which people suffer from history is distinguished by real experiences of disparity. Unlike Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in which Saleem's struggles under essentialising notions of nationalism is supposed to represent the experiences of "six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous" Indians (Rushdie 37), Soueif's protagonists Amal and Anna try to understand the specificities of history that cause local communities to suffer from violence and oppression. Both Anna and Amal understand that their own struggle against colonialism and neocolonial nationalism is one shared by others. At the same time, they are also aware that while national identities are multiply determined, history is experienced differently because the uneven degree of factors, such as religion, class, and race asymmetrically shape the extent to which identities can be fluid and transformative. The following section will offer examples to give concreteness to how Soueif bridges the cosmopolitanism that defines Amal with the local experiences that also shapes her cosmopolitanism.

While the majority of Josna Rege's work focuses on the writing of cosmopolitan South Asian women writers, both in India and in Britain, her analysis of the characteristics of varying articulations of women's rooted cosmopolitanism seem very applicable to Soueif's attempt to

situate her cosmopolitan protagonists within the local. Among the four characteristics of a rooted cosmopolitanism that Rege describes one stands out as most relevant:

> The choice to work within a local setting, without looking at people and at ethical choice through a local lens alone. While holding allegiances to people and places, these writers do not employ or identify with the language and structures of nation in their quest for identity and social engagement. And to the extent that they do invoke the nation, it is conceptualized in plural, inclusive terms. They find no creative capital in marginalization, seeking instead constructive engagements with society. (Rege, "Women and the New Cosmopolitanism")

Kwame Anthony Appiah describes rooted cosmopolitanism, or what he calls "cosmopolitan patriotism," as the state of being for someone who is "attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities" (Appiah 91). A rooted cosmopolitan can also be defined through a "presence [among] other, different, places that are home to other, different people" (91). In *The Map of Love*, Anna considers Cairo her home, even after the tragic death of her Egyptian husband Sharif, because not only does she give birth to a daughter of mixed heritage, but also because she too suffers under Cromer's administration. In Amal's case, her cosmopolitanism is rooted in subverting Egypt's neocolonialist policies and its acquiescence to America's economic imperialism that divides its governing class from the majority. Amal's cosmopolitan consciousness is defined by an underlying connection to the local struggles of the fellaheen, Egypt's peasant class. When a bomb kills eight westerners in Egypt, the arrest and presumed torture of thousands of fellaheen follows. In the novel, tragedies like this one that have drastic effects on Egypt's peasant class force Amal to use her resourcefulness and privilege to initiate a point of contact with local communities.

Reifying the "Women Question"

Apart from Soueif's construction of the cosmopolitan narrator as the antithesis of nationalist notions of fixity and authenticity, her emphasis on the role of women as the engine that drives the novel's multiple narratives suggests that discursive reformulations of society depend on, and must also include, or begin with, its women. Unlike Saleem's patriarchal silencing of Padma's linear interjections in his narrative in *Midnight's Children*, in *The Map of Love* Soueif does not only assume that women are the traditional transmitters of culture, but also that women are the source of potential rebirth and change. In a way, Soueif responds to and modifies the male-centered paradigms of an entire genre of postcolonial literature that places the future of postcolonial states, the promises of modernity and cultural selfhood in the hands of its sons and fathers. Rushdie's gender politics replay patriarchal systems of power that suppress alternative narratives of gender and class. Whereas Rushdie ratifies domains of subordination, Soueif reifies the alleged all-inclusive politics of nationalism, which as Radhakrishnan mentions, signals the suppression if not "the demise of women's politics" (78).

By positioning women's struggle against colonialism and neocolonial nationalism at the forefront of both public and private domains, Soueif does not only disrupt official ideologies of nationalism and colonialism. Rather, she also subverts traditional forms of postcolonial literature and postcolonial criticism as it is currently practiced. While such literatures highlight the struggles of postcoloniality, they also tend to subsume local specificities and histories to an overarching framework or a single struggle, which, can be illuminating, but often overlooks irreconcilable tensions.

In her essay "The Angel of Progress," Anne McClintock describes the counter-productivity of postcolonial literature and postcolonial studies which assumes that all formerly

colonized people live under a single rubric of postcoloniality. She claims that these discourses further entrench the ideologies they claim to work against: "Not only have the needs of 'postcolonial nations' been largely identified with male conflicts, male aspirations and male interests, but their very representation of 'national' power rests on prior constructions of gender power" (McClintock 92). The enforced silence of different aspects of India's multitudinous society predicated by the male-centered monologism characterizing Saleem's narrative is repudiated by Soueif in *The Map of Love* through the process of creating discursive alternatives to how the nation is imagined – a space whereby women's narratives are written and re-written. In *The Map of Love*, Soueif's construction of a multi-voiced and female-centered narrative enacts what M.M. Bakhtin sees as the primacy of the novel in its power to communicate the coexistence of competing discourses. In the *Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin terms this coexistence *heteroglossia*, a process that is represented in the novel by a hybrid construction that contains within it two or more discourses. For Bakhtin, this process is instrumental for cultural awareness and the potential for social change:

> The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance, it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. (Bakhtin 276)

In *The Map of Love*, it is in the regenerative effects of women's narratives for both the individual and the nation that Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia is demonstrated.

The linkage between the different female characters and their experiences and history is occasionally illustrated through the voice of the omnipotent narrator in the novel. The

interjection of this voice serves to highlight the contextual and historical specificity that locates individual characters in their disparate temporal settings:

> And so it is that our three heroines – as is only fitting in a story born of travel, unfolded and shaken out of a trunk – set off upon their different journeys. Anna Winterbourne heads eastwards out of Cairo, bound for Sinai in the company of Sharif al-Baroudi. Amal al-Ghamrawi and Isabel Parkman take the Upper Egypt road which will lead them to Tawasi, in the Governorate of Minya. (Soueif 164)

This passage underscores the dialogism that takes place between the different characters, illuminating also the non-linear storyline through which women develop and are empowered by the multiplicity of their voices. Soueif layers her narrative with her female characters' documentation of opinions, worldviews, political struggles, and intercultural relationships. The text seems to suggest that the collective memory of women is necessary not only for rewriting national history, but also for ensuring women's place in the nation. For Amal, her exploration of Anna's journal leads her to reflect on her mother's relationship to her place of birth:

> She had wanted to go home, my mother. I only realized that towards the end. She had spoken about it, of course about Palestine: her school, her friends, her mother's room rich with tapestries, her father's library, the theatre [...] the picnics at the olive groves in the harvest season [...] and I had listened I suppose, first as children do, storing up the images then later with adolescent cynicism to those tales of an earthly paradise where everything was always as it should be. (118)

This longing to return home is reminiscent of Amal's own yearning to return to Cairo from London – the two experiences are connected through a longing for a place that is not merely spatial, but also socio-political and historical. At the end of the passage, Amal asks, "But what

do you do if you can never return?" (119). Speaking of her mother's inability to return to Palestine in the context of the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, Amal's return to Cairo forces her to reevaluate her own privilege and social mobility as a cosmopolitan. Accordingly, she tries to restore the missed possibilities and powerlessness of women in the context of involuntary exile by translating her privilege into effective participation by fighting against the oppression of fellaheen. In the context of the "global war on terrorism," Amal returns to Cairo to find that "much had changed" on a local level. With the help of Anna's journals and correspondences, the historical events she unravels become catalysts for mobilizing her cosmopolitan consciousness to effect change in her own community.

Focal/Local Points of Women's Resistant Practices

One of the main techniques that Soueif uses to emphasize women's significant role in shaping and re-writing the nation is the political and contextual point of contact between Anna and Amal. The back and forth dialogism between past and present inform Amal's active participation in her attempt to overcome the obstacles of Egypt's contemporary political conditions. Amal's access to the individual national histories of her ancestors, coupled with her mobility between the global metropolitan and the local, play a crucial role in her contribution to reshape how the global perceives the local and how the local is influenced by global politics. Soueif demonstrates the continuity of tyranny in Egyptian history from colonialism to neocolonial globalization. Whereas British colonial presence in Egypt was prolonged and legitimized by an alleged defense and a safeguarding of an overall Egyptian interest against anti-colonial nationalism, acting in the interests of the nation, in 1997 Egypt's government created and implemented land-reform laws that allegedly protect Egyptians and the global world at large against fundamentalism and terrorism. Through Amal's present narrative and her unraveling of

Anna's journals, it becomes evident that both the colonialist and nationalist regimes in Egypt use the "terrorist issue" with free rein, not in the interest of the nation they purport to serve, but to act in their own interests by inflicting oppressive ideologies. Through Amal, Soueif gives ample attention to the plight of the peasant class (fellaheen) in Egypt. Amal's documentation of, and active intervention in stopping the arbitrary round-ups and detentions that the fellaheen are subjected to by the police is one of the most salient examples in the novel of how acting in the interest of the "global community" is often served at the grave expense of local peoples. Shortly after her return to Cairo, the chief farmer of the village of Tawasi, located on the land that Amal inherits from her family, informs her about the ways in which the rent and land law reforms have influenced the farmers and their families. The tyrannical reforms implemented by the Egyptian government in 1997 removed the freeze on land rent established during the socialist leadership of Gamal Abdul Nasser that privileged the fellaheen on account of their tilling of the land.

With the land reforms and Egypt's crack-down on fundamentalists, 'Am Abu el-Ma'ati pleads to Amal to help him speak to government officials about overturning the closure of the school set up in the village by her great-grandfather and his nephew Sharif al-Baroudi. The government accuses the teachers of the school of being "terrorists and ruining the children's minds" by "telling them the law is evil and the land belongs to those who work it" (125-126). 'Am Abu el-Ma'ati urges Amal to talk to the government by using her power as a British-Egyptian and her elite privilege since "the whole world knows who [her] father was [...] the whole world knew he was a Basha [Ottoman title, roughly equivalent to 'Lord'] and a man of understanding" (126, 520). After learning more about the situation of the fellaheen from visiting the villagers in Tawasi, Amal discovers that the random round ups of ordinary people going to work is a result of the conflict between the peasant class and the landowners. She understands

that "if someone [landowner] is close to the authorities and he wants people off his land, he can use the terrorist issue and get rid of them" (228). When Amal meets with various obstacles during her deliberations with government officials to free the detained teachers, she realizes that the government is really only interested in collecting lists of names of the people from the villages. She reflects on the purpose of the lists: "centuries of lists being used to tax people, to take their sons away to dig canals or till the Khedive's land or be killed in wars; centuries of distrust, broken only briefly by what the fellaheen now call 'the good time': the time of 'Abd el-Nasser" (203). Instead of succumbing to these insidious ploys, Amal decides to go live in Tawasi, look after the land, and "man the school [her]self" (339). With the help of two city-bred teachers, Amal succeeds in reopening the school.

Amal's determination to see the school working highlights her conviction that "the personal is the political" and her commitment to seeing society move forward despite the obstacles imposed by tyrannical national ideologies (338). An important consideration at work within the narrative is the degree to which colonial and neo-colonial ideologies stifle social progress in the colonized and formerly colonized world. As Amal's friend Deena notes, "the interests of the governing class are different – are practically opposed to the interests of the majority of the people" (230). She also reflects on the conditions that shaped Egypt's modern history, claiming that "the British came in at a crucial point in our history. They froze our development: our move towards democracy, towards education, industrialization, towards modernity" (223).

The authoritarian and monolingual discourse of British colonialism and neo-colonial nationalism is most strongly demonstrated through the novel's parallelism of events between the past and the present. The en-masse police clampdown on Upper Egyptian villages in the wake of

the Luxor massacre in November 1997 complicates and prolongs Amal's efforts to intervene on the behalf of the fellaheen; this event is paralleled by Anna and Sharif's efforts to publish articles in British newspapers (Manchester Guardian and Daily Chronicle) about the atrocious butchery of the fellaheen by British officers (428). Anna documents an incident that takes place in June 1906 in a village called Denshwai where British officers shooting pigeons for sport anger the villagers; the chaos of the event resulting in the death of one officer. After blaming the fellaheen for the event, an Egyptian peasant is beaten to death by British soldiers, two hundred and fifty people are arrested, and four are sentenced to death with others sentenced heavily with hard labour and public flogging (424-427).

Both incidents force Amal and Anna to be active participants in shaping the worlds they inhabit. The initial cloudiness and hesitancy that they feel about their place in the world is gradually answered by their actions. Adding to the palpability of Amal's character, Soueif interjects self-reflexive criticisms in Amal's narrative regarding the coincidence drawn between the past and the present. For example, Amal reflects on her sudden active participation by asking herself "Is it Fate? Or the pull of the past? Is the empty, unchanging house easier on the mind than the voices, the points of view, the hope and the despair? Or is it merely a conscientious application of a project?" (292). Amal's project involves a diachronic narrative that seeks to disrupt and rectify the corrupt repetitions in Egypt's, and to a larger extent, in Middle Eastern history. While Amal is critical of the coercive identities of nationalists, fundamentalists, and colonialists that create states with borders, ruling parties, authorities, and official narratives, she also questions and analyzes her own position of privilege and consciousness. Amal heeds her friend Deena's advice that "history can be changed [and that] it's people who make history. The

problem is that we are allowing other people to make our history [...] we do have the power [...] we're being told we haven't—but we have. But to use it we have to have the will" (228).

The text suggests that the process of constructively writing and rewriting historical and social contexts is one of the most effective means of re-formulating a nation's oppressive ideologies. By restoring their own history and the history of the underprivileged and oppressed people in both past and present, Anna and Amal both enact what Francoise Lionnet views as the powerful instrument of narrative for cultural awareness. In her essay, "Geographies of Pain," Lionnet writes that "Literature encodes, transmits, as well as recreates ideology [...] to create new mythologies that allow the writer and the reader to engage in a constructive rewriting of their social contexts" (Lionnet 132). But Anna and Amal's commitment to "recreate ideology" goes beyond the power of their narrative (active writing and rewriting). Their projects are both characterized by building the material and conscious basis for liberation through collective participation and eradicating patterns of oppression. Both Amal and Anna's project is not a reflexive opting out from the process of history making, but an active reshaping of the course of their history through narrative and active intervention in the social context of their times.

Dialogic Interventions

Anna uses different means than Amal to effect change; she formulates her own methods of informing the British public about the atrocities of occupation. Anna shrewdly observes that the failures of the Egyptian nationalist movements to defeat the colonialist regime are not only due to the authoritarian sectarianism dictating their politics. Rather, Anna attributes these failures to the fact that the Egyptian public does not actively seek to influence and address British public opinion. Anna and Sharif address and try to challenge the conditions that shape the reason behind the inability of Egyptians to "speak for themselves." Anna explains that

> they cannot speak because there is no platform for them to speak from and because of the difficulties with language. By that I mean not just the ability to translate Arabic speech into English but to speak as the English themselves would speak, for only then will the justice of what they say—divested of its disguising cloak of foreign idiom—be truly apparent to those who hear it. (Soueif 399)

Anna's method is a direct attempt at entering the discourse of colonialism by countering it with "its own language." The instrument with which she seeks to counter the constructed obstacles created by colonialist rule disrupts and destabilizes the representations of the "Orient" that Edward Said analyzes in his seminal work, *Orientalism*. Said claims that Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, that the Orientalist speaks *for* the Orient,

> describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West [....] The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation [...] The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and faute de mieux, for the poor Orient. (Said, *Orientialism* 20-21)

By creating a platform through which the "Orient" can 'speak,' Anna and Sharif disrupt the paralyzing concept that the Orient is eternally silenced and spoken for by the Orientalist.

Anna and Sharif collaboratively draft letters and newspaper articles for the British press. Their letters assume a Saidean perspective on how Europe should eliminate and "unlearn" its "inherent dominative mode" of thought (*Orientalism* 28). Sharif and Anna write that

> Europe simply does not see the people of the countries it wishes to annex—and when it does, it sees them in accordance with its own old and

> accepted definitions: backward people, lacking rational abilities and subject to religious fanaticism. People whose countries—the holy and picturesque lands of the East—are too good for them. (Soueif 483)

Anna's ability to perceive and enter the discourse of colonialism by exposing and manipulating its very mechanisms of oppression, coupled with her proposal to use the manners in which "the English themselves would speak" to affect British public opinion, is perhaps more rebellious than her taboo love affair and marriage to an Egyptian nationalist. That Anna stirs British public opinion in favour of the Egyptian nationalist cause bolsters Soueif's urgent assertion that social change and cultural awareness are inseparable from the creativities of women's narratives and their political consciousness.

The interdependence of women's struggles across time leads Amal to intervene in the social context of her life vis-à-vis the documented struggles of Anna and her agency to effect change for the Egyptian cause. The connections that Amal creates between global consciousness and local struggles critiques stances like Homi Bhabha's where the local is left behind in the celebration of hybridity. Bhabha's description of ambivalence in his theory of hybridity underlines Amal's own position as a hybrid-cosmopolitan subject. Bhabha argues that cultural hybridity is necessary for the "deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination" (Bhabha 160). Bhabha locates the possibility for alternative forms of resistance within the "interstices" of the dominant discourse. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity has come under attack in recent postcolonial discourse for its favouring of the migrant experience. Critic Pheng Cheah argues that "Bhabha is not interested in those who do not migrate [...] In Bhabha's world, postcoloniality *is* the hybridity of metropolitan migrancy. Everything happens as if there are no postcolonials left in decolonized space" (Cheah 300-301). Cheah's

investigation of Bhabha points to some of the problems in recent postcolonial theory that overlook the perspectives of postcolonial peoples in formerly colonized nations. Unlike for Bhabha, Soueif's construction of Amal as a cosmopolitan hybrid who freely moves between the metropolitan centre and the postcolonial locality of Tawasi does not fail to account for the postcolonial remaining in the decolonized world. Rather, Amal's move from the global metropolitan to the local is characterized by a commitment to destabilize the oppressive binaries that limit the fluidity between local and global attachments.

Epilogue

"At the Heart of all Things is the Germ of Their Overthrow"

I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale, a sage of sexual rivalry, ambition, power, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge. But the women seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories, comedies, obliging me to couch my narrative in all manner of sinuous complexities, to see my "male" plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and female side. It occurs to me that the women knew precisely what they were up to—that their stories explain, and even subsume, the men's...So it turns out that my "male" and "female" plots are the same story, after all.

—Salman Rushdie, *Shame*[8]

I refuse to accept that nationalism is the determinate, dialectical opposite of imperialism; that dialectical status accrues only to socialism [...] What role any given nationalism would play always depends on the configuration of the class forces and sociopolitical practices which organize the power bloc within which any particular set of nationalist initiatives become historically effective. [This position] implies at least two things. It recognizes the actuality, even the necessity, of progressive and revolutionary kinds of nationalism, and it does not characterize nations and states as coercive entities as such [...] Some nationalist practices are progressive; others are not.

—Aijaz Ahmed, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*[9]

What distinguishes *The Map of Love* from *Midnight's Children* is that participation in the local is an integral mode of belonging. In his introductory essay to *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation,* Bruce Robbins says "situating cosmopolitanism means taking a risk" (Robbins 2). His claim warrants considerable attention particularly in the context of Rushdie and Soueif's *voyage* back into the micronational. What Robbins seems to gesture towards is that by aligning cosmopolitans with particular national struggles, such allegiances with the local can potentially re-inscribe totalizing and essentialist markers of identity. This is particularly problematic for traditional advocates of cosmopolitanism who "have most often felt obliged to keep it unlocated in order to preserve its sharp critical edge, as well as its privileges" (2). We have to be circumspect about whose interests these "privileges" privilege. The idea that

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[8] Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (New York: Aventura, 1983) 189.

[9] Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992) 11.

cosmopolitanism exists in the interstices of society is a salutary reminder of Bhabha's general celebration of hybridity, a third space that "inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality" – hybridity that has a liberatory potential to counter hegemonic notions of fixity and authoritarian discourse through its (Bhabha 19). However, my attempt in this project is to question the extent to which cosmopolitans are not only critical, but also effectual in practice. For Robbins, "actually existing cosmopolitanism is a reality of (re)attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance" (Robbins 3). The risk of realigning attachments with the local as mentioned by Robbins is a crucial concern. At the same time, an attachment with the local by cosmopolitan identities with visions toward liberation is necessary even at the risk of appearing essentialist and totalizing. However, it does depend on what part of life and thought is being essentialized and how it is carried out in practice.

My comparison of *Midnight's Children* and *The Map of Love* demonstrates how the collisions between ethnicity, language, class, and gender in the nation-state cannot simply be resolved through artistic experimentation with and articulation of "actually existing cosmopolitanism". Rather, as my analyses have shown, Robbins' claims function as springboards for resistance practices. In order to create productive solutions to the lamented and criticized injustices in micronational postcolonial settings, the agency and empowerment of cosmopolitan hybrid identities cannot be isolated from action and active participation with local struggles. In chapter two, I attempt to situate Soueif's *The Map of Love* in the trajectory of cosmopolitan postcolonial literature instigated by Rushdie that both questions the interdependence of and conflates complex categories of identity and nation. At the same, I step out of that framework and consider cosmopolitan women's artistic identity and its inseparability from individual and collaborative initiatives towards national liberation.

In *Midnight's Children* Saleem resigns his efforts towards liberation and in many ways suggests the very nationalist imaginings of nation he rejects. As Benedict Anderson notes, the nation is imaginatively produced by each of its members: "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members [...] yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6). Saleem illustrates this resolve when he places the hopes of a democratic future in the hands of his newly born son Aadam Sinai. He says, "I understood [...] that Aadam was a member of a second generation of magical children who would grow up far tougher than the first, not looking for their fate in prophecy or the stars, but forging it in the implacable furnaces of their wills" (Rushdie 447). The potential that Aadam represents in Rushdie's novel is fulfilled by Soueif. *The Map of Love* is also framed by the birth of culturally hybrid children. The novel opens with the birth of Anna and Sharif's daughter Nur al-Hayah (light of my life) and closes with the birth of the paternally orphaned Sharif, the son of Omar al-Ghamrawi and Isabel Parkman. Soueif's choice to close her novel with the birth of a son who is named after the nationalist Sharif al-Baroudi is worth consideration. At the same time, it also suggests the necessity of a gender-balanced revision of the nation-state system. Official discourses ultimately produce the very root and "germ of their overthrow" to use Soueif's words. Before his final departure, Saleem's says that "the privilege and the curse" of his multiply determined cosmopolitan identity is that it made him both "master" and "victim" of his times and prevented him also "to live or die in peace" (Rushdie 463). While Saleem's failures can be rooted in the power relations between curses and privileges, masters and victims, the limits of his social role prevent him from strategically aligning himself with the local. Yet, these limitations inevitably create a different kind of consciousness. The birth of a son at the end of *The Map of Love* does not simply reproduce the patriarchal discourses of power that Soueif

tries to break away from. Rather, because Amal and Isabel are the only surviving family members of the newly born Sharif, the birth further reinforces that the struggle towards liberation should necessarily involve the inclusion and active participation of women in the discourses of power. Soueif constructs desperately needed bridges, and points to more positive cosmopolitans of the future. The progressive double mothering of Sharif should not be impervious to investigation particularly when the myth of collectivism can only be achieved through newly developed and formulated alliances and resistance. While the configurations of gender, class, ethnicity, and national language create what Said once called the current of "contestatory force[s]," these very same categories offer us ways to reconceptualize the significance of micronational spaces (*Culture and Imperialism* 312). Radhakrishnan points out that the "the concept of 'totality' should not be understood as a pregiven horizon but as a necessary and inevitable 'effect' or function of the many relational dialogues, contestations and asymmetries among the many positions [...] that constitute the total field" (81). Cosmopolitans may be an effective opposition to the totalizing narratives of nation and the power structures it imposes and reproduces. However, the cosmopolitan's enshrined fluidity and negation of fixity must necessarily move beyond a mere celebration to 'actually existing' modules of social change. Only then will the contested threshold between the local and the global create productive points of connection between the nation-space and cosmopolitans.

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