مجلة جامعة دمشق للآداب والعلوم الإنسانية

اسم المقال: الاستعمار: روح العصر في رواية "خارطة الحب" لأهداف سويف
اسم الكاتب: د. علي اللحام
رابط ثابت: https://political-encyclopedia.org/index.php/library/2774
تاريخ الاسترداد: 2026/11/02 11:57 +03

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Colonization: The Spirit of the Age in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*

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Abstract

This article is a textual reading of Ahdaf Soueif's novel *The Map of Love* (1999) highlighting Egypt's history in the last 100 years, through mirroring intercultural love stories. It explores how she analyzes the Egyptian past, then compares it simultaneously to the status quo of Egypt in 1997. Souif re-examines the British colonization of Egypt and juxtaposes it with the modern prevailing force of neo-colonization in the post-emancipation period. The aim is to question the inevitability of West colonization over Egypt which has led to implementing hierarchal structure between the wise civilized West; *self*, and the illiterate uncivilized East; *other*. This article focuses more on the British colonization than on the Ottoman one, since the former had the upper hand over Egypt. The novel underlines how the colonial/neocolonial hegemony was, and is still, maintained by using the same tactics, namely, by imposing force, the theory of efficiency, perpetuating sectarianism, and controlling education in Egypt. Hence, as the novel explicates, Egyptians suffer in the present from the same problems encountered under British mandate. Moreover, Egyptians struggle with the American domination which intends to control Egypt's natural resources and support and secure "Israel". Nonetheless, Soueif introduces a third hybrid globalized space created by the respect and understanding of the intercultural meeting between the West and the East.

The love stories between the main characters are not a mere romance, but a means of achieving a unity of conscience; this unity breaks the inevitability of colonization and deconstructs the binary oppositions and stereotypes of West and East. Mezzaterra reconciles the similarities and differences between the past and present Egyptian society, i.e. *differance*. Consequently, a *mezzaterra* state of understanding is created connecting the past and present at the backdrop of historical events. Soueif's *mezzaterra* aims at paving the way for a hope of living in a common ground for all humanity.

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الاستعمار: روح العصر في رواية "خارطة الحب" لأهداف سويف

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الملخص

تعدُّ هذه المقالة قراءةً نصية لتاريخ مصر في السنوات المئة الأخيرة ممزوجة بقصص حب تعكس ثقافات عدة كما هو الحال في رواية أهداف سويف "خارطة الحب". وتعنى المقالة بالكيفية التي تحلل فيها سويف ماضي مصر بشكل أساسي بين عامي 1900 و1911، ومن ثمة تقارنه بشكل متزامن مع الحالة الراهنة لمصر في عام 1997. تعيد سويف دراسة مرحلة الاستعمار البريطاني لمصر، وتقارنه بالقوة الحالية المتمثلة بالاستعمار الحديث في مرحلة ما بعد التحرر. والهدف من ذلك هو دراسة حتمية الاستعمار الغربي لمصر الذي أدّى إلى ترسيخ البنية الهرمية للغرب المتحضر و"الشرق" الجاهل غير المتحضر "الآخر". توضح الرواية كيف كانت الهيمنة الاستعمارية الجديدة ولا تزال تترسخ عن طريق استخدام الأساليب ذاتها، أي استخدام القوة ونظرية الكفاءة وترسيخ الطائفية والتحكم بالتعليم في مصر. وهكذا وكما توضح الرواية أن المصريين يعانون في الحاضر من المشكلات عينها التي واجهوها إبان الاستعمار البريطاني. وبذلك تقدم سويف حيزًا عالميًا ثالثًا هجينًا أوجده الاحترام والتفهم المتحصل جراء اللقاء بين الشرق والغرب.

إن قصص الحب بين الشخصيات الأساسية ليست مجرد غرام، بل هي أداة لإيجاد وحدة على مستوى الضمير (ضمير جمعي)، وتكسر هذه الوحدة حتمية الاستعمار وتهدم الصور النمطية والأضداد بين الشرق والغرب. وهكذا توجد حالة (بين بين mezzatera) من التفاهم فتربط الماضي بالحاضر على خلفية الأحداث التاريخية. إن الحالة البين بينية لسويف تهدف إلى تمهيد الطريق أمام أمل الحياة على أرضية مشتركة للبشرية جمعاء.

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Ahdaf Soueif's works seek to carve a space for a cultural meeting between the East and the West. Tolerance and acceptance can be the fruitful result from the dialogue between the East and the West. This article analyzes Soueif's *The Map of Love* through addressing three main axes. Firstly, she re-reads the British colonization of Egypt and juxtaposes it with the present. This juxtaposition highlights the prevalent spirit of colonization which continues even after Egypt's independence, but in a more developed complex form namely: neocolonialism. Secondly, Soueif questions the inevitability of history, which goes hand in hand with colonization. Thirdly, this article investigates how Soueif carves a third hybrid space or what she calls a *mezzaterra*, which is a creative place for all the people around the world irrespective of their cultural or religious identities.

The enchanting love stories between Anna and Sharif in the past, and Isabel and Omar in the present, are encompassed in an interconnected web of events and historical backdrop. The historical background plays an important role in affecting and shaping the characters' lives. The political status at that time affected how the lovers acted and reacted, which makes these relationships hybrid ones. The characters' examining of themselves is strongly associated with the colonizer's legacy because the mentality and doctrine are indoctrinated by the colonizer. The repercussions of colonialism upon the Egyptian society reach ideology itself, which causes a state of unrest in the society. Furthermore, Emily Davis points out that Soueif's "skillful interweaving of detailed historical research with fiction in *The Map of Love* has led critics like Amin Malak to describe the novel as 'atour de force' of revisionist meta-history of Egypt in the twentieth century" (9). In the novel, Amal reviews a critical span of time in Egypt, mainly from 1900 to 1911.[1] She was motivated to revise this period while reading Anna's journal,. Amal wants to have a kaleidoscopic vision over the past; not only by reading Anna's journal, but also by researching in books and articles.

1 Amal is the first person narrator in the present narrative who re-visualizes the story of Isabel and Sharif Pasha and investigates the period her ancestor Sharif lived in. Her role in this novel is complex and important since she reflects upon both the past and present and voices Soueif's ideas and beliefs.

Furthermore, Amal makes parallels between the life of Egyptians 100 years ago and their lives in 1997, which continues throughout the novel. Soueif's revisiting the past and juxtaposing it with the present highlight Egypt's harsh experience under colonization and after independence. Anna wonders: “How much is our life governed by the lives and past actions of others?” (Soueif 466). As shall be discussed later, the colonial past of Egypt has affected the present in different arenas. This love story depicts the sufferings which independent Egypt endured. In the same context, Suzan Darraj says: “This is truly post-colonial novel in that it reshapes, rethinks, and re-evaluates the colonial period in the Middle East” (12). This post-colonial novel revolves around the Western attempts to dominate Egypt. Hence, the novel provides a critique against all forms of colonization.

Soueif is interested in rereading the history of Egypt since “we always know how the story ends. What we don't know how is what happens along the way” (74). Amal knows the end of Anna's love affair, yet she is interested in the journey to the past which re-echoes in her present history. This unraveling of the past enables Amal to understand her present political, and social reality. Amal says, "I do not believe I am living in a time-warp, but I confess I find the events of a hundred years ago easier to deal with than the circumstances we are in today” (Soueif 218). According to Amal, investigating the past is much easier than going into the present. Therefore, by analyzing the Egyptian past mainly between 1900 and 1911 then meditating it in the present 1997, she is able to comprehend the complexity of the status quo in Egypt. At the early beginning of the novel, Anna narrates how one British said that imperialism; colonialism is embedded here, is the spirit of the age (Soueif 27). This idea is also mentioned in the present by Dr. Ramzi: “Colonialism is the spirit of the age” (Soueif 223). When he narrates the history of colonial domination, he uses the present tense instead of the past tense, which indicates that the colonial movement (precisely neocolonialism), led by America now, still has the upper hand over Egypt. In this regard, Soueif says in an interview:

> I had believed that we had entered a historical stage which was, genuinely post-colonial: a free space where the ideological, emotional philosophical underpinnings of inequality had been repudiated, rejected by the West, our

> past colonial masters. In the 60s, it seemed that, along with racial discrimination, the subordination of women and queer-bashing, colonialism had become profoundly unacceptable. And now we discover that this sense of a new found equality was not, in fact, well-founded. ("I Have Always Looked …")

The deception of independence is merely on the face value; the colonizer's legacy upon the Egyptian society is not that of the physical or political dominance, but of a mental and ideological one, a hidden fact that Soueif attempts to un-conceal.

Soueif holds the belief that today's world is free from the colonial spirit. However, this belief was an illusion since a just world has not been established yet on a solid ground. Soueif's main characters Anna, Sharif and Amal depict the harsh reality of Egyptians by their narratives. Egyptians suffer in the present from the same problems, such as poverty and illiteracy, which were encountered under British mandate. However, Soueif highlights the importance of the past in affecting the present and the future. In this respect, Lama Nusair writes,

> By using history, the novelist suggests that the past should be loved no matter how painful it is, as the past creates one's present, which in turn creates one's future. The act of love such as Sharif's love for his country and his love for Anna are both natural phenomena that, as the narrative suggests, should not clash but reconcile and prosper. (*Gender Writing* 178)

Nusair highlights that the repercussions of the past upon the present need to be taken into consideration to make a difference. This difference is not only reconciliation, but also affluence and development. In addition, Egyptians struggle with the American supremacy which seeks to control Egypt's natural resources. America's dominion over Egypt is also to support and secure "Israel". It could be argued that the government in Egypt is an accomplice with America at the expense of its citizens. A village woman says to Amal that whatever unjust decision is taken, such as closing schools, arresting people, or imposing new taxes, the government declares that it is what America wants (Soueif 176). The government obviously justifies their callous political and economic measures by America's control over the government's decisions.

The spirit of colonialism dwells in the present through repeating the binary opposition of West and East re-imposing the colonial power and hegemony which existed in the past. The West has created binary oppositions of Occident/Orient. This has led to a hierarchal structure in which the West is the land of virtue and civilization, and the East is the place of evil and ignorance (Said 40). The novel explores "the misconception that exists in the space between East and West" (Darraj 10). These misrepresentations of the East are pertinent to colonialism since they lead to hierarchies. This dichotomy, of West/ East, revolves in its core around the binary opposition of the colonizer *self* and colonized *other*. The colonizers project all their desires, which cannot be fulfilled in their country in fear of traditions and negative feeling, onto the colonized other. This dichotomy is highlighted in an article written by Sharif about "The state of relations between the West and the East as he sees them today" (Soueif 490). Sharif posits the view that:

> There is also a kind of attachment that comes from satisfaction with the European's own image of himself in the East, an image different from the one he has of himself in his own country and among his own people. Certain aspects of the European' personality which find no outlet in his own land, he allows to flourish while he is in the East. (Soueif 484)

The lure of the exotic – that grass is always greener on the other side of the hill – has colonial backgrounds. The hegemony that the colonizer aspires to enjoy creates this superiority/inferiority complex within the colonizer and colonized. The Egyptian society was subject to the British power, be it the political, the educational or the cultural one. These aspects of power impose the Western personality upon the Eastern – especially the Egyptian – people.

The West is the *self* which projects its fantasy onto the Oriental *other*. Sharif's article echoes Said's *Orientalism*, which is a direct influence upon this novel. Such binary oppositions are what empowered the West and gave it the pretext to colonize others' countries since the West represents rationality and progress (Said 32). Therefore, the West colonizes other countries to guide them into rationality and civilization as it claims. An example that could serve here to highlight the misconception of the East is when Emily fears the Egyptians and ignores them since she thinks that they might kidnap and enslave her (Soueif 68).

Emily is the colonizers' *self* that projects her fear onto the Egyptian *other*. This process is called *othering* which is "the process of forming one's identity through the alienation and exclusion of another unit is represented in the postmodern concepts of 'otherness' and 'othering'" (Bengtsson 3). The concept accordingly denotes negative connotations. The other has always been viewed as inferior and negative. The British people in the Agency, which is the political representative authority of British colonization, do not interact with the Egyptians and alienate them from the political scene. The British view themselves as superior to the Egyptians in terms of morals and knowledge. Consequently, this establishes hierarchies in favor of the British.

In *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, Lawrence E. Cahoone gives an accessible definition of constitutive otherness as the "strategy of maintaining cultural units by an active process of exclusion, opposition and hierarchization." Other units will be represented as 'other' in a hierarchical dualism in which one of the units is 'privileged' or favored and the other is devalued. (Bengtsson 3) The British in the Agency keep distancing themselves from the natives and undermining the Egyptian character. Sharif is quite aware of *othering* and binary oppositions. In a conversation with Anna he asks her:

> "Weren't you afraid of me? The wicked Pasha who would lock you up in his harem and do terrible things to you?"
> "What terrible things?"
> "You should know. They're in your English stories". (Soueif 153-54)

Sahrif remarks how literature enhances this misrepresentation of a devious voluptuous East. In the romances about the East, the representation of the male Arab is so negative and imaginative. However, Anna, throughout the novel, dismantles these imaginative stereotypes. This process of *othering*, which is an outcome of colonialism, still persists in the present. Omar is separated from his wife simply because "we both discovered I was An Arab" (Soueif 334). His wife could not transcend the cultural differences since he was from the East. Being an Arab is being the villain other who the West marginalizes and disrespects. In an interview with Soueif, "Scheherazade Tells All," the interviewer asks her if she thinks that the West has changed its view of the East, she answers: "It is kind of worse. There is bias" (3). Therefore,

Anna and Isabel explore these discriminations against the Arab and deflate them through their love unity with Sharif and Omar.

The second idea which reiterates how the colonial spirit still persists is power and hegemony. Supremacy was, and is still, maintained by the British colonizers in the past century and by America and its agencies. The colonizers in the past and present have maintained their power through using force, proving the theory of efficiency, controlling education, and perpetuating sectarianism between the Muslims and the Copts in Egypt.

To subjugate another country, one has to have weaponry and military power. One of the most alerting epigraphs in this novel is a line of poetry composed by Hilaire Belloc: "Whatever happens we have got/ The maxim gun and they have not" (qtd. in Soueif 25). This gun was the first self-powdered gun which is "most associated with [British] imperial conquest" (Martin 11). This epigraph pinpoints how colonial powers depend on raw force. British colonizers depended on the monopoly of power; consequently, Egyptians had no strong army, and the British tightened the noose on any revolution against them. The British suppressed the nationalist movement such as Urabi movement, whose use of force resulted in failure. In addition, and as shall be discussed below, there is the mentioning of the Dinshaway incident in the novel, and it is considered a turning point in the struggle against British mandate.

In June 1906, a number of British officers made the people of the town of Dinshaway angry by shooting the pigeons and accidently wounding a woman from the village. Consequently, the villagers attacked the officers who refused to leave. One of the fleeing officers returned to the camp and died later because of a sunstroke. A villager tended to him in an attempt to save him, but when the soldiers saw the villager beside the dead body, they thought he was the killer. As a result, the British authorities put a number of villagers on trial. The villagers were accused of premeditated murder; the defense, including an Egyptian named Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyed, said the villagers only reacted to the British soldiers' acts. The villagers were found guilty in this mock trial, and were consequently punished to be an example; some were whipped, whereas others were executed publicly at the town (Soueif 423-230). The cruelty committed by British colonization against the Egyptians made Anna feel ashamed and disgusted (Soueif 229). El-Feky underscores that "This

colonial cruelty is a disgrace for the civilization that the occupying British represent" (22). The British acted like barbarians, and this incident unmasks the falsity of their claim of justice and civilization.

The Dinshaway incident is immediately juxtaposed with the Luxor incident in the present. Amal is informed of the bombings of the temple Luxor in which fifty or a hundred tourists were killed. As a result, the police arrested a lot of innocent fellaheen (peasants) and interrogated them without any mercy. When Amal goes to Minya, she sees "ordinary fellaheen, being arrested. They were tied with ropes. On their arms and necks," since the government suspected them to be fanatics (Soueif 437; 227). The interrogation and harsh measures are necessary according to the government as a result of fear of America and the West. Those fellaheen are associated with the so-called "Islamic" terrorism[2] although they do not support the fanatics. This highlights how the government's decisions are controlled by the hegemonic power, namely America, which dictates its conditions on Egypt at the expense of its people.

The "List" issue is another example that should be highlighted. Isabel wonders why the fellaheen do not cooperate with the authorities and give them the names of the teachers, who the government suspects of having a negative influence upon the villagers. Amal says that taking a list was a common strategy by the colonizers to take people for war or tax them (Soueif 203). This pinpoints the fact that until the present moment people suffer from the colonial techniques which are repeated by the Egyptian government to please America. In this regard Soueif says, "Our colonial oppressors couldn't have done it better – the humiliation, the torture, the collective punishment. You have a situation where political institutions have been systematically emasculated over 30 years or more"(4). Soueif is aware of how the current Egyptian government repeats the same colonial structure. In addition, collective punishment is a way to suppress people and that is manifested clearly in the Dinshway and Luxor incidents. Collective punishment is a means of intimidating – and therefore controlling – the Egyptians.

2 I believe that the concept of terrorism is wrongly attached to Islam; and the justification here is simply that terrorism does not have a religion, it is universal. However, the discussion of such an argument is definitely beyond the scope of this article.

The British had the supremacy over Egypt under many pretexts; such as helping the Egyptians to know how to govern themselves. Anna writes to her father-in-law Sir Charles saying that, "Mr. Boyle took the line you would expect: that the country had never been run so efficiently and that the Egyptians had never been happier or more prosperous than under Lord Cromer" (Soueif 96). Mr. Boyle, the Oriental Secretary at the British Agency, justifies British colonization by claiming that the British are helping the Egyptians in organizing their affairs. Moreover, Anna points out that "both HB [Harry Boyle] and Mr. S held that it would take generations before the natives were fit to rule themselves as they had no integrity nor moral fiber, being too long accustomed to a foreign rule" (Soueif 99). The British colonizers are undermining the Egyptian society and questioning its morality. This is done on purpose to extend the British custody over Egypt under the plea that the Egyptians are not fit to rule themselves. Egyptians are like children who need to be governed by the adult civilized British. Anna comments:

> I have started to believe that what we are doing is denying that Egyptians have a 'consciousness of themselves'-.... and that by doing so we settle any qualms of conscious as to our right to be here. So long as we believe that they are like pets or small children, we can remain here to 'guide them; and help them 'develop'. But if we see that they are as fully conscious of themselves and their place in the world as we are, why then the honourable thing is to pack up and go. (Soueif 247)

Anna is aware that the British are ignoring the Egyptians' ability to run their country quite efficiently. In the same manner, some industrialists at the present such as Tareq, a friend of Amal, make contracts with the Israelis. Tareq claims that by bringing Israel's technology, he is shifting the power to the Arabs (Soueif 202). However, Deena says, "they're already talking of Israeli brains and Arab hands" which is a reiteration of the colonial domination over Egypt (Soueif 222). When the Zionists occupied Palestine, they pretended they wanted to teach the Palestinians farming and peasantry. However, "Israel" has taken the land by force (Soueif 422). Hence, normalization, a neocolonialist tactic with Israeli, is

quite similar to the theory of efficiency proposed by colonization. Emily Davis sheds light on this notion arguing that:

> Low-wage Egyptian agricultural workers are no match for Israeli agribusiness, which is part of a powerful regional economy backed by American military muscle. These contemporary neocolonial economic conditions exacerbate fissures in national politics regarding the right path for Egypt, just as the presence of the British disrupted precarious nationalist coalitions in the early twentieth century. (par. 14)

Davis underscores how nationalists in the past and in the present are under economic pressure. The colonial movement still takes advantage of Egyptian resources and industries by claiming that they are teaching the Egyptians how to invest in their economy.

Soueif also underscores the question of education under colonialism and after independence. Mr. Willcocks, who is against the British mandate over Egypt, calls attention to the point that "Little is done to educate them to learn how to govern themselves" (Soueif 99). Mr. Willcocks is quite aware that the British Agency does not support any educational programs for Egyptians. This point underpins the reason why the British neglected education which is to keep the Egyptians ignorant; consequently, the British will keep ruling Egypt. In the same context, schools in the villages, such as Tawasi, are being closed down by the government in the present. The pretext is that the teachers in these schools are terrorists and extremists. The government's claim is a mere lie since those teachers are educated and open minded. The closing of the schools increases ignorance and illiteracy among the working class especially the fellaheen (Soueif 123-26). The Egyptian government, like British colonialism, does not prioritize improving education. Both parties try to keep the Egyptians ignorant in fear of revolution and opposition since 'knowledge is power;' to borrow Michel Foucault's words. Therefore, colonialism takes advantage of depriving the Egyptians of power and knowledge to otherize them and eventually colonize them.

Soueif's novel sheds light on how the British fuelled and perpetuated sectarian issues between the Muslims and the Copts on different occasions in the novel (Soueif 99). This stirring of sectarian

problems gave the British Agency the right to interfere in Egypt under the banner of protecting the Copts. The Copts, according to the British Agency, are the real people of Egypt (Soueif 99). This strategy is repeated in the present as Amal points out: "Well, they're trying to pass some bill through congress about their duty to protect the Christian minority in Egypt, and of course that's the game the British played a hundred years ago and people know that. It just stirs up bad feeling" (Soueif 186). The colonial and neo-colonial movements, whether the British in the past or America in the present, claim their right to defend Christians only to have the rein of power over Egypt.

The first axis leads both characters to question the inevitability of colonization. Soueif is aware that "Even God cannot change the past" (3). However, she questions whether Arabs, and Egyptians in particular, can truly unfetter themselves from colonization. In the past, Anna wonders "It is very hard, listening to him, not to feel caught up in a terrible time of brutality." Sir Charles tells Anna how the English Empire expands by colonizing other nations such as Egypt and Sudan; as a result, many innocent people are dying and being deprived from their natural resources. Therefore, Anna feels a sense of entrapment in an incurable situation due to the West's greed and ambitions (Soueif 39-40). Soueif observes how the present is no better than the past. This is revealed when Amal ponders upon the dreadful things happening in Egypt and the Arab world. Arab countries are still entrapped in a horrible time of cruelty imposed by the colonial imperial spirit. Whereas Anna is sure that British dominance will end, Amal questions whether the Egyptians are truly liberated from colonization (Soueif 100-1). This juxtaposition between the past and the present consecutively underlines Soueif's previous notion. In addition, this parallel between the past and the present status quo questions the future of the Egyptian people and whether they will always succumb to neocolonial powers.

In a conversation between prominent intellectual Egyptians, Mahgoub comments that "The future being planned for us is a terrible one" (Soueif 223). The Egyptian intellectual is aware of being caught in the power struggle and the difficulties encountered in fighting Western colonial intervention. Dr. Ramzi states that: "It is history … The conjunction of certain conditions. After a hundred years the historians will say what happened was inevitable. If we look now at Egypt a

hundred years ago, we see that what happened was inevitable" (Soueif 223). Dr. Ramzi holds a pessimistic view that Egyptians are at the intersection of different conflicting colonial powers which will lead them to repeat the past.

However, the spirit of defying the inevitability dwells in different characters. Anna says, *"My name is Anna Winterbourne. I do not hold (Much) with those who talk of the Stars governing our fate"* (Soueif 7). Anna believes that one can control his/her destiny whatever the circumstances are. Moreover, Deena pinpoints that one can change history since the real problem is that some Egyptians are allowing others to make their history. Deena is sick of playing the role of the victim, and she calls for an action instead of raising empty political mottos against the colonial intervention (Soueif 228). Deena's analytical points provide a critique against some Egyptians, such as Dr. Ramzi, who maintain the idea of the futility of fighting colonialism (neocolonialism at present).

Soueif's mezzaterra is a necessity for the Egyptian society. Firstly, the British deconstruct the value of independence by means of *temporalizing*. Though they evacuate the Egyptian lands, the colonial spirit still poisons people's, along with the government's, mentality and ideology "[H]istory can be changed … it's people who make history. The problem is that we are allowing other people to make our history" (Soueif 228). Diaspora is a colonial means to guarantee control because dispersion indicates weakness, i.e. no resistance. Sectarianism, also provoked by the colonizers, takes the Egyptian society apart. The inevitability of history, as discussed earlier, proves that whether the colonizer is present or absent, the result has no alternatives. All of the above predicaments represent the "*a*" of differ*a*nce and of temporalizing, to borrow Jacque Derrida's term (See *Margins of Philosophy*). The value of Soueif's map is navigating the detour of temporalizing. She diagnoses the problem and presents a panacea that can cure the poisoned Egyptian society. This cure-all medication is what she calls *mezzaterra*.

Soueif proposes a means of breaking this inevitability of history by creating a just hybrid world in which everyone participates and deflates the colonial hierarchies. Amal observes after the conversation with her intellectual friends that "There must be a way … of making a space for ourselves where we can make the best of ourselves" (Soueif 234). This echoes Soueif's idea about *mezzaterra,* which is a creative

common space for all humanity. Soueif defines *mezzaterra* as a "spacious meeting point, a common ground with avenues into the rich hinterlands of many traditions" (*Mezzaterra* 6). She aspires to a space where many cultures mingle freely without hierarchies and struggles. Sharif acknowledges the relationship between the different cultures:

> If there are elements of Western Culture in us, they have been absorbed through visiting your countries, learning in your institutions and opening ourselves to your culture. There we have been free to choose those elements that most suited our own history, our traditions and aspirations- that is the legitimate commerce of humanity. (Soueif 484)

Sharif admits the influence of the West upon Egypt; however, he stresses the freedom of choice. He is aware that one should have channels of communication with other cultures and take from them what is useful to his or her nation. In the same context, Said says, "Cultures and civilizations are so interrelated and interdependent as to beggar any unitary or simply delineated description of their individuality" (349). Cultures and nations are integrated through interaction and exchanging products, knowledge, or technology. Omar, for example, acknowledges and accepts his hybrid identity. When Isabel asks Omar if he considers himself an Egyptian, he says, "Yes. And American. And Palestinian. I have no problem with identity" (Soueif 50). Omar is able to take up different national identities at the same time. However, Homi Bhaba suggests that "Hybridity is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures" (qtd. in Davis). Therefore, there will be some sort of tension dwelling in the identity of the hybrid person. Nonetheless, the hybrid characters in *The Map of Love* manage to overcome these tensions such as Omar who feels quite comfortable with his hybrid identity. Hybridity as highlighted in the novel is comparable to the one referred to by Bhabha. The third term, or the third place, is that space in between. Hence, Soueif creates a *mezzaterra* in her novel by creating a hybrid space in which there is no hierarchies or intolerance between dissimilar characters from varied cultures. As shall be discussed in what follows, some elements of hybridity in the novel are the transnational characters, the tapestry, the epigraph, and the garden.

Some of the transnational characters are Nur, the daughter of Anna and Sahrif, and baby Sharif, the son of Isabel and Omar. Nur and

Sharif are the offspring of different cultures and religions. Their parents transcend their cultural differences and are united through love; as an outcome, their unity contributed to creating a *mezzaterra*. Anna and Isabel understand the difficulty and the precarious political situation in which Sharif and Omar are drawn. However, Anna and Isabel support their mates and help them irrespective of their different ideas, beliefs, and nationalities. In addition, both couples hope to raise their children up to enjoy a sophisticated and open-minded mentality that goes in accordance with varied nations and religions.

The tapestry made by Anna also functions as a kind of a *mezzaterra*. The tapestry is three-paneled, and it is intended to be a "Contribution to the Egyptian renaissance" since it will unite different elements and cultures by Anna. It depicts "the Goddess Isis, with her brother consort the God Osiris and between them the Infant Horus, and above them a Quranic verse" (Soueif 403). The verse is: "It is He who brings forth the living from the dead" (Soueif 491). In this way, "Anna's tapestry, when complete, highlights the fact of regeneration and resurrection and its possibility" (Davis par. 22). This tapestry also represents the transnational unity between Anna and Sharif in the past, and Isabel and Omar in the present. Both couples produce a Horus who is Nur and baby Sharif. Furthermore, the tapestry plays a key part in the novel since it embodies three religions: the ancient Egyptian religion, Christianity, and Islam. Thus it becomes a *mezzatera* encompassing different religions and cultures, and it symbolizes a transnational unity. This artistic piece connects not only religions but also love stories. Yvette Katherine Leboeuf says,

> The tapestry connects many mirroring love stories: that of Isabel and 'Omar, that of Anna and Sharif, and that of Isis and Osiris, complete with the assassination of Sharif and Osiris, and the consequent implied assassination of 'Omar at the end of the novel (*Diasporic Writer* 35).

The tapestry's value in the novel lies not only in pacifying religions but also in reflecting human experiences and feelings. This reflection can become true when all the pieces of tapestry are put together into action.

The tapestry also functions as a metaphor for hope. The clash of cultures, the malicious practice of power by the British over the Egyptians, and inevitability of history make the picture dark for the

Egyptians to envision a better future. The tapestry gives this faint light in the dark tunnel that Egypt is lost in so that a better future becomes true. Manfred Lohmayer writes,

> the tapestry metaphor is as hopeful as the ending of *The Map of Love* gets: there is no happy ending for the characters of the novel, and the outlook for Egypt's future and the future of the whole Middle East seems grim, but a message of hope survives, if only as a mere image hidden in a trunk and ready to be re-discovered in the future. (*English Autumn* 39)

The novel does not bear a happy ending for the characters, but by combining and reconciling dichotomous representations in one frame, it creates the mezzaterra that can enable Egyptians to co-exist with all the eccentricities in their society.

Another element of hybridity which helps in creating a *mezzaterra* is the epigraphs before every chapter. These epigraphs are from a variety of writers, religions, and cultures from different eras. For example, there are quotations written by Mathew Arnold from England, Nagib Azoury from Lebanon, and John Monsell from Ireland. Some of the functions of these epigraphs are to foreshadow and comment on the events. This demonstrates how Soueif creates in her novel an open space for sharing knowledge and conversing amongst cultures.

The garden, made by Sharif to his daughter Nur, also becomes a hybrid space. This garden, which represents a significant page in Egypt's history, contains different plants from the East and West such as Magnolia and Palestinian Willow (Soueif 413). The variety of flowers and plants represents the diverse cultures being celebrated by Sharif and Anna. This garden sets an example to their child, Nur, to see the harmony amongst different cultures through planting varied plants from different spaces.

The *mezzatera* achieved in the novel came as a result of a unity of conscience between the characters. Sharif in his article says:

> Our only hope now –and it is a *small* one- lies in a unity of conscience between the people of the world for whom this phrase itself would carry any meaning. It is difficult to see the means by which such a unity can be effected. But it is in its support that these words are written. (Soueif 484)

Both Sharif and Anna achieved a kind of unity of conscience since both of them accept and respect each other's beliefs and traditions. In addition, they celebrate the traditions of both Christianity and Islam. Sharif brings in a Christmas tree and decorates it for his daughter, Nur. In a similar vein, Anna celebrates Ramadan with her husband's family (Soueif 383).

The above-mentioned quotation is echoed in *mezzatera*. This emerging consciousness breaks the stereotypes and hierarchies. The hierarchies of the colonizer and the colonized are shattered between the two love couples. In the same context, Said calls for "re-thinking and re-formulating historical experiences which had once been based on the geographical separation of peoples and cultures" (371). Said's calls for re-evaluating history are similar to what Soueif adheres to in *The Map of Love* and *Mezzaterra*.

To conclude, *The Map of Love* is a rich novel in which Soueif problematizes the history of Egypt after its independence from the British colonization because of the lack of real progress. Egyptians still suffer from foreign interventions along with terrorism, ignorance, and poverty. Even though there is no direct force from Western powers after Egypt's independence, Egypt is still controlled by political and economic agendas which are the tactics of neocolonialism. Nonetheless, Soueif defies the inevitability of colonization and hierarchies constructed by the West through creating a *mezzaterra*. Soueif's hope of living in a common ground for all humanity is translated into the novel by the success of the love relationships and by aspiring to a unitary consciousness. All the afore-discussed representations of what mezzaterra juxtaposes spotlight acceptance rather than resistance, which can exhibit the essence of Soueif's vision for a better Egypt.

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Received 5/1/2016