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(Im)possible encounters, possible
(mis)understandings between the west and its
other: the case of the Maghreb

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(IM)POSSIBLE ENCOUNTERS, POSSIBLE (MIS)UNDERSTANDINGS
BETWEEN THE WEST AND ITS OTHER:
THE CASE OF THE MAGHREB

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by
Tanja Stampfl
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Abstract

My work deals with what I call (im)possible encounters, possible (mis)understandings between the West and the Rim of the World (in my case The Maghreb). I focus on writers (such as Paul Bowles, Patricia Highsmith, Edith Wharton, Tayeb Salih, Ahlam Mosteghanemi, Ahdaf Soueif) who stepped across the cultural dividing line to claim a voice of their own; a voice that enabled them to represent and at times misrepresent the host culture they chose to live in, and which acts as a “lieu” and at times “milieu de mémoire.” It is what the late Edward Said aptly called “intertwined histories, overlapping territories.” I analyze the trope of shared space, food, song, pleasure, sexuality, laughter, and even the concept of time between the cultures as they appear in *In Morocco*, *The Sheltering Sky*, *Tremor of Forgery*, *Season of Migration to the North*, *Memory in the Flesh*, and *Map of Love*. My approach is variational in that it seeks to look at what Raymond Williams termed the “alternative”: a telling that looks at both sides of the story—from the *bottom up* as well as from the *top down*. Suffice it to add that my way of seeing and/or narrating is hybrid insofar as it draws on Maghrebian, American, and European history, culture, and story-telling. It is meant to be worldly: its intention and method goes so far as to break down the boundaries of race, gender, creed, and even pleasure. I examine three works written by Western authors and three novels written by North African authors in order to trace and classify (mis)presentations of the other. My goal is to implement a way of reading that transcends Manichean binaries and to introduce *Mezzaterra*, a utopian meeting ground made up of fragments of recognition between various cultures, as a concept inherent in Post-Colonial literature and a transnational world. In tracing these encounters, I re-contextualize the actual time and space of shared history while reading the narratives not as unique depictions of encounters but as classic examples of (mis)recognitions between cultures.

Reading Mezzaterra: Arab-Western Encounters in The Maghreb

In a transnational world, where cultures, religions, cuisines, and lives constantly overlap and flow into each other, the encounter between people is of essential importance. Even though we constantly cross paths, have instant access to cultures half a world away, and mingle and mix with individuals of all possible backgrounds, origins, and beliefs, how much are we aware of this constant flow of exchanges, and can understand or even recognize the people within our reach? While it is mostly the more violent and radical encounters, such as acts of terrorism, political invasions, and other acts of aggression, that raise awareness, we rarely investigate these encounters or question the motivations as well as the consequences intricately linked to them. In fact, our understanding of other peoples and cultures still has to catch up with the technological advances and economic developments that bring us into close contact with each other across the globe. Immigration, for example, more than ever, is perceived as an existential threat both in the United States and in Europe.¹ The expansion of the European Union shows this problem all too clearly, as it grew without making room for the ensuing consequences.² While the interaction between people and their movements between places has been viewed through a political, economic, and scientific lens, I am interested in a comprehensive perspective that uses all of the above in analyzing the construction of identity—of the self and the other.

While every individual at any time in history is never just man or woman, black or white, American or African, it is especially today that these markers of identity have become more

¹ One example of the fear of an overwhelming influx of Latinos into the United States, for example, is the rather recent erection of the wall along the Mexican-American border.

² The influx of cheap workers from Eastern European countries, for example, together with stark fluctuations of the Euro and the controversial implementation of a European constitution have caused much mistrust in the European Union within Western European countries. Instead of creating a united Europe, the unification has caused more dissent. On the one hand, individual countries like Ireland have affirmed their own identity and reject a complete assimilation into a European union; on the other, the new constellation of countries and the inherent challenges to nation states have strengthened the independence movement of regions such as Kosovo.

flexible, their natural fluidity stretched just a little further. Too often what are complicated situations, such as the conflict between Israel and Palestine, are being reduced to simplistic power structures or dismissed altogether. To contextualize and situate these new developments in our social transnational interactions, we need a new paradigm that goes beyond traditional dichotomies and thus draws on national, racial, gender, religious, *and* sexual constructions of the self and the other. My own identity offers an example of these overlapping markers and partly explains my interest in this research. I am an Italian citizen, who grew up in an autonomous border region, Alto-Adige/Südtirol, speaking German and acquiring Italian as a second native language. Now, I am married to an American in the United States while I am teaching and writing in the English department of a university. So, I deal with legal issues in Italian, talk to my family in a German dialect, and lead my (professional and personal) life in Louisiana in English. For individuals who live a transnational existence, such issues are more than a matter of translation and language skills; rather, a clear national identity is in dispute. How much can we cling to the home country when we have left it? And how much does a new culture influence the way we see our own heritage?

What we need then is an approach that allows for intersections, crossings, and overlappings of various selves within us and with a variety of others in the world. This concept I find verbalized in basic form in Ahdaf Soueif collection *Mezzaterra*. The word “mezzaterra” is an original term; Soueif creates it by combining the two Italian words for “half” or “middle” (mezza) and “world” or “ground” (terra), thus literally invoking the middle ground, an expression of compromise and balance and the global potential for this concept. A meeting ground, no less, which is never quite complete as the “half” or “mezza” indicates. It is necessarily fragmentary.

Soueif uses the term primarily as a state of mind, indicating the various facets that make up who we are. Mezzaterrans, according to Soueif, inhabit “an area of overlap, where one culture shaded into the other, where echoes and reflections added depth and perspective, where differences were interesting rather than threatening, because they were foregrounded against a backdrop of affinities” (*Mezzaterra*, 7). In her description of this common ground, Soueif emphasizes its inherent Arabic roots. She situates Mezzaterra in Arabic history and seems to provide it as a model specific to the relations between the West and the Arab world when she describes it as “a territory imagined, created even, by Arab thinkers and reformers starting in the middle of the nineteenth century when Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt first sent students to the West and they came back inspired by the best of what they saw on offer” (6). Soueif challenges old assumptions like the equation of the West with science and social justice, when those in fact were partly imports to Europe from the Arab world. The two cultures, as other cultures, cannot be easily separated for they inhabit the same ground and shape and influence each other, as they have done over centuries.

Mezzaterra, as I use it here, acts as a three-dimensional model of identity construction, and a way of re-reading the intersections between race, gender, nationality, sexuality, and politics in literature. The scope of this dissertation allows for only a limited application of Mezzaterra in transnational literature. I have chosen texts from the twentieth century because this century has challenged notions of identity probably most strongly as it witnessed wars on a scale never seen before, the drawing of new borders that led to the challenge of the nation state, and the increase of voices that have traditionally been silenced. I thus situate this model at the intersection between discourses of critical race studies, feminism, and post-colonial discourse in attempt to do justice to the complexity of identity constructions and power negotiations as we experience them in a transnational world.

I.

Most often encounters between cultures—especially between Europe and Africa, the Caribbean and Asia—have been the focus of post-colonial studies. When Edward Said called for the re-evaluation of literature in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1979), he arguably marked the beginning of that field. The term post-colonial in literature refers to works written in and about the Commonwealth, including under-represented ethnic groups in the United States, and mostly deals with notions of Empire.³ Invariably, the focus on Empire has created binary oppositions that can run their course through post-colonial criticism. Albert Memmi in particular has qualified the distinction between the two groups in his seminal theoretical work *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957). Memmi uses the distinction in order to draw attention to the oppressed state of people in colonies but also to people ‘colonized’ by social and racial hierarchies, such as African-Americans. Even though notable critics like Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Ania Loomba, for example, have emphasized the impossibility of a Manichean dichotomy⁴, as long as the focus is on Empire, the relation between the powerful and the oppressed, we cannot move beyond a binary discourse. In no way do I want to discredit or devalue these works, for they were necessary to create awareness and to verbalize oppressions that hitherto were simply accepted as normal social hierarchies, upheld by the presumed inherent right of the more powerful. In a colonial situation, therefore, at the beginning of a civil rights movement—which would not have

³ I am capitalizing Empire because I am referring to the notion of Empire as Said explains it.

⁴ Homi Bhabha for example has proposed the concept of the hybrid as a transgression between various cultures and as a shifting identity marker, and many post-colonial critics and scholars have cried out against the homologizing between the various countries and peoples that are all being discussed under the larger name of “colonized” or “Third World.”

been possible without critics who emphasized difference—this approach was unavoidable.⁵ In today's world, however, where most colonies have become independent and civil rights have become part of open discourse, we need to re-evaluate power hierarchies and the construction of identities. Even though traditional colonization has virtually ended, border disputes, invasions, terrorism, and economic exploitation have not. At the same time, the ways we interact with each other, the means at our disposal and the progress in the realm of civil rights call for a more inclusive and complex discourse. In other words, while these binary constructions served a political purpose, literature and lived reality offer a far more intricate and interactive picture. Now that we have drawn the broad strokes of oppression and tyranny, we must look at the specific locales and moments when these acts of oppression and resistance take place in literature in order to analyze not the imposition of hierarchies but the negotiation of power at work.

In order to find this meeting ground, physical and geographical locations offer a useful lens. In his influential exploration *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Paul Gilroy shifts from analyzing racial binaries in one place to an investigation of blackness and black culture in any country surrounding the Atlantic: "In opposition to both [...] nationalist or ethnically absolute approaches, I want to develop the suggestion that cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (15). In a Caribbean context, moreover, Antonio Benitez-Rojo introduces the concept of the Repeating Island. Similar to the Black Atlantic, for Benitez-Rojo, "The Caribbean is an important historico-economic sea and, further, a cultural meta-archipelago without center and without limits, a chaos within which there is an island that proliferates endlessly" (*Repeating Island* 9). Without generalizing the manifold

⁵ The term 'civil rights' as I use it here is inclusive and refers to race, gender, and sexual orientation.

experiences of Caribbean people, or Africans, both critics concentrate on a fixed geographical point because it serves as the location for the tensions and histories of a people. While the cultural, political, and linguistic barriers may remain, the geographical location becomes the literal, symbolic, and metaphorical meeting ground between various and often opposing cultures.⁶ Rather than following and analyzing one culture in particular, therefore, critics like Gilroy and Benitez-Rojo allow for the mingling of many people and ideas in one place.

Gilroy and Benitez-Rojo's models are useful even though limited to the Black and/or Caribbean experience and history. Edouard Glissant's "Poetics of Relation" (1989), however, proposes a more inclusive discourse, "in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (11). Glissant applies his concept of relation specifically to the colony and elaborates on the quest for identity that is "spoken multilingually" and transcends political and cultural homogeneity and pressures (19). The main site of investigation for Glissant is not one people, but "the absolute unknown [...] Not just a specific knowledge, appetite, suffering, and delight of one particular people, not only that, but knowledge of the Whole" (8). This mode of investigation, the poetics of relation, is not unidirectional, but includes a totality of experiences. Glissant's concept of the w/whole speaks directly to the possibility of shedding one's preconceived notions of the other, of being completely open to what one might expect in the void, and at the same time signals acknowledgment of the other as a whole, meaning a complex and multi-layered being. As a psychological approach, the poetics of relation seems especially conducive to the analysis of transnational encounters and cross-cultural communication.

I see the most useful model emerge from the synthesis of an all-inclusive approach with a specific location. The encounter offers this synthesis because it is rooted in a concrete

⁶ Among other studies that welcome a more geographical approach and focus on shared spaces are also Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands = La Frontera*, Fernand Braudel's studies on the Mediterranean, and Transatlantic Studies.

geographical, political and historical moment, while constituting the grounds for the negotiation of power(lessness), meaning(lessness), and (mis)understanding. In advocating Mezzaterra as an inclusive paradigm, I chose The Maghreb as the location for my inquiry. Though The Maghreb offers specific points of interest in analyzing encounters—such as its westernmost position of the East, its Northernmost location of the South, and its access to the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, which characterize it as a vital participant in ancient and modern world history, and the varied populations who inhabit it—the combination of that location with the wider paradigm of the Mezzaterra fuses a general and inclusive approach to a specific moment in history. We constantly negotiate, challenge and understand power and identity in specific locations, and these moments serve as a model for a more general understanding of encounters between peoples. Put differently, we need a specific geographical point of reference for our inquiries, for it is the influences at play in that place at that moment that shape identity and power constructions, but the paradigm itself is not bound to any one place in particular.

This emphasis on “becoming” and the dialectic nature of cultural identity has been central in diaspora studies and Deleuzian theory. Stuart Hall for example has delineated two models for cultural identity: one is static and fixed, while the other is in flux:

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of “becoming” as well as “being.” It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (*Theorizing Diaspora*, 236)

Interpreting cultural encounters and transnational migrations as contributing factors to the continuous changing of cultural and national identities⁷ challenges simple binary oppositions

⁷ While nationhood and citizenship form a central focus in diaspora studies, these same concepts are being questioned by the condition of diaspora as Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, for example, explain in their edited collection *Theorizing Diaspora*: “Diaspora forces us to rethink the rubrics of nation and nationalism, while refiguring the relation of citizens and nation-states” (7).

between the colonizer and the colonized, the “First” and “Third” World. In fact, diaspora itself has evolved from a notion of forced emigration and slavery to a concept referring to chosen exiles and better opportunities abroad. Vijay Mishra has distinguished these various stages of evolution and has called the later form the “new diaspora,” while critics like Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma have named the diaspora generation of chosen exiles “new cosmopolitans.” The encounter between cultures and the subsequent investigation and analysis of one’s own belonging and cultural identity in literature have become the focus of cosmopolitan theory.

Gilles Deleuze’s distinction between history and becoming serves as an illustration of what Mezzaterra aims to accomplish. Deleuze calls history a sequence of events which serve the main purpose of facilitating discussions beyond history; put differently, history provides a starting point, but is never itself the subject of inquiry. Only by entering history, returning to the specific moment in time, or, as Deleuze puts it “to go back into the event” in all its contradictions, “to take one’s place in it ... to grow both young and old in it at once, going through all its components or singularities” enables “Becoming.” Deleuze reiterates that belonging “isn’t part of history; history amounts only to the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to ‘become,’ that is, to create something new”(Control and Becoming). The reconstruction of this event in history, I argue, can most easily be found in the encounter between people, as they directly shape each other’s ideas and perceptions, sometimes actively, sometimes passively. The Deleuzian event, therefore, functions similarly to the way Slavoj Zizek’s defines the encounter, which “cannot be reduced to symbolic exchange: what resonates in it, over and above the symbolic exchange, is the echo of the traumatic impact. While dialogues are commonplace, encounters⁸ are rare” (*Organs Without Bodies*, xi). Encounters

⁸ Every future use of the word encounter will be based on Zizek’s definition.

transform notions of identity and nationhood, addressing what Stuart Hall calls “hidden histories.”⁹ What emerges then from the general discussion of the critics above, is a shift in focus to either geography or history, a tangible place and a precise time, which signals a desire for exact markers in the discussion of culture, identity, and power. Secondly, the inclusion of a non-literary subject, such as geography and history, in a literary discussion shows the limitations of departmentalized methods of inquiry in a globalized world. It is not possible to discuss history without geography, nor to read literature without a sense of one’s history.

II.

Resonating with the various models and schools outlined above, two critics in particular have chosen the encounter as a locus of analysis. Homi Bhabha and Marie Louise Pratt propose theoretic approaches to transnational encounters that expose the values inherent in traditional discourse as well as its shortcomings. Even though they attempt to provide a new lens and to break through dichotomies, in the end they engage in and thus support Manichean binaries.

In his seminal study *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha conceptualizes hybridity as a new lens of reading world literature in general, and approaching others in particular. Like Hall, Bhabha defines identity as a fluid process that challenges itself constantly in its encounter with the other. He maintains that “If cultural diversity is a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics or ethnology, cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements *of* culture or *on* culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity” (50). He is thus interested primarily in the space that lies in between the two different cultures, his so-called ‘third space.’ This is where he locates the beginning of knowledge, even though this realization will never lead to a full recognition of the self.

⁹ More specifically I will analyze which stories are hidden within these histories, and how useful narration is in unearthing them.

Hybridity has no [...] depth or truth to provide: it is not a third term that resolves the tension between the two cultures, or the two scenes of the book, in a dialectical play of ‘recognition.’ The displacement from symbol to sign creates a crisis for any concept of authority based on a system of recognition: colonial specularity, doubly inscribed, does not produce a mirror where the self apprehends itself; it is always the split screen of the self and its doubling, the hybrid. (162)

Bhabha’s ‘colonial specularity’ connotes a binary distinction between colonizer/colonized or western/non-western, whereby the latter in each pairing fights against marginalization and refuses to be defined as the negative of the other. Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon, for example, have demonstrated how the colonized have access only to the ‘superior’ culture, history, and norms of the colonizer and thus necessarily are constructed as inferior. Only by imitating the white, Western colonizer—an impossible feat since the native will never be fully recognized as belonging to the master race—does the colonized gain recognition and respect from the white oppressor.¹⁰ Rather than focusing on the outcome of the encounter between different cultures, Bhabha emphasizes the encounter itself. He views it as a process in flux that is never stable and always in the making. Even though a true hybrid in Bhabha’s definition lacks any sense of connection, homeland, or identity, since all these remain unattainable in a state of constant unrest, the third space enables a view that is interested in intersections and momentary recognitions of the other.

A more stable and localized definition of an encounter emerges in Marie Louise Pratt’s concept of contact zones, which she defines as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the

¹⁰ I am referring here primarily to Albert Memmi’s study *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), and Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), but there are numerous other critics and works that explain this dichotomy and racial hierarchy, like Jamaica Kincaid in *A Small Place* (1988), Henry Louis Gates in *The Signifying Monkey* (1988), Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* (1993), and Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1979) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) just to mention a few.

globe today” (4). Like Bhabha, Pratt emphasizes the irregularity in the two cultural positions and the ensuing struggle to recognize and understand the other and the self. Pratt, moreover, by using the term ‘contact,’ invites the reader to examine each encounter on its own terms, since it entails the active co-presence and interaction of two (or more) distinct cultures and ideologies. Pratt hereby stresses particular encounters where individuals interact actively with each other.

In contrast to Bhabha’s third space, Pratt bases her analysis on the existence of an ‘originary’ self, a self that is highly aware of its connections and position in society. The interacting parties in the contact zone pursue very specific motives and manipulate their position and image regarding the other they encounter. For example, in tracing and analyzing a variety of travel literature, Pratt points to what she calls ‘anti-conquest’, or “strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert their European hegemony ... The main protagonist of the anti-conquest is a figure I sometimes call the ‘seeing-man,’ ... whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess” (7). The European traveler portrays himself as an innocent observer while at the same time asserting his superiority. The Western scientist, capitalist, or ethnographer is conscious of his privileged position in the foreign world and, therefore, in order to secure the cooperation of the locals and the success of his expedition, is careful to demonstrate his genuine and innocent intentions towards the other. As contact zones acknowledge the active process in an encounter, it seems that Pratt locates agency primarily with the European traveler who consciously manipulates the way he is perceived, but in essence remains untouched and unaltered by the encounter. Rather than an interactive space that causes profound changes and reactions from both parties, Pratt’s ‘seeing man’ remains in control as he uses the local for his own purposes.

Both of these theorizations of encounters are valuable as they recognize the specificity of the encounter and its circumstances in Pratt’s argument, and as they acknowledge the fluidity of

identity in Bhabha. It is, however, again the combined quality of these theories rather than either one standing on its own that offers the most, as combining them localizes the encounter *and* theorizes ongoing constructions of identity. The fact that identity is constantly changing and adapting should not preclude the possibility of any stable identity. For while new ideas, cultures, and concepts certainly produce change in the way we perceive ourselves, these changes shape and revise current notions of our self rather than recreate it from scratch.¹¹ This notion of fluidity is most helpful in analyzing constructions of power and identity in literature if we perceive it as coexistent with a stable core, a sense of self that always remains.

There will always be some parts of an individual that describe him or her more than others in different times and places. One's nationality, for example, does not necessarily matter if one stays in one's native country. I am Italian; this will not change about me. It forms a stable part of my identity. What does change, however, is the meaning of my being Italian. First of all, it only becomes a conscious part of my identity if it is in any way challenged or emphasized, either through the contact with people who are not Italian or by an active engagement with the subject of nationality. Secondly, being Italian signifies differently based on the location, such as the United States, South America, Europe, Africa, or Asia. In the United States, an Italian identity might blend easily into the perception of a European identity, while in Europe a Swede perceives his or her nationality very differently from an Italian. Furthermore, a Spaniard might define an Italian as a refined and cultured person, while a German or Austrian equates Italians

¹¹ Again, to provide a concrete example for the shaping rather than a re-creation of identity, we can take national identity. We only become aware of the meaning of our national identity if it is threatened or challenged in any way. If we travel abroad, our nationality might become a main marker for others to recognize and categorize us, or we might be confronted with a very different understanding of our nationality than we conceive of it. It is only at that moment that we feel the need to re-define and re-vise our national belonging and our definition of what it means to be American, Italian, or Moroccan. As we thus shape and adjust our understanding, we still maintain a basic understanding, a root explanation of our national identity and at no time—unless we wish to do so—do we cease to be American, Italian, or Moroccan altogether. It is the synthesis of the various meanings that come together that shape our understanding and thus support and enhance our own identity rather than undermine it.

with guest workers and ice-cream vendors. Thirdly, the time in history, the moment, shapes its final meaning. The term Italian might have served as a geographical marker before 1861, but could only become a national marker of identity after Garibaldi unified the various regions and city states. These examples illustrate the complex interplay between stable markers of identity and the fluidity in identity construction, though nationality as a concept is by no means stable.¹²

If Bhabha's notions of self slip through our fingers, however, Pratt's understanding of identity—especially Western identity—is too fixed and thus remains essentially unquestioned. Due to the categories she establishes, such as the naturalist-hero, the capitalist vanguard, and the social exploratress, Pratt does not analyze constructions of the Western self but uses it as starting points of her analysis. She acknowledges that the Western travelers will momentarily adjust their behavior, but the emphasis is on the representation of the native, the way he or she is influenced by the Westerner while the explorer remains untouched and unchanged. Where both Bhabha and Pratt fall short then is their subscription to binary constructions of identity. Both critics essentially distinguish between the Westerner and the other. Pratt analyzes Western travelers to the Americas during colonialism and Bhabha discusses the post-colonial migrant. In either case, the sphere is limited as it allows only for two sides: Western and non-Western. By using these two concepts and opposing them to Westernness, both Bhabha and Pratt take an essential Westernness for granted, the image in the mirror, the starting point. Especially the unchallenged notion of the Westerner as the one in power runs rampant throughout post-colonial criticism and literature. While I do acknowledge that the Westerner is, in most cases, the colonizer, this simple equation reduces the other participants in the encounter automatically to the oppressed and assumes a one-directional interaction, even though, for example, especially early scientists and explorers depended on the expertise and knowledge of local guides. The notion of Westerner,

¹² Especially in a transnational world the importance and relevance of national markers has become questionable.

furthermore, is troubling, as not every Westerner entering unknown territories inhabits the same position of power. Pratt does include women in her analysis, but fails to comment in detail on the differences between the male and the female constructions of contact zones. In addition to gender, class makes a big difference in negotiating power in the colonies. Men like Humboldt, in Pratt's study, for example, come from a privileged background, equipped with servants, money, and enlightenment ideals. The combination of these attributes leads to a very specific encounter and cannot be generalized under the term "Westerner." If we subscribe to that underlying premise of the West as the 'originary self,' the self constructing the other, then we fail to do justice to the multiplicity of transnational interactions and cross-cultural (mis)understandings and in the end uphold traditional power structures and hegemonies. Such an approach will always lead us to categorize and read literary works *as already* "Third World" texts and "Western" works, when the two in reality overlap and coexist within each other.¹³

As Judith Butler and Benedict Anderson have shown in the construction of gender and national identity respectively, there is no founding movement or discovery of these concepts, but rather "a regular pattern of repetition" (Butler 145). In repeating and performing, we thus reinforce patterns that come to be identified as markers for national and gender identities. Kay Anderson has made a similar argument for the performative nature of what she calls "the fictionalized collectivities of 'Black,' 'White,' 'European,' 'Asian'" (197). In all of these constructions of selves and others the two (or more) parties are mutually exclusive and self-contained. It is the juxtaposition and inherent exclusiveness in discussing identity construction and, by extension, the encounters between different individuals and cultures that are most

¹³ The so-called Third world inside the West, highlighted by the high illiteracy rates and poverty in the United States and the immigrant ghettos in European capitals, and the internet, luxury living, and power commodities in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, all challenge such easy distinctions. Not only do the North and South, East and West, First and Third World live within each other, but they also depend on each other, one shaping the other in endless ways through business, politics, engineering and not the least with the migration of people.

incompatible with the world we live in. Not only do we share traits, experiences, and places with one another, but neither are our selves simple monoliths. Especially in academic discourses we privilege specific parts of what we think defines humanity, such as class in Marxism, gender in feminism, race in critical race theory, nationhood in post-colonial studies, sexual orientation in queer studies, and so on. By choosing and privileging one part of human identity, we aim to analyze and make sense of power structures in literature and in the world. In a way, of course, such a breakdown might be necessary, as it renders the vast expanse of human interaction more digestible and understandable. The danger inherent in these approaches, however, is the narrow focus it demands, the exclusive attention to *one* marker, *one* aspect of power, and *one* way of understanding the human condition, when in effect, we are much more complex than that.

Recent feminist and critical race studies, for example, have demonstrated how race and gender are difficult to separate. As Nancy Duncan affirms in the conclusion to her anthology *BodySpaces*, “gender and sexuality do not map neatly onto one another and are sites of contestation and resistance against exclusions and dichotomizing tendencies” (246). So while race studies and feminist studies both reject simple binaries that leave the female and the non-white inevitably at a disadvantage, they also in a way compete with each other, as they cannot simply be equated. An African-American woman might experience gender very differently from a Chinese woman, and a Caribbean man might view blackness differently from a Nigerian man. In establishing these broad categories we are in danger of homogenizing experience, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty has warned.¹⁴ More than granting these differences within the broader categories of race and gender, we need to include more markers that make up our identity, such as religion, sexual orientation, nationality, class, political conviction, etc. While these broader

¹⁴ See especially her essay “Under Western Eyes” which accuses Western feminism of reducing Third world women to two principles: woman as oppressed victim, and ‘third world’ as poor and uneducated. In this depiction Western feminists do not grant their sisters any form of agency but reaffirm traditional binaries and forms of oppression.

discourses are certainly valuable on an abstract level, therefore, in-depth and global analyses cannot be contained by single strands, but need to be multiple, inclusive, and specific.

I thus look at specific sites of interaction. One such site is the geographical location of The Maghreb in the twentieth century. Especially in post-colonial studies, the perception of Empire has to be acknowledged as differing between various locations and people in The Maghreb have experienced French, British, Spanish, Ottoman, and American forms of colonization. Each form of colonization signifies differently and creates interesting connections also between the colonizing countries as they compete against each other some times and forge alliances at other times. Thus the colonial situation was not the same in Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria and demands a more detailed analysis. Because of the predominant role the French played in the region and the continuing prominence of the French language, works written in and about The Maghreb have been discussed in Francophone studies, but are virtually missing from English studies of literature. Lastly, The Maghreb as a gateway between Africa and Europe has traditionally served as a marketplace of human interactions, similar to the way I read interactions in a global and transnational world.

Secondly, my analysis focuses on the encounter between cultures. In defining this encounter I find the image of the marketplace most helpful, as I don't envision a simple *tête-a-tête* between the Westerner and the Easterner, the American and the Arab, but rather an intermingling of Americans, Europeans, Arabs, Berbers, and Touareg. In reading the novels in this study, I am interested in the ways different cultures touch, understand and represent each other. Some characters only touch marginally, catch a glimpse of the other out of the corner of their eyes, while others collide and curse or love each other. The marketplace is a shared space, filled with noise and determined by outside events as much as by the personal agenda of each person participating in it. Each individual has his or her shopping list, his or her task to fulfill. In

reading the encounters between cultures in these novels, therefore, I analyze both the character's internal motivations and constructions of the self as well as the historical, political, and literary factors that influence the encounter and the character from without.

The third specific location of inquiry is the text. It documents and reconstructs the encounter, including some perspectives and ignoring others. It is stable in the sense that the words never change once they are printed; they live on the page unaltered. The words both transcend history as they are timeless and yet are rooted in history as they bear witness to a specific location and history that partially created the text. The narrative is also fluid as it obviously recounts only one perspective, pays tribute to one point of view, and thus necessarily alerts us to the missing voices and the legible traces of others. For even though the reader might only see one part of the scene, the one that pertains strictly to the protagonist, the text and the circumstance it describes always hint at the tracks of what is not included. The text, moreover, is also in dialogue with other texts, whether they be of that same genre, of texts written by the same author, or with texts about the same subject, location, or theme. While it is stable in time, therefore, the text itself forms an encounter, not only between reader, author, and character(s) at the time of reading, but with other times, different readers, and various authors at other times and other places. Like Mezzaterra, moreover, writing and the text have constituted a sense of home, especially for writers in exile, as they recreate and reconnect with their homeland and thus establish a sense of belonging on the written page.

In addition to specific geographical and textual locations, the body has become a useful trope, as it constitutes the location of desire and identity, while displaying the variety of visible markers of identity, such as gender, race, and class. Luce Irigaray, for example, equates a woman's rediscovery of herself with never "being simply one. It is a sort of universe in expansion for which no limits could be fixed and which, for all that, would not be incoherency"

(104). Even though gender and other markers can be constructed in a variety of ways, they contain a basic root, a common ground that lends them coherence and meaning. It is the body in the encounter that hears, smells, touches, and feels the outer world. The skin, as Judith Butler would have it, acts both as outer boundary of the self and first physical contact with the other.

In contrast to the emphasis on the seeing I/eye that is so prevalent in post-colonial theory and travel writing, Judith Bradford and Crispin Sartwell analyze the voice as both a physical part of the body and a signifier for agency. They reject the idea that the subaltern cannot speak, as Marx and Spivak proclaimed most famously, and instead identify the source of the problem as a lack of willingness to hear. They acknowledge the dialectical process in speaking and being heard, shifting the focus from the general seeing I/eye to specific encounters and negotiations of power:

That these voices are ‘in process’ means that the modes of speech are constantly changing, and the expectations about who can speak in what ways are shifting. Also, however, it is important to remember that if voices are interactive events, voices are also in process as the *abilities of listening* of different audiences change. Whether a voice is recognizable and how it is recognizable depends on the way people hear and respond to it. (201)

The quest for identity becomes a dialectical process that involves two (or more) sides and in turn forms and transforms identity for each in any particular moment in time. Especially the outcome of the most recent presidential elections in the United States invites us to revisit the discourse of race and power hierarchies.¹⁵

So while many schools and critics have advocated a more inclusive approach when looking at markers of identity such as class, gender, and race, most models and paradigms available still fall short of that goal and remain in essence two-dimensional. They investigate

¹⁵ As Shu-mei Shih points out, not much has happened in race discourse since the publication of “Race, Writing, Difference” in 1986. With the recent election of Barack Obama, however, race becomes once again an active topic for discussion as it has gained in complexity.

either the colonizer/man/white/heterosexual *or* the colonized/woman/black/homosexual, but not *both* at the same time in the same place.

III.

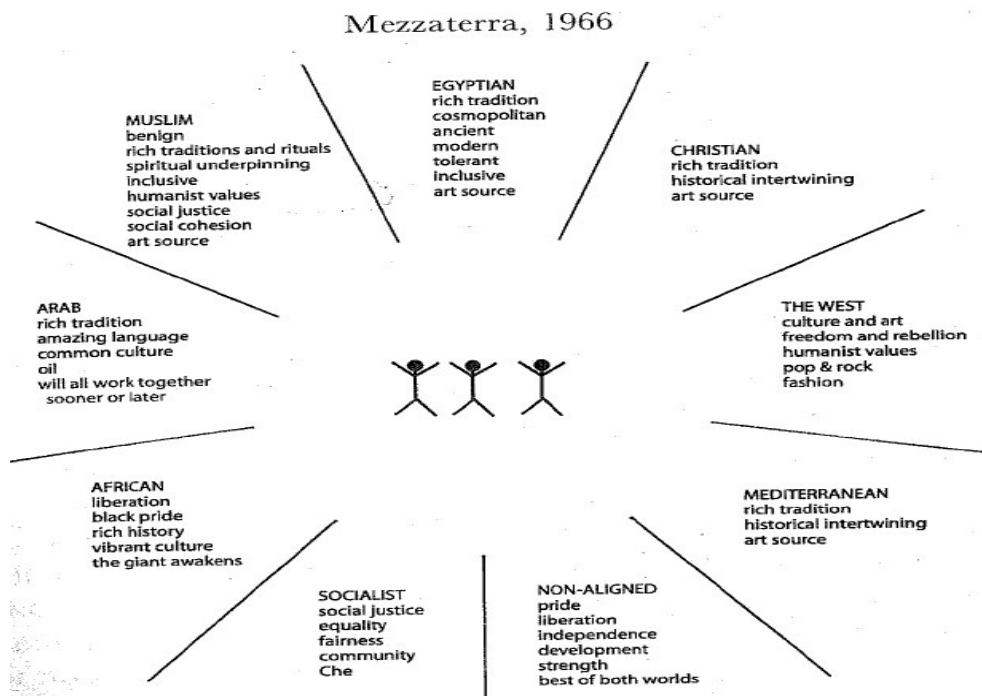
More than a mere location of inquiry, Soueif's Mezzaterra is a utopia that provides comfort and acceptance for everybody willing to inhabit it. Especially in a transnational world where people's wanderings and migrations raise the pressing need for a stable homeland, a floating center that is not bound to a geographical location or the nation state, becomes useful if we imagine it as a state of mind. Despite foreign environments and strange faces, we can fit in and belong if we strive for the Mezzaterra, recognizing the common ground between us and other people. As many cross-cultural encounters entail some form of conquest and/or exploitation, Mezzaterra becomes an alternative. "This is the ground where everybody is welcome, the ground we need to defend and to expand. It is to Mezzaterra that every responsible person on this planet now stands to migrate. And it is there that we need to make our stand" (23). Mezzaterra thus becomes a state of mind and a way of feeling at home in the world.

Soueif envisions Mezzaterra as a common ground within the self that brings together the various strands of our identity. It acknowledges the various markers that, at any point in time, we identify with and pertain to. This notion of the self is split up into various facets, pertaining to geographical (Africa, Mediterranean, Egyptian), cultural (Egyptian, Arab, West, Africa), religious (Muslim, Christian), and political (Socialist, Non-Aligned) markers that, taken together, make up the self.¹⁶ These various strands, moreover, are not empty signifiers but have a specific meaning for Soueif. Graph 1.1 illustrates how she visualizes this utopian meeting ground. The form of the circle as an ideal geometrical figure with equal segments leading to a stable inner

¹⁶ It should be noted here that Soueif does not intend for this model to be highly personal; rather, she introduces it as a valid schemata for Egyptians in general.

core underline the harmony between the various strands and emphasize the utopian character of Mezzaterra that offers a sense of home and belonging in a de-stabilized world.

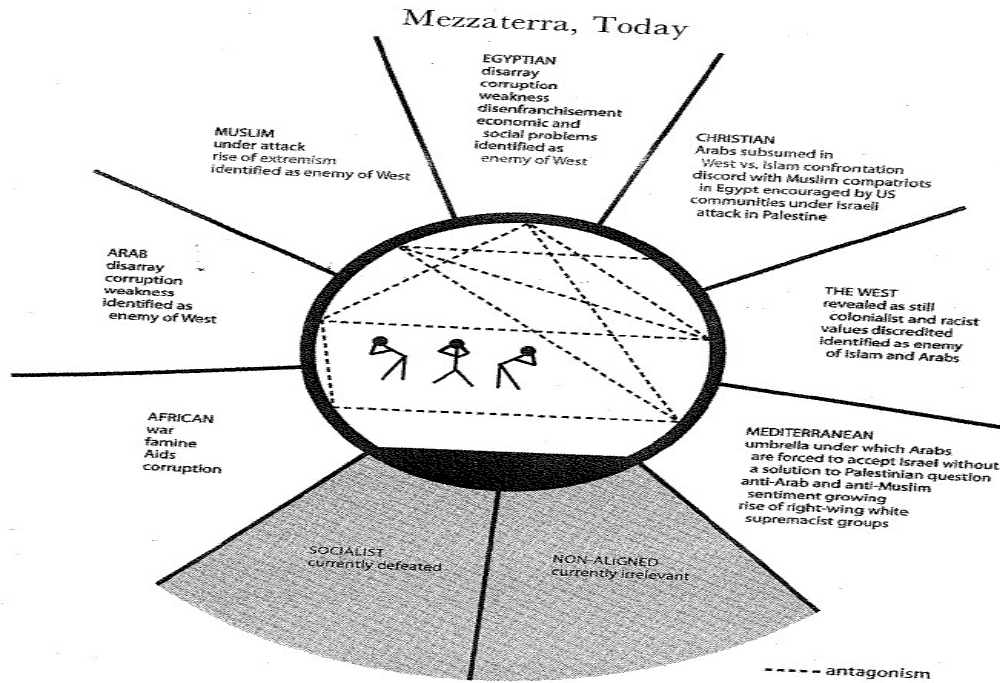
In splitting up her identity, Soueif identifies the varying forces tugging at and defining the self. Moreover, the various strands are mainly positive, consisting of “rich histories” and “humanist values,” which complement and sustain each other. For example, Muslim, Socialist, and the West all share humanist values. The inherent qualities of each aspect affirm and combine the other identity strands, which lead to the perception of a harmonious self in the middle. It stands for security and stability. The various markers, moreover, do not uphold traditional or Western dichotomies of science vs. culture, civilization vs. nature and refuse to prioritize one over the other. At the same time, this illustration also differentiates between Arab, Muslim, and African, and Western and Christian, when all too often those categories are being lumped together and collapse into simplified notions of identity.



Graph 1.1

In essence a very hopeful concept, Mezzaterra nonetheless leaves no doubt about its utopian character. As the whole title of the collection suggests, *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground* (2004), Mezzaterra consists of broken pieces or moments. We cannot imagine it as a safe haven always there for us to reach, but as fleeting moments that provide us with hope. In fact, one could argue that in order to reach the common ground something always needs to be broken, to be made incomplete in order to be reassembled, looked on from a different perspective, to be made other before it can become one's own. It is exactly that process of reaching Mezzaterra that Soueif highlights. Partly due to political and historical reasons, the common ground, especially between the West and the Arab world, has been challenged, as she shows in the second graph, a visualization of Mezzaterra today (2005).

As Graph 1.2 illustrates, the categories remain the same but have changed their meaning forty years later. Each segment now has negative characteristics and various influences are at odds with each other. It seems that one needs to renounce one of the segments in order to be able to uphold another one. The West and Islam now directly oppose each other as they identify themselves as one another's enemies. The strands of Egypt and Arabness collapse almost into one as they share the characteristics of disarray and chaos. Instead of each aspect reflecting positive influences from different strands of this identity, Mezzaterra has become a battle ground, or as Soueif calls it, "a 'which is better than which' project" (8). By contrasting one with the other without allowing for the possibility of including Muslim *and* Christian, Arab *and* Western influences, the common ground is in shambles. Soueif cannot celebrate Mezzaterra but rather invites us to create it, to be convinced of its existence. Her use of terms like common ground and meeting point, terms less scientific than 'contact' and 'hybridity,' indicate the intimate quality attached to *Mezzaterra*.



Graph 1.2

While Soueif's model is limited to an affective state of mind, a way of reconciling various identities within oneself, I am building on and expanding the basic concepts of Soueif's Mezzaterra into a new reading paradigm. The various facets of identity that she presents in the above graphs serve as a great model for identity construction of the self, but not only for the Arab self. While Mezzaterra serves as an international concept which applies first of all to transnational people in a globalized world, its focus on particular places and moments in history make it applicable also to national contexts. My assumption here is that, no matter where one is and how much one travels, encounters between us and others shape the way we look at ourselves and the world. By splitting up the various markers that make up a character, rather than, let's say, to focus primarily on gender *or* class *or* race, we will reach a more complex understanding of the character and his or her actions by substituting the *either/or* with *and*. Furthermore, by opening up the construction of the self, we can then apply the same complex image to the construction of the other. By making the other complex, thereby showing both the good and the bad, the

powerful and the weak, we might be able to transcend binaries of the self and the other. The other is no longer the outsider, the opposite, but merely the person confronting us at this moment. In locating sources of power and weakness in the self *and* the other, we can then investigate the power negotiations at play rather than relying on presumed established hierarchies. When does the power hierarchy change, even for a limited time? What are the discrepancies between the way the self constructs itself, and the way the other sees the self? Where can we locate these differences? How much agency does the character have, and how much influence does the specific situation wield?

In using Mezzaterra as a model to read identity construction from various perspectives, the individual markers need to be more complex. For in its symmetrical design Soueif's Mezzaterra might be just a little too neat to fit the jagged reality of identity construction. By creating eight equal segments, Soueif seems to suggest that each of these markers is equal in value and significance and that their number is fixed. This model is reductive because we have a variety of markers, maybe an unlimited amount of them. If eight markers of identity then are simplistic, too great a number of personal signifiers might run the risk of rendering any stable notion of identity ungraspable, as Bhabha suggests. What I would answer to that legitimate problem, is that while theoretically there might be an unlimited number of markers that make up our identity, in reality we make use and are conscious of a very manageable set of strands that will gain and lose weight in the overall make-up of our identity construction depending on the moment and circumstances. In addition, there are certain markers that remain more or less constant because they are what we identify most in normal circumstances. Depending on the individual person, these might be religion or politics, research interests, or social roles. When our normal circumstances change—we meet someone new, we move to a different location, or confront new ideas—each strand's weight will shift. So, if I teach a course on women's

literature, I might be more aware of my gender than my class. During elections, one's political conviction might take center stage over one's gender consciousness, and so on. It is in this sense then that our identities are flexible and fluid. This fluidity does not go so far, however, as to take away any stability in constructing our identity. Some basic categories remain mostly stable, but are weighted differently; they do not fit a symmetrical pie chart, but are rooted in a basic understanding of the self.

The application of these different markers in the analysis of literature necessarily demands a more interdisciplinary approach. A rather strict adherence to any one of the literary schools, such as feminism, critical race theory, post-colonial theory, or new historicism, becomes obsolete as each field offers only a limited perspective. Instead, Mezzaterra as a reading paradigm invites us to investigate encounters from all relevant perspectives. We can reconcile the different approaches above, for example, by highlighting their shared interest in the construction of and resistance to power in society. They all examine how individuals establish, justify and uphold power, while offering solutions as to how these hierarchies can be challenged and undermined. By including all of these approaches and acknowledging the complexity in the identity construction of the self and the other, therefore, we can focus on the dialectic process of power *negotiations*. For if we take for granted that woman is always weaker than man, the native always inferior to the colonizer, then we cannot hear the voices of the subaltern. We exclude them from discourse and do not listen when they do raise their voices. These might be moments, slivers of history, but they are worth paying attention to if we want to investigate power in its "capillary form of existence" (39) which Foucault has defined as "the point where power reaches into the very grain of the individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions, attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (*Power/Knowledge*, 39).

Secondly, we can use the model of Mezzaterra not only as an inside look into the construction of identity, but the middle of the circle that brings together the various strands signifies also a common ground between people, cultures, and ideas. Mezzaterra therefore stands also for the marketplace I mentioned above, a space that many different voices share and contest. This externalized application of Mezzaterra resonates directly with the internal construction of identity. If we are not prompted in any way to revise or explain certain parts of who we are, we probably don't engage much with our selves. In a way it is only through and in the encounter with the other (person, idea, location, circumstance, and so on) that we challenge and channel our selves. What Trinh Minh-Ha has called the "process of othering" therefore is a dialogic process, where "one is a being-for-other, but also a being-*with*-other. The seer is seen while s/he sees. To see and to be seen constitute the double approach of identity: the presence to oneself is at once impossible and immediate" (23). If there is no other, however, who prompts this awareness, the self also will not change. It remains uncontested and unaware. Any time, therefore, we discuss constructions of identity we necessarily must refer to encounters, to meeting points between the self and others. Rather than the image of the mirror, the self-reflection Minh-Ha and others seem to suggest, this process is not linear or two-dimensional. Instead of one individual facing another in visualizing the construction of identity, we need to picture the bustling marketplace, where moving bodies brush against and bump into each other. We are constantly nudged and prodded by new ideas, new faces, and new cultures as we touch and influence others in our complexities.

Establishing these categories shows layers in the construction of any identity, thus evading the trap of one-sidedness and simplistic notions of any culture. By giving us a variety of concrete markers, Mezzaterra opens up the floor for rational discussion. Instead of attacking or (mis)representing Arabs as a whole, we have concrete points of reference that can be explained,

discussed, and redefined. In fact, Graph 1.2. shows most clearly how the original markers carry different meanings: now they are mostly negative, and even more importantly, their characteristics have become narrow. They no longer address art, politics, and humanistic values. Instead, they now only pertain to religion and culture. If the two parts—in Soueif’s image, the West and the Arab world—become almost mutually-exclusive opposites, no harmony and complexity is possible any longer. Instead of a complex interplay between various strands, we now have a gridlock that forces one to choose sides, and rejects any possibility of the two truly co-existing. They negate each other. The problem in this second graph, therefore, lies not in the disagreement between the various strands—in fact, consensus is not a natural state and hardly ever leads to the creation of new understanding, as it merely affirms what everybody agrees on already—but in the narrowing of the categories. They have started to form (negative) mirror images of each other, rather than reflecting the variety of characteristics that describe them. By allowing first of all for the complexity of the self and the other, and secondly then by anchoring our discussions in the specific definition of each of these categories, rather than broad general principles or only select few strands, we can transform differences and tensions into fertile ground for new meaning.

Also in the physical encounter with other cultures, such an approach opens up the various intersections and validates encounters beyond the colonizer/colonized, self/other. In fact, by splitting up the self, the other does not become the non-self—that complete opposite that the mirror image seems to evoke again and again—the other becomes complex, layered, and we can acknowledge the similarities as well as the differences. In this way, differences cease being essential and threatening but become defined, specific categories that can be discussed, respected, and understood. Instead of a colonizer confronting the colonized, we can use more concrete and complex markers, such as an Muslim Indian upper-class woman meeting an

American Catholic nun. Moreover, the multiple layers in each individual should reflect the manifold cultures participating in the encounter. Let's take slavery as an example. It did not merely involve Africa—and here it needs to be said that the various regions, tribes and peoples the slaves came from also need to be distinguished—who provided the slaves and America where the slaves ended up. No, it involved Europe as a broker, the Caribbean as loading station, and the Native Americans as the work force to be replaced. Even more importantly, how do we analyze encounters where categories like colonizer and colonized do not fit easily because they do not happen along western-eastern or southern-northern lines?

So, how do we apply this concept of Mezzaterra to our reading and interpretation of literature? Firstly, it does justice to more recent post-colonial work that transcends North-South and East-West trajectories and provides a fresh glimpse of cultures and national literatures without the West as a necessary referral point. The West and its influences are maybe one part of the encounter but other factors, such as race, gender, religion, class, and political convictions for example become part of the scrutiny as much as the West or non-West. Much recent scholarly work, for example, has examined the migration and power constructions within the so-called Third World, such as Pallavi Rastogi's study on Indians in South African fictions and Michelle Wright's *Becoming Black*, where she analyzes constructions of blackness from German, French, Caribbean, African, British and American perspectives.

Secondly, Mezzaterra invites us to look at the shared places and shared histories in texts. Rather than following the trajectories of a character, it is important to illuminate the ways in which he or she interacts with others and to analyze these encounters closely. In the case of Port, one of the protagonists in *The Sheltering Sky*, for example, I argue that the way he interacts with the locals and the colonials in Algeria contradicts the image Port has of himself. While he thinks he is a world-open traveler, he turns out to be a tourist who buys people and their services with

money. His interactions, if examined closely, are merely transactions. So, by paying special attention to the encounter itself and reading it as a dialogic process in a specific context rather than a one-sided imposition (such as Pratt's seeing-man), texts such as *The Sheltering Sky* open up new possibilities for analysis.

Thirdly, Mezzaterra highlights the spectrum of cultures involved in any specific point in history. In my understanding of the encounter as a marketplace I explore the simultaneous and overlapping histories of characters from America, Europe, and North Africa. Since they share the same space at the same time in history, I am interested in how the various constructions of self resonate with but also challenge the perception of the other. The other, moreover, is not only the Maghrebian, but can be the French colonizer or the estranged homeland. In my analysis of *The Sheltering Sky*, for example, I look at the depiction and interaction between the American, British, French, Arab, and North African characters, which renders the reading of this work much richer than if we concentrate solely on the three American protagonists. Bowles wrote this novel in 1949, a time of stark revisions and changes for national identities. European colonial powers could no longer afford their colonies and slowly initiated the various processes of decolonization. While the British had not occupied Algeria, where Bowles set *The Sheltering Sky*, they had just granted independence to India in 1947. The Americans, on the other hand, had recently taken their stand as the new leaders on the world stage—a completely new role for the United States. So, the Mezzaterra in this case would be the various characters crossing and interacting.

Thirdly, I see this concept as important in contextualizing a work and writer. By situating Edith Wharton's *In Morocco* in its political, national, and textual context, for example, I argue that her orientalist travelogue about Morocco is an attempt at an American pioneer narrative. An expatriate living in France, Wharton writes about Morocco in order to reconnect with America

both as a writer and as a woman, two aspects that define much of her work and life. This analysis only emerges, however, when we fill in the French presence, Wharton's previous commentary on women's rights, and understand and explain the actions of The Maghrebians she meets.

Wharton's choice to present a text that is very much linked to other texts, both written by herself and by scholars, further illustrates how she foregrounds her role as a writer in constructing her own identity.

Lastly, Mezzaterra extends beyond one particular text. If we want to achieve a broad spectrum, an understanding of cross-cultural encounters, we need to read the various perspectives across nationalities, genres, and historical time periods. Ahdaf Soueif's *Map of Love*, for example, exposes orientalist behavior that is central to Edith Wharton's travelogue. At the same time, Wharton's and Mosteghanemi's narratives share the concern for conflicting emotions towards the homeland and it is in their writing that they both reconnect with it—mostly through the figure of the Arab woman. Wharton demonizes and belittles the Moroccan ladies because she wants to point out the lack of women's rights and women's independence in the United States. Khalid, the protagonist of *Memory in the Flesh*, shows extreme emotions towards Ahlam, a woman he thinks he loves, only because she becomes a substitute for Algeria, his home country, in his mind. Both Khalid and Wharton struggle with conflicting notions of self that are directly related to the struggle with their estranged homelands.

Reading American, European, African, Asian, and Australian literature side by side, instead of against each other, analyzing the way issues and concerns intersect in them, and acknowledging the various layers in the constructions of selves and others seems an appropriate approach in a transnational world. Empire, migration, and transcultural encounters form an important part of our political, literary, and social discourse. More than ever our world seems polarized and fraught with tension between countries and ethnic groups. These everyday events

influence how we teach and the way we approach literature, which in turn can help to adjust our views and attitudes towards others as well as to re-evaluate the self and our actions on a global stage. While literature is fictional and literary analysis primarily confined to academia, I aim to provide here a practical lens that applies to literature and to the social and political realities literature imagines and represents.

IV.

In the following chapters I analyze (mis)understandings between cultures in literature, specifically between the United States, Europe, and North Africa, in order to challenge Manichean binaries. Instead of harping on barriers and differences between cultures, I emphasize shared spaces, shared histories, and even shared bodies. I look at the moment in time and space when two people meet, when they inhabit the same moment in history, interact with each other, and (mis)understand each other. The central question to this inquiry is a deceptively simple one: How can we see, recognize, and understand each other, especially if we belong to different races, cultures, and power structures? Situated among these major theoretical schools, this project investigates the feasibility of such a task. Can we transcend the dichotomy of Empire and find a common ground between the East and the West, the South and the North? Can we use literature to recreate the encounter of various forces and cultures?

In an attempt to answer this question, I read three Western novels: Edith Wharton's *In Morocco*, Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* and Patricia Highsmith's *The Tremor of Forgery*, in conjunction with three novels by North African Arab authors, specifically, Tayeb al-Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh*, and Ahdaf Soueif's *Map of Love*. The novels span the twentieth century, and thus reflect historical and political changes regarding colonization, nation building, and civil rights. America, Europe, and North Africa are meshed together in the composite picture that emerges from these encounters

involving exploitation, art, love, lust, patriotism, and friendship. I did not choose these works because they are exceptional or revolutionary in their treatment of encounters; instead it is their representative nature that renders them good examples. From the travelogue to the tourist narrative and the love letter, if read together, these works offer a pastiche of comings and goings, of leaving behind and finding anew, but also of seeing and being blind, of interacting and transacting, of violence and love, lust and hatred as human actions and reactions to each other.

In a characteristic fashion for Mezzaterra, its uses as a reading paradigm overlap and converge in the various chapters. The chapters appear chronologically since they represent different encounters, genres, and colonial situations in different times. At the same time, I do not wish to outline a trajectory or progress from the first work to the last, but rather invite my readers to look at this dissertation as a whole as a manifestation of Mezzaterra. In re-reading Arab-Western encounters in *The Maghreb*, we need to consider representations and migrations over different times and in different contexts in order for a more complete picture to emerge. If Wharton's text is overly orientalist, it still resonates and to some extent is part of later texts such as *Tremor of Forgery* and *Map of Love*: both novels revise and revisit some of the overt and underlying notions in travelogues like Wharton's. Rather than reading those converging lines of thought as a *harking back*, however, I see them as mutually influencing our reception of any of these works today. As written words, these works coexist simultaneously and the complementary reading of all of them side by side challenges us to engage in an ongoing discourse that is not necessarily bound to predetermined discourses and perspectives.

I have chosen works that represent an overarching array of perspectives, at least as much as this forum will permit.¹⁷ Because the works cover a time span of a century from Edith

¹⁷ Even though this project can only analyze a minute portion of works and the selection will always include a certain measure of arbitrariness, the novels I have chosen form contrasts and show similarities that invite a dialectical approach and seem to fit well with the goal of this project in general.

Wharton's *In Morocco* (1919) to Ahlam Mosteghanemi's *Memory in the Flesh*, which was published in English in 2000, this analysis allows for multiple encounters with Empire, from the rule of colonization, to fights of independence, and post-independence. These various political situations point to the many layers and manifestations of post-colonialism.

In addition to the various languages and geographies, I have incorporated both male and female voices. Even though four of the six authors are women, Highsmith and Mosteghanemi use male narrators and male voices to tell their stories. It is both male and female constructions of gender that I see complicated in the works under discussion here. Most of all, however, these works challenge romantic and heterosexual bonds as meaningful encounters. In fact, most works point to the inherent danger in subscribing to notions of the traditional family and heterosexual love. Since romance and marriage constitute the most privileged and popular form of the encounter between two people, I am interested in the deconstruction of that trope that mostly relies on traditional and binary constructions of male and female gender. I thus explore alternative encounters and bonds, such as homosexual relationships, sister- and brotherhoods, and non-sexual alliances between men and women. In fact, in negotiating gender across cultures and nations, bodies become sites of resistance to imposed binaries as they bleed, die, love, and desire. In Wharton's and Ahdaf's narratives, for example, the absence and contestation of the female body becomes central in the comparison between the two novels. Wharton is denied access to the Arab world because of her Westernness, and the same reason forces her to inhabit a male space in her travels. The power invested in the lightness of her skin elevates her to that of an Arab man, which makes it even more difficult for her to enter the world of Arab women. Similarly, Anna Winterbourne only gains access to the hidden "real" Egypt when she disguises herself as a man and is captured by revolutionaries.

In *The Sheltering Sky* and *Season of Migration to the North* gender remains a stable commodity but the body becomes literally the meeting ground between North and South. It is exactly the thirst for the other body and the consciousness of its difference that drives desire and at the same time plants the seeds of demise. Here the literal and personal body seems to expand and include the social body that disapproves of a cross-racial and cross-cultural union. Moreover, the gendering and location of the union between bodies takes on a role of its own and complicates the politics of desire at hand.

Mosteghanemi and Highsmith, on the other hand, highlight the mutilated body. First of all, both protagonists are physically removed from their homeland, while they are emotionally obsessed with it. This separation between desire and body can serve as a first example of mutilation. In a more literal sense, the protagonist Khalid has lost his arm during the resistance fights. The missing arm becomes both a personal and national marker of identity for him. At the same time it is exactly his injury and loss that cause him to start to paint, which releases his trauma and longing for home. Howard, on the other hand, does not suffer from any mutilation on his own body, but is haunted by murder. First he sees a man whose throat has been cut and then he kills a man as he tries to enter his bungalow, which leads to doubts and the critique of his American values. As a last act of bodily violence, Howard kills the intruder with his typewriter, as Khalid is killing his love with the letter he writes. Their art thus becomes an exploration of national bodies and results in the rejection of lover's (female) bodies as allegories for the nation.

My overarching methodology is thus dialectic, as I compare and contrast the various texts in order to go beyond the fixed opposition. Since most of the texts discussed in this project deal with issues of identity—personal and national—Antonio Gramsci's explanation of "What is Man?" highlights my methodology in this analysis, which resonates both with Hegel's dialectic and critics of diaspora studies:

[M]an is a process, and precisely the process of his actions. When we consider it the question “what is man” is not an abstract or “objective” question. It stems from what we have thought about ourselves and others, and, relative to what we have thought and seen, we seek to know what we are and what we can become, whether it is true and within what limits that we do “make ourselves,” create our own lives and destinies. We want to know this “now,” in the given conditions of the present and our “daily” life, and not about any life and about any man. (76)

Each work, therefore, depicts one individual’s quest and demarcates how far this individual is able to master the “now,” that is his or her destiny, place, geography, and history. What is more, how have other works, texts that come from a different past but meet in the “now,” depicted and explained this situation? How can this dialectic process of comparing and contrasting one work with another illuminate the reading of each work on its own? With the use of common tropes, I shed a different light on these novels and yet am able to analyze the success or (wo)manliness of each individual in order to bring trans-national texts into the same discourse and place.

V.

In Chapter One, “Textual Reflections: Reading the Other to Write the Self,” I argue that Wharton’s orientalist travelogue about Morocco is an attempt at an American pioneer narrative. An expatriate living in France, Wharton writes about Morocco in order to reconnect with America both as a writer and a woman, two aspects that define much of her work and life. If we read *In Morocco* only in the context of colonialism/orientalism, the text is simply a scathing critique of Moroccans as inferior, lazy and inefficient Third-World Arabs. If we include the spectrum of Wharton’s creative, political, and sexual thought, however, and fill in as well as rectify and explain these encounters from a Moroccan and French perspective, *In Morocco* emerges as a layered and complex work that tries to negotiate a stable place for a self in a world that is about to forget her.

Chapter Two, “Collision in the Desert: Negotiating National Identities in *The Sheltering Sky*” emphasizes the plurality of cultures and their mutual (mis)comprehensions in The Maghreb by analyzing the encounters between Americans, French, Algerians and the Touareg in Paul Bowles’s *The Sheltering Sky*. Even though Maghrebians only play small parts in this novel, it is the Western characters’ interaction with the locals that exposes the various (mis)constructions of selfhood that make cross-cultural understanding almost impossible. This chapter pays special attention to the ways capitalism and World War II, in conjunction with patriarchal and neo-colonial power structures, influence constructions and negotiations of identity.

In Highsmith’s novel it is also the encounter and the converging lines of identity construction that reveal its complex layers. Chapter Three, “Acts of Aggression: Violence in *Tremor of Forgery*,” therefore foregrounds the violence and suppressed sexual desire in the encounter between Americans, Europeans, and Tunisians in Highsmith’s text. Situating the aggression and mistrust in this work in its historical context of the 1967 Seven-Day-War and the Cold War, this chapter highlights the underlying commonalities between Westerners and Arabs in an increasingly transnational world and maps out the existential threat to traditional power hierarchies expressed in these encounters.

Chapter Four, “White Whores and Black Gods: Gender and Power in *Season of Migration to the North*,” re-examines notions of gender in the construction of the colonized and the colonizer in Tayeb al-Salih’s novel. Rather than reiterating Mustafa Sa’eed’s failed conquest of the North, my reading hones in on the multiple manifestations of power as they are expressed in the interactions between villagers, metropolitan elites, men, women, British, and Sudanese. My reading strips away imposed (colonial) layers of identity to expose the gendered language and power structure underneath. Published the same year as *Tremor of Forgery*, this novel in many ways engages in a dialogue with the American work, which compliments my reading of

the individual texts as creating common ground between East and West. This discourse seems to extend beyond the pages of each work and spills onto the words of the other.

Chapter Five, “The (Im)possibility of Building a Nation: Of Algeria and *Memory in the Flesh*” analyzes notions of national belonging, martyrdom, and gendered constructions of the nation through the figure of the exiled artist. My reading traces the dangers in abstracting national belonging through art instead of accepting a more complex notion of the nation and the self. It is again the interplay of bodies, nations, and texts that invite a skeptical interpretation of representations of others. Only by coming to terms with a more complex understanding of love, family, and the body can this tension be solved. As long as the characters construct their homeland from far away, they necessarily recur to orientalist tropes and view points. Once they acknowledge and accept a physical connection to their country and their family, rather than an abstracted one, they assume an active role in the history of their homeland.

Chapter Six, “Entangled Histories, Entwined Bodies: Friendship and Family in *Map of Love*” evaluates the concept of hybridity in a transnational world as it is presented in the encounters between British, European, and Egyptian characters in Ahdaf Soueif’s novel *Map of Love*. Even though the novel revolves around parallel cross-cultural love relationships, my reading highlights the failure of heterosexual constructions of national belonging. By foregrounding the bonds between women, the challenge to traditional gender roles on all sides of the Atlantic, and the relevance of geography and class, this chapter revises traditional notions of family, nation, and love. I argue that Soueif creates a foundational myth in this novel that uses the trope of the extended family and homosocial friendship as the new markers of cross-cultural connections and constructs a history that lies outside of a national imagination.

Textual Reflections: Reading the Other to Write the Self

At a first glimpse, Edith Wharton's travelogue *In Morocco* (1919) poses a shocking contrast to her fictional work. Whereas she exhibits sharp criticism of class and gender constructions in novels such as *The Age of Innocence* (1920) or *The House of Mirth* (1905), Wharton lacks critical discernment in her travel book on Morocco. She orientalizes Arab culture and Moroccan people, regardless of gender or social status. Even though Edith Wharton travels to Morocco and meets locals there, the narrative in the end does not provide as much information about Morocco as it allows the reader a glimpse into the author's negotiation of her own political and personal identity. On the one hand then, this text signifies all orientalist texts. On the other hand, it provides the first and most problematic depiction of encounters between Americans and Arabs in this project which identifies various reasons, motivations, and ways narratives depict the other. For those reasons *In Morocco* deserves to be analyzed as a particular and individual text as it grapples with differing notions of identity. This reading will complicate some of the more general exhibitions of orientalism by contextualizing *In Morocco* in its specific time and place, focusing on the encounters in the text, not only those between Wharton and locals, but also the sometimes hidden presence of the French, and resituate this work among her other writings. Even though this travelogue stands apart from Wharton's general *oeuvre* in its subject matter and style, it revisits common themes like women's rights, World War I, and relations between France and the United States.

In examining the varying positions and negotiations of power in this travelogue, manifested primarily in the encounter, I argue that *In Morocco* constitutes Wharton's attempt to reconnect with her home country, the United States. *In Morocco* is an essentially Western text, as it comes out of other Western narrative traditions, and reflects back to the West—both Europe

and America. If we read beyond the obvious orientalist depictions in this work, therefore, we find an international market place of encounters where a forgotten American woman writer tries to assert her craft as a writer and her status as an American celebrity. An expatriate living in France, Wharton expresses her American identity in this text, primarily through the trope of pioneering. While her enthusiasm for things French plays out on the surface of the narrative, her dialogue with America forms more of an undercurrent. The somewhat halting cooperation of France and the U.S. during World War I and the public image of American and French attitudes constitute a strong influence on Wharton's depiction of Morocco and her selection of critical and artistic representations of The Maghreb. She emphasizes her role as pioneer by laying claim to the exclusivity of her experience and her text since no other travel book in English exists about the region. Many of the locations she visits have been opened to Western and non-Muslim travelers only very recently. In portraying herself as a pioneer, Wharton negotiates her own identity as an American woman writer.

An acclaimed author and social figure both in France and America, Wharton engages in a dialogue between her earlier writings, her personal convictions, and her experiences in Morocco. While her fictional observations and satire remain conspicuously absent in this book, it is the writing itself and the positioning of her role within a larger circle of writers and travelers that mostly guides her representation. Wharton's depictions of selected scenes and people in The Maghreb echo her understandings of the genre of travel writing, her fictional work, and her precarious political situation and involvement. As the author tries to fuse the rambling observations of the personal travelogue with the measured facts of the public guide book, she struggles between objective description and personal outrage and dismay, French and American discourse, and feminine and masculine subjects. Wharton's gaze at Morocco and her representation of The Maghreb do not provide a true picture of the country and people she visits;

instead, the narrative mirrors the author's own struggles with herself, her country of origin, and her art.

Even though Wharton's travelogue comprises the only travel narrative *in form* in this study, all texts and their encounters discussed in later chapters are intricately linked to travel and will revisit themes, styles, and tropes first explored in this text. In order to trace these various depictions of others in foreign lands, I hope to address following questions. How does travel writing vary over centuries? While 'travel writing' as a term seems to suggest a transnational direction, can we assume that this genre relates to travel from East to West and South to North as it does to the directions of West to East and North to South? In other words, does travel writing operate intrinsically in an imperial mode? Can we use or revise the genre of travel writing in a way that overcomes Manichean binaries? Even more importantly, what are the factors that seem to inhibit the possibility of an encounter between peoples where they see each other eye to eye? What are the layers of (supposed) meaning and perception that lie between the traveler and the local? I hope to answer some of these questions in a close analysis of Wharton's travelogue in order to use it as a basis for the continuing discussion of encounters and (mis)apprehensions of the other in the rest of this dissertation

I.

Travel writing operates in a strictly limited framework: temporally, spatially, and discursively. It renders the traveler mostly synonymous with the tourist and therefore emerges primarily at a time when Westerners travel to foreign parts of the world for recreational and educational purposes.¹⁸ A genre still alive today, even though confined to the more esoteric or

¹⁸ Mary Louise Pratt uses the term travel in its most general sense, applying it to Westerners moving across the seas in order to explore, catalogue, or conquer different peoples and places. She defines the "naturalist-hero" in the vein of scientists like Humboldt, whose main interest in exploring remote regions lay in the landscape, flora and fauna. He measures, catalogues, and names the various species he encounters without any overt interest in occupying or conquering the foreign land. The "capitalist-vanguard" travels abroad in search for new markets and business

consumer-oriented shelves of bookstores, it essentially functions as an introduction to foreign cultures. The traveler gazes upon the previously unknown in order to explain and interpret the various monuments, sights, peoples, and habits for the reader at home. While travel writing most commonly, certainly for Pratt, is associated with Europe and European expansionism, Mary Suzanne Scribner has made a case for the very American involvement and engagement with the genre in the nineteenth century, when she explains that American writers alone had published 1439 travel books between 1850 and 1900 (149).¹⁹

Regardless of the traveler's nationality, the genre works within very fixed conventions. Certainly part of this rootedness can be traced back to the inherent assumptions about travel in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The traveler/writer was mostly Western, middle-class, and male. Even though we have many accounts of female travelers available now, most of these surfaced rather recently in feminist recuperations of history and literature, and some of these texts are still viewed differently from the male texts. Moreover, with few exceptions, the women travelers usually came along with their husbands rather than venturing off on their own, as Pratt among others has explained.²⁰ Due to their middle-class status, these travelers were educated and relatively well off. It is exactly this economic and educational background that allows the traveler to articulate his foreign experience, in contrast to the poor laborer/migrant worker or soldier, for example, who does not have the means, leisure, and education to write and

opportunities. He is interested in the marketability and efficiency of natural resources and the people. The last category, that of the "social exploratresses," refers to women travelers who get engaged in local communities and take up certain local issues. These women make use of their newly-found power in the foreign societies as they escape from their own.

¹⁹ Scribner has investigated the genre of travel writing in general, but pays special attention to the American traveler as she discusses American authors. Her essay "Edith Wharton and the Dog-Eared Travel Book" establishes Wharton as a writer who is able find her voice in a market swamped with travel narratives from Americans in Europe

²⁰ This remark is significant as it posits Wharton and Soueif's character Anna Winterbourne as the exceptions. Part of my analysis will explore what enables the circumvention of these traditional texts.

publish his account of being abroad. The similarities in the travelers' socioeconomic background, moreover, cause similar interests to be explored for the sake of the reader at home, such as architectural, historical and political tidbits, sprinkled with some practical advice on the country's infrastructure and general accessibility.

Apart from authorial similarities, the travel book as a genre is necessarily pre-scribed by time and place. The plot is confined by the arrival and departure of the traveler and, in contrast to the expatriate who actually settles in the foreign place, the tourist's sojourn will be relatively short, characterized by constant movement from one (more or less) spectacular sight to the next. The travel book surveys and catalogues. Scribner has identified the following conventions for travel writing, which serve to reflect the relatively uniform nature of the traveler and the genre. She explains that any travel book will include "comment[s] on modes of transportation; references to intertexts that mediate the vision of travelers; asides that the plasticity of the travel genre permits; and invocations of the past" (151-152). In other words, the narrative instructs the armchair traveler at home on how to reach the desired destination, how he or she should understand the sights and peoples described in the text by means of allusions to art and straightforward commentary, and by playing on the reader's desires and nostalgic impressions of the foreign place.²¹

Even though the genre depends on very narrowly defined conventions, its general reception and outlook differ significantly regarding the destination of the traveler. While American travelers to Europe, for example, looked on the astounding remnants of the Roman

²¹ I interpret Scribner's use of the 'past' as desire or nostalgic impression, since that idea applies more generally to travel writing to Western and Eastern places. The concept of the past differs significantly whether it is applied to acknowledged 'cradles of civilization' such as Italy, Greece, or Egypt, than say Morocco or the Congo. While the past serves to glorify a certain civilization and its achievements in the cases of Italy, Greece, and Egypt, other third-world countries are perceived as being stuck in a backward and inferior past. For the former, therefore, the past becomes the present, for the latter, the present is still in the past.

Empire and contemporary artistic masterpieces in complete awe, these same travelers could not find many admirable things to say about non-Western countries. Edith Wharton is a case in point. Her two travel books about Italy and France respectively bear none of the Orientalist attitudes of her last travelogue, *In Morocco*. Her 1905 account of travel in Italy, *Italian Backgrounds* and her still relevant guide book on France, *A Motor-Flight Through France* (1908), serve as exaltations of the marvelous landscapes and architecture Wharton perceives as superior to the ones in America. Making reference to Italian and French painters and musicians, she re-interprets the countries she visits in order to inspire a desire in the reader to see these places. She presents Italy and France as idealized places of civilization and culture.²²

In Morocco, on the other hand, falls into the Orientalist type of the genre. Rather than idealizing the foreign destinations, the authors routinely create hierarchical binaries between the home civilization and the local culture. Edward Said has most famously discussed orientalism and its prominent role in travel writing in particular. Referring only to male orientalists—namely Flaubert, Loti, Fitzgerald, and Renan—Said defines the main problem with orientalist discourse thus: “The Orientalist can imitate the Orient without the opposite being true. What he says about the Orient is therefore to be understood as description obtained in a one-way exchange: as *they* spoke and behaved, *he* observed and wrote down. His power was to have existed among them as a native speaker, as it were, and also as a secret writer” (*Orientalism*, 160). The Western traveler interprets the unfamiliar sights for the reader, but in doing so, he or she often generalizes, simplifies, and, even more problematically, dehumanizes the people he or she encounters.

Travel writing, especially those texts delineating a West-East trajectory, has been widely discussed within the orientalist framework. Stavros Karayanni, for example, links European

²² Teresa Gómez Reus has also discovered an unfinished manuscript of Edith Wharton’s travels in Spain, which stylistically resembles more *In Morocco* than the two books on France and Italy. Reus’s observation here confirms my reading of Wharton’s disregard for Spain in her travel through Morocco, as I will explain below.

travels explicitly to imperial expansionism in his inspiring study of the dancing body. He analyzes male Western travelers to North Africa and their depictions and representations of the local bodies through a distinct orientalist lens. Also Timothy Brennan in his discussion of cosmopolitanism identifies a specific type of travel writing that he situates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This later form of travel writing, which he places with “journalistic reportage,” finds beauty in decay and poverty (180). In search for the authentic, these travel narratives are not interested in exploring, conquering, or marketing a certain place and the people in it, but seem to be interested in preserving its peculiarities and inferiority in comparison to the homeland. The primitiveness and poverty of the visited place aims to be shocking, disturbing, and charming at once because all of these characteristics together confirm the place’s inferiority.

In recent years, scholars have paid special attention to female travelers and their written experiences, which differ somewhat from the male texts. Pratt’s concept of “social exploratresses,” women who traveled and wrote about their travels as they re-established their life in a foreign country, serve as good examples. Pratt sees the main difference between these female travelers and their earlier male counterparts in the women’s pronounced involvement in the local communities and their refusal to conquer the other. Instead of appropriating the place of the local, Pratt argues, this type of female traveler aims to find her own place. Her experiences mainly stay within the traditional female sphere of drawing rooms and social engagements. Phyllis Lassner also makes a case for the different perception of the other in women’s writing, who, she claims, write the end of the British empire by legitimizing local women’s (and men’s) claims to freedom and independence. Lassner, in short, argues that women seem to be better able to deconstruct binary roles of colonizer/colonized in their writing than male writers. Judith Mabro acknowledges the peculiar role of women writers in her study on travel in the Middle East, where Western women enjoy a ‘masculine’ sort of freedom as they move freely in and

around male and female spaces. In contrast to Lassner, however, Mabro cites numerous examples of women who exhibit the same degree of orientalism as their male counterparts.

In Morocco doubtlessly belongs in the category indicated by Mabro. The main character is a woman endowed with freedoms that she does not have in the West and a Westerner who shows little sympathy for the local Moroccan (man and woman). Even though criticism on Wharton's life and work is extensive, her travelogue to Morocco is one of her lesser known pieces.²³ The critics who do discuss it all acknowledge the travelogue's orientalism, but justify or explain the sentiment from a variety of perspectives. Charlotte Rich, for example, reads *In Morocco* as a public relations piece in support of French colonialism in North Africa. Rich contests that Wharton aided in the general and psychic rehabilitation of France after the devastation of World War I by praising the colonial enterprise and French culture in general. Segalla Spencer and Mary Suzanne Scribner, on the other hand, argue that Wharton did not merely repeat and blindly follow French imperial rhetoric, but made the genre and the colonial enterprise in Morocco her own. Spencer identifies ideas and comments in *In Morocco* that do not overlap with General Lyautey's view of Morocco and/or colonialism, while Scribner establishes Wharton's expertise and originality in the genre of travel writing. So, while various critics see different reasons for Wharton's orientalism in this narrative, they all agree that the text looks down on Moroccans, revealing them as backward, lazy, and in need of French culture to be "civilized."

²³ For more information on Wharton's life, see R. W. B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton: A Biography* (New York City: Harper & Row, 1975), the second biography ever written on Wharton and still one of the most acclaimed examples. Percy Lubbock wrote the first biography, *Portrait of Edith Wharton* (1947), but most critics dismiss it as misguided and malicious. Other reliable biographies include Cynthia Griffin Wolf, *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Eleanor Dwight, *Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life* (New York: Abrams, 1994); Shari Benstock, *No Gifts From Chance: A Biography of Edith Wharton* (New York: Scribner's and Hamish Hamilton, 1994); Theresa Craig, *Edith Wharton: A House Full of Rooms* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1996); and Hermione Lee, *Edith Wharton* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2007). Elizabeth Ammons, Dale Bauer, Millicent Bell, Janet Beer, Susan Goodman, Carol J. Singley, and Candace Waid also count among the most prominent Wharton scholars.

II.

By re-situating Wharton's position in this text, paying attention to national, gender, and artistic influences in the construction of the self and the other in this narrative, I hope to offer a more complex picture of power negotiations at work in this travelogue, to investigate the Mezzaterra. For that reason my analysis will pay special attention not only to the *depiction of the other*—as represented in the unidirectional gaze—but to the *interaction between* the author and the local. This approach aids in reading the text contrapuntally and in highlighting the mutual gaze and Arab agency as it re-contextualizes some of these encounters from the Arab point of view. In a second step, this chapter will investigate the (im)possibilities of interacting and understanding the other in early twentieth-century travel writing. How can we read *In Morocco* in a way that lets us see behind the veil and Western attitudes? In other words, even though Wharton describes Moroccans as being lazy and barbaric, does the text offer examples and ideas that bear witness to the contrary? Most importantly, what is the role of the text and the reader? How does Wharton's reading enhance or diminish her understanding of the local? In order to answer these questions, we need to start with the orientalist depictions in the book and the textual implications and affiliations of these representations. In short, we need to identify the texts within this text.

In Morocco constitutes a meeting place between texts, primarily Western texts, that is. First of all, much information about The Maghreb in this travelogue stems from other texts rather than from Wharton's direct experience and understanding.²⁴ In introducing the Western reader to her Maghrebian surroundings, she is mostly concerned with mediating text and place both as she travels and as she depicts the people, landscape, and monuments she encounters. Her manifest

²⁴ I use the term "text" here in its most general sense, denoting narratives, paintings, and discourses.

rootedness in the textual representations of The Maghreb superimposes all her actual experiences. These overwhelming textual representations of The Maghreb infusing *In Morocco* range from novels and travelogues to scholarly books about the history and architecture of Morocco which Wharton discusses and cites openly in her travel narrative. In addition to explicit references to works of art, writings on colonial, national and gender discourses inform and permeate this narrative subtly yet persistently.

The texts reverberating through this narrative are of three dimensions: scholarly, political, and artistic. I will discuss the scholarly documents first since they constitute the author's first interaction with Morocco. Letters she writes before she sets sail for North Africa illustrate Wharton's desire to read about the country she is about to visit. She thanks André Gide for a copy of his novel *L'Immoraliste* that he has sent her "exactly at the moment when [she is] preparing ... for a trip to Morocco, where [his] beautiful evocation of the desert that [she has] loved so much ... will give [her] an advance-taste of what is waiting for [her] there" (*Letters*, 397). Only a month later, on September 14, 1917, Wharton confesses her frustration at the lack of reading material about Morocco to her friend Bernard Berenson: "It's so queer to be going to a country that has next to no books about it!—Just a few twaddling 'journals' by military explorers, no good at all—& one fairly good vol. by Aubin, wh. takes in only a small bit. I wrote to Chevrillon for a list, & and this is the result" (*Letters*, 398). It is well worth noting here that a very preliminary search on my part found no less than twelve travelogues and treatises about Morocco that were published well before 1917—none of which Wharton mentions.²⁵ These books are all available in English and were written by Englishmen, Spaniards, Frenchmen, and Arabs. So, even if they had been obtainable only in the native language of the authors, reading

²⁵ Some of these works are Budgett Meakin, *Life in Morocco and Glimpses Beyond* (London: Chatto&Windus, 1905), Thomas Roscoe, *The Tourist in Spain and Morocco* (London: Robert Jennings and Co., 1838); Joseph Thomson, *Travels in the Atlas and Southern Morocco* (London: George Phillip and Son, 1889); S. L. Bensusan, *Morocco* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1904).

them would have constituted no problem for the polyglot Wharton. It is curious that someone like Wharton with the connections and wealth she had at her disposal and who was ostensibly eager to read about Morocco and sorely disappointed at the poor selection of books she received, did not go out and find some of these books. Rather than inaccessibility, therefore, Wharton's choice of texts for her visit to Morocco indicates the mental framework she wishes to adopt. She is only interested in French scholarship and thoughts on Morocco.

The texts she quotes are featured prominently in *In Morocco*, which demonstrates their central role in this narrative. First of all, Wharton dedicates the second half of her preface to her choice and selection of theories and information on Morocco. In fact, this part of the book resembles a literature review as she addresses the works of several authors and finally concedes that "the chief merit of this sketch will be its absence of originality" (12). She relies most heavily on French scholarship and political discourse in her description of Morocco, all of which overtly glorifies and idealizes French thought on Morocco. In praising Agustin Bernard's volume *Le Maroc* as one of the most helpful and compact works consulted, Wharton makes a statement about "the clearness and consecutiveness of which French scholarship alone possesses the art" (*In Morocco*, 12). In agreement with this statement, most of the works she consults and lists in chapter IX are French, even though others were available. Wharton explicitly thanks General and Mme. Lyautey for their helpful advice and exposure to Morocco, but fails to extend a similar kindness to her Moroccan hosts, as Saadia Erradi has pointed out in her unpublished dissertation. Wharton in fact visits several households, including the sultan's, where she talks with men and women. Obviously she does not deem it necessary to validate and acknowledge their contributions to her experience and knowledge of Morocco.

Not only do references and information from these French scholars and politicians permeate the actual travel narrative, but she dedicates half of the book explicitly to subjects

discussed in these works. While chapters I, II, III, and IV deal with Wharton's actual travels to Rabat, Salé, Volubilis, Fez and Marrakech respectively, chapters VI, VII, and VIII provide factual background information on General Lyautey's work in Morocco, Moroccan history, and Moroccan architecture. Chapter V discusses "harems and ceremonies" (7), an attempt to lift the curtains and to provide a glimpse behind the scenes. Curiously, Wharton's list of consulted books does not appear as appendix or afterword, but as chapter IX, which signals the inherent participation of these texts in the travel narrative. By dedicating an actual chapter to various scholarly treatises on Morocco, she validates these perspectives as much as her own personal observations.

French ideas and language act as markers of Western identity and civilization. Immediately in her introduction Wharton values French over Arabic, when she explains that "in the writing of proper names and of other Arab words the French spelling has been followed" (17). She explains that the French spelling will be both simpler for the reader and more appropriate since Morocco is a French colony. By using the French spelling, Wharton therefore erases any claim to Moroccan independence and shows utter indifference of Moroccan language and culture. Again, let it be noted that she made it a point to speak foreign languages (and her native English) impeccably in the case of French, German, and Italian. Arabic does not even become a choice in the spelling. The note on language and French spelling, for example, with which she introduces the actual travel narrative, stems from her justification in not using the *English* spelling: "To spell *Oudjda* in the French way, and *koubba*, for instance, in the English form of *kubba*, would cause needless confusion as to their respective pronunciation" (17). Similarly, she will call the new part of Fez "Fez Eldjid" (71), a crude transcription of *Fez el-Jedid* as the standard Arabic transcription would read. The Arabic form of the name also emphasizes and clarifies the various components of the name: Fez, the New, literally. Especially

for pronunciation there is a crucial difference, as Wharton's spelling inverts the "j" and the "d," thereby effectively altering the name. Throughout the text, down to the words and letters, she silences Arabic and instead stamps her seal of approval on all things French in Morocco.

When Wharton does name two North African chroniclers, she undermines their importance and contribution to this narrative on various levels. First of all, while the French references are her contemporaries, the Maghrebian informers, Leo Africanus and Ezziani, wrote several centuries before Wharton's time. Using these ancient sources supports Wharton's view that Morocco is stuck in the past and its people are "backward." Any new and worthwhile information about The Maghreb, in Wharton's view, can only flow from the pen of the French. Neither Ezziani nor Africanus, moreover, appear among the sources listed in chapter IX. Since she does not consider them "scholarship," they neither deserve any professional acknowledgment. Wharton treats these sources more like folk tales than scholarly treatises, as she introduces Ezziani only to compare his work unfavorably to that of an Englishman and then to dismiss him altogether. "Ezziani's chronicle dates from the first part of the nineteenth century, and is an Arab's colourless panegyric of a great Arab ruler; but John Windus, the Englishman who accompanied Commodore Stewart's embassy to Meknez in 1721, saw the imperial palaces and their builder with his own eyes, and described them with the vivacity of a foreigner struck by every contrast" (*In Morocco*, 68).²⁶ This passage introduces several assumptions central to Wharton's own travelogue: she values the exotic Western observation over the local scholarly chronicle, and prefers fantastic, "colorful," stories over "bland" facts. While Ezziani is merely *an*

²⁶ Notice the different degree of specifics she uses in introducing both men. While we are being given similar information about the two, the information pertaining to Ezziani is clearly more opaque. He wrote "in the first part of the nineteenth century," which leaves us with a time frame of about fifty years, while we know the exact year of Windus's travel, who his companion was, and where they were headed. The same is true for the subject of each man's work: Ezziani writes about *a* great ruler—we only know from context that this ruler is Moulay-Ismaël—in a typical (and thus boring and worthless) Arab way (even though there is no evidence that suggests Wharton's expertise or even great familiarity with Arab literature), while Windus describes "*the* imperial palaces" that he has witnessed.

Arab, John Windus is *the* Englishman; the first is part of a mass, the second a distinguished individual. For Wharton, the Westerner has much more fascinating and interesting things to say than the Moroccan. What's more, this passage also implies that Moroccan people are not half as interesting as Moroccan architecture and monuments.

In fact, much of her comments on Morocco and its people are not only informed by Western thought, but reflect Wharton's thoughts and opinions on her Western heritage. Her partiality towards French instead of Arabic culture and language, for example, mirrors her preference of France over the United States and is indicative of other hierarchies she establishes among Western cultures and countries. Italy and Greece, for example, enjoy much higher esteem in Wharton's mind than do Spain and Germany. She expresses these views mainly through references to art, such as to the Italian painters Carpaccio and (Gentile) Bellini, who have both painted images of the Orient. One of Bellini's most famous paintings is "The Preaching of St. Mark in Alexandria" which merges Italian and Maghrebian landscapes. Bellini chooses St. Mark Square, Venice, as the setting for the religious scene and then superimposes the Temple of Serapis onto St. Mark's Basilica, adding distinct Alexandrian landscapes, people, and camels to the foreground. Venetian art scholar Rosella Marmoli Zorzi has analyzed the Italian art references in *In Morocco* in detail and comes to the conclusion that "the colors of the Venetian painters add brilliancy to the bright colors of the Morocco landscapes, cities, inhabitants, and furnish a sharp contrast to Wharton's recent experiences" (29-30). Like the colonial order the French bring to Morocco, Wharton draws on Italian art and color to bring the culture and landscape she experiences to life.²⁷

²⁷ Zorzi identifies various paintings and painters in Wharton's travelogue, those who are mentioned explicitly, and some images that she recognizes from works of art by Giovanni Mansueti, Decamps, and Delacroix.

The paintings she mentions, however, carry distinct tones of colonialism and social hierarchies. “The Preaching of St. Mark in Alexandria” and “The Sermon of St. Stephen at Jerusalem,” a painting by Vittore Carpaccio, both date from the second half of the 15th century and depict scenes of conversion. Carpaccio, who was Bellini’s student, accompanied his master to Constantinople where Bellini was commissioned to paint the portrait of Sultan Mehmet II, and thus they both visited the Orient and experienced it firsthand. Since most of their paintings, especially Carpaccio’s, are religious, however, the Maghrebian landscapes are mainly biblical and serve as sites of conversion.²⁸ In addition to adding color to the drab landscape of Wharton’s Morocco, therefore, these paintings also signify the superiority of the Christian religion and validate (Italian) artistic expressions over actual descriptions of Wharton’s experiences. Zorzi clarifies that Wharton uses artistic references in all of her travel narratives but concedes the difference in using Italian art to visualize Italian landscapes and subjugating descriptions of Morocco to Italian depictions of the Orient. Both forms of art, whether the paintings or the narrative, aim to represent and imagine at the same time, yet never pierce through the artistic and textual fabric to understand and interact with Maghrebian reality. Even more importantly, by choosing scenes of conversion and art that conjure up the Crusades, Wharton underlines the essential differences and inherent animosities between Christians and Muslims, Europeans and North Africans, which make it impossible for her to understand and communicate with Moroccans.

On the one hand then, Wharton fears that the only way for her to gain access to the culture in front of her is her familiarity with other Western cultures. She thus appreciates

²⁸ In addition to Carpaccio and Bellini, Wharton also mentions Carlo Crivelli, who is most famous for depicting the baby Jesus with the eyes of a dead child. Zorzi explains that the reference to this particular image of the Christ child adds to an atmosphere of despair that Wharton experiences in the harem (*Literature and the Visual Arts*, 31). Wharton certainly conveys the hopelessness in her reference to Crivelli, but by using another painter of the 15th century and a specifically Christian image, she again superimposes cultural and religious hierarchies onto a sad scene where women worry about a sick child.

Moroccan art and architecture only if it shows Western influences or characteristics. In her discussion of architecture, she conjectures that any creative impulse must have come from Europe since “the Arabs have never been creative artists, nor are the Berbers known to have been so. ... Moroccan art has, so far, nothing to show of pre-Islamite art, save what is purely Phoenician or Roman” (*In Morocco*, 199). She further demonstrates this belief when she describes the local earthenware as “a primitive and homely ware, still fine in shape, though dull in color and monotonous in pattern; and stacked under the red earth of the olives, the rows of jars and cups, in their unglazed and unpainted state, showed their classical descent more plainly than after they have been decorated” (*In Morocco*, 90). Wharton associates the “classical” tradition with the West, namely Greek and Roman art that echoes from the Moroccan vases. The purity of that lineage is obscured, however, by the application of the local culture in the form of paint. The vessels, like the rest of The Maghreb, become “dull” and boring. Only a couple of paragraphs later, Wharton more specifically notes the lineage of art in Morocco when she concludes that “there can be at least no doubt that Fazi art and culture, in their prime, are partly the reflection of European civilization” (*In Morocco*, 91). If she can only peel back the layers of monotonous Morocco, then the splendor of European art and civilization emerges brilliantly.

In addition to fine arts and architecture, Wharton also uses European literary references in conveying her sentiments and experiences in and about Morocco. These equally reflect her idealization of European culture and emphasize her own learning and elite education. The reference to Dante’s *Inferno* is subtle but telling: “After wandering through narrow and malodorous lanes, and slipping about the offal of the *souks*, we were suddenly led under an arch over which should have been written ‘All light abandon—’ and which made all we had seen before seem clean and bright and airy” (*In Morocco*, 99). The above passage resonates strongly with the inscription above the Gate of Hell in Canto 3 of the *Inferno*:

Through me the way into the suffering city,
Through me the way to the eternal pain,
Through me the way that runs among the lost,
Justice urged on my high artificer; ...
Before me nothing but eternal things
Were made, and I endure eternally,
Abandon every hope, who enter here. (*Inferno*, 1-9)

The equation of the *Mellah* of Sefrou with hell needs no further explanation. The choice of Dante's work, however, needs to be analyzed beyond the obvious orientalist connotation. As the quote demonstrates, the *Inferno* is a religious work and thus harkens back to the essential differentiation between Christians and Arabs. The *Inferno* is also, however, a political text. Written in exile, the *Inferno* exposes criminals and sinners and lashes out especially against Dante's political enemies. Wharton, though not an exile, similarly does not live in her home country but in France. From a political point of view, therefore, Wharton promotes the French cause, a country she has adopted and prefers over her native America, but yet never sheds her nationality or citizenship. By nodding to Dante, Wharton thus confirms her idealization of Romance culture, her elevated position of a Western rich traveler, and her complicated relationship to the United States.

As a matter of fact, Wharton's immersion and reliance on art in this text sheds some light on her orientalism. Part of this distance and the depiction of the local Moroccans can be traced back to texts that have influenced Western thinking about The Maghreb for ages. As Brian Edwards and Melani McAlister have explained, Western travelers to The Maghreb viewed Morocco either through the images of *The One Thousand and One Nights*²⁹ or through the Bible, which has linked North Africa in a meaningful way to the Western Christian world. In either

²⁹ I use the literal translation of the Arabic title of the work *Alf Layla wa-Layla* rather than the commonly used title *Arabian Nights*, because the latter implies an outsider view and an anthropological perspective, while the former is more neutral and literary.

case, the traveler relies on a textual depiction of The Maghreb, rather than a direct representation. As in the passage about the *souk*, Wharton does not look and then try to explain what she witnesses; instead she seems to apply what she has already read. She uses her textual and artistic knowledge in interpreting her surroundings and thus assigns already-formed and familiar roles to people she meets.

No wonder then that she feels removed from the world she experiences. In fact, Wharton comments several times on the performative quality of the country and people she meets. To her, the world she experiences in Morocco seems “staged” and like a “fairy tale.” In her letters to Mary Cadwalader Jones on September 26, and to Bernard Berenson on October 2, she refers to “a fairy world, where a motor from the ‘Résidence’ stands always at the door to carry us to new wonders” (*Letters*, 399) and gushes over a sojourn that “has been a fairy tale every minute” (*Letters*, 402). Similarly, she describes scenes she witnesses by using theatrical terms, as when she observes the festivities of the Hamadchas in Moulay Idriss. Wharton finds herself on a balcony overlooking the throngs of people in the street, a “spectacle” that

took on the blessed air of unreality. Any normal person who has seen a dance of the Aïssaouas and watched them swallow thorns and hot coals, slash themselves with knives, and roll on the floor in epilepsy, must have privately longed, after the first excitement was over, to fly from the repulsive scene. ... But the beauty of the setting redeemed the bestial horror. In that unreal golden light the scene became merely symbolical; it was like one of those strange animal masks which the Middle Ages brought down from antiquity by way of the satyr-plays of Greece, and of which the half-human protagonists still grin and contort themselves among the Christian symbols of Gothic cathedrals. (54-55)

Wharton registers shock and confusion at the festivities and, in line with her general view of Morocco as backward, finds equivalents and explanations for this ‘spectacle’ in the past. Her interpretation of the events she witnesses as “unreal” and “staged,” moreover, seems to suggest that they need an audience to be meaningful. At the same time, she filters out the Moroccans

who watch and participate in the festivities. Wharton is there, but doubly removed. Focusing on the “unreality” of the event she witnesses, she distances herself from her surroundings. Rather than dealing with or explaining, maybe even trying to understand, what the various parts of the ceremony mean, Wharton takes refuge in antique art.

These underlying assumptions inform the way Wharton chooses to relay her experience to the Western reader. As the book’s structure and chapter titles indicate, places and things, rather than men and women, take precedence in her descriptions and explorations. Moroccans rarely figure as characters in the narrative; rather, they form part of the background and general exotic atmosphere. Upon leaving Tangier, which she criticizes for being much too European, Wharton anticipates the sight of an unadulterated Morocco, where “every figure on the road will be picturesque instead of prosaic, every garment graceful instead of grotesque” and “noble draped figures” “majestically” ride on donkeys and camels (25). Wharton does not perceive actual people, but what Frantz Fanon has called “natural sights” when he explains how “the Algerians, the veiled women, the palm trees and the camels make up the landscape, the *natural* background to the human presence of the French” (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 250). Wharton’s world is bound by the Western perspective: only what Westerners have to say, what they do, and what they think is important to her; Moroccan landscape, architecture, and people only form the exotic wallpaper to her North African experience.

III.

While the first impression of local people admittedly does not provide much ground for intimacies, Wharton describes them very condescendingly even if she interacts with them directly. As she passes through several villages, Wharton describes the inhabitants thus:

One of these villages seemed to be inhabited entirely by blacks, big friendly *creatures* who came out to tell us by which trail to reach the bridge over the yellow *oued*. In the *oued* their *womenkind* were washing the variegated family

rags. They were handsome blue-bronze *creatures*, bare to the waist, with tight black astrakhan curls and firmly sculptured legs and ankles; and all around them, like *a swarm of gnats*, danced countless jolly children, naked as *lizards*, with spindle legs and globular stomachs of children fed only on cereals. (*In Morocco*, 47; my emphasis)

I quote this passage at length to illustrate the persistent dehumanization of the people living in this village. She uses terms related to animals when she refers to the villagers and calls their clothes “rags” to underline their poverty and lack of civilization. In line with orientalist and racist depictions of blacks, Wharton objectifies them by focusing on their bodies. She maps the women’s bodies voyeuristically and shows more interest in the physical manifestation of malnourishment than the actual problem. How else do we expect African children to look like, if not with protruding stomachs and big eyes?

The text offers several more examples where Wharton gravely misjudges and misinterprets the actions of the locals she comes in contact with. One telling example appears early on in her travels. Because the roads are not fully finished and Wharton and her group travel in motor cars, they get stuck and ask pilgrims who happen to cross the path for their help. Some of the local men aid the foreigners in dragging the car back onto the trail in what Wharton calls “a saintly readiness” (46). Once money is dispensed, however, these saintly pilgrims turn into raving madmen. “Even in this land of contrasts the transition from pious serenity to rapacious rage can seldom have been more rapid. The devotees of the *marabout* fought, screamed, tore their garments and rolled over each other with sanguinary gestures in the struggle for our pesetas” (*In Morocco*, 46-47). While it might well be possible that these men were eager to receive their award, Wharton exposes them as liars pretending to noble aspirations when they are in reality base, mean, and greedy.

Here, one might note that at no point did the pilgrims actually ask for any recompense for their help. In contrast, I would like to emphasize how doling out the monetary reward changes the position of power, and thus the encounter, between the European travelers and the Moroccan pilgrims. The encounter starts as a favor, a gesture of kindness, as the pilgrims stop to help the stranded strangers; once the money is dispensed, however, the encounter becomes a transaction that transforms an act of kindness into a service provided and paid for. In the eyes of the Moroccan pilgrims the stranded strangers must seem pitiful. Their motorized vehicle is completely useless, while the pilgrims know the terrain and have sufficient man power to drag the vehicle back on the trail. This act of goodwill is a natural gesture, as the stranded people are foreigners in a harsh and unfamiliar landscape. It is a humanistic gesture: one person helping out another. The moment the Westerners are back on the road and pay the men for their service, however, power relations change. The Westerners treat this act of kindness as a service rendered, thereby reducing its humanist motivation to a class-based transaction. The one with the money, symbolized by the car, pays the local labor force. The helpers who have the advantage of knowing the terrain become the local servile manpower on foot. Now the Europeans can resume their privileged travel over a country they are changing to accommodate their needs. Besides, the tearing of garments and the ensuing fighting might well be read as a refusal on the part of the pilgrims to accept the money. As the hosts of the country and the people offering help, they would not have expected any reward for their actions. So, rather than exposing the Arab as devious and false then, this passage, if read contrapuntally through the encounter, offers a critique of colonialism and the momentum of power relations.

I will cite one more example of Wharton's express distance and fear of the local that evidences her limited and prejudiced perspective. In one of the few instances of her travel narrative when the locals do not appear in mobs or an animal-like indistinguishable mass,

Wharton identifies select groups in the bazaar only to emphasize their otherness. I will quote this passage at length as it exposes Wharton's stereotypes and orientalism most clearly.

All these threads of native life, woven of greed and lust, of fetishism and fear and blind hate of the stranger, form, in the *souks*, a thick network in which at times one's feet seem to literally stumble. Fanatics in sheepskins glowering from the guarded thresholds of the mosques, fierce tribesmen with inlaid arms in their belts and the fighters' tufts of wiry hair escaping from camel's-hair turbans, mad negroes standing stark naked in niches of the walls and pouring down Soudanese incantations upon the fascinated crowd, consumptive Jews with pathos and cunning in their large eyes and smiling lips, lusty-slave girls with earthen oil-jars resting against swaying hips, almond-eyed boys leading fat merchants by the hand, and bare-legged Berber women, tattooed and insolently gay, trading their striped blankets, or bags of dried roses and irises, for sugar, tea, or Manchester cottons—from all these hundreds of unknown and unknowable people, bound together by secret affinities, or intriguing against each other with secret hate, there emanated an atmosphere of mystery and menace, more stifling than the smell of camels and spices and black bodies and smoking fry which hangs like a fog under the close roofing of the *souks*. (*In Morocco*, 112-113)

Wharton does not see people in a square, but monsters in a nightmare. She links the various ethnic group with specific characteristics, each as outlandish and orientalist as the next. What is most telling about this excerpt, however, is Wharton's visible distance. Not only are each of these people and groups different from her because of their looks, behavior, and character, but they all have something in common. They either conspire with or against each other—in either case their actions are exclusively theirs and leave out Wharton, the stranger. What she does not say clearly is that they all come together in their "otherness," and it is because of this inherent difference between the "normal" Western observer and the "shocking" Moroccan that Wharton feels threatened. This passage exemplifies how little Wharton understands the world she finds herself in. She cannot read the faces she encounters, nor understand the actions she witnesses. She can only gaze in horror at these events and people and fall back on old and familiar stereotypes in her description of them.

Especially the *One Thousand and One Nights* serve as a textual guide to Wharton and her narrative. This collection of tales provides some of the most accessible descriptions about Arab culture at the time, and Wharton could assume that most of her readers would be familiar with it.³⁰ Wharton herself devoured *The One Thousand and One Nights* as a young girl and cherished the stories her whole life, as many of her biographers have noted. Wharton makes ample reference to this work in the travel narrative and even mentions it in her letters home, which shows how engrained those textual images were in her imagination. In one of her letters to her sister-in-law, Wharton explains that “every expedition takes one straight into Harun-al-Raschid land” (*Letters*, 399) and her personal observations constantly tie back to the images invoked in Scheherazade’s tales. The staged quality Wharton perceives is due to the clash between European and Arab worlds, one hidden behind the other for the Western traveler:

Every detail of our trip ... was carefully planned to keep us in unbroken contact with civilization. ... But let one little cog slip and the whole plan falls to bits, and we are alone in the old untamed Moghreb, as remote from Europe as any mediaeval adventurer. If one loses one’s way in Morocco, civilization vanishes as though it were a magic carpet rolled up by a djinn” (*In Morocco*, 28).

Wharton’s orientalist notion of equating Morocco with medieval magic seems to step straight out of *The One Thousand and One Nights*, a collection of stories written in the middle ages that does include djinns and magic carpets.

At least in this passage Wharton acknowledges the artificial imposition of European culture. For once she does not equate Western civilization with essential humanistic qualities and present it as inherently superior to Moroccan culture, but notes the enforcement of European norms and traditions onto the Moroccan landscape. Since the French occupy the country and she

³⁰ In general it is safe to imagine that Wharton had a rather educated audience in mind as most of her literary references are mere hints and therefore assume a rather broad familiarity with works of art in general. Also her inclusion of scholarly texts to back up her own narrative points to an educated and well-read audience.

as Western traveler only gains access to specific sites, which she alters the moment she enters them, she cannot be an objective observer. By the act of observation she already influences and alters the events and thus “the real” Morocco remains hidden from her. While European culture and infrastructures have been established in Morocco, they form only a layer that thinly disguises what lies underneath. The hotels seem like stepping stones over a pool of water that form little islands of Western “civilization,” but can only be followed on a very narrow route. One step outside the boundaries and one is lost in the sea of Moroccan culture. Wharton’s juxtaposition is both exhilarating and frightening. To find oneself lost in any strange place is disconcerting, and yet Wharton also seems to look for it, the magic and the images she has read and internalized in Scheherazade’s tales.

Her reading of *The One Thousand and One Nights* is highly selective, however, as Wharton does not identify or sympathize with Scheherazade, but approaches and references the text through the figure of Rashid, one of the Abbasid caliphs featured prominently in many of the tales. As she surveys old Fez, Harun al-Rashid becomes her counterpart: “When the moon rose and the muezzin called from the minaret, the domestic squabbles and the shrill cries from roof to roof became part of a story in Bagdad, overheard a thousand years ago by that arch-detective Haroun-al-Raschid” (*In Morocco*, 75). Wharton’s word choice and textual sympathy reveal her own role in Morocco, both in the country and in her own text. On the one hand, she signals her own performance in a story that is not hers, as she identifies with al-Rashid, a character in many stories, rather than with the narrator of *The One Thousand and One Nights*. This reading symbolizes again her distance and acknowledgment of estrangement from her surroundings. She is like a character and can only understand and interpret her part, but is not able to tell the whole story. Taken into a larger context, Wharton, in addition to being the narrator, primarily feels like a character. She is creating a fictional image of herself, one that reminds her readers of another

powerful and smart character in an Arabic collection of tales. While *In Morocco* thus is a narrative about a place and its people, it is also a text about herself.

On the other hand, Wharton's identification with al-Rashid mirrors her own powerful position in the text. Harun al-Rashid was the fifth Caliph of the 'Abbasid period, and it is widely believed that many of the stories in *The One Thousand and One Nights* were collected and written during his reign. A powerful man, who dealt with other very notable rulers of his time, namely Charlemagne and the Byzantine Empress Irene, al-Rashid, the real man and not the character, thus facilitated the creation of *The One Thousand and One Nights*. In general his great fondness for learning and education earned him the reputation of a wise man. Wharton similarly has come to Morocco in a political function and visits the country and her people mostly with other important statesmen. Moreover, even if she acknowledges her distance from the experiences she has in Morocco, she is a woman of letters. She is proud of her education and knowledge and thus feels more like a surveyor than a visitor in Morocco. Even though she might not be in control or fully understand the stories and events surrounding her, she still facilitates and proliferates them.

Her word choice in describing al-Rashid also signifies Wharton's position in Morocco. She identifies al-Rashid as an "arch-detective," as he supposedly listens to the voices that travel from roof to roof. In calling him a detective, Wharton does not so much emphasize his political role as his intellectual capacity of collecting stories and finding out information about people's lives so that they can be passed on. This differs slightly from the more traditional role of the story teller, who repeats stories in order to convey a message. Some of these stories might be his or her own, but what counts is *how* they are told, rather than *what* happens. Since the audience might be familiar with many stories, delivery is more important than plot and originality. The detective, on the other hand, uncovers the truth. He or she does not convey a message, but

exposes stories that are hidden. In contrast to the storyteller, the detective is not interested in telling a variety of tales, but in finding the one true story that explains it all. At the same time, the detective has to overcome obstacles and try to understand what is not easy to grasp. He wants to find reasons, motivations, and justifications. Since this is a non-fictional work, a travel book, it might well seem logical that Wharton prefers the detective's approach over the role of the storyteller, which more readily relates to fiction.

More than a question of genre, the choice of the detective pinpoints Wharton's personal role. In fact, she approaches Morocco like an anthropologist. In contrast to her other travel books on Italy and France, she feels the need to mediate and explain, to excavate the layers of meaning behind a people and a country that she cannot truly understand. She tries to glimpse behind closed doors in search for the fairy land she has encountered in her reading of Arabic tales, but cannot find it. As a result, many of her interactions with locals are riddled with misunderstandings. Wharton remains so removed from the spectacle in front of her that she does not realize how much of a player and participant she really is. She is so wrapped up in her observations and "studies" of the local culture that she becomes blind to her own involvement. One of the most critical shortcomings of the stage model is the exclusion of herself in the whole picture, while she is the one creating it. Like the photographer behind the lens, she will not be in the photograph, but as she snaps the photo, everybody is looking at her. The people perform at her command and react to her suggestion and attitudes.

IV.

This perceived capacity of the anthropologist further sheds light on texts Wharton relies on and reveals her struggle with national and gender discourse. Most roles Wharton identifies with are male. Harun al-Rashid was a man and most anthropologists at the time were male, Franz Boas the most eminent among them. A renowned writer and a wealthy, privileged woman,

Wharton effectively inhabits a male world in Morocco (and in France). She travels, dines, and visits with men, carries on “manly” conversations about politics, history, and architecture, rather than babies and marriages, and in general enjoys all privileges a (wealthy) Moroccan man would. Even outside of Morocco Wharton does not lead a typical ‘feminine’ life. She supports herself—actually, gained extraordinary wealth—from the publication of her own books, lives alone, has no children, travels and goes about as freely as she wishes. What’s more, she congregates with a circle of (male) thinkers in her salon to discuss literature and politics in Paris. Even though perceived as a “cold” grand dame of the past, Wharton enjoys independence, wealth, and influence among women and men in America, Europe and North Africa.

This identification with male figures should not come as a surprise if we consider her personal letters as well as her fiction. Hermione Lee, for example, notes that Daisy Chanler, one of Wharton’s friends, called both Wharton and Roosevelt “self-made men. [Wharton] was pleased with the saying and repeated it” (40). In addition to this phrase, which resonates with Wharton throughout her life, she makes an explicit reference to gender constructions in a letter to Bernard Berenson on the eve of her departure for Morocco. She sent him a copy of her novel *Summer* and replies thus to his praise: “And, oh, how does it agreeably titillate the author’s vanity to have *his* pet phrase quoted to him!*

In a footnote to her letter, the author then comments on the use of the male pronoun in the above sentence, by conceding, “You see I’m getting a little confused about my sex! A form of megalomania” (399). This use of the male pronoun in her correspondence in her own identity construction at times does not indicate any confusion about her gender but, of course, reflects the difference between her personal status and that of official positions of power attributed to women in the early twentieth century.

For these privileges and lifestyles have not come naturally; she has had to fight for them and defend them. In fact, Wharton leads the life and extols the virtues of the so-called “new woman” who refuses to bow down to her husband and cherishes intellectual freedom over motherhood and family.³¹ The “new woman” does not consider her husband a master, but an equal. At around the same time that Wharton travelled to Morocco, she compared American and French society in her treatise *French Ways and their Meaning* (1919). In this work Wharton presents French culture as more desirable than American society, especially concerning the question of women’s freedom. She explains, for example, that French women can converse more freely with men on a greater variety of topics and are considered in general the intellectual equals of French men. This study of hers also suggests that any idealization of the French and French ways is necessarily a reflection on America ways.

Her interactions with well-to-do Arabs serve to illustrate Wharton’s own conflicted sense of self and her complicated position of power. She is invited to people’s homes on several occasions and never finds anything favorable to say about her hosts or the houses. To her, Arab men are lazy and Moroccan women dull. The few lines she dedicates to the people she meets deal with clothes and accessories. It seems as if the realist or anthropologist in her is taking over the narrative and transmits a “truthful” picture to the reader from a distance, rather than a person meeting another person. As if she was viewing a monument, Wharton emphasizes colors, fabrics, and overall physical appeal. Her visit to the Sultan’s palace is one of the most telling examples of her (lack of) interaction with Arab women.

As the young things moved about us on soft hennaed feet the light played on shifting gleams of gold and silver. Blue and violet and apple-green, all harmonized and bemisted by clouds of pink and sky-blue; and through the

³¹ As Elizabeth Ammons has noted, Wharton does become more conservative in the last years of her life, extolling motherhood as the greatest virtue and fulfillment of any woman’s life. As she is writing *In Morocco*, however, Wharton does not yet subscribe to this conservative view but is very much concerned with the role of the “new woman” as her other writings at the same time show.

changing group capered a little pickaninny in a caftan of silver-shot purple with a sash of raspberry-red. But presently there was a flutter in the aviary” (138-139).

In all her attention to colors and fabrics, the actual women get lost. Of course, calling the imperial harem an aviary emphasizes most clearly Wharton’s low opinion of Moroccan women. Even though they invite her into their private rooms—and Wharton herself acknowledges the privilege inherent in this invitation, a favor to the French general and his wife whom she accompanies—Wharton is slightly amused at the women’s beauty and does not take them seriously. In her mind, they chatter away lightheartedly like birds and have nothing to say or do that is of any consequence. They are ornaments and sights, not real women.

This denigrating portrayal of Arab women hardly supports the feminist ideology some critics have attributed to Wharton’s travelogue. Elizabeth Ammons and Judith E. Funston in particular have defended Wharton’s feminist perspective because she refuses to sexualize the harem the way male Western travelers have done. Malek Alloula, for example, explains in his work how male travelers sent home postcards of Maghrebian prostitutes.³² The visual depiction of the harem was widely popularized by painters such as Delacroix and by written accounts like those by Flaubert. In each case, the harem is a sexual place overflowing with odalisques and indolent willing women. Wharton, on the contrary, represents the harem as a bleak and boring place when she visits the house of a Moroccan gentleman. In her various encounters with women in their quarters, Wharton describes her hostesses as “listless” (149), “apathetic” (151), boring and shallow. She can never wait to leave the company of the women with whom she hardly exchanges a word, all the while commenting to herself and her readers on the inferiority of these women. Like in her description of the impoverished villagers, Wharton seems to prefer terms related to animals when she highlights the inefficiency of women at another house in Fez: “She

³² See Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

leaned over in a Veronese attitude and screamed down to the others like an excited parrot. In spite of their febrile activity and tropical bird shrieks we waited in vain for tea” (151). So, while Wharton refuses to sexualize the women in the harem in the same fashion as other European writers and painters do, she does denigrate and objectify them.

The indolence and stupidity Wharton attributes to Moroccan women at once resurrects stereotypical images of the orient and emphasizes the stark contrast in Wharton’s negative perception of women in the East and her active support of their counterparts in the West. I would argue, therefore, that if we read these passages contrapuntally, the “bird shrieks” say less about Moroccan women than they provide textual evidence for Wharton’s prejudice and inability to communicate. Fluent in English, French, German and Italian, Wharton surely could have picked up a couple of phrases in Arabic to respond to her hosts, thus engaging them in a real conversation. Instead, as Saadia Erradi has remarked, Wharton never mentions the thought of learning the language or familiarizing herself with the basic vocabulary either in preparation for her journey, or during her sojourn in Morocco. In fact, she does not even acknowledge the language barrier as a possible reason for her lack of communication with the women she visits.

Wharton’s lack of knowledge of Arabic clearly limits the communication between herself and her hostesses, making a real conversation virtually impossible. She can only observe, interpret and judge, but not understand. She puts the burden of conversation on the women even though she does not expect much of the encounter in the first place, as the following passage shows. I quote this passage at length because it illustrates Wharton’s impressions of the Arab household as a whole.

After a brief exchange of compliments silence fell. Conversing through interpreters is a benumbing process, and here are few points of contact between the open-air Occidental mind and beings imprisoned in a conception of sexual and domestic life based on slave-service and incessant espionage. These languid

women on their muslin cushions toil not, neither do they spin. The Moroccan lady knows little of cooking, needlework, or any household arts. When her child is ill, she can only hang it with amulets and wail over it; the great lady of the Fazi palace is as ignorant of hygiene as the peasant-woman of the *bled*. And all these colourless eventless lives depend on the favour of one fat tyrannical man, bloated with good living and authority, himself almost as inert and sedentary as his women. ... The redeeming point in this stagnant domesticity is the tenderness of the parents for their children. ... It is in fact charming to see the heavy eyes of the Moroccan father light up when a brown grasshopper baby jumps on his knee. (*In Morocco*, 152)

So, right from the beginning, Wharton focuses so much on the differences between herself and the local women that she cannot even conceive of a possible communication. In her mind, Moroccan women are so sheltered—due to their “imprisonment”—that they have nothing worthy to say. Instead of interacting with the women she meets in an attempt to get to know them and their culture, Wharton imposes her critical Western gaze onto the locals, reading and writing them without letting them speak for themselves.

I will further contextualize these encounters in order to offer a more complex reading of the supposed chasm between Eastern and Western women. First of all, the authoritative tone in this passage is quite astounding as Wharton makes statements about the Moroccan household and its hygiene in general, even though she has only visited three.³³ Not only has she seen only select households, but her stay in the harems, as she acknowledges, is in every instance rather short and quite uneventful. She is unable to communicate with the women, cannot really distinguish between wife, slave, and servant among the women she encounters,³⁴ and meets them not as any visitor, but as part of the French resident-general’s official entourage. As she observes

³³ In this travelogue she details exactly three visits to Moroccan households, which she all groups into the chapter on harems. Wharton might have visited more households in Algeria and Tunisia where she traveled a couple of years prior to her trip to Morocco. In any case, her experience on the matter is very limited and selective.

³⁴ See Erradi’s dissertation on a more detailed explanation of Wharton’s confusion regarding religion, class, and race in her regard to women. Erradi explains that Wharton used American race standards to identify the mistress and the slave in a household even though this might have been misleading in many cases.

these women, Wharton remains oblivious about her own role in this interaction and the conflicting notions her affiliation with the French carries. For example, when she comments that Moroccan women do not work, she bases her observation on her visits to the various harems. Since she is a distinguished and important visitor to these households by express invitation—she is after all a writer and in company of General and Mme. Lyautey—the women expect her and therefore do not pursue their everyday work in front of her. Moreover, the households she visits, again due to her own status, are those of influential and wealthy Moroccans, who enjoy social positions comparable to her own social status. Put into a Western context, Wharton certainly would not expect an American, British, or French lady to be working or cooking in her own household, much less in the presence of a distinguished guest. Due to their high social status and the official nature of Wharton’s visit, the women she describes in this passage are not expected to perform menial duties around the house when Wharton comes to observe them. For the actual work and labor performed by Moroccan women, we only need to read writers like Fatima Mernissi who has dedicated a whole study to the function of work in Moroccan women’s lives and the variety of goods they produce.³⁵

If we read Wharton’s dismissive remarks of Moroccan women more generally as evidence for her concern with women’s roles and status in society, moreover, we can see the link between her travelogue and her fiction, which also emphasizes greatly women’s issues and women’s rights in America in the beginning of the twentieth century. Considering Wharton’s critique of American backwardness in comparison to “modern” France, I would suggest that the above passages do not as much concern Moroccan women as they mirror Wharton’s critique of American women. Her comparison of Moroccan women to birds immediately reminds one of her

³⁵ For more information on the life of Moroccan women in the 20th century in their own words, see Fatima Mernissi, *Doing Daily Battle: Interviews with Moroccan Women* (London: Women’s, 1988) and, by the same author, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994).

satirical depiction of female characters elsewhere in her work. May Welland, for example, acts like a vulnerable innocent creature, whose main purpose in *The Age of Innocence* it is to maintain the role and façade appropriate to her social status as she feigns a pregnancy in order to finally get rid of Ellen Olenska, her intellectual superior. Ellen does not always conform to social rules and thus remains shunned by society. Besides, American society of the Old New York Wharton describes in her novels is as much segregated by gender as the Moroccan households she visits. Both cultures distinguish between a “feminine” and a “masculine” discourse, the former of which implies exclusive interest in children, clothes, and household cares. Wharton was bored by this female discourse; she felt it to be her (intellectual) right to participate in the more meaningful conversations about politics, art, and history. Wharton thus despises Moroccan harems because they remind her of American drawing rooms.

Also Wharton’s orientalist depictions of Arab men relates back to her concern for women’s rights. She is especially critical of the “feminine” qualities she seems to detect in Arab head of households, such as the “heavy eyes,” because they insinuate sleepiness and laziness or inertness, as well as control over the women, who accept his superior position unquestioningly.³⁶ Her critique of these qualities resonates with earlier, fictional portraits of inert—and therefore—despicable characters like May Welland, and to women’s dependence on men’s power in American society. Lily Dyer, the heroine of *The House of Mirth*, desperately makes her rounds among the salons of the upper class in search of a suitable husband who can save her from poverty. As she in fact is not able to make a favorable match, she dies poor and alone. She

³⁶ The text offers numerous examples of the effeminate nature of Arab men which Wharton equates with inefficiency and laziness, as the following passage describing a merchant. Note how Wharton does not make the distinction between this one particular man she describes and this type of man in general: “The slippered Fazi merchant, wrapped in white muslins and securely mounted on a broad velvet saddlecloth anchored to the back of a broad mule, is as unlike the Arab horseman in the desert as Mr. Tracy Tupman was unlike the Musketeers of Dumas. Ease, music, money-making, the affairs of his harem and the bringing-up of his children, are his chief interests, and his plump pale face with long-lashed hazel eyes, his curling beard and fat womanish hands, recall the portly potentates of Hindu miniatures, dreaming among houris beside lotus-tanks” (80-81).

cannot improve or secure her life on her own terms, but relies on a man—any man with means—to assure her a certain life style. Because she asserts her will and refuses to enter just any marriage, she becomes a seamstress and finally succumbs to illness and death. *The Age of Innocence* likewise details the stifling social rules and etiquettes for women in Old New York, where the angelic and devoted May Welland subdues and manipulates the free-spirited Ellen Olenska. Even though May is a static, passive, and boring character, she finally succeeds in ousting the worldly and intelligent Ellen because the former coheres to social standards while the latter harbors qualities that are more desirable in a man than in a woman. Both novels satirically demonstrate the limits of women's freedom in New York. In fact, Wharton despises these rules in America especially in light of French traditions and published a comparison between women's social roles in both countries.³⁷ The Arab despot and the dependable women in the household, therefore, are familiar tropes to Wharton and her writing; her outrage at these conditions does not stem from surprise or shock, but serve to underline and support critiques she has made earlier in her life and in her work.

The connection between her fiction and this travelogue goes deeper than the similarities between the oppression of women. As a matter of fact, the serialization of *In Morocco* in 1919 coincided with the publication of *The Age of Innocence*; the works were published only one month apart from each other (Lee 513). What's more, Newland Archer, the narrator in the novel, also assumes the role of anthropologist as he analyzes and comments on the society of Old New York from a distance. Like Wharton, Newland's distance symbolizes Wharton's own nostalgic glance to the past as she resurrects the image of Old New York and America, even though she had not visited her native county in years. Highlighting the novel's juxtaposition of the American traditional wife and the European new woman, Hermione Lee aptly calls *The Age of*

³⁷ See Edith Wharton, *French Ways and Their Meaning*, 1919.

Innocence “obviously a novel about America. But it is just as much a novel about America’s relationship to Europe” (576). Wharton’s construction of her own role then, as a “new woman” and a writer, remains mired in her dialogue with America even as she travels through and writes about Morocco.

V.

By invoking the image of Rashid, the Arab detective and trickster, as she revisits themes and places close to her heart, such as the women’s questions in the United States, Wharton aims to reposition herself in an American context. The masculine voice in this travelogue serves to construct an American trope in the text by emphasizing Wharton’s role as a pioneer both in visiting as well as in describing Morocco. The very first sentence of the text and the prologue address her role of being the first: “To step on a steamer in a Spanish port, and three hours later to land *in a country without a guide-book*, is a sensation to rouse the hunger of the repletest sight-seer. ... There is no guidebook to Morocco, and no way of knowing ... where the long trail over the Rif is going to land one” (*In Morocco*, 21). This initial passage immediately introduces the danger and mystery of the new country that Wharton is about to experience. Also many of the places she visits, such as Salé,³⁸ the sacred town of Moulay Idriss, the tombs of the Saadian sultans in Marrakech, and the imperial festivities of the Aïd-el-Kebir (the sacrifice of the sheep), have only recently—or never before—allowed Christians, Westerners, or women as spectators. Thus, Wharton is the first American Christian woman to see the sacred city of Moulay Idriss, for example, and even witnesses the festival of the Hamadchas. The Aïd-el-Kebir, on the other hand, is reserved for men in politically distinguished positions. Much has been said already about her visit to the imperial harem, which also counts as a special privilege. Wharton, therefore, whether

³⁸ The visit to Salé is again directly related to literature, as she introduces this section with the subtitle “Robinson Crusoe’s ‘Sallee’” and remarks that “few Christian feet had entered the its walls except those of the prisoners, who, like Robinson Crusoe, slaved for the wealthy merchants in its mysterious terraced house” (*In Morocco*, 35).

on the road, sightseeing, or visiting with local Moroccans, treads for the most part in uncharted waters and makes the most of her exclusive access.

She is not only the first to see things and people but she also mediates this information to her Western audience. She becomes the chief interpreter and anthropologist. In fact, she establishes the importance of the travel narrative in the very first lines of her preface: “Having begun my book with the statement that Morocco still lacks a guide-book, I should have wished to take a first step toward remedying that deficiency” (9). She goes on to cite the various obstacles and widely ranging observations that made the writing of the book difficult, but one cannot help but wonder whether this assumed modesty about the narrative at hand is not designed to emphasize the writer’s courage and pioneering spirit rather than apologize for a lack in coherence in the travelogue. Still in the preface, Wharton mentions that books about Morocco are available in French, but hard to get by and hardly ever translated into English (11). While neither the language nor the difficulty in obtaining the books would have constituted a significant obstacle for Wharton, who was fluent in French and had money and influential friends in America and Europe, this passage again serves to highlight the originality of the present text. Her narrative is written in English, and, since she is a writer of renown, it will be readily available to anyone interested in the topic in America.

This image of the pioneer is a textual construct. First of all, she draws the reader’s attention to it very obviously, as I demonstrate above. Secondly, her narrative, while paying tribute to the work and kindness of General and Mme. Lyautey, does not really spell out to which extent Wharton depends on the French couple for access to Moroccan sites and society. She mentions in her personal letters that she and others were invited explicitly, but does not do so in her book. Her letters also reveal that Wharton for the most part stayed in French residences and establishments and her travels through Morocco were well within the established French zones

and culture. In her letter to Mary Cadwalader Jones, Wharton illustrates the sheltered life she leads in Morocco: “We shall leave in a few days, I suppose, for Marrakesh, Meknès & Fez, & I understand that we are to be lodged in the Resident’s palaces, which is a fortifying thought after one or two glimpses of Moroccan inns on the way here! The only drawback is the excessive heat, but I hope to get used to it in time” (*Letters*, 401). Also, while Wharton mentions particular French officials and scholars she meets, she does not really express how much she is surrounded by the French, which would dampen the pioneering image she has established in the very beginning of her text. Wharton, one of the distinguished guests of General Lyautey sees Morocco with French eyes. She uses French maps, explanations, guides, and interviews as her main signposts through Morocco. In fact, Wharton owes it to General Lyautey and his wife to be able to travel to and traverse Morocco in 1917. In addition to supplying the author with the necessary logistical help and information, the French infrastructure and power hierarchies—here represented by the general and his wife—enable Wharton to penetrate Morocco to the extent she describes. Without the Lyauteys, she would literally remain stranded outside the gate.

In her correspondence, she explains that on her arrival in Morocco she “found several young friends on the General’s staff, . . . , & altogether there was a friendly coming-home feeling about the arrival that one doesn’t often find in strange lands” (*Letters*, 400). So Morocco might not have a guide book but it is inhabited by a great number of friendly and engaging French soldiers that offer advice and a hearty welcome. Similarly, in her descriptions of visits to new places she never clarifies how many people are in the group, leaving the impression that she is by herself. As her letters indicate, however, she is almost always accompanied by Mme. Lyautey and usually serves as a companion to the French lady who receives the actual invitations. Since the number of invited guests from France is also quite large, it can be safely assumed that the entire group was shuttled from one place to the next as the official trip was very well organized.

The careful construction of the pioneer both behind and in the text, I propose, pertains to what Elizabeth Ammons has called Edith Wharton's "argument with America." Ammons contends that Wharton engaged in a public argument with America concerning the freedom of women.³⁹ I would add to this a more political stance on the late U.S. entry into World War I. It has been widely documented that Wharton was very resentful of the neutral stance the United States assumed while France (and the allied forces) were destroyed by German fire. *In Morocco* constitutes part of this argument both on the woman question and the war. As I have already addressed women's rights, I would like to explain briefly how this narrative pertains to the war and to America. On the one hand, Wharton lived in France, but never took French citizenship. Her friendship with Henry James and her own status as celebrated writer made Wharton a prominent figure in American literary circles. Young and upcoming authors, such as Fitzgerald, made it a point to receive her opinion on their works. On the other hand, Wharton was very involved in the war effort in France and established several welfare programs for war refugees. At the same time she tried to rally American support for the war by publishing *Fighting France* (1915). In this book Wharton shows similarities between American and French ways and tries to conjure sympathy for the French under attack. *In Morocco* pertains to these war narratives as it not only upholds French imperialism, but makes a case for French imperialism *in preference* to German imperialism. Up until 1914 Morocco was one of the contested zones between France and Germany. In the end France ceded part of its territories in the Congo in order to maintain control over Morocco (Lee 513-514). Out of geographical considerations alone, it only seems logical that France was vested in maintaining this North African country because its proximity to France would facilitate enemy attacks if under German control. In showing the relative

³⁹ Ammons proposes her argument in relation to Wharton's fiction and does not offer a reading of *In Morocco* along these lines.

advantages of French imperialism over German domination, Wharton thus aims to gather American sympathy and rally US support for the allied forces.

Also on a more personal level, the pioneering spirit exhibited in *In Morocco* relates to Wharton's problematic relationship to her native country. Always a critic yet never abandoning it completely, Wharton aims to reassume her role of the great American writer. She distances herself from her colonial hosts in an effort to construct her own pioneering narrative and thus to address America directly. Firstly, it affirms her national role as American delegate in France. She is part of the French expedition because of the fame she attained as a writer and her extensive involvement in the war efforts. Secondly, Wharton aims to exemplify the ideal interaction between Americans and French as their cooperation can only be beneficial to both parties. She acts as a pioneer in North Africa but also as a champion of French-American relations. It is exactly her own role as American writer that has started to suffer, however, and Wharton struggles to reconcile her role as "political" ambassador and writer. Lee describes, for example, how Wharton and her friend Walter Berry travelled to remote war-torn regions of France in the last years of the war in order to survey and describe the devastation. Again, she embarks on this task in order to create sympathy for France in the US. When she promises her publisher in New York exciting essays of these trips, however, Scribner's prefers "short stories" (Lee 485-486). Similarly, she immediately pitches her trip to Morocco to Scribner's as another publishing venture in which she promises an "exotic travel guide ..., [with a] unique expose., and Francophile propaganda" (Lee 513). As she travels through France and Morocco, therefore, Wharton has her American audience foremost in her mind.

This preoccupation with America and her own role as a writer comes in the middle of her attempt to resurrect herself. Lee explains that *The Age of Innocence*, for example, centers around Whartonian themes of money, Old New York, and society in order to remind readers of the

unprecedented success of her first novel, *The House of Mirth*, which established her as an influential (and rich) American writer. And in fact, she did win the Pulitzer Prize for *The Age of Innocence*. As Dale Bauer has commented, however, rather than resurrecting Wharton as a literary giant, the prize acted as “a kiss of death” for her career (xi-xii). Distancing herself from emerging modernist writers and becoming more and more conservative in her later years, Edith Wharton became obsolete long before she stopped writing. She had exerted herself in the war effort, had fallen behind in her promised production of new fiction for Scribner’s during the war, and publishing houses were starting to refuse her submissions.⁴⁰ Her trip to Morocco and its description, together with her other creative and critical output in the years between 1917 and 1920, form a clear attempt to re-establish ties with America and to position herself as one of its greatest and most influential writers once again.

VI.

As much as Wharton struggles in her role as mediator to translate a truthful picture of The Maghreb for the Western reader, she herself remains aloof and outside. She may visit temples and gain entrance into the homes of families, but for the most part, Wharton remains distant and oblivious to the ‘real’ Morocco and of her role in it. Instead of questioning her authority in judging Moroccan habits, customs, and traditions, she assumes an automatic power position. Since this special position seems to be granted most freely to her in North Africa, rather than in France and even less so in America, one could argue that it is exactly her awareness of the fragile role of women in the Western world and her empowerment when she travels to The Maghreb that imbue her with these false assumptions of authority. Her own text reveals most

⁴⁰ Some essays and short stories Wharton tried to publish on women’s issues, such as prostitution, were refused by women’s magazines because of their scandalous content; on the other hand, her more traditional stories were found to be too old-fashioned to be able to compete with the emerging modernist fiction. (*Edith Wharton*, 596)

clearly how she misreads the Moroccans, and how she remains trapped in fictional and scholarly depictions that hinder her from looking at the reality in front of her.

As these attitudes place *In Morocco* in the traditional genre of Orientalist travel writing, Wharton's travelogue serves as an introduction to this dissertation. The various shortcomings and obstacles in her encounter with The Maghreb will be further explored in the chapters on Ahdaf Soueif and Paul Bowles' novels in particular. Especially *The Sheltering Sky* offers intriguing parallels between American travelers in North Africa thirty years later, after another devastating war. While Bowles introduces the new American consumerism and grapples with the role of America as a new world power and its responsibilities towards old colonies, Wharton writes in a time when Europe is still the leader of the world. She looks to France as an example and ideal. In both novels the French still provide the infrastructure and logistics, which emphasizes the (vanishing) role of the French in American depictions of The Maghreb. More interestingly even, both texts employ women as "true" pioneers. Here it is Wharton travelling by herself and exploring a hitherto closed and unnavigable region; her endeavors will be mirrored in Kit Moresby who also crosses over into unknown territory. Both women are intensely aware of the positions of power/lessness in America and look to The Maghreb as an alternative. In Wharton's time, alas, this alternative only served as an exaltation of Western values rather than a questioning thereof.

**Collision in the Desert:
Negotiating Power and Desire in *The Sheltering Sky***

Paul Bowles (1910 – 1999), a composer and writer, was born in New York City but lived most of his life in Morocco.⁴¹ The Maghreb has not only become Bowles's new home of choice but it provides the setting for many of his novels, short stories, and travel writings. Like Wharton, Bowles describes The Maghreb from the point of view of the American traveler and thereby replicates American ideals. *In Morocco* and *The Sheltering Sky* share some similarities, such as a pervasive latent orientalism, the construction and challenge of an American identity at home and abroad, a preoccupation with colonial powers, such as the French, and the coming to terms with a world war. Many of the tropes, such as the travel narrative, the role of the French in the text, and American identity, recur in my reading of *The Sheltering Sky* in order to highlight the way the two American texts dialogue with each other. In applying the Mezzaterra as a way of negotiating and shifting constructions of identity, many of these tropes will have changed meaning when they resurface in this novel. To be an American signifies very differently when Bowles writes his novel, only a couple of decades after the publication of Wharton's travelogue. In these thirty years, America ascended to the role of a world power and underwent the change from provincial backdrop to metropolitan world player. In Wharton's travelogue, therefore, Americanness is mediated through France and other Western texts that serve as models both for Morocco, but also for the United States, while *The Sheltering Sky* plays on the emerging consumer mentality and the schizophrenic image of the United States after World War II as savior of the world on the one hand, and a country still plagued by racism and segregation on the other. In both works, the authors and characters show their Americanness more than they acknowledge it, thereby enacting *and* challenging American ideals.

⁴¹ See Allan Hibbard's biographical essay on Paul Bowles on the official Paul Bowles website, www.paulbowles.org

In addition to the American images at home and abroad that I explore in this novel, my analysis in this chapter emphasizes the plurality of cultures and their mutual (mis)comprehensions in *The Maghreb* by analyzing the encounters between Americans, French, Algerians and the Touareg. As an American identity is being refashioned, European ideologies and positions of power, especially in regard to colonialism, are being dismantled. At the beginning of the “American century” *all* national identities undergo a transformation, bartering for their position in the new world order. A preoccupation with national borders, as evidenced by the various war treaties and the still ongoing disputes of these borders,⁴² and the changing relations and roles of these countries in the world result in an identity crisis of sorts. As more countries and territories become accessible⁴³ and old hierarchies decline, I read this novel as an exploration of power and identity constructions in a new world order that involves Europeans, Americans, and Maghrebians. As the Western characters in particular find themselves in a sort of limbo between positions of power and weakness, they remain mired in old constructions that influence and determine their interactions with others. I thus focus on the negotiation of power and the way the Western characters function as national allegories of colonialism. Instead of assuring the already-political function of the Maghrebians, as Fredrick Jameson would propose, I explore the political and public function of the Western characters.⁴⁴ These are exposed primarily in their encounters and interactions with each other and with the North African characters in this novel. Even though Algerians, Arabs, and Touareg only play small parts in this narrative, it is the Western characters’ interaction with these groups in Algeria that exposes the various

⁴² Some examples are the war between Palestine and Israel, the war in the Balkans in the 1990s, and the recent declaration of independence by Kosovo, just to name a few.

⁴³ While Wharton only entered Morocco upon the invitation of General Lyautey, the American characters in this novel enter *The Maghreb* as tourists. Even though they do not cross paths with many other tourists, their use of facilities and infrastructures for tourists indicate a greater accessibility of this area than in Wharton’s time.

⁴⁴ In his controversial essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” Jameson claims that all so-called Third World literature is necessarily public and political.

(mis)constructions of selfhood that make cross-cultural understanding almost impossible. This chapter pays special attention to the ways capitalism and World War II, in conjunction with patriarchal and neo-colonial power structures, influence constructions and negotiations of identity.

The way Bowles writes about The Maghreb, and more importantly, about the various encounters between Westerners and Maghrebians, has earned him a complex reputation. Some biographers, like Lawrence D. Stuart, see The Maghreb as an exotic locale, “an outpost of the American dream” (*The Illumination of North Africa*, 1) and Paul Bowles as the American readers’ lens into this mysterious world. Similarly, Millicent Dillon has interpreted The Maghreb as a subject matter stemming from Bowles’s desire to “break with the past, with what he had been (“Tracing Paul Bowles,” 63), and characterizes North Africa as the mysterious other to the (Western) world in which Bowles has grown up and from which he wants to escape. Allen Hibbard goes so far as to call Bowles a visionary who has witnessed the horrors of “the heart of darkness.” In current times of conflict between Western and Islamic fundamentalist values, Hibbard looks to Bowles for helpful insights into the Arab psyche.

As these critics’ observations (unwillingly) substantiate, Bowles’s work carries a distinct note of orientalism, as The Maghreb emerges mainly as a mysterious, obscure, and primitive backdrop to the exploration of the main character: the privileged Western traveler. Even though the nature of his orientalism may not be as vicious or simplistic as suggested at first glance, Syrine Hout has rightly suggested that “to claim that these narratives—thanks to the author’s evident sympathies for non-Western cultures—fall entirely outside of Orientalist and/or colonial literature would be sentimental and naïve” (“Grains of Utopia,” 114). William Schoupe acknowledges the complexity in Bowles’s treatment of inter-cultural encounters and depictions and concedes that the West-East orientalist binary is never broken, which implicitly supports and

further orientalist notions of The Maghreb. Ralph M. Coury agrees with Schouppe and points out the undeniably varied and contradictory positions Bowles presents vis-à-vis The Maghreb but interprets these fluctuations as layers of orientalism instead of proof to the contrary.

More recently, critiques of Bowles have emerged that go beyond speculations about the writer's orientalism. For example, Brian Edwards in his informative essay "Sheltering Screens: Paul Bowles and Foreign Relations" situates Bowles and his work within the tradition of Moroccan history and literature. Edwards discusses the mixed reception of Bowles's work by Arab critics and writers that range from Mohammed Choukri's condemning Bowles's character, life style and (Arabic) language abilities, to Tariq as-Saidi's heralding Bowles as a champion of Moroccan literature in the West, and Bin Bushti's declaring Bowles the founder of a new literary movement that is specific to Tangiers (312-313). Edwards reads Bowles in the light of an expatriate writer who not only brought Moroccan literature to the West, but who inhabits both the American and the Arab world and should thus be understood as being in a constant dialogue with both Western and Maghrebian politics and history. John Maier's study entitled *Desert Songs*, like Edwards's article, pays pronounced attention to the interaction and mutual understanding between Arabs and Americans in the works of writers like Paul Bowles.⁴⁵ Rather than only reading Bowles from a Western viewpoint, then, these two critics are interested in the in-between, the space where Americans and Moroccans mingle and their histories intertwine.

⁴⁵ Maier's book is a longer study of various Western writers who traveled to and described Morocco. He includes Edith Wharton and Elizabeth Fernea in his analysis and identifies three phases of encounters, whereby the stages progress from misunderstandings between cultures to more frequent and meaningful encounters. In its scope and intent, therefore, it is quite similar to this analysis but he uses Morocco as the focal point and does not pay much attention to the interaction between the cultures. His main focus is still on the Western view point, also acknowledged by the fact that all the Moroccan writers he uses are cramped into one chapter and don't offer an adequate counterweight to Western perspectives.

My analysis follows in the steps of Edwards and Maier as I propose a reading that brings to the forefront the richness of *The Sheltering Sky* by exploring the various interactions between the characters. Such a reading exposes the various (post-), (neo-) colonial attitudes and investigates the role of imperial communications and representations in the formation of national identities. While Wharton's argument with America was personal, I argue that Bowles novel emphasizes national identities as they influence and undermine our communication and encounters with others. To which extent can we divorce the individual from the larger political goals a nation pursues? Put differently, how can the Americans or French be individuals, when their nationality to a great extent prescribes their role and function in The Maghreb? Conversely, how aware are these characters of their national influence and the imprint of their nations on their imagination? How important is the nation in constructing one's identity? What are the national images the characters accept, challenge, or have unconsciously internalized? Most criticism on *The Sheltering Sky*—with the exception of Edwards who briefly alludes to the French officials and the Algerians in the novel—have focused only on two of the American characters, namely Port and Kit. Such an exclusive and narrow focus of analysis, however, propagates orientalism as it refuses other voices to be heard.

In line with Mezzaterra as a marketplace of encounters, I argue that *The Sheltering Sky* already in its title promises a more inclusive approach. All identities, not only Americans, are being renegotiated at this time and in this narrative, and through the dissection of the individual encounters between *all* cultures present in this text emerges the complex interplay between nationalities, gender, and desire. I will focus especially on the representation of the Maghrebians since they have not been discussed critically and appear at the margins of the novel (and even

more so in the film adaptation of the novel).⁴⁶ In thus applying the concept of Mezzaterra, my reading exposes a variety of ways of absorbing and understanding culture in this novel and thereby offers a panorama of possible encounters and consequences of encounters. In its varied display of attitudes and perceived identities, the novel is a profoundly post-colonial text; it exposes and explores concepts of nationality, power hierarchies and bridges the colonial and post-colonial reality of the Maghreb contemporaneously. In offering a variety of strategies of encountering others in his works, my reading of encounters helps to classify characteristics that seem to aid in the mutual understanding and acknowledgment of the other.

I.

The setting of the novel in the late 1940s suggests strong and complex ties to colonial and imperial politics and is crucial for the understanding of the various characters and their interactions. The events in the novel take place right after World War II, which shifted power relations in Europe and the world. While England and France lie in shambles, the United States emerges as the new world power. American ideals and their image on the world stage therefore constitute one of the underlying themes in Bowles's novels. It is quite remarkable how America and her ideals have changed both on a local and on a global level in the thirty years since the publication of *In Morocco*. The official role of the United States as liberators of Europe and the consequent exposure of atrocities and genocide committed by European dictators like Hitler and Mussolini, in combination with the relative inefficiency of Great Britain, France and Russia to stop the spread of fascism, creates an image of the United States as a powerful, brave and innocent nation: committed to democracy, standing up to evil, and helping friends and allies in

⁴⁶ Bertolucci's eponymous film version of the novel rekindled interest in the novel. Even though Paul Bowles was significantly involved in the making of the film and appears in it as observer and narrator, the film shows several discrepancies. Some of the most obvious differences deal with the way Maghrebians and French characters are portrayed. Since the film is not the primary focus of this analysis, further references to the movie versions will be explained in footnotes.

need. At the same time, however, the United States themselves is a racially segregated society, sends Japanese-American citizens to intern camps, and drops the deadliest weapon known to mankind on women, children, and old men. What mostly emerges is a conflict of national identities. European nations have to straddle an image of a glorious and powerful past with the reality of abject poverty and widespread destruction. America, on the other hand, projects itself as a liberator of humanity abroad, while it violates and oppresses large groups of its own population at home.

The shift in power relations extends beyond America and Europe. The defeat and vast destruction of France and England mirror their decline as imperial and colonial powers. Colonies have become too costly and their claim for independence too dangerous. Colonized peoples who were forced to fight for the imperial powers in the war now recognize the possibility for independence in the weakened hierarchies. As Albert Hourani explains in his comprehensive study of *The History of the Arab Peoples* (1991), the 1940s was a crucial period in the establishment of an Arab identity. While Morocco's various small nationalist parties had united in the 1930s to form the Independence Party (Istiqlal), and the famous 'Urabi rebellion against British occupation in Egypt had already had considerable success in the 1880s, it was the formation of the Arab League during two conferences held in Alexandria in 1944 and 1945 that signaled the strongly emerging nationalist sentiment and the united opposition to imperial rule in Arab countries (Hourani 355). Morocco in particular was quite optimistic as "the presence of foreign commercial interests protected by the international treaty since the beginning of the century, and a new American strategic interest, gave the nationalists some hope of a certain sympathy from outside" (Hourani 364). At the same time, the British retreat from Palestine and the ensuing creation of the state of Israel in 1948 signaled to the Arab world the weakness of the British and constituted a direct affront to the Arab government. The 1940s, therefore, carries a

critical historical importance for the interaction between the politics of The Maghreb, France, Great Britain, and the United States. Taking The Maghreb as the location of intersection between these various nations, we see France as the lingering and Britain as the obsolete colonial power, while the United States emerges as the neo-colonial power because of its economic interests in the region and its newly-attained high status on the world stage of politics.

These historical and political interests aid in understanding the various interactions and encounters between the characters in *The Sheltering Sky*. Conspicuously, all characters in the novel belong to one of the above geographical regions. Port, Kit and Tunner are the American tourists who primarily represent the commercial interest in the region and exhibit naïve characteristics that coincide with the public image of the United States after World War II as the savior of Europe and a nation on the rise. The Lyles, on the other hand, present the British and are corrupt, weak, and out of place. The French Lieutenant d'Armagnac and Captain Broussard resent both the locals and the tourists, but at the same time offer help to the latter and aim to live in harmony with the former. The Maghrebians themselves are the most elusive in the novel.⁴⁷ Apart from waiters and various other service providers, the novel introduces Smaïl, who is mostly referred to as “the Arab,” Marhnia, the prostitute, Mohammed, who takes Kit to the Kasbah, the blind dancer at the teahouse, Abdelkader, the proprietor of the hotel in Bou Noura, the young Arab who helps Port and Kit in El Ga'a, Daoud Zozeph, who stores Kit's bags when she escapes into the desert, and Belqassim and his family, with whom Kit lives for a while. In contrast to *In Morocco*, the Western characters in this novel interact more directly with the

⁴⁷ The Maghrebians' (dis)appearance in Bertolucci's film adaptation is even more distinct. They are usually clustered in groups, their visual presence is underscored by tribal music, and they rarely talk. While the novel necessarily filters out voices and background conversations that the protagonists cannot understand, the movie would have offered possibilities of bringing the local people more into the foreground, or, at least grant them some *significant* background in the events described in the story.

Maghrebian characters, who offer valuable services, but also companionship. Their minor parts in the narrative reflect a colonial attitude as the immediate attention focuses on the Western, particularly the American, travelers. Their crucial functions, no matter how small, and their specific characteristics, however, undermine a purely orientalist view point and invite the readers to recognize them as agents and doers to the same extent as the American and European travelers. In other words, while the reader's eyes follow Port and Kit, the marginal characters refuse to be pinned to the background, and in crucial instances break through to disrupt and challenge easy constructions of identity and power.

As the various characters represent their respective countries and exhibit political and economic intentions towards other nationals they encounter in *The Maghreb*, the text at the same time challenges and mocks the (sometimes ill-informed) roles each character plays. Some characters, like the Lyles, serve more as a caricature than as a realistic portrayal of the British people. Also the French lieutenant seems comical at times, but it is his specific role as colonial ruler that makes him ridiculous, while Captain Broussard stands for a less arrogant form of colonial infrastructure. More specifically, it is especially the interaction with the Maghrebians that establishes the relative success of each character, which underscores the importance and role of the Arab characters on a textual level even though they do not command much of the novel's plot. By reading against the text and focusing on the encounter between others, we can determine the mutual influence and agency on *both* sides, which, according to Bill Ashcroft, addresses the core of post-colonial studies. He explains this concept in his book *Post-Colonial Transformation*: "All cultures move in a constant state of transformation. The attempt to understand how post-colonial cultures resisted the power of colonial domination in ways so subtle that they transformed both colonizer and colonized lies at the heart of post-colonial studies" (2-3). Not only does this dialogue offer a glimpse of a more complex colonial situation, but it also

effectively dismantles imperial influences and undertones in the identity construction of the Westerner.

II.

I will discuss the British characters first as they represent colonialism at its worst and show the least interest and empathy for others. Let me begin this section with the observation that even though the text ridicules and denigrates the Lyles as well as the French colonial officials, both are able to navigate The Maghreb with relative ease and are quite successful in their dealings with Maghrebians. This blending into the local landscapes and cultures relates directly to the long tradition of colonialism and the ingrained use of infrastructures and bodily labor and service offered by Maghrebians. Because the colonies have existed for such a long time and the navigation of its territories is crucial for the conquest and control of the occupied countries, the colonial powers are no novelty to the Algerians. Also from the local perspective, therefore, the British and the French are—sometimes threatening, at other times superfluous—fixture in their countries. Both the Lyles and the French are representatives of the colonial systems in The Maghreb: the French colonized Morocco and Algeria—the two locations in the novel—the British Lyles stand for an aging and corrupt colonial power in general.

The Lyles are a mother and her son who travel through North Africa in their white Mercedes, writing a guide book. This image alone invokes many parallels to colonialism and to texts like Wharton's. Like the American writer, they explore The Maghreb by motorcar on roads made for the colonial powers. The make of their vehicle denotes their privileged position in Algeria, as they have enough money to travel around the world, and do so by comparatively comfortable and luxurious means.⁴⁸ The color, of course, not only reminds the onlookers of the

⁴⁸ The possession of a car in general constitutes a luxury in 1947, when the novel is set. In Europe and North Africa at that time only politicians and the rich elite owned their own vehicle and used it for leisure.

racial difference between the Lyles and the inhabitants of The Maghreb, which again denote traditional hierarchies, but the very light color makes them stand out. As they traverse desert towns in their white luxury car, they immediately stick out as foreigners. No matter how well they know the road and landscape in Algeria, they do not belong. In typical fashion for the writer of travel books, the Lyles visit various towns in The Maghreb in order to report back to the armchair traveler at home. They remain outside of the culture they are visiting as they make no attempt to learn or understand Algeria and its people; their interest is restricted to roads, hotels, and sites. Rather than communicating with the people they encounter, the Lyles have already judged them (as inferior) and write back to people in their own home country and culture. Their observations in The Maghreb serve to support and propagate pre-existing stereotypes rather than to challenge them and introducing new ideas. They can impose their stamp of disapproval on everything and everyone, having no kind words to spare about any of the lodgings, people, and landscapes they encounter. In fact, they complain to Port about their lack of safety among Arabs and Mrs. Lyle's opinions of Arabs could not be clearer: "They're a stinking, low race of people with nothing to do in life but spy on others. How else do you think they live? ... It may seem incredible to you because you don't know them, but look out for them. They hate us all. And so do the French. Oh, *they* loathe us!" (71). Actually, one wonders whom or what the Lyles do not despise as they propagate a British superiority that the text undermines at every level.

While the Lyles serve to illustrate traditional colonialism and orientalist attitudes, the narrative exposes them as being annoying, condescending, and dishonest. It is only the mother and her son who believe in their supposed superiority over others. Their actions and interactions with others reveal their base characters, their moral corruption, and their pathetic lives. Mrs. Lyles's overbearing nature and her whining underachieving son make for less than likeable characters. More than that, however, they are thieves as the episode reveals when Eric visits Port

in his room in order to borrow some money. While Port digs through his suitcase to retrieve the bills, Eric steals his passport, which he then sells in Messad, a town with a booming black market for foreign legionnaires. The theft of other's resources of course resonates immediately with colonialism and empire, as it takes possession of others' lands and governs them. The fact that Eric elicits sympathy from Port with a phony story in order to steal the passport, which he sells for money, moreover, exposes the selfish motivations of the colonizer. In an attempt to justify the rule of others, imperial powers have presented their colonial endeavors as moral obligations to their inferior brothers and sisters in the colonies.⁴⁹ Even though the Lyles make no effort at a humanitarian act here, their deviousness and pure self-advancement mirror the ugliest sides of colonialism.

The Lyles are caricatures because in their arrogant and isolationist attitude they only hurt themselves. They constantly fight with each other, face financial problems and hint at health complications. All of these problems are symbolized in their incestuous relationship. Tunner, the friend travelling with the American couple Port and Kit, discovers that Eric and Mrs. Lyle have sexual relations with each other. This incident could mean that Eric and Mrs. Lyle are not mother and son, but lovers, and serve to underline their devious nature which plays in the above notion as positing an innocent and inoffensive relationship to cover up a more sinister one, such as colonialism. I would argue, however, that the incestuous quality of their relationship mirrors their cultural and racial isolation. In order to create and maintain power structures, colonial powers usually favored one ethnic or religious group over another and bestowed legal and economic powers on them. The Belgians in Rwanda, for example, favored the Tutsis over the Hutus, partly because of their perceived lighter skin color and "European" facial features.

⁴⁹ Most recently the Bush administration framed the invasion of Afghanistan as a mission to free the oppressed Afghan women, but once the Taliban were defeated, women's rights lost their imminent importance to the United States. The oppression of others in the name of a moral mission, of course, has been practiced since the Crusades and was very prominent in times of slavery in America.

Similarly, the British recruited primarily Sikh for their armies, because they perceived Sikh men as being stronger and manlier than other Indians. Even though certain groups profited somewhat from this preferential treatment, the imposed hierarchies allocated the highest positions in government, economics, and education to Westerners or to the Western-educated elite. Such a self-serving system obviously leads to eventual collapse. By only accepting and respecting ideas and thoughts that spring from their own culture, colonial societies cannot progress. From a racial point of view, incest mirrors various behaviors in history in order to control the bloodline, whether that is related to class or race. The Lyles' relationship promises only degeneration and disease, as already hinted at in their various health problems. By isolating themselves from others through their feelings of superiority, they become a mockery of colonialism.

The Lyles hate the locals because they view them as inferior and corrupt; they despise the French because they are in control, and they look down on the Americans because they think of them as naïve and content. As the Lyles serve as symbols for colonial corruption, however, their power and influence remains limited. The passport they steal is retrieved and Tunner personally brings it to Bou Noura and then El Ga'a. Their project of the guide books seems to come to nothing in the end, and overall they cut a very sad picture. Racing from one place to the other, trusting no one, loving and hating each other, escaping from trouble and debt, the Lyles are out of place. They belong nowhere and their white Mercedes signifies the ostentatious emptiness and restlessness in their lives. Scrambling to preserve some last scrap of dignity and position of power, they become a caricature of an Empire in decline. Great Britain has won World War II, but only with the help of the United States and other allies, and its colonies are clamoring for independence. The British have been beaten severely, and, as we know, can never recover their empire and grandeur. They still cling to old fantasies of power and wealth, but have nothing to show for it but debt and corruption. No longer the colonial masters, they are not welcome as

visitors either. No longer in power, their continued presence in the former colonies only inspires pity and resentment.

III.

If the Lyles allegorize the declining British Empire, the French characters symbolize the existing colonial structure in The Maghreb and the complex relations between France and the United States. In contrast to Wharton's travelogue, this narrative refrains from idealizing the French and their presence in Algeria, but at the same time allows them a more visible presence in the text. While Wharton touted "French Ways," she pushed the French people on her journey through Morocco to the margins. This change in the depiction of the French again mirrors the changing power relations between the United States and France. As Brian Edwards explains, "the period during which Paul Bowles was writing *The Sheltering Sky* and the immediate context of its publication (1947-50) was a key transition moment in US relations with France. France, the largest recipient of the Marshall Plan aid, was vital to U.S. interests; ... U.S. thinking about North Africa was framed by French thinking about the Maghreb" ("Sheltering Screens," 319). The novel demonstrates how the Americans have to rely on French infrastructures, supplies and mediation in navigating The Maghreb. Even though they depend on them, however, the Americans feel superior to the French and treat them not much better than they do the locals. This somewhat ambiguous treatment of the French in this text signifies the more complex layers of colonialism and points to the continuation of traditional colonialism, as represented by the French, in neocolonialism, as the American characters showcase.

In contrast to the liberal and independent American travelers in the novel,⁵⁰ Lieutenant d'Armagnac, the commander of the military post in Bou Noura emerges as the colonizer *par*

⁵⁰ Port in particular presents himself as a traveler, rather than a tourist. He claims to be at home wherever he chooses. While a tourist sets a time limit to their travels, the traveler will go wherever the road takes him or her, making spontaneous decisions and being open to see as many different parts of the world as possible.

excellence.⁵¹ The following longer excerpt from the novel showcases the almost overdone caricature of the lazy, racist colonial, who is obnoxiously full of himself:

As commander of the military post of Bou Noura Lieutenant D'Armagnac found the life there full if somewhat unvaried. At first there had been the novelty of his house; his books and furniture had been sent down from Bordeaux by his family Then there had been the natives. The lieutenant was intelligent enough to insist on allowing himself the luxury of not being snobbish about the indigenous population. His overt attitude toward the people of Bou Noura was that they were an accessible part of a great, mysterious tribe from whom the French could learn a great deal if they only would take the trouble. And since he was an educated man, the other soldiers at the post, who would have enjoyed seeing all the natives put behind barbed wire and left there to rot in the sun..., did not hold his insanely benevolent attitude against him, contenting themselves by saying to one another that some day he would come to his senses and realize what worthless scum they really were. The lieutenant's true enthusiasm for the natives lasted three years. About the time he had grown tired of his half-dozen or so Ouled Naïl mistresses, the period of his great devotion to the Arabs came to an end. (147)

This passage alludes to all stereotypes one associates with the colonial official: openly racist, with a thinly veiled missionary zeal of bettering the natives' life, surrounded by his own "superior" culture and "exotic" and exciting local mistresses. These stereotypes not only apply to the colonial official, however, but also echo stereotypes about the French, a people that considers its theories and language highly superior to anyone else's, and, true to Mediterranean cliché, prefers to spend their time in the company of women and (good) wine instead of working.

The mere brashness of the description, however, raises a flag. In fact, Bowles's style is usually quite subtle, so the generous use of stereotypes in this passage is quite atypical. Instead of introducing a realistic colonial, therefore, this passage sets d'Armagnac up as a comical figure. His uncomplicated attitude, which is immediately laid out before the reader and stands in

⁵¹ Note how the text introduces and names the two French characters, *Lieutenant* d'Armagnac and *Captain* Broussard, with their official titles. Both titles denote military functions and thus immediately situate them as public and governmental figures rather than private individuals.

stark contrast to Port's complicated and cerebral attitude towards life. Port is angry, restless, and introverted, whereas d'Armagnac has found a comfortable niche in his Algerian life. The overt difference between the two characters invites the reader to see them as doubles. By mirroring them, we can see how each informs the identity of the other. The reader can see d'Armagnac only as far as the American traveler can see him. The stereotypes inherent in the description of the colonial official stem from Port's perceived notions both about the French and about colonists. Conversely, the lieutenant's view of Port highlights the American's status as foreigner, and at the same time offers the reader an outside perspective on the main character.

Like the initial description of d'Armagnac, the lieutenant's imagination of Port is fraught with stereotypes. When he hears that an American has accused a local influential man of theft, d'Armagnac shudders at the prospect of his dissuading the foreigner from lodging the complaint:

With a Frenchman he would have known how to go about persuading him..... but with an American! Already he could see him: a gorilla-like brute with a fierce frown on his face, a cigar in the corner of his mouth, and probably an automatic on his hip pocket. Doubtless no complete sentences would pass between them because neither one would be able to understand enough of the other's language. He began trying to recall his English: 'Sir, I must to you, to pray that you will—' 'My dear sir, please, I would make to you remark---' Then he remembered having heard that Americans did not speak English in any case, that they had a patois which only they could understand among themselves. (154)

Notice how the lieutenant not only has a wrong impression of Americans, but demotes Americans to savage brutes with "gorilla-like faces" who cannot even speak a civilized language. In fact the crude stereotypes emerging in this passage not only mirror the earlier French clichés but point to the (mis)understandings between cultures in general. One trait they both share is their assumed superiority over the other. Port thinks of d'Armagnac as a (morally) corrupt and inefficient official, while the lieutenant imagines Port as an uneducated brute.

Nowhere is the transformation in their roles and the reversal of outsider/insider clearer than in the exchange between the two characters. Port, who sees himself as the traveler, who glides easily from one culture into the other without prejudice, and who, by intimation, thinks the French lieutenant a blatant racist, exposes his own racism and outsider status. When Port discovers that his passport is missing, he immediately concludes that a native must have stolen it and says as much to the lieutenant.

“And why precisely do you demand that it be a native?” Port smiled faintly. “Isn’t it reasonable to suppose it was a native? Apart from the fact that no one else had the opportunity to take it, isn’t it the sort of thing that would naturally turn out to have been done by a native—charming as they may be?”

“No, monsieur. To me it seems just the kind of thing that would *not* have been done by a native. ...I have been with the Arabs a good many years. Of course they steal. And Frenchmen steal. And in America you have gangsters, I believe?” ... “Yes, everywhere people steal. And here as well. However, the native here,” he spoke more slowly, emphasizing his words, “takes only money or an object he wants for himself. He would never take anything so complicated as a passport.” (157-58).

The lieutenant shows knowledge of the local population and humanizes them as he equates Arab theft to theft committed by French and Americans. He exposes the hypocrisy in Port’s initial accusations. In fact, as we know, the Lyles stole Port’s and Tunner’s passports to sell them. D’Armagnac, in infantilizing the local Maghrebians supports the colonial mission of bringing civilization to the brutes in the colonies. He does not credit them with the capabilities for a complex crime. As problematic as this assertion may be, however, it exposes the scheming capabilities of the Western colonizer. It is the foreigner, in the form of the tourist, the traveler, and the colonizer, who have introduced the complex crimes, the ones that manipulate others and sell identities for the highest price. Whether the colonizer bestows favors on one of the local groups, or sells the passport as a way to gain easy access to another country, identities and positions of power are being negotiated during colonialism. The theft and bartering of the

passport symbolizes this precarious position of identities. Port, however, remains oblivious to these changes and makes general assumptions about non-Western people in general, as he takes it for granted that they are all thieves and liars underneath their servile and amusing fronts. In contrast to the official, moreover, Port has no interest in establishing or maintaining long-lasting relationships with the locals and never feels particularly sorry for his rash conclusions about Abdelkedir. It is left to d'Armagnac to ease relations with the innkeeper and to search for Port's passport.

This key encounter between d'Armagnac and Port parallels the U.S. interest in learning from the French as the Americans prepare to take an active role in North Africa. *The Sheltering Sky* exposes the U.S.'s inexperience in dealing with foreign countries and its reliance on colonial infrastructures and systems of control. The lieutenant arranges for the recuperation of Port's passport and offers the Americans vital information regarding their next leg to El Ga'a. The French captain Broussard, on the other hand, provides them with a room, food, medicine, and advice when they reach El Ga'a and realize the gravity of Port's sickness. The French play the role of provider, but also serve as communicators: because of their knowledge and relative integration into Maghreb culture, they facilitate communication between the travelers and the locals, as in the case of Port's missing passport, and even aid in the communication between the Americans when Broussard informs Tunner of Kit's disappearance and d'Armagnac alerts Tunner when she reappears. The French officials in the novel, though not central characters, act as necessary mediators, translators, and facilitators.⁵²

⁵² The film version, on the other hand, cuts the French out almost completely. Lieutenant d'Armagnac, for example, is neither mentioned nor seen in the movie, and even Captain Broussard appears only very briefly, projecting a rather menacing and condescending image. Port and Kit do, however, see a military formation of the French in the distance during one of their walks. My argument about French as an equalizer therefore also applies to the film, even though the French presence is hardly noticeable there.

This more positive role of the French official we find articulated in Captain Broussard. He oversees the military station in El Ga'a where he provides shelter, food and medicine for Port and Kit. When the local hotel remains closed to the American travelers, Broussard agrees to take them in. He extends this kindness, moreover, not because he likes the Americans or finds any affinity between them and him, but seems to act on humanistic principles. He is not interested in any intimacies with the couple, but rather views them as a nuisance as they disrupt his day-to-day business and do not always adhere to his rules. Regardless of their behavior, however, he accepts them and helps them as much as he can. The presence of Captain Broussard complicates the French colonial mission in the text as it emphasizes the infrastructure and medical benefits the French did bring to the region. Especially in the eyes of the American travelers, moreover, it is much more difficult to look down upon and judge the French in The Maghreb, if they are not corrupt, arrogant, and racist. This encounter, though brief, emphasizes French knowledge over American naivety. Only Broussard recognizes the seriousness of Port's health condition and can provide the necessary relieve. Port and Kit stumble through the desert without being able to gauge the danger they find themselves in. Even though Broussard cannot save Port's life, he does save Kit's by allowing her to rest and stay at the fort.

This complex colonial mission in the text is underscored by the use of the French language, which constitutes one of the main common denominators between the Americans, the French, and the Arabs. While the novel is written in English, most of the communication actually would have happened in French. More specifically, the American group resorts to French when speaking to the French and the Arabs, which acts as an equalizer—both groups become the others to the Americans. In most encounters, as in the one between Port and Lieutenant d'Armagnac, spoken French signifies civilization and sameness, because the characters can communicate with each other. While the language acts as a common denominator, however, it is

also rife with imperial connotations and presupposes hierarchical roles. If knowledge of French functions as a marker of civilization and superiority in The Maghreb, then d'Armagnac is more willing to help Port, for example, when he finds out that the latter speaks French. The language identifies both of them as belonging to Western culture, while it confirms the French lieutenant's superiority over the American tourist. In the context of American-French relations of the period, this hierarchy mirrors Europe as the harbingers of "high" culture. The Americans may have taken the leading role on the world stage, but Europe still regards them as the newcomers who have money but no culture. If we read d'Armagnac and Port's encounter along the lines of political and historical national imaginations of their respective nations, we can glimpse the complexity of the power construction at work. The Americans and French publicly accede to their shared role as leaders and world power, but inwardly look down on the other. Moreover, as the French language serves as common denominator, it also serves to signal foreignness. French, after all, is the language of the ruler, but not the native language of the region. By communicating in French, therefore, Port signals his implicit participation in the (French) colonial enterprise in The Maghreb.⁵³

French acts as an equalizer not only between the American traveler and the French colonial but in the American-Algerian encounters as well. The ambiguity in the use of the French language is most clearly demonstrated when Smaïl, an Algerian man, leads Port to a prostitute. Only when the Arab man speaks French does Port trust and follow him to a dangerous quarter. "The Arab waited a bit. He walked to the very edge of the slope. A dislodged tin can rolled noisily down toward the rock where Port sat. "*Hé! M'sieu! Qu'est-ce ti vo?*" He decided to

⁵³ Note the difference between the conscious exaltation and choice of French in Wharton's travelogue and the more subtle, hidden use of French in this novel. Port and the other characters use French out of necessity, not because they prefer it to any other language. At the same time, none of the characters ever mentions the possibility of learning or speaking Arabic during their travels. It is in this sense that call Port's participation in the colonial mission implicit: he may not choose it consciously, but he does not question or challenge it either.

answer. *His French was good.* “Who? Me? Nothing.’ The Arab bounded down the bank and stood in front of him” (26, my emphasis). When Smaïl speaks French, Port recognizes some affinity with him, and therefore trusts him. It is the command over the language that renders him trustworthy to Port, because he, like d’Armagnac, equates the ability to speak French (well) with civilization. The orientalism inherent in Port’s attitude forms only one side of this encounter, and I would like to analyze the power relations in this encounter more closely. For Smaïl to speak French is more complex. He consciously uses a colonial language in addressing Port, which signals his recognition of Port as a foreigner and his cautious attitude towards Port. By using the colonial language, Smaïl’s gesture is public, since French is used primarily in official transactions. He approaches Port in order to broker a deal for a prostitute. So, while the French language in this encounter signals sameness for Port, it marks their inherent difference for Smaïl. In fact, the outcome of this encounter is negative, as the woman to whom Smaïl introduces Port tries to steal his wallet and then alerts other men to the intruder, who chase Port out of the settlement. Moreover, Smaïl speaks a French dialect, rather than standard Parisian French, which indicates his agency and his success in making parts of the colonial system his own. The language he speaks is regional and thus attests to his experience. In fact, he does act like a guide to Port, which indicates his local knowledge, and wants to get into business with Port, which indicates the ways Smaïl has found a way to use the colonial system to his own advantage—at least some parts of it. I will discuss the role of the American characters more in detail below, but want to emphasize the (mis)constructions of values in the form of the French language that leads to misunderstandings and misinterpretation among characters.

The depiction of the French characters and the role of the French language in *The Sheltering Sky* therefore serve to illustrate the complex meaning of colonialism for the various characters and their national identities. Less satirized than the British, the French presence is

precarious: humorous at times but also central to the construction of identities and power. The reader is supposed to identify and sympathize with Port and Kit, and thereby remains blind to the stereotypes and imperial notions inherent in their interaction with others. However, by inserting the French perspective and foregrounding the Americans' foreignness through the use of a second language, the analysis of the encounter exposes the inner workings of Port and Kit's attitudes. Brian Edwards has explained that the key realization in Port's travel stems from Port's conversation with d'Armagnac, who exposes the American's naivety. "He thereby discovers that the American project in the desert can only work while the travelers block out the visibility of the French colonials and the relationship of American projects (whether political or epistemological) to French ones" (317). I would clarify Edwards's statement by claiming that even though the American characters, especially Port, aim to overlook and ignore the French, the text consistently re-inserts their presence into their journey. A close reading of the French presence and representation in *The Sheltering Sky* not only offers a different lens through which to read the work, but also implicates the American characters in a more historical and national endeavor. Rather than critiquing their culture and re-evaluating their Westernness in their travels, Port and Kit reaffirm imperialist attitudes and lose themselves in the desert of their empty lives.

IV.

The American tourists signal the dawning era of neo-colonialism, an economic wielding of power over other countries rather than a military occupation. As this new form of colonization is at the point of emerging in the 1950s, the United States does not exhibit any guilt, but rather feels superior to the corrupted and devastated Europe. The Americans are the saviors, the innocent and the brave—an image of national identity construction that pervades the main characters' motivations and actions throughout *The Sheltering Sky*. The official role of the United States as liberators of Europe and the consequent exposure of atrocities and genocide

committed by European dictators like Hitler and Mussolini, in combination with the relative inefficiency of Great Britain, France and Russia to stop the spread of fascism, create an image of the United States as a powerful, courageous and guiltless nation: committed to democracy, standing up to evil, and helping friends in need. In the American relations with North Africa in particular, Melani McAlister has called the U.S. attitude “benevolent supremacy” and explains that “during the first decades of World War II, American encounters [with the Middle East] were most often posited as affiliations, and U.S. interests were framed in terms supportive of the region’s anticolonial movement” (2). This positive public image, however, stands in contrast to the internal racial and class divisions in the United States at the time. African-Americans are de facto second class citizens—in fact white Americans even contested their participation in the war effort—and while the Allied Forces dismantled concentration camps in Germany, Austria, Poland, and the Czech Republic, Japanese-Americans were held in internment camps on American soil. The public and private images of the United States in the 1940s therefore are incompatible.

It is not my intention to discuss the role of the United States during World War II in any detail, but the twisted and strongly edited public national identity fashioned by the American government mirrors the confused identity construction of the American characters in Bowles’s novel. I argue that Port, Kit, and Tunner each act out one part of the various images related to America. Because these various images are at odds with each other, however, they are forced to question and renegotiate their national identities. While none of the characters will return to the United States—and thus each remains mired in a foreign and disorienting landscape—each of the characters engages critically with their identity to different degrees. Their encounters with others expose their (mis)constructions of the self and the ways they propagate or challenge colonialism. Just as the image of the United States had been airbrushed considerably, so do Port, Tunner and

Kit display a rather blue-eyed understanding of their role in The Maghreb and their interactions with the Arab population. While they look down on the actual colonizers and openly disagree with notions of empire, they showcase their internalized racial and cultural hierarchies and thus propagate new forms of colonialism. The United States, in fact, had started to explore and exploit other countries as markets at the time. McAlister exposes the “benevolent affiliation” of the United States in politics as “an alternative to colonialism ... which included nearly unlimited access to Middle Eastern oil” (2). A nation on the rise both in cash flow and clout, it could take advantage of newly independent nations and colonial infrastructures, all the while distancing themselves from the European colonial powers for their oppression of colonized people.

Most criticism on the work has focused on the existential ideology at work here and the overall failure of the American travelers. Port dies of Typhus, Kit goes mad in the desert, and Tunner is trapped in his guilt while he is waiting for Kit’s return. The Moresbys are neither able to finish their journey nor will they mend their marriage. Man tries to defy nature and loses. If we analyze the Americans’ interactions with each other and the local people, the novel challenges the varying ways American culture is perceived abroad. Bowles, an American living and writing in Morocco, would have been acutely aware of these images and uses this novel to critique American capitalism and Western patriarchy, and explores a cultural intermingling that steps over national and cultural boundaries. While the various Western characters are fleeing post-war Europe and their life and problems there, they realize to varying degrees how much of the European mentality they have brought with them to North Africa. Even though they think that they are exploring/absorbing/conquering The Maghreb, the novel illustrates more than anything else how the characters struggle with their own identities: identities that they have left behind willingly and gladly, but which they have not been able to shed. Port impersonates American capitalism and consumer culture: a passion which consumes him in the end. Tunner,

on the other hand, as various lines in the novel suggest, represents the public image of post-war America in foreign eyes: a beautiful and prosperous nation, famous through its movies and naïve make-believe. Even though critics have not paid much attention to Tunner, his character parallels Port's by displaying the somewhat good-natured flip-side of a country which saved Europe in World War II and has thus established its place as a world power on the global scene. As both male characters remain either centered on themselves or on their own culture/interests, Kit engages with her own identity most critically, thus facilitating more meaningful encounters with others, especially with people of The Maghreb.

Many of the American personal interactions in this novel—with each other and with Maghrebians—are rooted in sexual desire and introduce the concept of the shared body. The subaltern body is a familiar colonial trope. The desire for the other body parallels the desire for power over the other culture and country. According to Fredrik Jameson, for example, the body in literature has often been equated with the country. Saleem in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, symbolizes India as he can actually hear the voices of other Indians in his head. Even more common is the female body as a national allegory, especially in reference to the mother, like the figure of Mother India (Bharat Mata).⁵⁴ The inherent colonial and patriarchal attitudes in conquering/penetrating the foreign body, and, conversely in sacrificing/surrendering the body undermine the supposed anticolonial and benevolent mission of the American characters in *The Maghreb*.

Reading desire and the body as colonial tropes in *The Sheltering Sky* exposes Port's colonial endeavor in North Africa even if he shows no awareness of his latent Orientalism and

⁵⁴ For an exploration of the tropes of motherhood, the body, and national images of India see for example Sangeeta Ray, Sumathi Ramaswami, Sandhya Shetty, Gyanendra Pandey, Radha Kumar, Urvashi Butalia, and Vijay Mishra.

views himself as a tolerant and world-open traveler. He is careful to make the distinction between the tourist and the traveler:

He did not think of himself as a tourist; he was a traveler. The difference is partly one of time, he would explain. Whereas the tourist generally hurries back home at the end of a few weeks or months, the traveler, belonging no more to one place than the next, moves slowly, over periods of years, from one part of the earth to another. . . . For, as he claimed, another important difference between tourist and traveler is that the former accepts his own civilization without question; not so the traveler, who compares it with the others, and rejects those elements he finds not to his liking. (14)

If analyzed closely, Port's definition of the traveler reveals an individual who does not cherish connections or belonging and who makes no distinction between Americans, French, Moroccans, and other local peoples of The Maghreb. Instead, he foregrounds mobility and the landscape. While his message expounds critical awareness of one's own identity, however, the underlying concepts in this statement are typically American. The constant movement signals the economic upward mobility of the United States as a world power after World War II, and the innocence in the traveler's wanderings mirrors the US military as liberators in the war. The landscape, on the other hand, harkens back to early American frontier mentality. In fact, Port reflects later on that he derives the utmost pleasure from the "idea that each successive moment he was deeper into the Sahara than he had been the moment before" (109), because "it made him feel that he was pioneering—he felt more closely identified with his great-grandparents" (*Sheltering Sky*, 108). So while Port professes to question his own culture as he encounters other countries and cultures, he affirms and relives a distinct American identity. Like Wharton, Port does not fully engage with his foreign surroundings, but identifies them as the new American frontier and thus as an extension of America.

Port remains rooted in his national identity, which corresponds with American policies in The Maghreb at this point in history:

A few months before *The Sheltering Sky* was published, the *Saturday Evening Post* ran an article by Demaree Bess entitled 'We are invading North Africa Again.' The reference was to U.S. businessmen who, urged by Truman's Point Four program (the so-called Marshall Plan for the Third World), were returning to the places the GIs had been during the war and doing their bit to stave off the spread of Soviet influence. ("Sheltering Screens," 317)

This call for entrepreneurs to look for business in The Maghreb and to introduce a Western consumer culture mirrors Port's participation in and propagation of American neo-colonialism, which emerges most clearly in his interactions with Maghrebians.

In fact, Port's attitude towards locals and his transactions with them are determined by a consumer mentality. He sees them primarily as laboring bodies, whose services he purchases. When he and Kit try to get to El Ga'a before Tunner, whom they had ditched earlier, Port bribes a man in the bus station to arrange seats for him and Kit on the bus.⁵⁵ Port is fully conscious that he has robbed two people of their fare to El Ga'a and when Kit protests, Port brushes it away with stereotypes: "What's a week for them? Time doesn't exist for them" (177). Time is money and Port just bought them another week and closer proximity to their elusive goal. By using the pronoun "them", Port clumps all Maghrebians together, orientalizing them as one exotic and undistinguishable mass. Time, in Port's view equates money and progress, which reflects entrepreneurial attitudes. He who has the money can buy labor and outbid other competitors. Rather than an honor system of first-come, first-served basis, service for Port is up for auction and goes to the highest bidder. The more he pays, the better services he deserves. The reference to time, or better, the timelessness of The Maghreb, also resonates with orientalist equations of North Africa with antiquity as we have already seen in Wharton's travelogue. In Port's eyes, The Maghreb is so far removed from the modern world and so obviously lacks progress by any

⁵⁵ As an aside, in Bertolucci's film adaptation of this novel, Port actually throws the money at the man, and the man cries out in recognition "American?"

American standard that time has become irrelevant. Only by applying his American standards to The Maghreb can he come to these conclusions, which marks him as a tourist by his own definition.

Port's capitalist ideology becomes even more apparent in his encounters with women. He is fascinated by the exotic, the other, the mysterious. Port has not had any sexual relations with his wife in years but uses the first days to wander around the town and quickly agrees to visit a prostitute. When Smaïl invites him to see "a friend," Port immediately focuses on the transaction rather than the interaction. He does not think of sex, but of a body for sale. "A girl?" he said. 'You mean a whore.' Smaïl was indignant. 'A whore? Ah, my friend, you don't know me ... This is a friend of mine, very elegant, very nice. When you meet her, you'll see'" (30-31). Even though they are both talking about a prostitute, Port vulgarizes the transaction and dehumanizes the girl, while Smaïl praises her as an individual with qualities that go beyond the body and services she can offer.⁵⁶

A similar scene is repeated later in the novel when Port goes to the Casbah and finds a traditional tea house. He becomes fascinated by a particular dancer and insists on having her for the night. His companion and guide refuses to negotiate the price for Port, however, when he finds out that the girl is blind. When, as a result of the man's refusal to negotiate the girl has left, Port is furious:

Now that she was gone, he was persuaded, not that a bit of enjoyment had been denied him, but that he had lost love itself ... In bed, without eyes to see beyond the bed, she would have been completely there, a prisoner. He thought of the little

⁵⁶ Interesting to note in this passage is also Bowles's choice to introduce Smaïl's name exactly when he defends the girl. For most of the passage he is referred to simply as "the Arab." By emphasizing the girl's individuality, Smaïl himself become more of an individual in the text. As most Maghrebian characters in the novel, Smaïl has a name but it is neither mentioned often nor repeated; in other words, the reader needs to pay special attention to the names in order to remember them. In giving specific details without reiterating them, the novel seems to question the reader's participation in the colonial mission. Does he or she deem it necessary to remember the name?

games he would have played with her ... He thought of the countless ways he would have made her grateful to him. (139-140)

Again Port is not interested in the individual or in the culture, but treats these women as means to an end. He reduces the local men and women to laboring and servile bodies: if they can help him to the next town or provide him with pleasure, he will pay them notice; otherwise, they constitute an indistinguishable mass of masks to him. He is completely indifferent towards the people he meets, for he is certain that he can buy them all. Money balances out all courtesy and polite interest in Maghreb culture. His failure in recognizing and interacting with the local culture and people results from the lack of criticism of his own role and identity. The difference between his orientalism and Wharton's is only that he locates his superiority in his wealth and not in his skin color. He fails to recognize his propagation of values that he supposedly questions and compares with others.

It is this dehumanization of others and the focus on things that in the end foreshadow and help the reader understand his death. Ironically, in his last hours he depends on the good will of strangers, and no money can heal him, so that he becomes reduced to a dead body. Kit and Captain Broussard have to arrange for his ailing body, sheltering it, feeding it, and nursing it, while Port is unconscious for most of the time he lies in the fort at El Ga'a. While Port has been a central character, Bowles undermines Port's actions by "killing him" two thirds into the novel. His actions lead nowhere but to a small room in a fort where he will die a slow and delirious death. Ironically, the room is being made available by the French colonials, which makes his last resting place a Western conclave. If he thought that he could escape Western mentality and simply feel at home anywhere in the world, the colonial fort with only one window undermines this notion of limitless freedom. Even though money could buy him some mobility, his ailing and sick body puts a firm stop to his travels. While he thought that money could buy him a place

anywhere, he has to rely on the French to give him a place for free since the locals refuse to open their hotels to a sick man even if he pays. His final resting place also highlights Port's underlying colonial ambitions, or at least his comfort in using colonial advantages.

Interestingly, Port starts to feel the first chills of his fatal illness when he leaves the tea house where he desired the blind girl. Even though he did not actually sleep with her, his previous adventure with a prostitute and his increased desire for the blind girl seem to manifest themselves in the fever he will eventually die from. The lust for possession has entered him, but it is impossible. He is only drawn by mysterious, dependent, and indecipherable bodies. This allure will vanish the moment he has known them, like his desire for his wife seems to have disappeared. The same can be said for his overall realization that he cannot filter out the Algerians and the French in his wanderings. He is looking for pure nothingness, but he will never find it. His failed encounter with the other has contaminated and condemned him. In his intention of buying the people's help, he actually excludes himself from their society and substitutes interactions with transactions.

If read in a political context, Port's death also signals the fear of cultural and racial contamination in the United States. On the one hand, America as the new leader of the post-war world can no longer hold to an isolationist attitude. In actively participating in world affairs, the United States needs to expose its own weaknesses and strategies, find compromises and ways of communicating with other cultures, and thus opens itself up to attacks and prejudice. The enormous responsibilities heaved onto the shoulders of a very young nation are exciting and dangerous at the same time. The inter-racial sexual relation that seems to lead to Port's demise also indicates the struggle of America with its own racial diversity. The Eugenics project in America, the mandatory sterilization of "genetically inferior" people to prevent racial and biological deterioration of the population, was quite controversial in the first half of the twentieth

century.⁵⁷ In fact, much of the division between the public and the private image of America centers on race and culture. A nation of immigrants it has not found a way yet to facilitate equal rights to all American citizens. America, both domestically and abroad, identifies itself as a white nation and feels contaminated by other races and cultures, as the one-drop-rule showcases only too clearly. Because the various races do not mix well in the United States, also Port's interracial encounter that is based on colonial and patriarchal hierarchies leads to his demise and exposes his flawed sense of identity.

The disappearance of Port's passport, in fact, symbolizes the contradiction between his sense of self and his actions towards others. The incident alerts the reader to the identity in question, the change in power relations and questions what makes us who we are. Upon realizing that he has lost his passport, Port confesses to Lieutenant d'Armagnac: "'It's strange,' he said with a deprecatory smile, 'how, ever since I discovered that my passport was gone, I've felt only half alive. But it's a very depressing thing in a place like this to have no proof of who you are, you know'" (159-160). The simple statement that he needs proof of who he is indicates his ambiguity towards himself. Port's passive acknowledgment stands in stark contrast to Kit, who at one point in the narrative spreads out all her clothes to feel "civilized" and declares confidently that she is "still an American, you know. And I'm not even trying to be anything else" (161). Port is pretending to be someone else and now only has his money to establish who he is in relation to Arabs and Frenchmen. At the same time, he has realized that he is different, neither accepting his status as a foreigner nor becoming a local. Instead of engaging with his confused sense of self, he decides to escape all forms of identity and responsibility. When he flees with Kit from Tunner, he also tries to run away from his passport, which Tunner is bringing

⁵⁷ For more information on Eugenics, see for example Ann Gibson Winfield, Steven Selden and Nancy Stepan among others.

with him. Port has glimpsed the impossibility of his traditional American self, but cannot reconstruct a new sense of identity. Only in his death does he realize his mistaken notions of himself. The emphasis on his body in the last instance of his appearance in the novel demonstrates Port's otherness.

As he is dying, Port starts to depend on others. Kit has to find a place of lodging and rest for him. Captain Broussard agrees to give them shelter, food, and medicine. While he had rejected Kit throughout the last years of their marriage, he is now terrified of losing her. The abyss he seeks and sees is not some existential truth but a reflection of his own actions. All the things he desired are unreachable, he depends on the people he pushed away earlier, and money cannot help him in the end. His death exposes Port's shallow nature. "‘He's stopped being human,' Kit said to herself. Illness reduces man to his basic state: a cloaca [sic] in which the chemical processes continue. The meaningless hegemony of the involuntary. It was the ultimate taboo stretched out beside her" (214). His death, the final destiny for Port, is described in very physical, even biological terms: "His cry went on through the final image: the spots of raw bright blood on the earth. Blood on excrement. The supreme moment, high above the desert, when the two elements, blood and excrement, long kept apart, merge" (235). As he has reduced others to bodies and bodily functions, so does the narrative diminish Port to flesh and feces. He can only engage with his identity by shedding his body altogether.

If Port stands for a critique of American consumer politics in *The Maghreb*, then Tunner exemplifies the "positive" image of America abroad: the goodhearted movie star type. Some of the most famous movies came out in these years and America attained the status as the land of opportunity and wealth. *Casablanca* in particular, like Bowles's novel, explores the role of Americans abroad and the viability of new power hierarchies. Films constituted some of the most successful forms of media(tion) between cultures—both exporting American values and

traditions and introducing American audiences to foreign countries and cultures—*Casablanca* does both. It is the story of Rick, an American expatriate who owns a nightclub in Morocco, as he meets his former love again unexpectedly. In an American neutral stance, Rick exclaims: “I stick my neck out for nobody.” 1942, the year *Casablanca* came out, is also the year the United States Armed Forces joined the North African Campaign in Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, which until then had been commanded by the British. The film thus speaks directly to the American attitudes about world affairs and recreates The Maghreb as the new American frontier to audiences at home. A political message from and to America comes packaged into a non-threatening and exciting love story to the American consumer. It is this image in particular, the United States as entertainers and good-looking, well-meaning actors on the world stage that Tunner personifies in this novel. His “paramount” looks immediately link him to the oldest movie production company in the United States, and signify his popularly crafted image.

Even though Kit and Port look down on him, Tunner is actually a very likeable character. He respects Port and Kit and values their friendship. He has some affairs with women in the course of the novel, but remains very discreet about them. In contrast to Port, these sexual liaisons seem to be rooted in mutual desire and pose less of a moral dilemma since he is not married. Even his brief fling with Kit on the train has nothing threatening or possessive about it.⁵⁸ Tunner constantly exhibits his loyalty to both Port and Kit. In Messad, when Port’s stolen passport reappears, it is Tunner who agrees to carry the document to Bou Noura and to deliver it to Port in person. When he finds out that Port and Kit have escaped to El Ga’a, he follows them there, painstakingly looking for them. He shows his loyalty in the strongest sense when he waits for three years in Bou Noura for any news about Kit. He stays put, visits the lieutenant religiously, and even keeps Kit’s family and friends informed on her status. So, while he started

⁵⁸ I will revisit this particular episode in more detail in my discussion of Kit.

out as the tourist who planned to stay in Algeria only for a couple of weeks, Tunner has become a local favorite. He communicates and interacts frequently with the owner of the inn and d'Aramagnac,

Tunner not only acts as a link between Kit and the rest of the world, but also serves to show the various degrees of national awareness of the American characters in this novel. He and Kit both change in their interactions with each other and the locals, which helps them to adapt to their new surroundings; Port, who miscalculated his role and freedom in *The Maghreb*, is unable to change and adjust, and therefore dies. Tunner, on the other hand, similar to Kit, is fully aware of his role and national identity. He complains about bad food and unsanitary lodgings and does not pretend to be comfortable with anything he is being offered. He is a tourist and has no problem with that role. Money, for him, is also a way of purchasing services, but since his financial supplies are limited, he also values what he gets. In other words, he is not pretentious or under any illusion that he might pass for a local. When the occasion arises, however, Tunner is able to navigate his way to El Ga'a all by himself and to stay in Algeria until he hears any news. As Captain Broussard offers a counter perspective in French colonialism, Tunner shows the friendly face of American expansionism. He may be a rather boring and shallow character, but he is friendly, devoted, and non-threatening. He does not aim to change anything in his surroundings, but pursues his own goal—finding Kit—while participating in the local culture.

Similarly, Kit starts out with a tourist mindset, but is able to reinvent herself. Syrine Hout has identified the difference as follows: “Whereas Port’s hypnosis is induced by certain properties of the arid landscape—its endlessness and emptiness—Kit’s is brought on by the qualities of compassion and exoticism in strangers” (“Grains of Utopia,” 121). Hout goes on to specify that “For Port and Kit, the wasteland was where they hoped to engage in self-discovery and pursue self-gratification away from the weariness and dreariness of America. Port was

spellbound by specific scenic features of the sandscape, whereas Kit was captivated by the warmth and exoticism of particular local characters” (“Grains of Utopia,” 130). While I think that Hout idealizes Kit in this description, I do agree that Kit is more interested in personal interaction than economic transaction, and once she has achieved agency, she will actively seek out this interaction without asking anything in return.

The first such glimpse of agency is her brief sexual encounter with Tunner. In contrast to most critics, who attribute the affair to Tunner’s seduction, I argue that Kit is not only complicit, but thinks of the possibility before it even occurs to Tunner. This reading reveals their encounter as a dialogic process and not, like Port’s sexual relations, as an imposition of patriarchal values and hierarchies. Kit’s decision to sleep with Tunner also shows her willingness to change her role and sense of self, which up to this point, was completely determined by Port. When Port decides to hitch a ride with the Lyles and leaves Tunner and Kit to take the train together, Kit immediately is “quite conscious of a desire to pit Tunner’s magic against Port’s” (66) and goes to a beauty parlor before their trip. More than merely using Tunner against Port, Kit feels safe with him when the moment comes. Kit, who has a multitude of phobias, is haunted by omens, and seems to be unable to embrace an idea that disagrees with Port, in Tunner’s arms now “could no longer think, nor were there any more images in her head. She was aware only of the softness of the woolen bathrobe next to her skin, and then of the nearness and warmth of a being that did not frighten her” (88). Both Port and Kit are highly cerebral individuals. While Port feels comfortable in his abstractions and calculations, however, Kit craves the physical closeness and does not reject her bodily needs. When Port has sex, he aims to possess another body, while Kit in sex can finally possess herself. This function of desire is completely different from patriarchal uses of the body, as it becomes a liberating, rather than an oppressive, act. Their mutual consent qualifies them as equals, rendering the sexual encounter an exchange and not an imposition.

Kit, unlike Port, recognizes herself and her role. She is not deluded about her status as rich female tourist. By recognizing her body as a class, racial, and national marker, she can recognize others. Kit is shocked and shaken when she sees the people in the fourth class carriage and shows awareness of the image they must have of her. “The idea occurred to her that these were Moslems, and that the odor of alcohol in her breath would scandalize them almost as much as if she were to suddenly remove all her clothing” (84). The people on the train are not one undistinguishable mass to her, but distinct individuals. She is conscious of the natives whose seat she and Port usurp on the way to El Ga’a and reaches out for help to the young Arab who sits in front of her in the bus. When she asks him to help her get Port off the bus and find the lodging, the reader does not witness a business transaction, but the young man offers his help out of kindness.

Kit indicated by word and gesture that she and Port would stay where they were until everyone else had left the vehicle. The young Arab said that in that event he would, too, because she would need him to help take Port to the hotel. ... ‘You are very kind,’ she said, sitting back in her seat. ‘Yes, madame.’ His face expressed nothing but friendly solicitousness, and she trusted him implicitly” (186).

Again it is the stranger, like Tunner, whom she trusts and feels safe with more than her husband. Kit’s reaction to both Tunner and the young Arab man signal her understanding of who they are and who she is in relation to them. Even though Kit may be relying on orientalist notions when she trusts the man on the bus *implicitly*—as the inferior always seems familiar—she and the man are equals. She recognizes her own disadvantage in this situation: she is too weak to carry Port herself and has no knowledge of the city to be able to navigate it. She thus depends, like another female character in America literature, on the kindness of strangers. In a world that has changed, she needs traditional markers to see and understand herself. She is an object of desire for Tunner and a helpless white tourist to the local. Her role in relation to Port, however, confuses her. She

is his wife, but feels alienated from him. They are running from one place to the next, but have no goal or final destination in mind. Port transfers his own confused sense of self onto his wife. When he is dead, however, she is free to find her own identity.

Her later encounters with foreign men, whether it is Captain Broussard who offers them shelter and medicine at the fort, or Daoud Zozeph, the Jewish shopkeeper who agrees to store her bags until she escapes to the desert, and finally her union with Belqassim, are not based in capitalist ventures, but on goodwill and interactions between individuals. Kit does not need to throw money into the men's faces to secure their help, and neither do they expect payment. Moreover, in accepting the various men's help, Kit acknowledges her foreignness and dependence on local and colonial infrastructures and knowledge. When she needs lodging for her sick husband, she gratefully accepts the room, medicine, and food from Captain Broussard. By asking others for help, Kit also shows that she trusts the people she encounters. After all, she entrusts them with her most precious things: her sick husband, her valuables, and her life. Accepting the help, moreover, while it poses an admission of her dependence on others, also signifies the beginning of agency. So far, Port had taken care of everything and therefore had also made the necessary decisions. Upon their arrival in El Ga'a, however, Kit starts to decide her own fate and explicitly includes others in her designs.

Kit's role in this narrative mirrors the subaltern in American society. When Bowles wrote this novel, women had only been granted the right to vote twenty years earlier. Her powerful status of Westerner and American in *The Maghreb* is already undermined by the lower hierarchical position of her gender. She is utterly dependent on Port, his love, his approval, and his opinion. She follows him and that is her only objective. She has no lofty goals other than rehabilitating their marriage. Like Tunner, who stays in Algeria because he waits for her, Kit travels to *The Maghreb* because Port wants her to. Her position of power, then, has always been

contested and overdetermined by others. The encounter with others allows her to re-examine, and, most importantly, to reconstruct her identity. In this light, Kit's much discussed encounter with Belqassim symbolizes the reaching out to someone else and giving without expecting anything in return. In joining a man with whom she can only communicate through her body, she sheds her identity and starts to form a new one. Like a newborn, she goes back to the basic element: the naked body. Frantz Fanon has differentiated between the natural and the human reality in colonial thought by defining the natural reality as that which has to be tamed, Westernized, cleaned up:

It is in the degree that I go beyond my own immediate being that I apprehend the existence of the other as a natural and more than natural reality ... The only means of breaking this vicious circle that throws me back on myself is to restore to the other, through mediation and recognition, his human reality, which is different from his natural reality. ... *they recognize themselves as mutually recognizing each other (Hegel)*" (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 217).

Kit recognizes Belqassim and her surroundings in their human reality by approaching him utterly defenselessly. She is in a foreign and disorienting territory, does not speak the Bedouin's language, and carries what is left of her possessions in an overnight bag. Kit enters his life and agrees to his rules without trying to adapt or assimilate them. She is ready to shed her national and gender identity when she decides to join the Tuareg merchants in their journey through the desert.

As in Port's case, *The Sheltering Sky* uses the passport as a national marker for Kit. In a conversation between d'Armagnac and Tunner a couple of years after Kit's disappearance we find out that Kit left the fort after Captain Broussard asked for her passport. She never surrendered her passport but neither does she use it at any other point during her journey. Kit rejects her American identity. She does not need a nation to define her but has found her own definition. This independence mirrors the sentiment of the Bedouin she joins, since "the Touareg

are antagonists of the nation form; they are identified with no nation-state and are in retreat from Moroccan and Algerian national culture” (“Sheltering Screens,” 319). Kit has become the true traveler who, in contrast to the tourist, rejects her national identity and culture and actively engages in creating a new sense of self. Her emphasis on the body and the satiation of the most basic desires, signify the repossessing of herself without imposing any external markers upon herself. Kit’s union with Belqassim, rather than symbolizing her captivity, is another example of her newly-found agency. Her very first encounter with the merchant group establishes her confidence and independence: “Even as she saw these two men she knew that she would accompany them, and the certainty gave her an unexpected power: instead of feeling the omens, she now would make them, *be* them herself” (268). Kit is not swept up and taken away by the Bedouin group, but stops them and clearly communicates that she will join them. Throughout the journey she is fully conscious and complicit in all actions.

Kit’s disappearance in the end, however, signals the complexity in constructing and negotiating a new identity. Similar to Anna in *The Map of Love*, Kit signals her independence by shedding her gender as she disguises herself as a male Bedouin when she enters Belqassim’s city. By shedding her clothes and then replacing them with male attire, Kit asserts her agency and independence but is still bound by gender limitations. In order to stay with Belqassim, she must stay locked in a room, hidden away from his wives and servants, only waiting for his to return to make love to her. While Kit seemingly enjoys this situation and, I would argue, replenishes herself and her body with affection and desire as she remains silent throughout the whole time, this relationship re-enacts gender hierarchies. The exception in this case is, however, that she stays as long as she wants, and consequently also leaves when she wants. She willingly submits to her role in order to change it later on. When she makes up her mind to leave, she does not encounter many obstacles in her way. Similarly, she refuses to be sent back home or to be

given an identity that determines her. When she escapes from the embassy staff woman, Kit demonstrates her determination not to be found and to limit herself to one particular identity—one that she has freely chosen and accepted. No compromise seems possible for Kit. She cannot navigate both cultures, but has to disappear in order to emerge more completely. It needs a direct collision to renegotiate contact zones between cultures.

V.

Through the analysis of the various characters and encounters in *The Sheltering Sky*, we can recognize the marketplace that is The Maghreb. Identities and positions of powers are being negotiated and undermined. As the world changes after World War II, so do the interactions between the various characters mirror and play with national identities and images. This text questions to what extent the characters are able to shed their imposed and supposed identities when they encounter the other. It reveals the discrepancies between characters' constructions of self and their actions towards others in order to portray a changing world and to critique colonialism. The Mezzaterra of encounters refuses simple definitions of colonialism and empire and cautions the reader about internalized concepts of power and superiority that undermine any anti-colonial project. This novel then offers a collision of cultures, peoples, and languages in The Maghreb because the 1940s set the stage for a new type of international encounter. Countries join the world stage while others are being explored, liberated, and occupied. The devastation of World War II has brought empires to their knees and changed the face of colonialism; it has not diminished colonial and orientalist sentiments, however. Money-based neo-colonial projects are under way, propagated by new people with a different language, but they are still colonial in nature.

This novel also demonstrates that encounters with others prompt not only self-reflection but also self-critique. The Western traveler changes in the encounter; it is no longer a one-

dimensional act of seeing, but of reacting to the altered circumstances. The changed power relations are also evident in the more prominent role of the Maghrebians. Though they still portray rather traditional, mostly servile, roles, they emerge with their individual personalities. The reader stays with the conversation, hears the shopkeeper's words, and learns their names. These small modifications symbolize the growing (critical awareness) of other cultures and people in the West. The successful encounter, it seems, is brought about by a clear and honest awareness of our political, social, and class components and by an equal willingness to shed these. Only if we trust the other and do not rely on inherent power structures—like colonialism—or class differences—like capitalism—can the encounter become successful. Another important observation is the fact that we don't always recognize who the other is. Port accused Abdelkedir of stealing his passport but the Lyles were the real criminal element. Tunner, on the other hand, is able to communicate and live peacefully both with the locals, as shown in the nightly chess games with Abdelkedir, and with the French in his daily inquiries. He has learned French and recognized and come to terms with the multiple voices and faces of The Maghreb. He does not judge and filter out one experience over another, but finds his place among the people.

As World War II ends and new alliances emerge, identities are in flux, and power shifts, violence becomes one way of interacting and counteracting the influence of others. Not only did the war bring different people into direct contact with each other, but it also established enemy lines. The atrocities committed in the first half of the twentieth century induced mistrust in humanity. War treaties bring about new borders, some of which remain contested to this day. As my reading of *Tremor of Forgery* will illustrate in the next chapter, acts of aggression will define cross-cultural encounters for the next decades, exactly because identities are not fixed and new hierarchies emerge. Once Lyotard's grand narratives are being dismantled, other narratives emerge and compete against each other as well as against ingrained values and traditions.

Especially across cultures, this struggle proves complex. If national identities are in flux, are they still relevant, especially today when more and more borders open? How do we fit subaltern identities, such as the queer, the liberal, and the woman into national narratives? What is our obligation and responsibility towards our nation? Is it possible to establish an identity without recurring to images of the nation? I will attempt to answer these questions in the following chapters from an American and an Arab perspective over time, beginning with an analysis of the function of violence in Patricia Highsmith's *The Tremor of Forgery*.

**Acts of Aggression:
Violence in *The Tremor of Forgery***

Like *In Morocco* and *The Sheltering Sky*, *The Tremor of Forgery* paints a partial image of America as it exposes the paranoia and fear permeating the relations between Americans, Europeans, and Arabs. The existential threat all characters perceive takes root in the Cold War and the 1967 war at a time when foreign countries have become more accessible and old power hierarchies, especially within national cultures, are being dismantled. By contextualizing the encounters in this novel in their specific historical, national, and psychological moment, I aim to reconstruct the Mezzaterra as a marketplace that is characterized by insecurity and uncertainty where characters mark their identity through acts of aggression. In step with American foreign policies at the time, the main character Howard Ingham opposes the traditionalist and neocolonial attitudes of Francis J. Adams, or OWL. Ingham's friendship with Jensen and his encounters and clashes with Tunisians in the novel mirror the existential fear at the heart of the political situation and the social changes that are under way. By questioning his national and social identity, Ingham⁵⁹ is able to find his place in The Maghreb. Like in *The Sheltering Sky*, my reading presents the reader with various attitudes and differing politics in regards to Arabs in order to challenge traditional interpretations of encounters and to discuss their larger implications. Similar to my findings in Bowles's novel, the degree of the characters' transformations as a result of their interactions with others stems from a willingness to critique and question national and traditional values. Only the characters who are willing to change, i.e. question imposed and fixed identities in constructing their sense of selves and that of others, engage directly with the other and are willing to investigate their construction of identity in the

⁵⁹ I refer to this character by his last name rather than his first name, as I do with the characters of the other works, because he is referred to as Ingham in the novel. Only when his friends address him directly do they use his first name, Howard. This specific use of last names is of importance as it points to the male world that I will discuss in more detail in the later part of this chapter.

process, thereby finding their place in a changing world. In a decade defined by civil unrest and global suspicion, these encounters are violent and question the sustainability of patriarchy, morality, and nationalism.

My reading of this text explores the crumbling of what Jean-Francois Lyotard has called “grand narratives.” These narratives of nations and forms of government, gender roles and racism all surface in this novel. The uncertainty linked to all of these concepts, the fear and arbitrariness, together with the fear of extinction and changes on a large scale indicate the struggle with identity. If all known norms are questioned and/or vanishing, what then makes up an American, an Arab, a man, love? All identities are constructed and thus, put bluntly, a lie or a forgery. Through the encounter with the other, this text investigates how we make up identities and how these identities stand up to the test of the real world. Adams, representing traditional American values, has a very strong sense of who he is, but other people don’t agree with him. His identity is so strict and rooted in national images that it will not survive. Jensen seems to be more successful. He is non-traditional. A Danish gay artist, recovering from a breakdown, he seems ready to go home and pick up his life again at the end of the novel. Jensen, though liberal on some fronts, remains utterly racist. He has nothing good to say about Arabs and takes advantage of the ripe market of young men without any scruples or shame. Finally, Ingham slowly unravels the notions of himself until he finds his place in Tunisia *and* in America.

Following questions arise from this investigation: Is it really the characters’ respective national background that defines them? What, for example, makes Jensen especially Danish or European? What constitutes identity? What makes us who we are? How do our encounters with others in particular expose this identity? In my attempt to answering these questions, my analysis of *The Tremor of Forgery* harkens back to my reading of *The Sheltering Sky* where encounters with Arab characters like Smaïl reveal the colonial nature of the transactions and interactions

with Maghrebians. As Port treats all locals and Maghrebian infrastructures as commodities to be purchased, so Ingham's relative cool after he has struck down (and probably killed) an Arab intruder reveals his orientalism. Both characters think of themselves as very tolerant and easy-going, but suffer from emotional conflicts. In addition to failed sexual relations with women, Highsmith's novel also raises questions about male fantasies of the male Orient, indicating a transformation in traditional forms of desire and questions of morality.

I.

Even though this novel constitutes arguably one of Highsmith's best works,⁶⁰ the author has never gained much fame or appreciation in the United States.⁶¹ Highsmith herself moved to Europe permanently in 1963 and lived in various countries, such as England, France, and Switzerland until her death in 1995 (Harrison 2). Even though she visited her native country quite regularly, and set much of her fiction in the United States, the American reading public mainly viewed her as a writer of suspense fiction.⁶² As Highsmith explained on several occasions, "the suspense label did me no good" (*Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction*, 141), because that genre "has a cheapness hanging about it, a reputation for superficiality, a stigma of inferiority to the straight novel, ... It is for this reason really—mediocrity—that most suspense

⁶⁰ Graham Greene, as has been duly noted any time *The Tremor of Forgery* comes up in discussions, has called this novel "Highsmith's finest fiction," but also Highsmith's biographer Russell Harrison has praised this novel and some of her subsequent work as her best writing.

⁶¹ In fact, while *Tremor* belongs among Highsmith's best work, her series of books on Tom Ripley and her novel *Strangers on a Train* were her most popular works, owing mainly to the successful film adaptation of *The Talented Mister Ripley*, *Ripley's Game*, and *Strangers on a Train*.

⁶² One needs to note that Leonard Cassuto argues for a resurfacing of Highsmith's work in more recent years, in fact, calls her "hot" in 2004 (B12). As proof for the author's new fame Cassuto cites the reprinting of much of her works by renowned publishing houses and the recent new film versions of two of her works that feature stars like Matt Damon and John Malkovich. The renewed interest in Highsmith is based in the perception of Highsmith as a queer author rather than a writer of suspense fiction. For an analysis of queerness in Highsmith's work, see also Michael Bronski's essay "The Subversive Ms. Highsmith." While many of her works hint at or include queer themes, only her very first novel, *The Price of Salt*, focuses exclusively on a lesbian relationship. She originally published the novel under the pseudonym Claire Morgan, but released the novel again under her own name when she was an established author.

books and therefore their writers can never be real best sellers, never break through” (*Plotting*, 144). While Highsmith thus bemoans the bad reputation of suspense fiction, she does not distance herself from that genre, and instead re-defines it as

Stories with a threat of violent physical action and danger, or the danger and action itself. Another characteristic of the suspense story is that it provides entertainment in a lively and usually superficial sense. One does not expect profound thought or long sections without action in a suspense story. *But the beauty of the suspense genre is that a writer can write profound thoughts* and have some sections without physical action if he wishes to, because the framework is an essentially lively story (*Plotting*, 1, emphasis mine).

Even though Highsmith herself calls her fiction “entertainments,” she clearly does not call her own work superficial; instead, she praises suspense fiction for the possibility of addressing profound issues underneath a bubbly surface. As her definition of the genre reveals, Highsmith pays great attention to the entertaining elements in her works, like exotic settings, bizarre characters, and detailed descriptions, but she also cautions the reader not to miss the more subtle elements, the issues at the heart of the novel. Her treatment of these issues raises her works out of the mediocrity of suspense fiction and into the realm of literature.

Unfortunately, readers’ limited appreciation of Highsmith’s novels translates into the lack of substantial literary criticism on the more profound issues in her work. Even though most critics have remarked Highsmith’s underestimated status as a writer in the United States, not many of their discussions of *The Tremor of Forgery* pursue any deeper meaning in detail.⁶³ By highlighting the concept of the writer in particular, Erlene Hubly, for example, aptly argues that *Tremor* explores the themes most prominent in Highsmith’s fiction, namely “the nature of identity; homosexuality; the real versus the imagined world; [and] the effect of a foreign country

⁶³ In addition to the label of suspense writer, Karl Stenger attributes the American public’s indifference towards Highsmith’s work to her characteristically negative depictions of the American middle class and American politics, and her “reclusive and prickly personality” (145). Those same alienating factors, however, deserve a closer scrutiny as they reveal the multiple layers of identity constructions, politics, and human encounters in her work.

on the Americans who live there” (116). Hubly further posits that “If *The Tremor of Forgery* is about an American confronting a foreign culture, it is also a novel about the nature of identity. For Howard Ingham, like Highsmith’s other artists, is a man without a clear identity” (120). Also Raimund Borgmeier praises Highsmith’s work but places it squarely in the category of crime writing, as he explains that works such as *Tremor* renew the genre of traditional crime writing by showing us the perspective and the moral dilemma (or lack thereof) playing out in the criminal’s mind rather than keeping the reader in suspense as to the “who done it.” Like Hubly, Borgmeier emphasizes the relativity of perspective and the uncertain nature of a concept like truth or identity. While both critics acknowledge Highsmith’s preference for American characters travelling abroad, they do not look at the interaction or encounter that takes place in the course of those travels. Instead, they read the foreign locations merely as settings that enable the main character to reflect upon himself and his politics. At the same time, neither of the two analyses pursues the larger issues central to the work in detail. As I will show in this chapter, the specific political and cultural context of the United States at home and abroad at the time of this novel go beyond Ingham and the anonymity of the writer.

Instead, the foreign setting helps to question American values and the (im)possibility of national identity in general. Harrison, for example, explains that the author’s “novels from the late 1960s on dealt more directly with social and political change in the United States” (x) and Andrew Wilson, in his recent biography of Patricia Highsmith, specifies these politics in *The Tremor of Forgery* as having to do with Vietnam and the Cold War. Also David Cochran explains that “her fiction signalled a sustained critique of the major cultural assumptions of the period, challenging the rigid dichotomies and vision of America as a savior of the world that marked the official foreign policy paradigm and the dominant gender assumptions and concept of the home and family providing salvation that constituted the official domestic ideology”

(157). While these political contextualizations open up new ways of reading and understanding Highsmith's works, no critic discusses *The Tremor of Forgery* in any detail. The above observations mainly address Highsmith's fiction of the 1960s in general and don't trace these challenges in the actual text. Moreover, while American politics does lie at the heart of many discussions within the novel, it is especially American *foreign* policy and, in this particular novel, also the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 that sets the political stage. The exclusive attention on American politics and American characters, therefore, neglects a vital perspective in this work: that of the local Arab. Tunisia serves not merely as background to the main plot, but influences the characters and itself plays a vital role. Again it is in particular the interaction between Americans, Europeans, and Tunisians that invites new interpretations and wider applications for this novel.

For, while *Tremor of Forgery* portrays an American who is critical of neocolonial attitudes, the setting remains colonial and encounters limited. Even though the interactions between tourists and locals are more extensive and prominent than in *In Morocco* and *The Sheltering Sky*, much of this novel still relies on stereotypical hierarchies: the local Tunisians are the workers in the hotel, owners of bars, criminals, and anonymous neighbors, passersby, and vendors. Even though one or two of the workers interact more frequently with the tourists, such as Mokta, the hotel boy responsible for the towels and breakfast service, their interaction is solely based on superficial courtesy; Mokta remains a local young man providing services for the rich Western tourists, and for the most part neither one trusts the other. To some extent, however, the narrative offers glimpses at positive encounters, or at least, investigates some possible explanations for the animosities and the degree of otherness experienced by the main characters. This chapter then interrogates the creation of identity, and the moral, political, and emotional connotations of the self in Highsmith's novel. What exactly is it that informs our identity? Is it

our essence, or is it our environment? Does our identity change if we leave our customary surroundings, or is it merely the image of the self that changes? How much power does the individual have in crafting an image of the self? Even more importantly, how does our image of self influence our interaction with the other? How much, if any, responsibility do we have regarding the other? How do we use that responsibility? Rather than providing fixed viewpoints and communicating a rigid message, *The Tremor of Forgery* aims to ask questions, to interrogate the reader and the characters on issues of responsibility, identity, racism, and sexuality. My reading will attempt to shed light on some of the above issues by analyzing one scene in particular that resonates with and exposes larger political, sociological, and literary contexts, thereby highlighting the complexity of this work and continuing to trace the change of encounters and the depiction of The Maghreb.

II.

Patricia Highsmith's 1969 novel *The Tremor of Forgery* narrates the story of Howard Ingham who travels to Tunisia in order to write a screenplay with his friend John Castlewood, who is supposed to join him in a few days. In Hammamet Ingham makes the acquaintance of Francis Adams, a fellow American, who has lived at a bungalow at the hotel Reine de Hammamet for the past year and secretly broadcasts pro-American messages across the Iron Curtain. Because of Adams's preachy attitude, Ingham secretly nicknames him OWL (Our Way of Life). Ingham also meets Anders Jensen, a Danish painter who has been in Tunisia for eight months, recovering from a mental breakdown. After some prolonged waiting for his friend and anxious letters to his fiancée Ina in New York, Ingham finally receives the news that John Castlewood has committed suicide in Ingham's apartment because he was in love with Ina. Even though John's death renders all the plans for the joint screenplay naught, Ingham decides to stay in Tunisia, where he has started to work on a new project. Several criminal incidents pepper the

otherwise simple and mostly uneventful plot. In an alley of the Arab quarter, Ingham stumbles upon a dead man whose throat has been cut. Shocked and afraid he hurries back to his car only to catch an old Arab beggar stealing Ingham's jacket and bath towel from his car. A couple of days later several valuables go missing from his bungalow. Shortly after that night, someone kidnaps Jensen's beloved dog Hasso. All these minor incidents lead up to a break-in at Ingham's bungalow in the middle of the night. In an act of self-defense, Ingham hurls his typewriter at the intruder, hurting and possibly killing him. The hotel boys clean up the mess; Ingham never checks on the man and denies any involvement to Adams, who keeps inquiring about the incident. Ingham does discuss the evening with Jensen, however, and eventually also confesses to Ina, when she comes to visit him two months after his first arrival in Tunisia.

I read the scene of the burglary and Ingham's violent reaction to it as the pivotal scene of the novel. It is the most violent, but also most direct encounter between an American and Tunisian character in this text and helps to explain the underlying feelings of animosity while it forms the nodal point of Ingham's transformation. Since this scene in my view forms the center of the narrative and of this chapter, I will quote the passage at length.

Ingham did not know what awakened him, but he pushed himself up suddenly on one elbow and listened. The room was quite dark. His doorknob gave a squeak. Ingham sprang out of bed and instinctively moved behind his work-table, which was in the centre of his room. He faced the door. Yes, it was opening. Ingham crouched. My God, he'd forgotten to lock it, he realized. He saw silhouetted a somewhat stooped figure: a light, the street-light on the bungalow lane, gave a milky luminosity beyond. The figure was coming in. Ingham seized his typewriter from the table and hurled it with all his force, shoving it with his right arm in the manner of a basket-ball-player throwing for the basket—but the target in this case was lower. Ingham scored a direct hit against the turbaned head. The typewriter fell with a painful clatter, there was a yell from the figure which staggered back and fell on the terrace. Ingham sprang to his door, pushed the typewriter aside with one foot, and slammed the door. The key was on the windowsill to the right. He found it, groped with fingertips for the keyhole, and locked the door" (93-94).

This passage, though very detailed and descriptive, highlights Ingham's fear and the imminent threat issuing from an intruder in a turban. The intruder himself is rather vague and Ingham "knew the man he had hit was Abdullah. At least, he was ninety per cent sure of it" (94). He takes no further action, hiding inside his bungalow and listening as the hotel boys drag the body away and then wipe the blood off the tiles.

Even though Ingham is afraid, he also acts with surprising clarity. His dive behind the table and the calculated throw of the typewriter are rational and logical moves. In fact, his cold-bloodedness emerges clearly when Ingham is sure that the boys have gone. He turns on the light behind closed shutters so that it cannot be detected from the outside, turns to his typewriter and assesses the damage. "The lower front part of the frame was bent. Ingham winced at the sight of it, more for the surprising appearance of the typewriter than for the impact it must have made against the forehead of the old Arab" (95). In fact, only the narrator makes the connection between the injured head and the bent typewriter. Ingham mainly concentrates on the typewriter and whether he should have it repaired. Even when he tries to investigate the incident the next morning, he gives up quickly, dismissing the damage done to a human being: "And what was the Arab worth? Next to nothing, probably" (101). All the heightened fears in the last days, Ingham's conversations with Jensen, and the latter's orientalist attitude towards Arabs leave Ingham rather indifferent. He only cares that his involvement remains a secret.

Since the burglary is rendered in such detail and situated literally at the center of the narrative, the scene invites a reading that goes beyond the textual plot and reflects the larger themes underlying this novel. On the one hand, Ingham throws a *typewriter* at the intruder and presumably kills him. While on a strictly textual level the heavy typewriter certainly makes for a handy and efficient weapon, one cannot escape the symbolism inherent in this action. First of all, the typewriter signifies the unequal power relationship between Ingham and the intruder,

Abdullah. Ingham, after all, stays in a luxury hotel in Hammamet and is relatively independent financially. The narrator explains that Ingham's most recent book was something of a bestseller, which gives him a financial break. Here it should be noted that none of the Western characters in this novel seems to depend on work for a living. They all have savings or other resources that allow them to lead a rather idle life in Tunisia.⁶⁴ Somewhat different from ordinary tourists and similar to the American characters in *The Sheltering Sky* then, the American and European characters in this novel enjoy a privileged sort of life: their daily activities like swimming on the beach and enjoying dinners at the bar starkly contrast with Abdullah's life as a beggar. While poverty does not justify crime, the vast social gap between the two characters shows that the incident of the burglary in the bungalow does not happen between equals. While the Western tourist perceives the Arab beggar as a nuisance in the beginning of the text, the aftermath of the incident reveals how the social and cultural differences between Ingham and Abdullah are in direct relation to their "worth," their humanity.

The typewriter as murder weapon here signifies the imposition of power hierarchies that has played out over the press and through artistic images of the East/South. As the chapter on Edith Wharton and travel narratives discusses, the white imagination of the orient has been less than favorable to the native. Part of the voyage from the West to the East, the North to the South, centers on the written representation of the people and sites the traveler encounters. Even though Ingham does not actually write about Tunisia (his initial screenplay project is set in Tunisia but he abandons that project after John's suicide), it is his more general role of the Western tourist and as a writer that the typewriter signifies. Significantly, Ingham kills or injures the Arab with

⁶⁴ Of course, the trope of tourism emerges here also the most strongly. The tourist can afford to take a vacation and stay in a luxury hotel that the local will only see if he or she works in it. Jamaica Kincaid has offered a most expressive picture of tourism and its impact on the locals in her 'angry little book,' *A Small Place*. It details how the tourist uses the local infrastructures and in general appropriates various services and landscapes, whereby the locals remain closed out from these spaces. The discrepancies in money and currency allow the tourist to enjoy a standard of living equal (if not higher) than in his own country, while the locals around him live in poverty.

the typewriter, which exposes the violent effect of denigrating travel writing and orientalism in general. Ingham is not really concerned about the old man when he disappears; even the thought of having killed him does not disturb him much.⁶⁵

The indictment of travel writing and white superiority inherent in Ingham's encounter with Abdullah at the bungalow resonate with the works discussed in previous chapters and their orientalist implications. Like in *In Morocco* and in parts of *The Sheltering Sky*, The Maghreb serves as a backdrop to the explorations and contemplations of the Western traveler. He or she can satisfy illicit lusts, live out (dark) fantasies, and re-orient his or her thoughts to deal with problems. Rather than an investigation or mingling with the local culture, then, this novel details a reflection of the individual's personal life and his own national identity. The typewriter as (murder) weapon exposes the traditional deprecation of foreign countries and cultures in and through art. Western artistic expression has distorted The Maghreb and erected a wall of sorts between the tourist/traveler and the local. Ingham, for example, comes to Tunisia for a creative project. Even though this project never materializes, he is inspired and in fact writes and completes a novel during his stay. The foreign atmosphere, the leisurely daily activities (Ingham writes for a couple of hours, goes swimming, and meets Adams and Jensen for various drinks and meals), and the people around him stimulate this creativity. Jensen also is an artist and obviously is inspired by his surroundings as show his numerous paintings of menacing Arabs. Adams, too, uses his creative vein when he composes his radio lectures under the pseudonym of Robin Goodfellow. He proudly drafts, revises, and tapes his speeches every week. Since he instructs the Russians on the merits of the American way of life and the corruption of the Communist system at the same time, he is also aware of his foreign surroundings, sometimes

⁶⁵ Even though Ingham is somewhat perturbed by the events, the possible consequences that he might face, such as Adams's persistence to go to the police, a possible police investigation, and Ina's reaction bother him more than any thoughts and guilt of having killed a person, albeit an intruder.

drawing from his experiences in Tunisia to show connections between America and Russia. The creative impulse exhibited by all main characters, influenced—if not prompted by their surroundings—resonates with Wharton’s triangulation of American, European, and Maghrebian values and identities through the various texts she employs. Creativity in this novel also emphasizes the foreignness and otherness of the place the characters find themselves in. Because they do not fit in, because they feel and look different, they respond through art to their foreignness. It is a common argument that this alienation is necessary for the artist, especially Modernist artists; however, by applying this alienation specifically to Tunisia, the characters only to some extent see Hammamet as another town with normal day-to-day activities taking place.⁶⁶ It is both threatening and exciting and thus attracts, fascinates, and scares them all at once.

The construction of identity and the role of the writer in setting up these performances, whether gendered or national, are emphasized in Ingham’s partial identification with his fictional character in the book he is writing. The most telling sign is of course the title of the fictional work, which he ultimately dismisses: “The Tremor of Forgery.” The two fictions intertwine and highlight each other. Dennison is a bank teller and embezzles money from his institution. He does so mainly in order to give loans to people with financial difficulties. He provides this help anonymously, and, by the time he is discovered, he has made interest on the money he has stolen, so that he can give it all back. On the one hand, then, Dennison is a hero, as he helps out people who are at a disadvantage, and since he gives back the money at the end, no harm is done. In a way of course, this action resembles the broadcasts of Adams, a.k.a. Robin Goodfellow.

⁶⁶ It is not only the Western tourist who distances himself from The Maghreb through art, but also the exiled artist, like Khalid in *Memory in the Flesh*. As I will explain in chapter 5, art in this case serves as a symbol for privilege that allows the characters to re-create their home country without actively taking part in it. This distance only leads to further alienation, however. The return to the city and the physical, rather than the artistic, perception of the city and the home country offer redemption in the end.

Dennison's actions and Goodfellow's names invoke Robin Hood, the hero who steals from the rich to give to the poor. While these actions are certainly noble, they are also questionable. In order to be able to give the money, Dennison first has to steal it from his bank and thus from his customers. Similarly, even though Goodfellow has the best intentions in mind when trying to persuade "his friends" behind the Iron Curtain of the greatness and openness of the United States, he is imposing his own ideology on others. In conjunction with the fact that the broadcaster is in agreement with the war in Vietnam, and that the methods for fighting Communism in the United States are very harsh, the pro-American messages carry a veiled threat within them. Come to our side and repent, or else.

Ingham clearly identifies with Dennison, particularly the Ingham who finds himself in Tunisia by himself. He is surrounded by an alien culture, thus coming face to face with his own convictions and identity.⁶⁷ The incident at the bungalow especially leads Ingham to question whether he has become a different individual in ignoring and not caring for an injured man, or whether we simply adapt to rules and norms that surround us. If the rules of social relativity apply, Ingham's actions are unquestionably right. The Arabs around him do not care and don't investigate or prosecute the incident, so why should he bother? In Africa a human life simply is not as valuable as in Europe or in America. Ingham goes so far as to question whether we even can make our own rules and stay untouched by the culture and norms surrounding us. He explains to Ina that he started to think about these issues only since coming to Tunisia. He lives out these ambiguities, but in his fictional creations he can give his imagination the full reign of freedom. Even though the correlations are subtle at points, Ingham filters his own experiences into the thought processes of Dennison. It is interesting that it is moral relativity and forgery in

⁶⁷ It is in this sense that Evans declares Highsmith an essentially feminist writer, as she explores the unconscious realm in her characters, and going beyond facts and plot. What matters is the current underneath, the open questions that remain, and the new psychological territories that are being explored.

particular that he investigates. He feels like a traitor when he thinks he has killed Abdullah, but then justifies his actions through his theory of social determinism.

We might note here that he uses his typewriter to deter the intruder, which again points specifically to Ingham's role as writer. At the same time, it also highlights the intertextuality and the metatext behind this narrative. If one narrative is linked with another, then we have to look at the other underlying narratives, like the Cold War, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the civil rights movements, and decolonization. It is the texts behind this text that also make up the content of this text. If the character cannot escape his environment, which influences and constructs him, then it is not only his immediate surroundings and his nationality that create his identity, but also the political conflicts, underlying fears, and pervasive changes of his age. The typewriter hurling through the room and ending with a clank on the intruder's head, injuring him, reflects the tension, the fears, and the hidden aggression underlying this narrative. The fact that it is a typewriter, and thus a fiction, points to the constructed quality of these tensions. At the same time, though, even though these identities are constructed, they are inescapable, if we buy into Ingham's theory. Even though Dennison creates his own rules and plays according to his own morals, thus breaking free of norms and rules imposed by society, he remains a criminal. He escapes his jail sentence, but he knows that he did something wrong. Like Ingham, who faces no consequences whatsoever for his actions that night, Dennison feels the fear. The tremor in his hands when he commits the forgery betrays his fear. This novel explores exactly that tremor, the moment of moral ambiguity, of the uncertainty of one's identity and actions, and thus also has the thumb on the pulse of the time. The world trembles at this point in history. Monumental changes are under way, but like an earthquake, the characters perceive only a distant rumble before their world crumbles.

III.

On the one hand, then, *The Tremor of Forgery* investigates moral issues of guilt and responsibility. Ina feels guilty about her affair with John Castlewood; John feels also guilty and desperate, which is why he refuses to join Ingham in Tunisia and instead kills himself in Ingham's apartment in New York. He further wants to invoke feelings in guilt in Ina by making sure that she would find his body, knowing full well that her rejection constitutes one of the main reasons for his suicide. The central issue of guilt revolves around Ingham, who feels guilty about having injured the intruder, about not having checked on the man, and most importantly, he feels guilty when he initially refuses to tell Ina the whole story. Guilt in this case is not limited to the self-lacerations of an uneasy conscience, but also the term in its more legal implications. Who is guilty of having stolen Jensen's dog? Who is guilty of having stolen Ingham's valuables from his bungalow? What really characterizes all these various instances of guilt and bad conscience, however, are larger issues. For all these conflicting emotions and situations lead to suspicions. It is that vague feeling of being threatened, of not knowing what to do, or the gnawing feeling of doubt within oneself whether one is doing the right thing or not. Is the Vietnam War a noble gesture that liberates oppressed people from the evil forces of Communism, or is it an invasion that causes the death of innocent people? Does it make a fundamental difference whether one kills someone in the United States or in Tunisia? Is the same amount of guilt even applicable? The various crimes and moral dilemmas in this novel thus serve to signal the uncertainty of facts, the relativity of concepts like truth, and the consequent paranoia characterizing human interactions.

Tremor highlights the concepts of justice and guilt in a very ambiguous manner as all crimes in the novel remain unsolved and uninvestigated. Jensen's dog miraculously returns after several weeks, starving and exhausted but otherwise unharmed. Ingham has seen Abdullah, the

old beggar, swipe his jacket and towel from the car, but never finds a culprit for the theft in his bungalow. Since there are no traces and the boys will not comment on their involvement either, Ingham cannot be sure whether Abdullah was the intruder on that infamous night and whether he died or simply disappeared. In fact, it seems that the novel offers few straight facts. John's amorous obsession with Ina and her consideration of a possible relationship with John question and contradict Ingham's impression upon his arrival in Tunisia that Ina loved him more than he cared for her. Ina's "betrayal" (91) and her insistence on getting to know the details of the night of the break-in make Ingham realize that she is more important to him than he had thought. However, once Ingham has confessed and Ina dismisses the incident, resolving to move in together in New York and to getting married, Ingham's initial doubts about their relationship resurface, and he breaks up with her.

Also the other characters come with their share of ambiguities. Adams, for example, broadcasts his pro-America, pro-democracy, and pro-God messages every Wednesday. He takes his task very seriously, recording his broadcasts and crafting them with care. He claims that someone within a dissident group in Russia pays him a small sum of money for his work. Ingham very soon, however, questions whether Adams might be deluded, and contemplates that Adams might receive dividends from his own account in Switzerland and, in his fantasy, pretend that they come from someone else. Or, since Adams's messages are clearly propagandistic, Ingham even conjectures that Adams might have been hired by the Communists in order to show Russians the shortcomings of America. While Ingham feels some affection for Adams and spends quite some time with him in the beginning of his stay, he feels more and more alienated from his fellow American as time goes on. He finds OWL too stiff, conservative, and self-righteous. Highsmith juxtaposes Ingham's guilt and his moral ambiguity with Adams's. Ingham argues that if the locals don't care about the death of one of their own and if they don't call the

police, then he will just follow the customs of the country. Adams, however, emphasizes that no matter where one happens to be, American values should be upheld. According to these, Ingham should have checked on the intruder and called the police after the incident—at least to report the burglary. Even Adams concedes that the police probably would not have done much about it and Ingham, should he have killed Abdullah, would have faced no consequences. Even though OWL insists on the ruthless application of morals, some of his positions remain highly contested and controversial. For example, even though he cares for Ingham when he is sick and seems friendly in general, Adams condemns homosexuality completely. In his ardor to “do the right thing,” Adams stops short of nothing; even interfering in Ingham and Ina’s relationship in order to bring Ingham to confess his involvement on the night of the burglary is not beyond him.

Ingham thus soon prefers Jensen’s company. Jensen lives in a basically unfurnished apartment in the center of Hammamet rather than in a hotel, like Ingham and Adams. He has not much money, loves his dog and is rather suspicious of locals. Probably most intriguing and ambiguous is the relationship between Ingham and Jensen. While Jensen is openly gay, and in fact makes a pass at Ingham the first night they meet, Ingham definitely is interested in homosexual affairs in Tunisia but never acts on them. When he first arrives in Tunis, for example, Ingham notices and comments on the open display of affection between boys and men. “Ingham saw no boy and girl walking along, only single young men or pairs of boys holding hands and talking earnestly. John had told Ingham about the closeness of the boys. Homosexual relationships had no stigma here” (2). This closeness in no way scandalizes Ingham, even though he is clearly not used to it. In fact, he is very close to Jensen—even closer than to Ina—but the two men never engage in any sexual relation. They travel together; Ingham shares his most

intimate thoughts with Jensen, and finally even practically moves in with him.⁶⁸ Throughout the novel, Ingham seeks out Jensen's company. And yet, Highsmith's prose allows neither character to reflect on this friendship explicitly. Never mentioned or discussed openly, the possible sexual implications of their relationship form an undercurrent throughout the whole narrative. This friendship is filled with ambiguities. The men never discuss their feelings for each other, even though it is clear that they like and respect each other greatly. On a more subtle level it might be a different guilt here that plagues Ingham: his feelings for a "queer" man. Ingham comes from a very traditional background. Having been married before, he probably never questioned his sexuality until now. Like his behavior towards the Arab intruder, Tunisia and its moral codes might permit also this relationship which would be considered "wrong" in the United States and by Adams.

The Tunisian setting and the cross-cultural nature of the violent encounter during the burglary invite questions about the applicability of American definitions of responsibility, guilt, and decency abroad. How is one to behave when in a strange country? What should the ideal interaction be with the locals? The novel does not envision any friendships between the Western tourists and the local Tunisians. All friendships emerge between fellow Westerners. Even Jensen, who lives in the Arab quarter, does not have much contact with his neighbors. Indeed, when his dog Hasso goes missing, he immediately suspects the family next door. What's more, North Africa constitutes a refuge and escape of some sort for all of them. Ingham decides to stay after he finds out about John's death and Ina's mixed feelings. Even though he could have returned to New York immediately, he does not want to deal with the problems and emotional tangles that are waiting for him there. Instead, he prefers to stay in Tunisia and write his book—an even

⁶⁸ Ingham does not share an apartment with Jensen, but takes the flat right below his. They share a bathroom, sometimes cook together, and in most other regards act like roommates, however. When Ingham comes home alone, he always checks whether the light is on in Jensen's apartment, often getting together with him before he goes to sleep.

further escape as he basically retreats within himself and concentrates on his work instead of confronting his own hurt feelings. Adams, moreover, has come to Hammamet after his wife's death. He keeps a picture of his house in his bungalow on the beach and has found a pseudo-humanitarian mission in his radio broadcasts. Both choices, however, make him very lonely. One wonders whether he broadcasts American values so profusely precisely because he does not live there. He yearns for a life that is not possible any more—with his wife in his American house—and he therefore prefers to remain distant. Like a modern-day Robinson Crusoe, he goes fishing with a pole, even though he has demi-pension at the hotel. He keeps his bungalow extremely neat and luxuriates in amenities like air conditioning and Western delicacies. Also Jensen, of course, has come to Tunisia in order to recover from his mental breakdown. While he never explains what caused the breakdown or whether his prolonged stay in Tunisia is actually helping in the recovery, Jensen seems as lonely as Adams. He rarely talks about his family, paints rather depressing pictures, and is mostly attached to Hasso. One wonders whether Jensen's breakdown is linked in any way to his sexual orientation, which he can live out without scruples and for very little money in The Maghreb.

One possible understanding of Ingham's relative calm is not so much the exploration of guilt in the individual, but a reflection of Western attitudes towards people and cultures different from one's own. Just as travel writers depict foreign countries and cultures negatively and condescendingly and thus contribute to the uneven relationship between Western and non-Western cultures, so does Ingham feel no responsibility towards Abdullah or Mokta. It almost seems that he first canvasses the boys at the hotel to find out whether he can get away with the assault and when he realizes that he can, he is no longer bothered by it. Since the only possible witnesses to the crime are not interested in any further inquiry and Ingham seems to get away with whatever he has done to Abdullah, it might be only human for him to not pursue this issue

any further. However, we can also read this reluctance as indifference towards the injured individual, which reflects the unequal relations between East and West and capitalist manifestations of neo-imperialism. As a tourist, Ingham will use the infrastructures, services, and resources of Tunisia without questioning their origins or consequences. For example, Jamaica Kincaid has shown how tourism deflects vital resources like clean water from the local population to the wealthy tourist. Living in a luxury hotel with all amenities he could wish for, Ingham is not aware of the very different living circumstances of the Tunisians. The imposition of one's own standards without any regard for local customs, traditions, and concerns characterizes the encounter between the traditional tourist and the local service provider. Hence Ingham's initial lack of concern and failure to take responsibility for his actions.

As we find out later in the novel, even if the incident was reported, the police would not investigate. The boys who work at the hotel clean up the incident and sweep Abdullah's death under the carpet. Whether they act out of self-preservation, as the narrative partly suggests, or whether there were other, more altruistic motivations behind their silence, remains a mystery. In any case, the consequences of the burglary and Abdullah's disappearance only confirm that the old Arab is not in a position of power—not even in his own country. It is the tourist and the money he or she brings to the country that is valued over the local poor. The question as to whether the tourist industry might also be a factor contributing to the poverty remains a question below the surface of the novel. I would argue, though, that the text does emphasize these discrepancies and thus draws our attention to them. Instead of presenting them as facts supplied by the narrator, these issues emerge in the discussions between Ingham and Adam.

The fictional treatment and discussion then invites the readers to question and form their own opinion rather than ingesting ready-made facts. What remains striking, however, is that the Western characters can't see beyond themselves, i.e. they can only see Tunisians they interact

with in relation to them and don't recognize them as other people. Similar to the affectionate treatment of the figure of the "mammy" during slavery, where the African-American caregiver is to some extent welcomed into the household and remembered affectionately, but seldom do the white children imagine or know that their nurse has her own children who hardly ever see her. The white children, because they mean survival and their care provides a living, take precedence over the biological children for the black slave woman. So is the relation with the tourist, who sees the local people mainly as servants and service providers. Ingham and Adams engage in conversations with some of the boys, but these conversations center around special services and information that are useful to the tourists, like arranging the time for breakfast, asking for more towels, or procuring air-conditioning for their bungalows. The disappearance of Abdullah plays out similarly; his presence on the grounds means that the boys did not do their job correctly in keeping out vagrants and protecting the tourists. Since knowledge of a burglary on the hotel grounds might hurt the flourishing tourism industry, it might have a direct influence on their employment. White Western money takes precedence over the well-being of the Arab man.

IV.

Because of these underlying inequalities between the Western tourist and the Arab local, their interactions are fraught with tension. The burglary scene and the various crimes Ingham witnesses before the break-in showcase this pervasive sense of fear and threat. Put into a larger context, this constant suspicion of the other ties in with the sentiments and atmosphere of the Cold War. In an era when everybody is a potential Communist and paranoia sits deep in the national consciousness, this suspicion might not be outright orientalist, but reflects a greater underlying anxiety. If the enemy looks like you, how can you identify him? How do you recognize and avert a dangerous situation? In this situation it is easier to transpose the threat to the visibly other. Abdullah in this case is the most "other" as he is an impoverished old Tunisian

Arab and is not linked to any establishment in particular that Ingham frequents. His social status, as far as Ingham can tell, is that of a beggar, and taken together with the omnipresent caution and suspicion of others, Abdullah's low class translates into criminal behavior. If he is poor, then he is probably also a thief. Of all the characters Ingham encounters, he singles out Abdullah immediately as the most obviously "dangerous" and suspicious. Since the text does not provide any objective information on Abdullah, we can only see him through Ingham's eyes, a view influenced by American Cold-War paranoia. Even though Ingham would not suspect Abdullah of being a Communist, the six-day-war and the Cold War atmosphere certainly contribute to a lingering feeling of fear. It does tell us something then, again, about the American consciousness and paranoia that the character is not even aware of.

The political situations emerging and pervading the actions of the characters in this novel serve as an important lens for reading the text. Even though Highsmith writes in a very subtle prose, "merely stringing one sentence unto another ... in a language that refuses to explain anything" (125; my translation) as Peter Handke has praised the author's style, these lofty sentences provide an entertaining cover to the grave issues discussed underneath. In fact, Handke has labeled the characters' issues in Highsmith's works as "*private Weltkriege*," or private world wars, because, as he argues, "the author takes the characters' experiences as seriously as historians regard national events so that they indeed appear to be 'private world history,' to borrow a term from Kafka" (127; my translation). Highsmith herself was certainly interested in the political situation of her time, and even dedicated her 1983 novel *People who Knock on the Door* and, eight years later, one of her Ripley books, to the Palestinian cause: "To the courage of the Palestinian people and their leaders in the struggle. To regain a part of their homeland" (Harrison 7). In addition to her political sentiments, Highsmith opposed traditional view points which restricted a woman's freedom and excluded "queerness" from the picture of

wholesomeness. Underneath the entertaining tone and style, therefore, Highsmith is concerned with larger issues, especially the political and social change taking place in America, Europe, The Maghreb and The Mashriq.

Also from a political point of view, then, this novel investigates the role of America(ns) abroad. If we apply an allegorical reading to the characters presented in this novel—an approach that is usually applied to non-Western texts—then we can understand this work as an investigation of national responsibility on various levels. Firstly, the relationship between the individual American or Western traveler to the inhabitants of poorer countries emerges consistently in the conversations between the various characters. The Vietnam War emerges in select passages, mainly in discussions between Adams and Ingham, or rather, in Ingham's thoughts when he has a discussion with Adams. Ingham thinks of it as an unjust war and as a manifestation of American neoimperialism. Adams, on the other hand, views the US war in Vietnam as a missionary and liberating expedition. Curiously, while Ingham here exhibits more liberal views and Adams stands for the orientalist (and racist) attitude, their reactions to the burglary are opposite. Adams insists that the incident should be reported to the police because the fate of Abdullah, a human being, demands resolution. Ingham, though abstractly advocating human rights in Vietnam, is unable to or refuses to see Abdullah as a human being whose death is of significance to someone. One should also note, however, that Adams exhibits that same care for another human being when Ingham is sick. He checks on him regularly, brings him noodle soup, and causes Ingham to “really feel he saved [his] life” (62). So, based on these two exhibitions of Adams's humanitarian side, he does not make a distinction between a Western and a Tunisian body when it comes to helping and valuing another human being.

While Adams attributes such behavior to his American nationality, however, and aims to enact the American way of life, Ingham subscribes to a different type of American identity: he is

an individualist. In this image of America, the individual has his own way of thinking and making decisions about his or her life. The simplified motto almost seems to be “live and let live.” Ingham wants to control and be in charge of his own affairs, he values choice over a certain predetermined “way of life,” and thus also does not care much about the Cold War and dismisses the US involvement in Vietnam. America for him is a country that has invaded another; it is not humanitarian and missionary; it is neo-imperial. These two views of America reflect the changing point in American history of its own image (curiously repeated in our days again), when two public images of the United States compete with each other: the one is the savior of the Western world, symbolized by D-Day and the Marshall Plan, for example; in this image, the United States serves as world police, as an exporter of democratic principles and liberator of the oppressed. This certainly is a very noble image, confirmed and crafted through the outcome of World War II. The Vietnam War, however, exposes the romanticism inherent in this image. For in order to police other people one has to use force against them. Moreover, if one country decides which states and countries need to be liberated and which ones are doing just fine, world power relations become imbalanced. So, while Ingham is aware of this changing relation and image of America in public, he re-enacts it in his encounter with Abdullah. While he does not want to impose on any other culture, in fact, shows interest in the distinct Arab parts of Hammamet, and thus represents a benevolent and open-minded tourist, he immediately rejects his benign attitude when his personal freedom and well-being are in danger. Adams also re-enacts his idealistic image of America, which compels him to persuade people to do the right thing even if they disagree with him, and he thus haunts Ingham about the details of the night of the burglary. In fact, Adams goes as far as telling Ina that Ingham is not telling the whole truth.

Secondly, the narrative seems to question the US role in regards to local politics. The fact that the Western travelers do not care much about the ongoing war, except to worry about

any violence that might be directed towards them, mirrors the lack of interest and engagement of their respective governments in the Arab-Israeli war. Since it is an Arab war, the West need not get involved, especially a nation that has been as outspokenly pro-Israel as the United States.

While his perception of the American way of life on the one hand enables Adams to care for the sick Ingham and wonder about the whereabouts of Abdullah, he, at the same time, condones the killing of Vietnamese in the name of combating Communism. One reason for this contradiction lies exactly in the personal encounter and the perception of the self. Neither Adams nor Ingham can escape their Americanness, especially as it stands out in Tunisia—as our nationality or culture always stands out more when we are outside of it and thus more visible to others and ourselves—and re-enact *their* image of America. It is the abstract and political thought that influences the encounter with the other. At the same time, this contradiction points to the arbitrariness of a national identity and the folding back of the outlook on others on the image of the self. In a way this folding back can be read as a returned gaze. By exposing their own values in dealing with others, their gaze is being returned, albeit by themselves. The Tunisians only serve as a vehicle for self-recognition. They are not the eyes staring back, but rather the glass of the mirror that facilitates that return of the gaze.

Thirdly, in the menacing faces and the instable conditions permeating the actions, we can detect the traces of existential paranoia, owing to changing power structures and hierarchies that are symptomatic of the 1960s. Due to the Cold War, American identity has become a bull's eye, an asset or a disadvantage depending on the circumstances. In any case, it has become visible. At the same time, the novel blurs the national differences between the characters. On several occasions Ingham mistakes Europeans for Americans and the other way around. I read this confusion as a sign of the paranoia and the vanishing of easy signifiers, changed conditions related to the Cold War. In fact, if a German can be confused for an American, then so can a

Russian. The doubts about Adams's affiliations are a case in point. Is he in fact working for the resistance or for the Communists? What exactly are American values, and can they so easily turn upon themselves as Adams's broadcasts seem to indicate?

In both wars, the single instance of the occupation of alien territories or the empowerment of a potentially dangerous ideology becomes a greater threat to identity, nationhood, and existing power relations. Both wars therefore had a profound impact on the psyche of the involved countries. For a writer like Patricia Highsmith, who investigates psychological and moral suspense in her fiction, the positioning of these two wars side by side in this novel are no coincidence. On the one hand, of course, they coincide temporally with Highsmith's writing and the setting of the novel. So, they represent a current interest of the time. The overwhelming psychological consequences of these wars, however, still resonate forty years later and are symptomatic of larger changes in society of the second half of the twentieth century. I already mentioned the ensuing paranoia about the unknown, the hidden, and the other that both wars inspired. The threat of Communism posed a great threat to Western capitalism and thus stood for the destruction of society as known in the West. Rather than an issue of conflict between two countries, the cold war smelled of the fear of extinction. Western powers and their institutions were under direct attack, while Communism was resolved to right the wrongs that had been committed by capitalism for ages. Cast as a revolution and the change of the world order, Communism presented an existential threat to the capitalist way of life.

It is not only the Americans who are afraid of the spread of Communism and the overthrow of capitalism, as evidenced in the war in Vietnam; the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 bears similar implications for the Arab psyche. Albert Hourani explains in his canonical history:

The dominant idea of the 1950 and 1960s was that of Arab nationalism, aspiring towards a close union of Arab countries, independence from the super-powers, and social reforms in the direction of greater equality: this idea was embodied for

a time in the personality of Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir, ruler of Egypt. The defeat of Egypt and Syria and Jordan in the war of 1967 with Israel, however, halted the advance of this idea, and opened a period of disunity and increasing dependence on one or other of the super-powers, with the USA in the ascendant. (351)

A general positive trend towards independence and unity received a fatal blow when Egypt lost the war against Israel. Arab leaders started to mistrust each other, Nasser in particular was perceived to be weak and too Westernized, and the resulting instability of the union of Arab nations made them more vulnerable to these Western powers who had only recently vacated their posts in the Arab countries.

More than only political fears of one country invading others, the particular fears connected to Vietnam and the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 are of an existential nature and cause deep crises in the psyche of the involved nations. While the US fears the collapse of capitalism, the basis of Western civilization as we know it, the complete overthrow of existing political and social structures by Communism, Arab countries fear the spread of Western capitalism and imperialism and the ensuing destruction of traditional Arab and Muslim values and social structures. Both fear defeat and feel trapped by their enemies. With the actual defeat of Egypt in the 1967 war against Israel, the most powerful nation of the Arab league has shown its weakness. If Egypt cannot beat Israel, then no other Arab nation can. Israel is the stronger of the two sides because of its powerful backing by Western nations, and thus causes the Arabs to feel trapped and threatened. Similarly, the US has been fighting Communism on all possible fronts, whether in open wars as in Vietnam and Korea, or through covert coups and support of militia as in Latin America and the Caribbean. Fighting the spread of "evil" on several fronts and the constant gaining of power by the Communists renders the existential fears of the United States vivid and real. What Highsmith invites us to investigate then is the fear both Arabs and Americans share in this novel. Though not direct enemies, they feel threatened by what the other represents.

The six-day-war, too, is characterized by a fear of extinction on both sides. The Arab countries feel that Israel, together with its Western allies, has started a direct attack on Arab life and society. For them it is capitalism that constitutes the threatening force. Because of Israel's technological superiority and expansion plans for the region, Israel is perceived as the intruder, the neo-colonial force. Arab nations interpret the establishment of the state of Israel as an attempt to correcting European mistakes on Arab soil—again an intrusion and direct threat to Arab land and society. The fate of the Palestinians as nationless second-class citizens stands as a prime example for the fear and hatred between Arabs and Israelis. Israel, on the other hand, also fears extinction. The holocaust during World War II (and countless earlier persecutions and ghettoizations of Jews all over Europe) brought the reality of that fear to everyone's eyes. The establishment of the state of Israel, then, constitutes a safe haven, a promise of survival and prospering for all Jews, and the threat of losing it gnaws at the very bones of existence. Both sides feel under attack all the time.

Even though both wars ended a long time ago, the pervasive fears linger for many years and its consequences are still felt or not resolved to this day. Israel and Palestine are still in arms against each other, and the current tensions between the Arab world and the West can be clearly traced back to the events of 1967. Communism has dwindled and constitutes no realistic threat any more, but the idea of fear and paranoia, the countless and questionable persecutions of potential Communists both at home and abroad left their toll.

What the existential fear on all political fronts indicates is a loss of traditional values, which would fundamentally change one's society and culture. From an Arab point of view, this loss pertains to the influx of Western values and the ensuing fear of losing the Arab homeland. Even though Ingham's fear of Arabs mirrors his nation's alignment with Israel, the personal interaction again contradicts this sentiment. He desires Arab boys and is fascinated by them;

while this is an orientalist trope already described by earlier writers, it might also hint at the commonalities between the two cultures. Both feel threatened in their identities and their territories—maybe that is the reason for the aforementioned turf wars. It is a way to re-establish masculinity, while it is at the same time undermined. It is precisely the Western affirmation of masculinity (sex with Arab boys and murdering the intruder) that constitutes the underlying threat Western influence poses to Arab society and culture. While Westerners and Maghrebians therefore share a common fear and paranoia, the way they react to it causes more friction.

The fear about vanishing cultures and changing power structures needs to be read also in gender terms. The novel deals primarily with male characters. They take center stage, while female characters only appear in the margins of the text. Ina is in New York, and when she comes to Hammamet, she constitutes an intrusion and source of anxiety for Ingham. He can never wait to meet up with Jensen after he has met Ina, because his Danish friend has become more a part of his life than Ina at this moment. Of course, his bond with Jensen seems to be stronger than with Ina partly due to Ina's involvement with John Castlewood. Moreover, Adams's influence on Ina has made the burglary the main topic of conversation and creates tension between Ina and Ingham. Ina makes it clear that she does not care to spend time with him unless he confesses all of the details relating to that infamous night. Ingham's interaction with Ina, therefore, apart from one night of lovemaking, is fraught with tension and unease on both sides. Neither one seems to know exactly what to do with the other.

The other female characters that appear briefly in the text or in thought, while at the margins of the narrative, similarly play powerful roles. The manager of the hotel complex, and specifically the supervisor of the boys at the hotel, is a woman. She is described as being very

strict and stern, and Ingham sees her only once, preferring to deal with the boys instead.⁶⁹ Ina also is quite independent. She works for CBS in New York and from afar somewhat dominates the actions and thoughts of Ingham in Tunisia. First, because she does not write, then because of the content of the letter she does write, and when she arrives, she controls Ingham to some extent, as he wishes to please her. She even gets him to confess to her about the night of the burglary. A third woman in the background of the narrative, but in the foreground of Ingham's mind is his ex-wife Charlotte. The reader understands that the marriage was doomed to fail and the divorce messy, which proves painful and traumatic for Ingham. The divorce happened two years before his journey to Tunisia, and yet Ingham feels the need to get in touch with Lotte, who in the meantime has remarried. Her wealth and independence allow her to do what she wants. In fact, she was the one with the money during their marriage, which might have contributed to their marital tensions. When Ingham realizes that he does not love Ina, but still thinks of Lotte, he coincidentally receives a letter from her, asking him out and informing him that her second marriage has failed as well. This letter marks a happy ending for Howard Ingham, even though he runs back to a marriage that never worked in the first place.

The contrasting role of women in this novel, on the one hand constituting a suspicious absence, on the other enacting a certain dominance and independence that overshadow that of the men, also hints at larger connotations of gender roles in the 1960s. Like the political situations of the Cold War and the Palestine-Israel conflict that cause the fear of extinction of traditional values on a social level, the 1950s and 1960s bring about the civil rights movement and women's

⁶⁹ As many critics have noted, Highsmith usually portrays women negatively. In an interview with Diana Cooper-Clark, for example, the author explains: "It was much more fun when I was going to school with boys before the age of fourteen, because they have a sense of humor, much better than that of the girls, I must say, and it was amusing" (318). What this statement hints at but does not address directly, is Highsmith's homosexuality, which would have emerged at the age of 14, and which might be the cause for the more complicated relationships with women.

liberation. As women enter the workforce more prominently, demand birth control, insist on their right to (higher) education and start to make more money than the traditional breadwinner of the family, masculinity is in crisis. In fact, the two fears parallel each other; traditional power structures, whether colonialism or patriarchy, are being attacked and dismantled. The men in this narrative then, whether Arab, American, or Danish, suffer from these fears. Ingham especially, as the central character, is trapped in this unspeakable role. He does not have an opinion of his own, he is unable to perform sexually during his date with Kathryn Darby, another American tourist in Hammamet, and in the end flees back into the arms of his ex-wife. Only while he is in Tunisia, and with Jensen, does Ingham feel secure and happy.

If traditional gender roles are being contested, homosocial bonds seem to offer a sort of respite. All the male characters are broken or hurt in one way or another: Jensen is depressed, Adams is lonely, and Ingham has been betrayed. Their friendship with each other in an all-male world offers more satisfaction than sexual or heterosexual relationships. In each instance, then, relationships change and are for the most part dysfunctional.⁷⁰ As in *The Map of Love*, it is not heterosexual affairs that offer stability, but homosocial bonds. If *The Map of Love* focuses primarily on women, then *The Tremor of Forgery* presents a primarily male world. When Ingham arrives in Tunis, he observes boys holding hands with each other. Most of the hotel employees, except the “evil” director, are male. So is the owner of the bar the three men frequent. Even Jensen’s dog, a recipient of great affection, is male. The few female characters remain distant. Adams’s wife is dead, Ingham’s fiancée is in New York and does not answer any letters for the longest time. Catherine is a pure sexual interest, and Ingham’s ex-wife Charlotte

⁷⁰ I would like to clarify Odette O’Henry Evans’s statement here that Highsmith usually depicts married women who engage in an adulterous affair. In this novel it is not so much the infidelity of women (even though of course both Ina and Lotte cheated on Ingham), but the failure of heterosexual relationships in general that needs to be addressed. Rather than a statement about women, the dysfunctional relationships reinforce Highsmith’s notion that traditional, one-sided relationships do not work any more. She pushes at the limits of the old world order, much of which is based on marriage and love affairs between men and women.

remains a distant dream, vividly reminding Ingham of the painful divorce. While this male-oriented world in *The Tremor of Forgery* certainly hints at the latent homosexuality between Ingham and Jensen, in a wider sense it can also be read as a terrain of establishing and defending power relations. It is after all Ingham and Adams who dispute the role of America and the appropriate behavior of an American abroad. Also the animosities between Ingham and Abdullah take place on this male turf. Ingham has been the victim of theft in his car and his bungalow presumably by the same individual. Abdullah, therefore, seems to have sought out Ingham in particular, which transforms a string of random crimes into direct and personal attacks on Ingham. When Abdullah enters the bungalow at night while he is sleeping and defenseless, the break-in marks the ultimate form of personal insult, which Ingham counters directly. For when Abdullah tries to enter the room in the middle of the night, it seems to be more than a random burglary. Ingham, in fact, from the beginning exhibits extreme dislike of Abdullah and suspects him immediately. Whether Abdullah in fact perpetrates all of these crimes and whether it is Ingham's suspicion that leads us, the readers, to suspect the old man as well, opens up very interesting parallels if we read that suspicion again metaphorically.

This island of manhood that the narrative centers around primarily, however, is short-lived and transitory. Jensen, upon the miraculous return of his dog, decides to return to Denmark. Ingham, who probably would have holed up in Hammamet forever if Jensen had stayed there, decides to return to New York when Jensen leaves and his ex-wife waits for him in New York. Even Adams, who has lived in Tunisia for a year, emphasizes that Hammamet is home, at least for now. He still lives in a hotel, the most transitory of all residences, and even though he has been able to establish a routine for himself and gain some semblance of American life, like air conditioning and Coca Cola, he is not at home in Tunisia. Adams, in fact, might not be at home anywhere. The picture of his house in the United States he keeps in his bungalow is devoid of

people. It is a big house with a white fence surrounding it. It certainly invokes the American dream that Adams himself also believes in and propagates profusely to anyone who does and doesn't want to hear it. The fact, however, that the picture has no people in it, and that Adams is such an oddball creates an eerie atmosphere around the America dream and "Our Way of Life." Adams does not have children, he is the oldest of the three men in this narrative, and he is a loner. He makes some desperate contacts with fellow Americans at the hotel and broadcasts his lonely messages behind the Iron Curtain, ignorant of whether and how his messages are being received. Francis Adams seems to represent the traditional man who is on the way out. He is traditional and religious—in other words, outdated. He does not even need a woman to threaten or control him; he is already out of place.

V.

As the Western characters re-enact their national and masculine identities in Tunisia, each finds his own way of belonging and interacting with Maghrebians. As Wharton and Bowles showcase to some extent already, the more each character erects a shrine to his home culture, the more difficult is it to establish a meaningful encounter across cultures. Only the active questioning of one's own values and the rejection of imposed identities leads to a transformation of the self and a possible understanding of the other. Even though the setting juxtaposes the Western tourists with the local workers, Adams, Jensen and Ingham all engage in interactions and transactions with Tunisian people and culture. All three, for example, to varying degrees prefer local restaurants and establishments, rather than more touristy establishments. All three men, moreover, speak some Arabic. Ingham knows enough to be polite and make some requests, while Adams and Jensen can pick up pieces of conversations in Arabic. Of course, their prolonged stay in Tunisia indicates the more intense involvement with Hammamet, albeit in differing degrees. Adams and Jensen form two extremes in their living arrangements and day-to-

day routines. Adams lives on hotel grounds, in an air-conditioned bungalow surrounded by American drinks and food. He will take his meals at Melik's, Jensen and Ingham's favorite restaurant, but never trusts its cleanliness.

The good thing about Melik's was the mixed clientele. There were turbaned camel-drivers, Tunisian or French students with flutey instruments or guitars, French tourists, occasionally some British, and ordinary men from the village who lingered over their vin rose, picking their teeth and nibbling from plates of fruit until midnight. Once Adams came with him to Melik's. Adams had been there before, of course, and was not so fond of the place as Ingham. Adams thought it could be cleaner. (19)⁷¹

Even though he has a car, and presumably travelled around the country when he first arrived, Adams now spends most of his days on the hotel beach, a protected and limited space. Jensen, on the other hand, has no car, no fridge, and no air-conditioning. He lives in a basically unfurnished room in the Arab quarter and in general depends on the same services and amenities that are available to Tunisians. Ingham's move from the main building of the hotel to his own bungalow and then finally to a couple of unfurnished rooms beneath Jensen's apartment signal his development and overall change in the course of the novel. He changes from tourist to exile, from visitor to (temporary) resident. Of these moves the one from the hotel to the apartment is the most crucial as it signifies Ingham's rejection of a ready-made Western-oriented image of Tunisia and his preference for the gritty reality of Hammamet. While Ingham's transformation runs through the whole narrative, the decision to move to the apartment comes as a direct consequence of the burglary and the assault on Abdullah.

Similar to Edith Wharton, when Ingham first arrives, he depends on the advice of others and is intent on sneaking a peak inside Tunisian culture. Ingham studied some statistics about

⁷¹ This passage is also worth noting as proof for the expanding tourist industry in The Maghreb. Only twenty years earlier, *The Sheltering Sky* comments on the scarcity of living quarters and hotels in The Maghreb, while *Tremor* presents a fully-developed tourist industry with visitors from all over Europe. Not only are there hotels, but lodgings of various qualities and sizes that offer moreover all services a Westerner might be used to.

Tunisia before his departure and his “job in the [following] week or so until John arrived was to keep his eyes open and absorb the atmosphere. John knew a couple of families here, and Ingham would be able to see inside a middle-class Tunisian home” (2). Like an anthropologist or journalist, Ingham therefore displays great interest in the locals but does so from a distance. He observes and makes mental notes in order to imitate and capture gestures, habits, and customs on film adequately. Upon his arrival, Ingham harbors a professional rather than a personal interest in The Maghreb. He does not try to understand traditions and behaviors, but wants to know how to replicate them in the screenplay he is writing. At a bar, for example, Ingham takes meticulous mental notes of another customer, describing him and categorizing him thus: “He wore a light grey business suit. Ingham supposed he was middle-class, even a bit upper. Perhaps he made thirty or more dinars per week, sixty-three dollars or more. Ingham had been boning up on such things for a month” (3). Even though Highsmith is known for her particular emphasis on details in her prose, this passage concerns Ingham specifically and shows the framework he is using in understanding and categorizing his surroundings. While such observations are common, especially for someone who has prior information on a subject, this classification and neutral recital of the man’s income, an arguably private and even intimate matter, shows Ingham’s role of distant observer.

This attitude changes, of course, when he gets the news about John’s suicide, makes acquaintances at Hammamet, and falls victim to thefts in his car and in his bungalow. Abdullah is one of the Arabs Ingham notices early on. He distrusts him immediately, but does not take him seriously. “The Arab had a short grey beard and wore a turban and classic baggy red ... He walked with a stick. Ingham knew that he must try the car doors when he—Ingham—wasn’t in sight... Ingham barely glanced at him. The Arab was becoming a fixture, like the tan fortress or the Café de Plage near Melik’s” (27). Ingham’s indifference soon turns into dislike when he

discusses “Arabs” with Jensen and finds his suspicions confirmed. “‘There’s one in red pants and a turban I’d like to paste. He haunts my car all the time’. . . . Jensen lifted a finger. ‘I know him. Abdullah. A real bastard’” (45). Jensen hates Arabs primarily because some people have repeatedly tried to hurt his dog Hasso. The violence directed at the dog changes Ingham’s feelings towards Tunisians from professional interest to personal fear. As he becomes the potential target of a crime committed by an Arab, Ingham is no longer a distant—and privileged—observer, but finds himself thrown into Tunisian everyday life. When he identifies the beggar Abdullah as a probable criminal, he recites no statistics about the level of poverty or healthcare for the disabled. Fear and personal stories suffice. When on the same evening, only a couple of hours after this conversation, Ingham then discovers the dead body of a man whose throat has been cut, and catches Abdullah stealing from his car, Ingham’s perception of Arabs becomes much darker than it had been before.

The night of the burglary, when Ingham throws the typewriter at the intruder, both marks the height of Ingham’s fear, but also functions as a turning point in his attitude towards others, especially towards Arabs. Abdullah’s intrusion into the bungalow at night signals the most obvious form of aggression on his part and thus justifies Ingham’s earlier suspicions. By hurling the typewriter at the intruder, however, Ingham establishes his agency and his own willingness to use violence. He proves to himself that he is not defenseless because of his foreignness. This assertion of power on Ingham’s part makes him more self-confident, and thus less afraid and suspicious of others. Moreover, because Ingham has identified violence as one of the local characteristics, his participation in overt aggression affirms his belonging in Hammamet. He has proven to be one of the locals. As a consequence of this identification, however, his American identity remains in question. It is for this reason that he refuses Adams’ pleas to confess his involvement in Abdullah’s disappearance on behalf of the American way of life. His sense of

belonging and identity changes at the moment when he decides to use blunt force against the intruder and to dismiss any implications of his actions. While Ingham never comments on this transformation in his own words, his actions, such as moving out of the hotel and into a Hammamet apartment, and the observations by other characters display his inherent change. The move to the apartment symbolizes his partial rejection of American values and his acceptance of Tunisian habits and attitudes. He leaves Adams behind in order to live closer to Jensen.⁷²

In fact, Ina's visit to Hammamet as a tourist serves to highlight Ingham's knowledge of the place and language and starkly contrasts his knowledge of things local with Ina's ignorance. First of all, it is now Ingham who can recommend restaurants, reserve rooms at a hotel, and provide information and relate small tidbits. On his return to Tunis to pick up Ina he shows how much he has learnt and taken in. He is no longer dependent on someone else's advice about Tunisia. In a rather typical Highsmithian fashion, however, the reader only gets this information from and about Ingham through his encounter with Ina, rather than through the narrator or in Ingham's thoughts earlier on. So we never really see his learning process, even though it seems we follow Ingham for every second. The reader thus sees Ingham more through Ina's eyes, which give the impression that he has changed. The moment she sees Ingham, she comments on his changed looks. "You look so brown! And thinner!!" (153), which hints at his changed attitudes as well. Because of Ina's visit, Ingham himself notices how much he has come to care for Hammamet. When they drive into "his" town, Ingham says: "'Here's Hammamet!' and realized his joyous tone, as if he were saying, 'Here's home!'" (156). His apartment—and Jensen—are in fact so intimate, and Ingham is so aware of the otherness this might invoke in Ina, that he refuses to show her his home and friend on the first day. Even though Ina and Ingham

⁷² From a moral standpoint, this preference resonates with the challenge to heterosexual and traditional values. Ingham's decision thus stems as much from the wish to escape from Adams and the traditional values he represents as his desire to live out ideas and fantasies that are not possible in the hotel and in the presence of Adams, which constitute an outpost of American values.

spend some nice days together, he needs to return to Jensen to talk at night. He feels more comfortable and at home with Jensen in the Arab quarter than with Ina in the hotel—one signifying Ingham’s newly discovered interests, the other a traditional and oppressing, forms of love and belonging.

Ingham has also picked up the language a little, which again astonishes Ina. The following explanation about Arabic appears relatively long in comparison to their otherwise tight-lipped conversation. Ingham provides a rather ample explanation to Ina’s question as to whether he is picking up Arabic.

Ingham laughed. “You mean what I said to Mokta? ‘Thank you, see you soon’? I don’t know *anything*. What’s so irritating is, words are spelled differently in different phrase books. ‘Asma’ is sometimes ‘esma’. And ‘fatma’”—Ingham laughed. “I thought at first it was our cleaning girl’s name, a form of Fatima. Turns out to mean ‘girl’ or ‘maid’. So you just yell ‘fatma’ if you want the maid here.” (157-158)

Not only is Ingham obviously interested in Arabic and engages actively with the language in this excerpt, but these little pieces of information about Arabic resonate with Amal’s instructions to Isabel in *The Map of Love*. In that sense, the language not only signals Ingham’s change, but also shows how the Arabic perspective, the world that is mostly hidden behind the Western characters, emerges in the text. Ingham’s knowledge of Arabic comes also as a surprise to the reader—the narrator never notes otherwise whether Ingham says things in Arabic or French to Mokta or Melik—which highlights the hidden quality of the Arab world in the rest of the novel. Even though it is right underneath our noses we do not gain access to it.

Ina certainly notices the change in Ingham and comments on it, thereby showing how much in a different world she is—a world that no doubt included Ingham only a couple of weeks earlier. In their clipped conversations about Arabs and “queers,” their different attitudes emerge most clearly. For Ina, both are “they,” an incongruous group, different from her and thus

impossible to understand. Ingham, however, has started to look beyond these differences. He does not form large groups by sexual orientation or nationality, but sees the individuals. When Ingham explains that Jensen's dog has been kidnapped, Ina replies sympathetically: "Goodness, that's too bad. –I did not know they were mean like that" (169), the "they" obviously referring to Tunisians. Ingham responds quite dryly, "Just some of them" (169), making a clear distinction between individual locals, and refusing to group them all in a menacing mass as he himself had done earlier. In a fairly typical fashion, Ina views Arabs and Hammamet as a mysterious background, a staged event for the tourists. When Jensen mentions Abdullah, Ina is astonished that Jensen "even knows them by name" (166) and, of course, immediately invokes the *One Thousand and One Nights*: "You must point out Abdullah to me sometime. He sounds like something out of the *Arabian Nights*" (166). Abdullah thus is a curiosity, *something* out of a book, not *someone* in the streets. In the same fashion, Ina likes the Café de Plage in Hammamet, because "it looked real" (169), but finally finds the air-conditioned bungalows much more appealing. Ina displays the same unease in regards to Jensen. She partly fears the closeness between Ingham and Jensen, but she also *others* him as "queer." She tells Ingham that he's "very close to Anders, face it. You practically live with him. I didn't know you got along so well with queers.' 'I don't get along with them or not get along.' Ina's words seemed stupid. 'I never think any more about his being queer'" (191).

Even though this distinction between Ingham and Ina emerges implicitly, and their break-up is rather vague, as Ingham merely realizes that he cannot marry her, it seems that their alienation peaks in the different encounters with the other. Ina, like Adams, prefers the Arab landscape as a background, an exotic and interesting backdrop of a country that in the end is inferior to America and its way of life. Ingham, on the other hand, starts to see and understand individuals. Ingham tries to discuss his adaptation of Arab life with Ina, when he explains that

“the Arabs all around me had different standards, different ethics. And they were in the majority, you see. This world is theirs, not mine. You know what I mean?” (189). Rather than a form of alienation, that “their world” is not “his,” I read this explanation as Ingham’s awareness of *his* alien nature. It is not the Tunisians who are other, but he, because he came to their country. When he finally confesses the incident of the typewriter, it is this conflict that lies underneath. Ina exclaims that she can “understand another Arab throwing something, but it seems a little violent from you!” (215). When Ingham tries to explain the moral dilemma of conforming to the local standards and mores rather than to the ones from home, Ina again makes an essentialist distinction between Americans and Africans. ““You compare [the incident] to a lot of Africans killing each other. But you’re not African. I just find it surprisingly callous of you”” (217). It is Ina then who sees Africans as essentially different from “civilized” people, who kill each other and are violent in nature. What Ingham attempts to verbalize, however, is that it might be circumstances that force one to behave in a certain way. Whether or not he adopts this attitude as a way of justifying his possible murder of Abdullah, Ingham sees Africans, Tunisians, and “queers” as people in very specific situations, to which they react and adapt. Ina, however, sees these groups as degenerate and somehow wrong.

Even though Ina in the end forgives Ingham and decides to marry him, the relationship has effectively ended in the above conversation. It is also at this point in the narrative that Ingham most fully connects and understands some of the people around him and his role in Tunisia. When he brings Ina to the airport, her premature departure a key symbol of Ingham’s break with his orientalist attitudes, Ingham vividly recognizes his changed perception of the Arab country.

The memory of his first minute on Tunisian soil returned to him at the airport. The sudden, shocking warmth of the air. Half a dozen Arab grease monkeys staring at the passengers, at him, under brows that Ingham had felt to be lowering

and hostile, though later he had realized that that was how many Arabs' brows looked normally. Ingham had felt conspicuously, disgustingly pale, and for a few unpleasant seconds had thought, 'They must hate us, these darker people. It's *their* continent, and what are we doing here? They know us and not in a nice way, because the white man has been to Africa before.' For a second or two he had actually experienced physical fear, almost like terror. ... Ingham realized that he was in a curiously delicate condition. (208)

Rather than his own orientalist attitude, then, it is Ingham's realization of his peculiar position, of the threat to the Arabs that emanates from his white skin. Ingham also realizes that it was mainly his fears and paranoia that he thus projected onto the "menacing faces" around him.

Even his attitude towards the neighbors, whom he and Jensen had secretly suspected of having stolen Hasso, changes, and they now appear friendly. Interestingly, the reader only finds out their name when Jensen talks of them favorably, after Hasso has returned. "The Choudis were very nice this morning. I think they were as glad as I was!" (238). Once the family no longer poses as possible threat, their humanity and individuality emerges, and Jensen is able to find commonalities between him and them. When Ingham shortly thereafter leaves the apartment building to buy some food for Hasso, he sees the little daughter of the Choudi family sitting on the stairs. She is no longer merely the neighbor's daughter, but he looks at her closely, almost affectionately, thus granting the reader a closer look at this little girl as well. "She grinned at [Ingham] with bright eyes, and said something that Ingham could not understand... Her little face was warm and friendly. ... He felt suddenly different towards the family next door, felt they were friends of his and Jensen's" (239). Ingham for the first time seems to take a real look at the people around him and starts to recognize and understand them to some extent. He feels close to his neighbors and Melik. Traditional markers of otherness have less meaning for him now.

VI.

The Arab-Western encounters are few but full of symbolism in this novel. On the one hand they reflect the status quo of orientalism, as the locals are servers, waiters, towel boys and prostitutes. Initially, the Western characters present them as sinister, dangerous, and untrustworthy. They do not enter the narrative very forcefully, and rather remain in the background. Even Abdullah only strolls by occasionally, does not utter a word to any of the characters, and in general is subject to mainly conjectures and suppositions. Our lens is limited to the view of the Western characters, particularly Ingham. We therefore do not understand the Tunisian characters, know nothing of their backgrounds or motivations, and can only perceive them as an indistinct, somewhat glowering, mass. By bringing these marginal figures into the center of this reading, however, the narrative opens up its complexities and touches on vital issues pertaining to politics, gender roles, and identity constructions. It is the marginal figures, like Abdullah, the women, Jensen's homosexuality and the places the characters have left that hold the key to the manifold layers of meaning. The direct encounter between Ingham and Abdullah at the center of this narrative—characterized by violence and doubts about responsibility and morality—questions whether it is ever possible to encounter the other on neutral ground.

Cross-cultural understanding and interactions in this novel have improved in comparison to the original travelogues like *In Morocco*, and further elaborate on the possibilities of identity constructions central to *The Sheltering Sky*, even though national and gender identities are under even greater attack than in Bowles's work. It seems that the years immediately after World War II were rife with hope and optimism about a new world. Dictators can be oppressed and a sea of new possibilities opened up for the United States in particular as it took its seat at the table of world powers. Twenty years later, however, democracy is under threat again, and this time it

does not emanate from one source alone. Furthermore, the borders that resulted from the peace treaties of the two world wars are being contested bitterly—to this day. The world order that seemed to have been re-established in 1949 is in danger of vanishing again, both from the outside as well as from the inside. The early travelers impersonated by Kit, Port, and Tunner, have evolved into mass tourists. North Africa has been developed and opened up for foreign markets. In contrast to Port and Kit who need insider information to find lodging for the night, there appears to be no lack of hotels, infrastructures, and amenities for the Western tourists in the 1960s. The initial economic ventures and investments that Port re-enacts in his encounters with North Africans have blossomed into a huge tourist industry.

At the same time as Highsmith writes what some critics call her best novel, writers like Tayeb al-Salih depict the flip side of the travel experience. While the Westerner comes to North Africa primarily for leisure and entertainment, the North African goes to Europe for education and a livelihood. The trajectory is the complete opposite. The tourist touts the income he provides for North Africans and expects to be treated better than in his home country, while the North African is a supplicant, an immigrant who is dependent on the mercy and understanding of Western authorities. Both cultures harbor prejudices against each other, yet the ones against the Westerners are hardly felt by the tourist as he pays for two weeks of sunbathing, exotic cuisine, and beautiful beaches. The immigrant, however, feels the prejudices and stereotypes on his skin the moment he enters the new country. Only rarely is he in a position of power.

What's more, for the first time, Westerners get to read the first-hand accounts of non-Westerners. They can hear their voices and their thoughts. The face-off between white and colored people, therefore, is not simple anymore. Unlike Edith Wharton, who draws easy conclusions about the social standing of women she observes based on their skin color, Ingham is fully aware of any underlying racism. It is not understood anymore that a white man is worth

more than a darker one. Here lies the crux of the guilt Ingham feels regarding the burglary. He rejects Ina's equation of barbarity with Africans as much as he refuses to believe in an "American" type of behavior that Adams proposes.

The Tremor of Forgery symbolizes the re-formation of identities at the beginning of globalization and postmodern culture. The other is not only the other culture, but also the others within our own culture, such as women and gays. In a time when power structures are in the process of being tumbled and old hierarchies are being replaced, there emerges an existential fear. The most human reaction in such a situation is aggression and self-defense. We thus find a variety of aggressive acts in this novel. Those might be as overt as the two wars that are mentioned explicitly (even though both wars are also based on acts of aggression in the first place; i.e. Vietnam resulted from the Communist aggression and occupation of various territories, and the Arab-Israeli war also came out of land disputes, the taking away of land from the Palestinians and the threat of expansion from the Israeli side). In addition to these aggressions on a very large scale, however, we encounter smaller aggressions, such as the harming of the dog, the injury of Abdullah, and the various crimes and thefts witnessed and experienced in Hammamet. Highsmith seems to suggest that by allowing these small crimes, the violence one person directs toward another, we also allow the mass violence between cultures and countries. By creating an atmosphere of *fear*—a term also significant in our times—everybody suspects everybody and reacts violently to the smallest offense. In addition to the literal violence committed, however, the novel is also rife with emotional violence, the type of behavior that might cause a harsh physical reaction. Adams's broadcasts, for example, are a form of aggression. Directed into the heart of the Soviet Union, they aim to dismantle and expose the regime, thereby threatening the existing power structure. Whether his messages are effective or not is not as important as the realization that he exhibits violent behavior. We should also not

forget John Castlewood's suicide, as it is directed against himself, but also against Ina and Ingham.

By emphasizing the violence in the various encounters, my reading wants to highlight the common human experience. Identities and nations are changing, social rules and moral norms are in the process of transformation, (homosexuality certainly has no place in "Our Way of Life"), and this new situation is threatening. In our fear, however, we can't distinguish between bad and good any more. Ingham sees only menacing faces when he feels threatened, and clumps all Arabs together, thereby disregarding Melik or the neighbors. It is fear and intolerance that cause this upheaval and violence. In highlighting the uncertainty and paranoia in this novel and the particular setting in Tunisia, Highsmith also seems to point to the emergence of a new global politics. In a way, the doubts that the Western characters experience, the knowledge that the locals know something that they cannot understand, that is beyond them, seems to be the flipside of post-colonial literature. The same year that Highsmith writes this novel, Tayeb al-Salih writes *Season of Migration to the North*. While the Western characters only start to realize the falsity of images and identities and the constructedness of hierarchies, the Tunisians, Sudanese, and Indians have long witnessed the charade of white superiority, the constructed difference between us and them and the privileges that come with that difference. Now it is their time to respond. They have something to say. In this novel, the characters seem to be on the verge of saying, of signifying, but they are still indecipherable. It is up to the Arab novel, like *Season of Migration to the North*, to re-insert these voices and experiences in a global literature.

In a way then, *The Tremor of Forgery* indicates the ending of Our Way of Life. The use of the possessive pronoun here is telling insofar as it posits the concept in the absolute. The pronoun connotes exclusiveness, a normalcy inherent in this way of life that allows for no comparisons; only for "us" and "them." In a world where we cannot distinguish between us and

them anymore, because people are migrating, and where the self reveals itself as not being quite clearly defined either, then this way of life is doomed. It can only appear in an archaic, obsolete form, far removed from its original source. It has become an artifact.

**Black Gods and White Whores:
Gender and Belonging in *Season of Migration to the North***

Tayeb al-Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1969) still counts among the masterpieces of Arabic and post-colonial literature. It has most notably been compared and contrasted with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and thus takes its rank next to works like Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1959) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel *Weep Not, Child* (1964), all of them African responses to Western depictions of the so-called "dark continent."⁷³ As pioneers of African fiction in the West, these works emerged most prominently in the years and decades following World War II and were "signifying with a vengeance," as Mustapha Marrouchi puts it. Situating this work in a dialectic relationship to the West, critics like Salwa Ghaly praise Salih's novel for the way it "question[s] the official stories and stereotypes that the centre disseminates about the margin, or the colonizer about the colonized" (21) and, according to Saree Makdisi, erodes old binaries between the East and the West.⁷⁴

Even though the bulk of criticism concerning Salih's work concentrates on colonialism, empire, and hybridity, some critics have used gender as a lens to read and understand *Season of Migration to the North*. Evelyn Accad, for example, identifies sexuality and violence as main tropes in this novel and highlights the ways in which "women remain the real victims of these games of power and seduction. They seldom reverse the power structure which oppresses them"

⁷³ For a comparison between Salih and Conrad's work, see for example, R.S. Krishnan, who describes *Season of Migration to the North* as a transplant of *Heart of Darkness*; M. Maalouf emphasizes the deliberate differences between the two works, which he attributes to Salih's critique of imperialism; Byron Caminero-Santangelo highlights the similar conceptualization of colonialism in the two works, rather than specific textual parallels. Benita Parry also links the novel specifically to notions of empire, but is more interested in a comparison between the narrator and Mustafa within the novel, rather than the parallels between this narrative and Conrad's.

⁷⁴ Patricia Geesey presents this breaking down of Manichean binaries as a positive affirmation of cultural hybridity as an antidote to colonial racial and "cultural contagion" (139), while other critics like John Davidson and Mohammed 'Abdalla characterize the cultural identity crisis apparent in the novel (both in the case of Mustafa and the narrator) in more dire terms. Davidson sees no possibility for any stable identity and defines the "middle point" between East and West more as a necessary but unwelcome compromise rather than an ideal. 'Abdalla, on the other hand, points to the widespread schism within the Sudan as an extension of the division between people, which leads to violence and unrest.

("Sexual Politics," 55). She situates the oppression of women in broader terms by referencing Arabic literary and feminist theory, while Wail Hassan analyses the construction of masculinities in *Season*. He parallels notions of masculine prowess with patriarchal and colonial hegemonies, finally asking his reader "how to construct more fluid and nonhegemonic notions of masculinity that promote both social justice and anti-imperialist resistance" (321). By choosing gender as the main focus of their analyses, Accad and Hassan do not merely highlight colonial and cultural power hierarchies and binaries, but focus on gendered constructions of power that render the dynamics at work in *Season of Migration to the North* more complex and refuse simple binaries of the colonizer and the colonized. Gender becomes the unifying factor in their analysis. Accad looks at the construction of women in the Sudan *and* in Great Britain, and Hassan emphasizes inherent masculine traits in the various forms of colonialism.

My analysis of *Season of Migration to the North* thus aims to answer Hassan's call for a more inclusive look at the various facets of encounters in this novel and adds to the complexity of these two analyses. While Accad and Hassan identified gender as the main theme in Salih's novel, I will explore how gender is enacted and challenged in this novel in constructing power relations. Is gender a category we can easily describe or is it one of the forces negotiated? What is the role of men and women in the Sudan and in Great Britain? How do class, education, and social status influence conceptions of gender and power? Do gendered identities in this novel remain static or do they evolve? Do the Arabic notions of gender coincide or clash with Western gendered identities in this novel and in comparison with other works? In trying to answer these questions, I will foreground the following factors of the Mezzaterra. The encounters in this novel are multiple and complex as gender, class, geopolitics, and empire influence each of them. Even though most of these encounters center around Mustafa, I identify the women as primary subjects in this novel. Similar to Francis Adams, Mustafa is a ghost because he relies on

masculine and traditional notions of identity that have become useless. The women he encounters, however, are the agents of change, who challenge traditions and disrupt power hierarchies. I read Jean Morris and Hosna Bint Mahmoud as challenges to traditional gender roles in Great Britain and in the Sudan and locate agency also in the actions of the supposed victims of Mustafa's seduction as they actively participate in these constructions of power in ways that go beyond simple stereotypes and exoticism.

In addition to sexual(ized) encounters in this narrative, textual encounters between the male characters point to the failure of belonging and the vanishing of old traditions. Mustafa mirrors various characters, such as the narrator and Wad Rayyes, yet all of them are doomed, killed by women. The juxtaposition between the local affairs in Wad Hamid, the central government in Khartoum, and the global adventures of Mustafa in Great Britain, emphasize the growing influence of new ideas and the simultaneous decline of patriarchal values. Like *The Tremor of Forgery*, this novel reflects the changing power relations of the Arab world and the influx of Western ideals that cannot be stopped. The text mirrors the anxiety of the time and the initial violence endemic of the first encounters between East and West. Both Highsmith and Salih emphasize the possibilities in crossing oceans and living in different cultures, but these encounters are fraught with tensions and full of mistrust. While Empire and colonialism play some part in this aggression, I want to emphasize the characters' reliance on masculine identity constructions as a symbol for the failure of traditional values on the local and the global level. The erosion of these grand narratives leads to a desperate search for belonging, an inherently conflicting identity, and a re-evaluation of globalism in its beginning.

Several encounters are crucial to the multi-dimensional constructions of selves and others in this text: the friendship and curiosity between the narrator and Mustafa; the sexual encounters between Mustafa and British women; the sexual encounter between Wad Rayyes and Sudanese

women; the economic, political, and emotional encounter between the narrator and his people in the village; the cultural encounter between Mustafa and the British; and the textual encounter between *Season of Migration to the North* and *The Tremor of Forgery*. These various encounters, if taken all together, indicate the intersections between sex and violence, masculinity and belonging, and identity and responsibility. I argue that political, economic, educational, technological, and cultural global changes affect both Great Britain and the Sudan and threaten a stable sense of identity. In order to re-establish a sense of belonging, the characters perform acts of masculinity that are mostly violent and always assertive. Written at the beginning of an aggressive globalization, *Season of Migration to the North* warns us about categories that are too narrow in a wide world of encounters.

I.

Salih's novel complicates notions of identity and belonging. The most notable examples for this vain search for identity are Mustafa and the narrator. While Mustafa never really belongs, the narrator first takes his fixed role in the village of his ancestors, namely his grandfather's, for granted, but slowly comes to realize his alienation from his family, his community, and his self.⁷⁵ While colonial constructions of the African/Arab seem the most obvious at first, the othering and alienation we witness in these two characters go beyond ingested and internalized notions of Empire and have everything to do with the characters' political, economic, and educational backgrounds.

Mustafa Sa'eed is a lie because he never belongs. When he stands trial in London for the murder of Jean Morris, Mustafa sees himself as a colonizer, "the intruder whose fate must be

⁷⁵ Notice the degrees in the awareness of their own difference between Port, Ingham and the narrator in this novel. Port thinks himself stable in his identity and thus misunderstands his role and function in *The Maghreb*. Ingham, on the other hand, finds a new sense of self when he accepts his difference. I read the narrator's transformation in this novel as similar to that of Ingham's, but in the narrator's case the recognition of his alienation is more complex, since he is different from *his own* culture, rather than a foreign people.

decided” (94), “a drop of poison which [the British] have injected into the veins of history. I am no Othello. Othello was a lie” (95). One of the pivotal passages in the novel which gives rise to the “missionary in reverse,” these phrases also invite a closer scrutiny. On the one hand, Mustafa himself uses this exact reference when he describes his race to Isabella Seymour: “I’m like Othello—Arab-African” (38). Together with the mirrors, the tapestries, and the incense in his rooms, this reference serves to seduce Isabella, to recreate an exotic and enticing image of himself that she has already seen in orientalist images and works. This is where many critics have found Mustafa’s strongest rebellion, in his play on orientalist stereotypes, a taking control over the inscription of the African Arab in Western terms. He has already been defined, categorized, and determined. In using these stereotypes to his own advantage, then, he turns them on his head.

The combination of the incense and the reference to Othello, however, are somehow at odds and mirror the schizophrenic vision of Africa in the West, as well as the attitude of the various parties involved in his trial. The incense, the furs, and the manifold hunting allegories Mustafa employs scrupulously in pursuing and seducing women hark back to traditional binaries of reason versus emotion, civilization versus savagery. Because the women supposedly equate Mustafa with emotion and primitive inner instincts, they accept him as a lover, and give themselves to him in order to maybe reconnect with an inner “pure” self that has not been contaminated by civilization. These orientalist images are not only a lie in themselves, but especially for Mustafa, who in effect, is more of an Othello. Mustafa obviously is not “a savage from the bush,” but a university professor of economics. The women know this, especially since he meets one of his lovers, Ann Hammond, at an academic gathering. The images of primitive nature he invokes in them, therefore, might be too simplistic a notion for understanding Mustafa’s power over these women.

The figure of Othello is complex in this narrative because it symbolizes Western inscriptions onto the African on the one hand, but also because Othello, if applied to Mustafa, is not really a lie. He comes to fulfill the same destiny. Barbara Harlow in particular has drawn the parallels between the two works and argues that *Season of Migration to the North* constitutes a *mu'aradah* (75), a re-reading and -writing of the Shakespeare tragedy and the figure of the Moor. By fusing the Western genre with the Arabic art form, the novel mirrors Mustafa in his hybridity and monstrosity. In a way, Mustafa, in his determination to expose Western and colonial orientalism, furthers and supports these exact same notions. He re-enacts black stereotypes and thus gives life to them. Even though his seductions lead to the death of several women, they also ultimately lead to his own death and do nothing to rectify binaries.⁷⁶ Mustafa excels like Othello. He is well-known in Western academia. In fact, he has always succeeded in the white British world. Like Othello, he is a leader in the West and marries a white woman. Like Othello, he kills his wife out of jealousy. Like Othello, he rejects magic and potions and seduces women with tales of wild animals and primitive cultures. Like Othello, he dies at the end. Rather than a subconscious internalization of Western stereotypes, Mustafa re-enacts this figure consciously and aggressively. He is so entrenched in these stereotypes because he wants to succeed in Great Britain and thus becomes that figure. While I agree that Mustafa is not a simple mirror image of Othello and that *Season of Migration* certainly revises the Shakespeare tragedy, I want to emphasize that the figure of Othello is probably the closest the reader gets to catch a glimpse of the real Mustafa.

While most critics focus on Mustafa as an outsider in Great Britain, I want to note that Mustafa never belongs, regardless of the place. As a child, he grows up without a father and has

⁷⁶ I read Mustafa's death as a suicide since he settles all his personal business in a letter the night before and tells the narrator that Jean Morris's call to "follow her" in death is haunting him. His seduction of British women leads to his meeting Jean Morris, whose murder then leads to his suicide many years later.

no real connection to his mother, whose features he compares to a “thick mask, as though her face were the surface of the sea ... It possessed not a single colour but a multitude, appearing and disappearing and intermingling” (19). This is a face Mustafa cannot read, understand, or relate to. He and his mother “act” like relatives to each other, express no emotions, and care for each other in an automatic and temporary way.⁷⁷ As Mustafa explains, “it was as if she was some stranger on the road with whom circumstances had chanced to bring me” (19). The first, presumably most intimate, relationship of a child with his mother is missing in Mustafa’s life. Not even in his own family does he really belong. Instead, his character is “made of rubber: you throw it in the water and it doesn’t get wet, you throw it on the ground and it bounces back” (20). It is not only colonialism or orientalism that makes Mustafa the “other;” he always has been different and has never fit in. In school his class mates describe him as a loner, in Cairo Mrs. Robinson comments on his exaggerated seriousness and seclusion. In London, he has no friendships he talks about. Mustafa is a lie, but not a colonial lie; he is a man who has never known how to truly fit in. He has learnt early how to perform belonging, how to pretend that he fits in perfectly. In fact, he even convinces the villagers in the narrator’s town that he is worthy of marrying the daughter of one of the most influential men. When Mustafa thus exclaims that he is a lie, the truth in that statement goes deeper than politics: it confirms that he has always been out of place.

Mustafa presents a paradox. His actions contradict his convictions and his background and ideals run counter to the world he lives in. In a culture where family history and connections

⁷⁷ The mother’s reaction to Mustafa’s decision to go to school and later to go to Cairo, where she shows just the beginning of a smile, hints at the possibility of a hug and maybe serves as a reminder that the indifference between these two characters might have been more one-sided than Mustafa acknowledges.

define one's origins, Mustafa grows up with his mother alone.⁷⁸ His father is dead, and they have no other relatives. In a country where the British are the enemies, Mustafa excels at their schools, profits from their support, and makes it his goal to live in London. In Great Britain, where his sharp mind got him a prestigious faculty position at the university, he uses emotional and sexual needs as his main weapon. He marries the one woman whom he cannot seduce. An example of cold blooded reason, he kills his wife in a crime of passion. He writes books about the colonial exploitation of Africa, but does so in a tongue and in a country that most of the people in the Sudan will never be able to read. When he is in a good marriage with Hosna, has two respected sons, and enjoys the villagers' esteem and respect, he first retreats into his English room and finally presumably kills himself. Mustafa is indeed a rubber ball who bounces back, but not in a way that makes him always land on his feet. His rubber is made of contradictions. It can only play off of something else, but is unable to absorb, to linger.

Mustafa does not conquer the Western world with his knowledge and education, but with his penis. His degrees and intelligence partly serve as a front to gain access to the British world and to conquer it then on an emotional level. His books, hidden away in the English room, illustrate this divide most clearly when the narrator discovers them after Hosna's deaths. They are all in English: not only the books Mustafa has read, but also the ones he was written. These books were not meant for a Sudanese audience, but for British readers. Only later in life does he arguably find a way of reconciling the theoretical knowledge about economics and colonization and village life in a way that benefits the villagers the most. The fact that he conceals his real identity, his past and language skills, and keeps this room sealed off from everybody else,

⁷⁸ In Arabic culture an individual's family can bring powerful connections or limitations. As expressed in the names of people, a person never stands alone, but his or her image and identity is always already tied to that of his family. Hosna, for example, is referred to primarily as Bint Mahmoud, meaning Mahmoud's daughter. Families are intricate and extended, which means that if one person wants to gain ground s/he has to depend on family connections as much as on skills and abilities.

however, signals finally the incompatibility of that type of knowledge with that of the village. While he wanted to conquer the West, it has conquered him. It has reduced him to the savage he was supposed to be by killing Jean Morris and has then treated him mildly due to his education and seeming assimilation to Western life. In either case, he is the outsider in Great Britain and in the Sudan.

When Mustafa thus goes to England and seduces white British women with stories about an idyllic Africa, it might be his way of reconnecting to his homeland and to confront his own identity. He does not know much about the Africa presented in Great Britain, which he uses as part of his seductions. During his years in the Sudan, he remains isolated, seems not to belong to any group in particular, and spends most of his childhood years in school reading British works. The stories of hunting, the incense and the images of harems, he conjures up in London never formed part of his childhood or identity. He is not just playing up Western stereotypes, but his own. These stereotypes are not only consequences of colonial inculcation; they are Mustafa's conscious constructions. When the British officer approaches him about going to school when he is a little boy, the adult Mustafa defines this moment as a "turning point in my life. It was the first decision I had taken of my own free will" (21). This decision is also life-changing: it causes him to leave his mother and finally his country, and constitutes the first step in honing his weapon, his mind. When Mustafa excels and travels from Khartoum to Cairo and then to London, meeting and interacting with fellow students and teachers, he turns his eye inward, worshiping his mind, which he describes as a "wonderful machine ... I was cold as a field of ice, nothing in the world could shake me" (22). It is his mind and the images he has in his mind that are most important to Mustafa Sa'eed, more important than other people and his own culture. His mind helps him to excel, to achieve what no other Sudanese has done before him: to go to England, to teach British students at the university, and even to marry a British woman.

In all his actions, including the seduction and passionate affairs with Ann Hammond, Sheila Greenwood, and Isabella Seymour, his mind is the driving force. He is not motivated by emotions or feelings. The closest Mustafa comes to experiencing his mission, his obsession to conquer these women, is to “colonize the West with his penis.” These women mean nothing to him; he equates them with towns, just like Mrs. Robinson and Cairo merge in his imagination: “Cairo was a city of laughter, just as Mrs. Robinson was a woman of laughter” (28). It is of note here that Mustafa seems to spend most of his time in Cairo with Mrs. Robinson and not with her husband. While Mr. Robinson is a scholar of Islam and Egyptian art and manuscripts, excavating and translating them for the Western world, Mrs. Robinson introduces Mustafa to Bach’s music, Keats’s poetry, and Twain’s fiction in Cairo. She does not even call him Mustafa, but gives him the nickname Moozie, an Anglicized and abbreviated version of his real name, which signifies Mrs. Robinson’s role as a bridge between Mustafa and the West.

Mrs. Robinson for Mustafa takes on the role of woman *par excellence*. She is the first woman to inspire a sexual yearning in Mustafa, she stands in for the first city he “conquers,” and she also functions as a sort of mother figure. Even though Mustafa tells the narrator that he never felt any gratitude towards people who facilitated his success and took “their help as though it were some duty they were performing for me” (23), his relationship to Mrs. Robinson seems to be different. She witnesses his trial and, upon hearing of Mustafa’s death and his family from the narrator, she invites Hosna to think of her “as a mother” (147). Maybe even more importantly, she is the trustee of Mustafa’s affairs in London. This important role and her attendance at the trial in London suggest that she has been a presence throughout the time that Mustafa associates solely with the women he conquers and the woman who conquers him, Jean Morris. When he finally leaves London, moreover, and starts a new life in the Sudan, Mrs. Robinson remains the guardian of his affairs, which indicates that he has not completely severed ties with his Western

life. Of course the British room symbolizes this lasting connection most strongly, but while that room and the obsession and secrecy surrounding it seem to be linked primarily to Jean Morris, Mrs. Robinson is a counterpart to this obsession and a testimony to Mustafa's economic and academic success. She facilitated his success in the West and remains a guardian of his achievements even after he is dead. The book she is about to write showcases her lasting involvement with Mustafa and her wish to preserve a particular image of him.

Mrs. Robinson, while at first glance a minor character in this story, I think is pivotal to understanding Mustafa. Because she stands for Mustafa's success, a sense of belonging, and the only bridge between his student years spent in Great Britain and his life in the Sudan now, Mrs. Robinson acts as a unifier and a source of stability in a split world and a divided life. Moreover, she straddles the East and the West in a sense as she has lived in both places and experienced both cultures. She complements the narrator in that bicultural experience and in preserving Mustafa for the future. While the narrator presumably addresses a Sudanese audience (as the appellation "It was gentlemen, after a long absence" (1) and the oral narrative style indicate), Mrs. Robinson will continue Mustafa's legacy in the West in her book—a traditional Western form of story-telling.

By recognizing Mrs. Robinson as a source of stability and belonging for Mustafa, we can re-evaluate his encounters with the other British women because the feelings and images she conjures in Mustafa's mind will characterize the way he approaches and "conquers" Sheila Greenwood, Ann Hammond, and Isabella Seymour. The simultaneous experience of academic success, with finally a sense of being accepted and loved, and his first sexual yearnings, all are linked to Mrs. Robinson. While Mustafa never makes a pass at Mrs. Robinson, his first meeting with her in Cairo and his intense response to that meeting, show all of the emotions and images

she means to him. I quote this passage at length as it introduces many of the symbols and tropes he will use later on in seducing the other women.

Then the man introduced me to his wife, and all of a sudden I felt the woman's arms embracing me and her lips on my cheek. At that moment, as I stood on the station platform amidst a welter of sounds and sensations, with the woman's arms round my neck, her mouth on my cheek, the smell of her body—a strange, European smell—tickling my nose, her breast touching my chest, I felt—I, a boy of twelve—a vague sexual yearning I had never previously experienced. I felt as though Cairo, that large mountain to which my camel had carried me, was a European woman just like Mrs. Robinson, its arms embracing me, its perfume and the odour of its body filling my nostrils. In my mind her eyes were the colour of Cairo: grey-green, turning at night to a twinkling like that of a firefly ... On the day they sentenced me at the Old Bailey to seven years' imprisonment, I found no bosom except hers on which to rest my head. (25)

Until this meeting, Mustafa has only been concerned with his brain and mind. He was the rubber ball who could not feel anything and felt no gratitude or warmth for anybody, not even his mother. Mrs. Robinson, however, inspires feelings and emotions in him. On a metaphorical and literal level, Mustafa is touched for the first time. There is no mention of intimacy between his mother and Mustafa, not even a full smile, let alone an affectionate touch. Mrs. Robinson, however, embraces him without reservations, and stands by him when he is sentenced and no one else will take his side. The professor who likes him and has supported him has turned out to be the prosecutor in his trial, his own attorney has never liked him, and the women who loved him are all dead. Only Mrs. Robinson stands by him and receives Mustafa's emotions—the shame, frustration, and grief—that he otherwise bottles up within himself.

In yet another way does his perception of Mrs. Robinson echo his sentiments regarding the later women. He compares them to cities. If the train carries Mustafa to the world of Jean Morris, one of the mantras in this novel, his first impression of London is again linked to Mrs. Robinson, where he likens “the smell of the place” to “that of Mrs. Robinson's body” (27). If he

wants to succeed as an invader from the South and the women's bodies represent cities, then he has to conquer the women's bodies. In this sense, his mind and his penis are engaged in the same mission. His mind and educational success brought him to London, and his manipulation of women's bodies will grant him the emotional conquest. The equation of a woman's body with a country or city, especially in colonial and postcolonial enterprises, has been well documented.⁷⁹ In addition to the colonial associations between the woman and the city or country, however, I argue that Mustafa fulfills his mission in an attempt to gain some of the love and understanding he has experienced with Mrs. Robinson. He in essence is in search of his identity and a sense of belonging. He performs the African for the women in Britain because that quality of his facilitated his first—and maybe only—sense of belonging and acceptance.

II.

The double conquest of the female body through the mind and the penis indicate Mustafa's performance of masculinity. The mind traditionally contrasts with the heart, reason is the opposite of emotion, and both pairs have been associated with the man and the woman respectively. They form polar opposites and binary distinctions, positing man/mind/reason as superior to woman/heart/emotion. This (de)construction of gendered colonial hierarchies is somewhat more complex in the case of the white woman and the black man. Basing his matrix on the theories of Frantz Fanon and Cornel West, Gordon Lewis explains inherent hierarchies in what he calls an "antiblack" and "antigender" world.⁸⁰ He uses these terms to denote the assumed superiority of the white male. In establishing categories and ordering them according to their position of power, Lewis comes to the following conclusion: "*Highest nonmixture* → *white*

⁷⁹ See for example Fatima Mernissi, Daphne Grace, Ranjana Khanna, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Edward Said, Margot Badran and miriam cooke.

⁸⁰ Frantz Fanon and Cornel West address cross-racial desire and power structures in their respective studies *Black Skins, White Masks* and *Race Matters*. See also Robert Young on this topic.

female → *black male* → *lowest nonmixture*” (124). The “highest nonmixture” denotes the white man, while the “lowest nonmixture” denotes the black woman, who pertains both to the “weak” gender and the “inferior” race. The black man and the white woman, according to Lewis, are more on equal terms as they both have one powerful attribute and one weak characteristic. While Lewis declares the white woman to be more powerful than the black male, I would suggest that also this power hierarchy cannot be presumed automatically, for the circumstances of their interaction influence the negotiation of power. The white woman in Africa, for example, inhabits a very different place from the black man in Great Britain. Depending on their relationship to each other these power constructions are full of tensions.

This struggle with power and its relation to gender roles emerges most clearly in the relationship between Mustafa and Jean Morris. I would argue that Mustafa is able to seduce the other women because they pose themselves in a feminine relationship to him, which Jean Morris refuses to do. He performs a masculinity that is able to subdue the other women’s femininity. Ann Hammond, for example, introduces herself to Mustafa as Sausan the slave girl after one of his public lectures and enacts a slave-master relationship with him. Even though they both know it is a performance, their respective roles mirror their positions of power in reality. Ann is a student of oriental languages and cultures, and Mustafa is a Sudanese professor. Because of Mustafa’s superior knowledge and social/professional position, he is an authority figure. He hails from the lands and culture she has chosen to study and thus represents a source of information, a superior to her. He is the worldly, knowing professor, who offers her a life completely different from the one she has known: “Ann Hammond spent her childhood at a convent school. Her aunt was the wife of a Member of Parliament. In my bed I transformed her into a harlot” (30). This specific “transformation” serves to debase her. She is a respectable young woman whom Mustafa turns into a whore, a sexual satisfaction, and nothing more. The parallels between the harlot and

the slave girl are obvious, yet it is Ann herself who introduces this role by approaching him after a lecture, at a moment when he just managed to enthrall a group of learned peers and thus personifies authority and respect. Her position as student already places her in a less advantageous position, but she emphasizes the discrepancy in their relationship, by playing the role of the slave. She lives out this unequal relationship and underlines their roles in her suicide note where she calls him "Mr. Sa'eed". The use of the formal appellation connotes the teacher-student and master-slave roles they performed to and for each other. I link the performance of inferiority on Ann's part to femininity, because her behavior constitutes in a way the model for the perfect wife at the time. She is educated enough to appreciate Mustafa's intelligence and willingly subordinates her own ambitions to please and support her lover.

Also the other women who fall victim to his charm perform a sort of femininity that is related to marriage, and Mustafa finds ways of feeling superior to them that transcends notion of gender and race. Sheila Greenwood, for example, is a waitress and comes from a working class background. A woman earning minimum wage and not having had the opportunity for much of an education surely must be highly impressed by this man who is a university professor and makes her expensive gifts. Even without him using his race and cultural background as a snare, I would argue that Sheila already is inferior to him in their power relations. In this inferiority, she falls into the trap of looking for a rich and educated husband. She does not care for his skin color as much as for his status in society, the things he has achieved. I do not believe that Sheila likes Mustafa because of his money and the future he promises, but these qualities emerge as more enticing than exotic fantasies. If Ann Hammond, the university student, sees Mustafa as an authority figure, how much bigger must the divide have been between the professor and the waitress? When she kills herself, Sheila Greenwood does not leave a note, an expression of her

shame and utter humiliation. Her suicide contains no message for Mustafa, but symbolizes her internalized sense of inferiority. By betraying her and manipulating her, he has silenced her.

If it is a class difference in Sheila's case, then Isabella becomes the perfect prey because of her age and her illness. Mustafa chooses her not because of her individual qualities, but because "there are many of her type in Europe" (37). When she tells him her name, he gives her a fake one. When they are at their climax and she cries out weakly, "no, no," Mustafa has no sympathy for her and thinks coldly, "This will be of no help to you now. The critical moment when it was in your power to refrain from taking the first step has been lost" (43). She never becomes quite human in his eyes, but remains a "bronze statue." During their conversation he remains in absolute control, measuring Isabella's reactions and movements while staking out his next move. Like a hunter who has shot the fatal arrow, he observes her coldly. "I pictured her obscenely naked as she said: 'Life is full of pain, yet we must be optimistic and face life with courage'" (41). While he objectifies her, Isabella refers to her cancer, which makes her remaining life short and bittersweet. I emphasize Isabella's illness here because, together with the age difference between Mustafa and her, it serves as a more complex lens for their relationship and their respective positions of power. In a similar way that Wad Rayyes yearns for a young bride in his old age, the fear of death causes Isabella to give herself to one last adventure, to experience love once more. The attentions of a young man must be very flattering to her, more than perhaps the fact that her admirer is African. He might be a symbol in Isabella's eyes, but that symbol cannot be restricted to his race and culture only. "She gazed long and hard at me as though she was seeing a symbol rather than reality. I heard her saying to me in an imploring voice of surrender 'I love you'" (43). The symbol Isabella sees is the male lover, the epitome of masculinity, youth, and vigor. She surrenders to the young and passionate lover because he saves her final days from dread and anxiety. He lets her experience love once more as

she feels validated in her aged and ill body. While she sees him as a symbol for (forbidden) love, he reduces her to a whore. Mustafa is so wrapped up in his strategies of seductions that he does not realize to which Isabella makes an active decision to engage in a relationship with him.

Isabella, therefore, forgives Mustafa in her letter, asking God to “grant you as much happiness as you have granted me” (140). This note in conjunction with the inscription on her photograph, “To you until death, Isabella” (140), not only shows her devotion and commitment to Mustafa, but underlines the notion that she saw in him a savior, a last chance at life before death. Mustafa’s description of Isabella contrasts starkly with her actual photo that the narrator finds in the English room. “Round of face and inclined to plumpness, she wore a dress which was too short for the fashions of those days. She was not, as he had described her, exactly a bronze statue, but there was manifest good nature in her face and an optimistic outlook on life” (140). Isabella is a woman then who shows her age and probably does not have many suitors. Married for eleven years, knowing that she will die in the near future, and having an optimistic outlook on life, Isabella appreciates whatever happiness Mustafa can grant her.

The way Mustafa describes Isabella, moreover, resonates strongly with his view of Mrs. Robinson. When he first seduces Isabella, he uses the same symbolism that refers to Mrs. Robinson earlier when he says of Isabella and London: “The city has changed into a woman. It would be but a day or week before I would pitch tent, driving my tent peg into the mountain summit. You, my lady, may not know, but you—like Carnarvon when he entered Tutankhamen’s tomb—have been infected with a deadly disease” (39). If Mrs. Robinson personified Cairo, then Isabella is the first woman to symbolize London. Since Isabella is presumably the first woman he seduces,⁸¹ it would seem like a natural transition. He has left Cairo and Mrs. Robinson, and has

⁸¹ The chronology of Mustafa’s affairs is not absolutely clear in the text, and the statements at his trial further insinuate that he had affairs with more than the four women mentioned by name. Ann Hammond is his last lover before Jean Morris, it would seem, since Jean bursts in upon them. Sheila Greenwood is compared to Ann

now found London and Isabella Seymour. The similarities between the two women go farther than that, however. They are both considerably older than he is, they are married to successful men—Mr. Robinson, an acclaimed Egyptian scholar, and Mr. Seymour, an accomplished surgeon—they both care for him in a motherly, and not purely sexual fashion, and they even look similar. If we take Mustafa and the narrator’s description together, Isabella is a plump bronze woman, just like Mrs. Robinson “was a buxom woman and with a bronze complexion that harmonized with Cairo” (26). It almost seems as if Mustafa has chosen Isabella because she reminds him of Mrs. Robinson.

The way Mustafa describes the two women also signifies his motivation in seeking out Isabella in particular. When he meets her, he anticipates, how he will “drive his tent pegs into the mountain summit (39),” which carries an overt sexual symbolism, but also nomadic connotations. This is not a purely orientalist trope, but signifies his restlessness and lack of a home. The tent also symbolizes his commitment to never stay still, to never remain in one place for long. He uses the trope for the first time on his travel to Cairo, a city he comes to equate with Mrs. Robinson.

I thought of the town I had left behind me; it was like some mountain on which I had pitched my tent and in the morning I had taken up the pegs, saddled my camel and continued my travels. [...] I thought about Cairo, my brain picturing it as another mountain, larger in size, on which I could spend a night or two, after which I would continue the journey to yet another destination. (24)

This image of the traveling nomad complements the symbol of the rubber ball that is affected by nothing, rejects everything and everyone, and just wanders on. Because he did feel something for the first time when he met Mrs. Robinson, however, the tent becomes a symbol for a temporary haven. She encourages him, accepts him, and admires him for his abilities, and he is re-enacting

Hammond, which leads me to believe that of the four women, Isabella is the first. Also, apart from Jean Morris, who ultimately comes to signify London and his fate, Mustafa uses the equation of city with woman only with Isabella.

this sense of belonging with the other women, starting with Isabella Seymour. She bears a physical resemblance to Mrs. Robinson and promises the same temporary resting place. At the same time, Mustafa remains a rubber ball. He will never settle down completely, but wants to travel, to conquer, to find more resting places. The collapse of women, places, and belonging, therefore drives him on from one affair to the next. Viewed from a psychological view point, the women are more than colonial retaliation; he needs them as much they think they need him. The fact that he keeps their photographs in his room in Wad Hamid, tells their stories, and recreates them for the narrator and the reader, signifies their importance. One could even argue that places for Mustafa have always been linked intimately to women. His mother is his only close contact in Khartoum, Mrs. Robinson gives him stability in Cairo, the British women define his life in Europe, and Hosna underlines his acceptance in the village and, in a way, continues his legacy.

III.

The question of women in this novel is an interesting one. On the surface they are minor and weak characters. While the white British woman is killed off “because she represents Western values which must be eradicated before the East can find itself” (Accad 63), the Sudanese women do not subvert patriarchal power structures, either because they die trying, like Hosna, or because they have gained a powerful position by those means, like Bint Majzoub. Accad’s argument shines the spotlight on the question of women in this novel, but I think that women are more powerful in this novel than Accad admits.

On the one hand, the women are the driving force behind the actions of this novel and its presumed main character.⁸² The women are the signposts and the measure of Mustafa’s success.

⁸² Most critics assume Mustafa to be the main character, and my analysis so far has mainly concentrated on this figure. As the following pages will show, however, I do not think that Mustafa is necessarily the main character or acteur. Instead, I read *Season of Migration to the North* as an allegory for national and social constructions of belonging through the performance of gender. In this sense, then, it is the interplay between the various characters, rather than any one character in particular that helps us to understand these constructions.

If his main goal is to travel, to migrate, and the women stand for the places he visits and conquers, then they are central to the plot. While there are parallel masculine institutions, such as the colonial schools, the grandfather and his friends, the post-colonial government, and the narrator, most actions and meaningful encounters involve and circle around women. Even Mustafa's mother, who remains a shadowy figure at best, with her distant and indifferent manner, might be a cause for Mustafa's coldness and inability to connect. His social training, not his scientific and scholarly knowledge, he attained through women like Mrs. Robinson. The most important figure in his life, indeed a character almost larger than life, is another woman, Jean Morris. His safe haven, the symbol of his return to his native land, is Hosna, his Sudanese wife. Even though the narrator thus shows great interest in the traveled and educated Mustafa Sa'eed, it is the women and his interactions with them that really define him.

Women in this novel are mostly understood or presented as commodities, but their actions advocate a more powerful role. Wad Rayyes, the most notorious womanizer in the novel, exchanges women like donkeys, and samples them like foreign wines. Even though the rest of the village supports, encourages, maybe even admires, his male prowess, Wad Rayyes finds his destruction in a woman. Hosna first defies his pride by rejecting him as a suitor; she challenges his masculinity by refusing to sleep with him; and finally kills him (and herself) when he forces himself upon her. The other womanizer, Mustafa, also dies because of a woman. Jean Morris's dying whisper, "Come with me," haunts him for years. He is so obsessed with her still that he finally answers her call, even though he has returned to his native land, has married and earned respect among his fellow Sudanese. Like Hosna, Jean challenges Mustafa in his pride. When he can easily manipulate women and seduce them effortlessly into his bed, Jean Morris, upon their first interaction insults him: "You're ugly [...] I've never seen an uglier face than yours" (30). She controls their interactions and monitors his desire. If he is interested, she rejects him; if he

seeks out another woman, she insults her. Jean controls Mustafa's emotions and thoughts the same way as he firmly holds the reins in his conversation with Isabella: "I pull at them and she stops, I shake them and she advances; I move them and she moves subject to my will, to left or right" (39). Like Hosna, Jean attacks Mustafa's masculinity when she also refuses to have intercourse with him and instead cheats on him with other men openly. Like Hosna, Jean Morris in the end causes her unwanted and humiliated husband's death.

The death scenes of the two women in particular carry an almost identical resemblance, pointing to gender, sexuality, and power as driving forces, and not only colonialism. Both women die with a knife in between their breasts, through the heart, while they are engaged in sex. They are exposed and their husbands are complicit in the act. Mustafa holds the knife and drives it into Jean's breast; Wad Rayyes brutally bites and beats Hosna as he rapes her. Even though Mustafa commits the murder, it is Jean who prods and invites him to kill her. Even during the actual act of murder, Jean seems to be in control, guiding Mustafa with her will.

Slowly I raised the dagger and she followed the blade with her eyes; the pupils widened suddenly and her face shone with a fleeting light like a flash of lightning. She continued to look at the blade-edge with a mixture of astonishment, fear, and lust. Then she took hold of the dagger and kissed it fervently. Suddenly she closed her eyes and stretched out in the bed, raising her middle slightly, opening her thighs wider. "Please, my sweet," she said, moaning: "Come—I'm ready now." (164)

So, even though Mustafa holds the dagger, it is Jean Morris who guides it into her heart. Hosna, after having stabbed Wad Rayyes repeatedly, kills herself. The crucial difference between these two death scenes is their emotional quality. The act of murder crowns Jean and Mustafa's relationship; it binds them together as it becomes a perverse symbol of love and the fulfillment of their mutual desires; or, as Mustafa puts it, "the universe, with its past, present, and future, was gathered together into a single point before and after which nothing existed" (165). This is an act

of love, a dance of passion, and the ultimate commitment to the other. Hosna's death is quite the opposite. Her death is filled with hatred and frenzy. She has not decided to die, but fights with tooth and claw for her life and against Wad Rayyes. She ends up stabbing him "more than ten times—in his stomach, chest, face, and between his thighs" (127). These deaths are not silent, calm, almost elegant, as Jean Morris's, but the couple leaves this life with "a mountain-shattering scream" (126) that rallies the whole village to their bedroom. This last act signifies the major distinction between Jean and Hosna: the first was a private act, while the second is a public murder. The first is one individual holding sway over another, while the latter is a public statement that indicts the whole village as co-conspirators. This distinction between private and public does not so much parallel the West and the Sudan, as it shows the reach of each woman's rebellion.⁸³

Both women use the master's tools in dismantling the master's house; they re-enact masculinity in order to fight patriarchy. In fighting Mustafa and Wad Rayyes, they subdue and kill them. Accad is certainly right that neither of the two completely subverts any power hierarchy, but they both weaken it and enact change, which is mirrored in the public consequences the women's actions have. In contrast to Ann Hammond and Isabella Seymour, the respective figures for the slave girl and the mother, Jean Morris refuses feminine behavior. She is neither affectionate nor subordinate; she flaunts her sexuality, thereby asserting complete control over her body. She is fully aware of her power over men. When she comes to Mustafa's room, for example, strips naked and then demands that he destroy the most precious artifacts and keepsakes in exchange for her body, Mustafa is helpless. He complies with her demands, determined to "follow her to Hell (157)," only to be jabbed between his thighs when he wants to

⁸³ Jameson has most famously asserted that Third World literature should necessarily be read allegorically, as the private is always mixed in with the public. Aijaz Ahmad and Anthony Kwame Appiah have refused Jameson's simplistic reduction.

collect his prize. Jean uses desire, psychological violence and physical aggression in order to attain what she wants. She never gives herself, but fights him to the end. She is not a prey that he has found out and circles for the kill, but she is a fellow hunter, keeping her fatal weapons aimed at him. She only tells Mustafa that she loves him when he has killed her. Because she is the stronger of the two, she can only respect him when he has proven himself a “real man” and asserted his power over her. The metaphor of the hunter with his spear becomes relevant here since the killing of a wild animal often functions as a rite of passage from boyhood into adult manhood in tribal societies. The murder re-establishes Mustafa’s masculinity in Jean’s eyes.

Hosna also refuses to play a traditional female role. Even though the text does not provide details about the marriage between Hosna and Mustafa, Hosna starts to change in a way that the villagers cannot quite understand or pinpoint. Wad Rayyes, for example, wants her for a wife exactly because she is different from the other women in the village and compares her to a city woman even though she has never left the village. Even the narrator thinks he detects “a foreign type of beauty” (89) in her. In a culture and village that judges and understands people by their ancestral and tribal lineages, these comments strongly suggest that Hosna has become a sort of stranger to Wad Hamid and its villagers. In Wad Rayyes’s eyes, this difference is highly desirable as he categorizes his wives by regions and brags about the different types of women he has been with. Hosna is the next item in his collection—the closest he will ever get to a sophisticated city woman. Hosna, however, has presumably earned that reputation because of her modern ideas, which she acts upon when she implores first the narrator’s parents and then his best friend Mahjoub to get the narrator to marry her—even only on paper—so that she might be saved from Wad Rayyes. The village is scandalized by her behavior because she plays the role of a man and thus defies the men in the village. A marriage proposal traditionally comes from the man to the woman, and is negotiated between the future groom and the bride’s father. Just as the

Muslim wedding contract is being celebrated between these two parties, the woman does not take matters into her own hands. By asking the narrator to marry her, Hosna defies her father who, as her legal guardian, decides whether she gets married or not; she insults Wad Rayyes whom she rejects in her proposal to the narrator; and she challenges Mahjoub and the narrator's father by making them complicit in her disobedience. Even though Hosna thus enjoys considerably less privileges than Jean Morris does, in her final act she manifests masculine behavior. Unlike Jean, who invites and guides Mustafa passively to kill her, Hosna takes the knife into her own hands and strikes Wad Rayyes repeatedly. She is active and asserts her rights, as she has done throughout Wad Rayyes's courtship. While Jean plays with notions of femininity, such as pretending to be chased and playing up her feminine bodily attributes, Hosna rejects any feminine qualities and only relies on humanistic values, such as friendship, community, and survival when she wants the narrator to marry her.

Jean and Hosna thus form stark contrasts to the other women in Europe and in the Sudan because they reject traditional gender roles, thereby upsetting their respective societies. The scandal and public reaction they cause become obvious in the trial and the village's reactions. The trial exposes Mustafa's previous affairs and is a contradiction in itself, as the people who dislike him defend him while his earlier supporters accuse him now. More ironically, the women whose suicide he supposedly caused take up a much larger part of the trial than the actual murder he commits. The text mentions no character witnesses for Jean Morris. Nobody comes to her rescue; nobody seems to care much about her, but Ann's and Sheila's fathers and Isabella's husband all testify in behalf of their daughters and wives. Only Jean Morris has no one to speak for her, no one to take her side. When Mustafa in the end receives a sentence of seven years, it is a slap on the hand. Jean's death was not as shocking because she was not an adored daughter, a beloved wife. Also Hosna's demise and tragedy is first swept under the proverbial carpet. The

people of Wad Hamid decide not to report the tragedy to the police, they barely bury the dead, making haste and refusing to give them a ceremonious goodbye, and they maintain their silence even in regards to the narrator, the guardian of Hosna's children. Only Bint Majzoub, prompted by liquid persuasion, finally describes the gruesome events of the fatal night.

So, both societies snub the deaths of the two women and blame Jean and Hosna for what happened to them. Yet, they are not silenced. It is because their deeds challenged the very core of patriarchy that they are being scorned in court and by the village. In the end, their stories live on through Mustafa and the narrator respectively. The village, moreover, changes once the masculine core has been shaken. The narrator's grandfather weeps over his friend's death, cursing all women, even though he is known for his stoicism. Wad Rayyes's first wife refuses to grieve for her murdered husband and instead openly celebrates his death with thrilling cries of joy, thus undermining his official image in the village. All the inhabitants of Wad Hamid now share a secret, a taboo has been broken, and even though they have sworn never to mention this incident again, the narrator is relating the events as we read the novel. Interestingly, his audience is male, which might showcase the very nature of this story as a cautionary tale. Even though Hosna and Jean do not break down patriarchy completely, they have refused traditional feminine roles, indicating that the times have changed. If they could commit unspeakable deeds, then more women will do the same.⁸⁴

IV.

Like in *Tremor of Forgery*, therefore, the crux of this novel lies in the search for identity in a destabilizing and changing world. Old hierarchies, such as patriarchy, are under attack; the

⁸⁴ A case in point is Mabrouka, Wad Rayyes's eldest wife, who claims to have slept through the attack that woke up the whole village, and who, upon hearing of the tragedy, emits cries of joy. This reaction does not stem from jealousy, since she seems almost grateful to Hosna, when she says, "Wad Rayyes dug his grave with his own hands, and Bint Mahmoud, God's blessings be upon her, paid him out in full" (128). Even though she did not commit the murder, she shows her hatred for Wad Rayyes openly and thus poses a challenge to her husband and to the other villagers who defend his actions and condemn Hosna.

new water pumps by the Nile are about to drown out the traditional way of life. Interestingly, the novel only grants the male characters a sense of doubt and the search for their identity. The women, at least on the surface, have been assigned their roles and are supposed to adhere to them. Even in Mustafa's affairs with the British women, the women remain traditional in their roles of daughters, wives, and mothers. The men, especially Mustafa and the narrator, are the ones who travel and learn about new inventions, ideas, and policies. What they chase, however, remains out of reach, because their identities are built on masculine and patriarchal traditions that are on their way out. It is the combination of class, education, gender, and nationalities that showcase the many ways in which the traditional way of life is vanishing.

This question of identity has been discussed as one of the main themes in this novel. Johan Davidson, for example, finds the origins of oppression in the separation of mind and soul as brought on by education and technological advances. He argues that anyone who wants to possess these changes and enact them on others blindly will cause more harm than good, as in the case of Hosna. Mustafa's corrupting modern ideas led her to rebel against traditions and finally to her death. Patricia Geesey also points to the cultural separation but highlights the positive hybrid qualities, such as Mahjoub's tree which bears both oranges and lemons. Hybridity, Geesey asserts, in *Season of Migration to the North* loses its sense of cultural contamination, and presents an example of "bicultural, or cultural, *grafting*" (139). Ali Abbas, however, locates this split not in the interactions between different cultures, but within characters. Mustafa Sa'eed, so Abbas, functions as an illustrative character, representing the two sides of the human psyche, "the second self" (29). According to Abbas's interpretation, then, Mustafa signifies a dark and unconscious will to die in the British women.

Differentiation, separation, and sense of loss certainly pervade this novel. Mustafa never takes roots and arguably remains a rubber ball to the end. He does not show any deep emotions,

but fulfills his last obsession, to join Jean Morris in death and thus to fulfill his destiny. Only by killing himself does he complete the action started years earlier in London. The empty shell of the British room, completely isolated and out of place in his modest Sudanese house, signifies Mustafa's empty identity. Surrounded by ghosts from the past, he participates actively in the village, on the surface at least performs a sort of belonging, but remains distant from its people. The notebook that promises his autobiography is empty. On the one hand, we can read these white pages as the precursor to the story that is coming to a close. When the reader or the presumed audience comes to hear the narrator's experiences and findings in the British room, most of the information is already known. It has been pieced together by various people, from different sources, and from a variety of perspectives. The white pages serve as an invitation to the narrator to tell this story, because it has not been written yet. Even though the narrator refuses to grant Mustafa that wish, he will tell the story in the end, because it is his own story.

In many ways Mustafa and the narrator are doubles. They mirror each other in their respective alienation. When the narrator first returns, he comments on Mustafa's status of foreigner. What he does not realize is that Mustafa is able to blend in better than the narrator. Mustafa has resigned his influential post in the capital to lead a modest life in the village, where he refuses any position of power, but uses his knowledge and skills to help the people in the village directly. He joins the committee for irrigation and in general commands respect among the villagers, not because of his education or wealth, but because of his knowledge and skills. He uses those to help the village instead of advancing himself in Khartoum. When Mahmoud thus accuses the narrator of belonging to the post-colonial elite in the capital that wastes money on self-aggrandizement and not on actual improvements for the people, the narrator seems to be guilty of it, at least in comparison to Mustafa. If Mustafa is a rubber ball who has learned how to

disguise his alienation from others, the narrator slowly realizes that he does not belong in his native village any more.

The very first lines of the novel signal both the narrator's distance and his wish to belong, as he foregrounds his return and glosses over the years he spent abroad: "It was gentlemen, after a long absence—seven years to be exact, during which time I was studying in Europe—that I returned to my people. I learnt much and much passed me by—but that's another story. The important thing is that I returned with a great yearning for my people in that small village at the bend of the Nile" (1). The narrator's yearning, his declaration that he had dreamt of his people, looked for their faces in the cold North, and now rejoices in being reunited with their familiar forms and voices, is foremost in his mind, and helps to lift the "fog" (1) that arises between him and his people when he first sees them. Having returned to his village, he feels assured. "I did not feel like storm-swept feather but like that palm tree, a being with a background, with roots, with a purpose" (2). Upon surveying the crowd who comes out to greet him after his long absence, the narrator reconnects with his people by recognizing them, feeling rooted in their midst. The participation and inclusion in traditions and rituals confirm to the narrator that he is one with them again. "Then my brothers and sisters came and we all sat down and drank tea and talked, as we have done ever since my eyes opened to life. Yes, life is good and the world as unchanged as ever" (2). This scene of rootedness and stability, however, is disrupted immediately when the narrator spots Mustafa's unfamiliar face in the crowd. Not everything is the same.

As the story unravels, the narrator's assurance about his role in the village further diminishes. He does not remain in the village, but moves to Khartoum, visiting his family and his village only three or four times a year. Only through the incident with Hosna does his alienation become apparent, as Mahjoub keeps him abreast of the basic events, but nobody in the village,

except Bint Majzoub, confides any details about the murder-suicide to him. The climax of his alienation becomes apparent when he enters Mustafa's room and confronts his own distorted face, instead of his "adversary," Mustafa.

I struck a match. The light exploded on my eyes and out of the darkness there emerged a frowning face with pursed lips that I knew but could not place. I moved towards it with hate in my heart. It was my adversary Mustafa Sa'eed. The face grew a neck, the neck two shoulders and a chest, then a trunk and two legs, and I found myself standing face to face with myself. This is not Mustafa Sa'eed—it's a picture of me frowning at my face from a mirror. (135)

He and Mustafa merge in their hatred, their obsession with someone they cannot have—in the narrator's case it is both to grasp and understand Mustafa, as well as his grief for Hosna—and their alienation. When the narrator enters Mustafa's room, he arguably becomes Mustafa, an outsider in Wad Hamid who performs belonging for himself and others.

The face in the mirror also signals the narrator's search for identity. In trying to find out the facts about Mustafa, I would argue, he is really trying to find himself. The narrator first detects Mustafa among the villagers when he returns from Europe and that new face in the crowd bothers him. Mustafa is the only one in the village who does not ask him any questions about Europe and the people there. Secondly, when they actually talk to each other, Mustafa downplays the doctorate the narrator has completed in Great Britain. He pretends not to be sure what it is, and then flatly announces that "We have no need of poetry here. It would have been better if you'd studied agriculture, engineering or medicine" (9). These comments sting the narrator's pride, as he freely admits, yet what really irritates him about Mustafa and these comments is the way they disrupt and challenge the narrator's role in the village, attack the core of his feeling of belonging. In critiquing him, Mustafa creates a divide between the narrator and the community by framing his comment in the plural, "we." The narrator fumes indignantly when he hears those words from Mustafa's mouth: "Look at the way he says 'we' and does not

include me, though he knows that this is my village and that it is he—not I—who is the stranger” (9). Mustafa and the narrator thus immediately detect the other’s alienation from the village while they themselves believe to have proven their belonging in Wad Hamid.

The role of belonging is very much tied to performing and agreeing with the mores and traditions of the village. Those traditions, however, are tied to patriarchy and masculinity. The core group performing such masculinity in Wad Hamid consists of the narrator’s grandfather, Bakri, Wad Rayyes, and Bint Majzoub: the elders whose opinions the villagers respect and obeys. Their circle, alas, is a closed one. The narrator has a special role in this group because he is the grandfather’s favorite grandchild and takes part in their meetings occasionally. Let me emphasize another reason for the narrator’s inclusion, however: his extraordinary educational success. The villagers say that the narrator has always been exceptional, and expect big things of him, such as a government post in Khartoum. He will be their voice in the capital. In this role, the narrator extends and continues the group’s influence from the local village of Wad Hamid to the national capital. The elders include him because he is a leader like they are. He is one of them, and by influencing him, they can sway—at least to some extent—the new national government and be assured that their concerns take priority.

The narrator certainly relishes this privilege, but fails to recognize the reciprocity inherent in this dialogic of power. He takes his place for granted, was born into the inner circle so to speak, and thus refuses to acknowledge the active engagement this position of power entails. The narrator does not just belong, because he was born in the village, because his grandfather is an influential elder in Wad Hamid, and because he knows the traditions of his village. He belongs when he gives back to the community. Belonging, in other words, needs to be earned. He needs to support and believe in the traditions, not just perform or know them; he needs to act as the extension of the village in Khartoum and not only occupy a posh post; and he

needs to perform the social roles in the village according to the traditions and, if possible, in the interests of the ruling group. All those failures culminate in the events surrounding and leading up to Hosna and Wad Rayyes's death. Wad Rayyes respects the narrator by asking him to interfere with Hosna on Wad Rayyes's behalf. He performs all the necessary social traditions, such as inviting him to his house and asking him formally for Hosna's hand. Wad Rayyes thus treats the narrator like a respected elder, an equal. The narrator, however, is outraged at Wad's request, refusing him in a rude manner and rebuking him like a small child. The narrator's grandfather, his friend Mahjoub and his parents laugh off the incident and see nothing wrong with the request, as Hosna is a widow and thus "in need of protection." Legally Wad can have four wives and has only one, and he is well off to be able to support Hosna and her two boys adequately. Moreover, Hosna's father and brothers have already agreed to the marriage, which validates the transaction. From a legal and traditional view point, therefore, Wad Rayyes's request is completely acceptable, if not laudable, because he is a respected and influential elder in the village who can offer important social connections. Also the age difference of forty years is not necessarily anything scandalous or improper, since Hosna is an adult woman who has been married and already has two children.

The real question, therefore, is why the narrator is so shocked and appalled at the idea of this marriage. I propose three main reasons for the narrator reaction. First of all, he is in love with Hosna. He does not have the courage to act on that love, and even worse, to rescue her from Wad Rayyes, but he respects her wishes, not in the least because he likes his role of guardian of her children, which binds him to her in an affectionate way and allows him to see her regularly without any other expectations. His desertion of Hosna is therefore twofold. On the one hand, a false sense of propriety hinders him from daring to upset his wife and personal well-being by marrying her. Granted, the other people of the village never tell him of her wishes, but Mahjoub

hints at them before the tragedy, and it would certainly be an idea that could occur to the narrator. Secondly, he deserts Hosna by not taking seriously the behavior and threat coming from the other villagers. He laughs off Wad Rayyes's wishes to marry Hosna due to the age difference between them, which provides another explanation for his rejection of the marriage. He closes his eyes to the fact that Wad Rayyes's proposal is by no means unorthodox or scandalous in the ways of the village. Like for Mustafa, the narrator's mind becomes his weapon: he follows his sense and not his feelings (whether those be his interest in Hosna or compassion for her situation) and then mistakes educational superiority with belonging. Because of his alienation from the ways of the village and his disregard for feelings, the narrator bears partial responsibility for the tragedy in the end.

In actuality, the narrator has been alienated from his home community for a while and this incident only forms its culmination. Because of his education, his post in Khartoum, and his experience abroad, the narrator, even though he takes his role in the village for granted, is estranged from his home community. His special role when he returns from his studies indeed gives him an elevated status, which already distances him from the rest of Wad Hamid. The narrator comments on the fact that usually, when he arrives, his whole family comes to pick him up from the steamer. When he returns to his village after the murder-suicide, only Mahjoub receives him. The villagers' attitude partly changes because of their feelings of shame, but their absence also indicates that the narrator is not welcome this time. His reception is reluctant, official, and formal like that for a government officer or an intruder, not a member of the family. Furthermore, I would argue, also the show of picking him up as a group shows him as an outsider, albeit a privileged one. The large group shows that his coming to the village is an event, something out of the ordinary, which would not be the case for one of their own. Surely Mahjoub or the narrator's father does not receive this reception every time. So, in fact, one could argue

that since the beginning of this narrative the narrator has always been an outsider. He only fully belonged in and formed part of Wad Hamid as a child and adolescent, before he went to school. Only at that time was he equal to the people in the village in their class, education, and profession. Now he is a government official, which puts him in a higher class. He lives in the capital and enjoys a lifestyle quite opposite from the agricultural existence of his family, and finally, he has the highest education of all his people in the village. Entrenched in another culture, “he is the one who knows,” as Fanon phrases it (*Wretched*, 24).

The narrator’s alienation mirrors and merges with the figure of Mustafa. Especially when he hears Mustafa’s story, the narrator must admit to himself that Mustafa and he are very similar in their travels, interests, and higher goals and achievements. In short, they are both outsiders for the same reasons. At the same time, Mustafa has been much more successful in the West and in his academic career. Even though the narrator has a Ph.D., Mustafa was a professor, has written multiple books, and even held a higher position in the government than the narrator will. While the villagers of Wad Hamid boast about the narrator’s exceptionality, it is statesmen, politicians, and other members of the ruling elite who sing Mustafa’s praises. Even in Wad Hamid—the narrator’s native home—Mustafa is more successful as an active member of the community. He participates in committees and is instrumental in the improvement of the irrigation system which is crucial for the livelihood of the villagers. Mustafa is respected by the narrator’s grandfather, by his best friend Mahjoub, and by the rest of the village. Even though Mustafa used to belong to the corrupt government in the Sudanese capital, he now applies his knowledge to the land with his hands rather than his mind. In many ways, therefore, the narrator’s obsession with and curiosity about Mustafa seems to be a reflection of his desires and wishes. Mustafa in a way has done everything and has been even better at it, than the narrator, while signaling their mutual alienation from the world they inhabit.

These various mirrorings in the text suggest an unequal relationship between the two. After the mention of Mustafa's name at an official gathering in Khartoum, one of the present members all of a sudden asks the narrator whether he is Mustafa's son (56) even though this young man knows the narrator and his family. If this question thus signals the similarities between Mustafa and the narrator, the narrator immediately deflates them by granting Mustafa an allegorical status. "Everything seems possible. He too could be Mustafa Sa'eed's son, his brother, or his cousin. The world in that instant, as brief as the blinking of an eyelid, is made up of countless probabilities" (57). The widening of the circle of possible Mustafas in the world undermines the uniqueness of the narrator and his close relationship with Mustafa. I also would like to point out that the invocation of the role of the son, though logical because of the age difference between the two men, also immediately suggests that Mustafa is the ideal that the younger man aspires to. Mustafa is the authority figure, the man who has broken all records and boundaries with his academic and political success both in England and in the Sudan. The brightest and the most remarkable student of his class, and yet, "no one remembers him" (56). It is the narrator, in one way or another, who seems to remind various people about Mustafa. So, there is something about his person that must bear semblance to Mustafa. It is the narrator's desire to be like Mustafa that makes the latter's image come alive in the other people's minds again. The narrator must see in him a rival, and they both in a way, give each other a sense of home in their alienation. They know what it means to be educated and live among peasants; they have lived in England as Africans and then returned home; they both try to use their education to further their own country and its people. They recognize each other and thus belong. I do not suggest that the narrator consciously seeks to imitate Mustafa, but Mustafa, with what he has achieved, with goals so similar to the narrator's, and the narrator's obsession to find out more about him, certainly suggest that the narrator from the beginning sees something of himself in

Mustafa. This driving desire, however, leads nowhere. The narrator tries to find out information about Mustafa in order to find his own place, to find out what his role is.

The narrator's epiphany in the British room shows that his search has been in vain. The face in the mirror, which he first mistakes for Mustafa's and finally recognizes as a distorted version of his own, indicates that he has been chasing his own shadow. The anger in his face signals his failure, his desperation, and his entrapment. He expects to find Mustafa in himself, but has to admit that he is very different. It is for this reason that Mustafa's memoir is empty, a mockery of the narrator's precharted life and career, and an invitation to narrate Mustafa's story. The narrator also finds a newspaper article which contains no link to Mustafa or his life. It signifies the ghost hunt, the search for the impossible. What the narrator is looking for is a way of succeeding and—at this point—of redeeming himself for his role in Hosna's death. I suggest that this empty search for identity goes beyond the narrator's sense of self in this novel, and constitutes an attack on identity construction in general—a construction that is built on masculine principles. If we subscribe to the North/South dichotomy, then the South is the weak female to be conquered, which Mustafa inverts in his mission in reverse. The English room in Mustafa's house combines these masculine and feminine characteristics. On the one hand, it is forbidden to Hosna, and thus an exclusively male space. Note that even as part of his last wishes, Mustafa gives the key to the narrator, and not to his wife. Since the narrator has the key, Hosna would not be able to enter the room even after Mustafa's death if she wanted to. Secondly, the books on the wall are all written in English by men on traditionally masculine subjects, such as economics, business, and literature.⁸⁵ The occupation of reading itself is a masculine privilege in this text, as the men cultivate their minds while the women are responsible for household duties

⁸⁵ In 1969 only very few women were considered to be literary figures and also the domain of high literature, which Mustafa has in his library, is starkly contrasted with novels and "light" literature more suitable to women.

and chores. As the heads of the household, only the man needs to know about politics, economics, and the arts. The English characteristics of the room suggest the power of class, empire, and gender, as it simulates an English gentlemen's study.

What gives the room a distinctly masculine flair, however, are the numerous photos of Mustafa and the women in his life. In keeping pictures of Isabella, Ann, Sheila, and Mrs. Robinson, including their inscriptions and declarations of love on them, Mustafa has erected a mausoleum of his masculine qualities: his mind and his penis. The artifacts in the room are trophies of his conquests. Like deer head, the pictures and books testify to Mustafa's strength, to his articulation of power and success. It is for this reason that Jean Morris's picture is a painting rather than a photo. On the one hand, it is bigger than life and thus signals the overbearing importance of this woman in his life. The large size and expensive display further indicate how prized of a possession this is. This is a treasure among trifles. On the other hand, the paint signals Mustafa's *desire* to possess her, rather than proof of his actual possession. He has not captured her in a photo; her head is not on the wall. The painting is a substitute for the real possession, because he never fully was able to possess Jean Morris. When she asked him to follow him in death, he did not kill himself and thus failed to reunite with her. His task is not finished, her ghost still haunts him, and he thus can only imagine her, paint her in his mind. She left no love note or gave herself symbolically in a photograph: his whole life he has to recreate her from his memory. Only in painting her, in putting part of himself into her, can he be united with her. The painting is the most prominent object in the room, because it defies the other ornaments of conquest. She remains a mystery, like the "disturbing and puzzling" expression on her painted face: "The thin lips were tightly closed as though she were grinding her teeth, while her jaw was thrust forward haughtily. Was the expression in the eyes anger or a smile? There was something sensual that hovered round the whole face. Was this, then, the phoenix that had ravished the

ghoul?” (155) Jean Morris’s large mouth undermines the smiles of the women Mustafa was able to control. He needs to possess her fully, prove his worthiness by killing himself. Then he has asserted his masculinity and does not need the room any more.

In addition to the painting of Jean Morris, his sketches of Bakri, Mahjoub, the narrator’s grandfather, Wad Rayyes, Hosna, and Karim signify Mustafa’s study of men and masculinity. The narrator marvels at the clarity and precise emotions Mustafa captures in his sketches: “Their faces looked out at me with the penetrating expressions I had long been aware of but which I had been incapable of defining. Mustafa Sa’eed had drawn them with a clarity of vision and sympathy that approached love” (151). The quality in the subjects that Mustafa depicts so perfectly—and which had escaped the narrator previously—is a sense of masculinity. Bakri, the grandfather, and Wad Rayyes are part of the ruling group and thus personify masculine power and patriarchy in Wad Hamid. Mahjoub, moreover, is the young leader of the village, the counterpart of the narrator and the continuation of the group of elders. In this position it is in his interest to keep traditions alive and thus to perpetuate patriarchy. Hosna, even though a woman, as I have shown above, performs distinctive masculine behavior in rebelling against her people. Mustafa seems to detect this difference in her even before she asserts her rebelliousness. Lastly, Karim is the only womanizer in the narrator’s family, and thus a “real man” according to Wad Rayyes. The fact that the narrator includes Karim in this list is quite telling, insofar as he is a very minor character and only emerges two or three times in the novel, never contributing directly to the action. In fact, the only information the reader receives about him is Karim’s desire for and lack of restraint in regards to women. Even though the narrator mentions that there are sketches of others, he only mentions these six people by name, noting their “penetrating” expressions. It is their masculine quality that binds them together, and that the narrator has not detected in any of them, only in Mustafa. The people sketched by Mustafa are close to the

narrator: his most beloved and respected relative, the grandfather, his best friend, Mahjoub, and the woman he loves, Hosna. He has been drawn to all of them, and only now seems to realize why. In light of the masculine traits, then, it is no wonder that Mustafa chose to draw Wad Rayyes multiple times, “eight drawings in different poses” (151). Wad Rayyes symbolizes the ultimate of masculine behavior: he is powerful, traditional, and a womanizer.

This is also the third reason that the narrator truly objects to this marriage: it is the way Wad Rayyes treats his women. Upon hearing of Wad Rayyes’s plans, the narrator cannot believe his choice of bride: “This woman is the offering Wad Rayyes wants to sacrifice at the edge of the grave, with which to bribe death and so gain a respite of a year or two” (89). Hosna is an offering, because the narrator knows that Wad Rayyes collects and uses women for his own pleasure. He does not respect them. Nowhere is this behavior as clear as in the banter between the group of elders. The whole conversation revolves around sex, and more specifically around the violation of women. Wad Rayyes boasts about the way he kidnapped a bride. She is still a child and a slave girl both of which symbolize her defenselessness in regards to Wad Rayyes, who objectifies her in his narration of what amounts to nothing but attempted rape. “I put the girl in front of me on the donkey, squirming and twisting, then I forcibly stripped her of all her clothes till she was naked. ... She was a young slave girl from downriver who’d just reached puberty” (74). The group who listens to this story finds the tale hilarious and seems to admire his habit of “jumping on and off [women] like a jack donkey” (75). Wad Rayyes is interested in sampling women like foreign dishes, comparing their sexual performances and replacing them when the novelty wears off. So, it is not only the traditional subjugation of women and their lack of rights such as the right to choose a husband for themselves, but the actual physical violation of their bodies that makes the narrator so furious. It is in this sense that Hosna becomes a sacrifice, as her flesh is being offered at the altar of lust. In the end, however, that is how the elders define

masculinity. It's over the woman's body that the man asserts his power. Bint Majzoub, the old matron of the group serves as a prime example. Even though she is a woman, she behaves like a man, in many ways even more "manly" than the others, as she drinks, swears, and brags about sex and her husband's sexual prowess. The way she describes their sexual intercourse is fraught with violent images. "May I divorce [...] if when my husband was between my thighs I didn't let out a scream that used to scare the animals tied up at pasture [...] May I divorce [...] if his thing wasn't like a wedge he'd drive right into me so I could hardly contain myself. He'd lift my legs after the evening prayer and I'd remain splayed open till the call to prayers at dawn" (75-76). These descriptions do not mean to indict her husband in any way, but, on the contrary, serve as proof of his manliness and justify Bint Majzoub's praises of him. This is the same woman who admits to laughing when she first hears Hosna's screams from Wad Rayyes's house, "telling myself that Wad Rayyes still had something left in him" (125). Only if a man can force himself unto a woman and assert his will, is he manly. In the same fashion as Mustafa defends his masculinity when it is under attack in the North by killing Jean Morris, so does also here a woman bear the consequences of reinforcing masculinity on her own body.

While these are prominent forms of masculinity and aggression in this novel, they all fail. Wad Rayyes and Mustafa both die in the end. What's more, they die *because* of the women they hurt and wanted to possess. Also the ruling group will never talk about sex and violence the same way after they have witnessed the murder-suicide in their midst. The grandfather is close to one hundred years old, the end of his predicted life span, and Bint Majzoub has spilled the village's secrets to the narrator. In contrast to the grandfather who blindly curses all women, and thus stays true to the old paradigm of male dominance, Bint Majzoub shows some regret and thus a spark of solidarity with another woman. Mahjoub, even though he has not received much critical attention, is one of the characters who in fact is able to straddle various changes. He remains a

friend and confidante of the narrator, thus catching a glimpse behind the scenes in the capital while he is active in his own community. Before Hosna kills Wad Rayyes, Mahjoub is in the process of building a hospital and a school. He is the chairman of the irrigation committee, and uses the knowledge he has learnt in school specifically for the good of his village. He consciously decides that he does not need more schooling for his goals, even though he performs even better at school than the narrator. Mahjoub also understands the technological changes that are coming to the village and the ways that the culture has not changed. He tries to talk to Wad Rayyes out of the marriage without ridiculing him. He understands the legitimacy of Wad Rayyes's request in his marriage proposal and respects Hosna's rejection. While he probably could have done more to prevent it, and in the end joins the ranks of the silent villagers, he navigates the various structures of power, whether they are related to class, socioeconomics, or politics, rather smoothly. Mahjoub is the possible future of the village. He is rooted in it, because he takes responsibility, a quality that is not gendered, but denotes the protection of the weaker members of society, a critical evaluation of one's successes and failures, and the use of one's knowledge to actively improve a situation.

The narrator has a model of belonging in the form of his friend in front of him the whole time, but he concentrates on the stranger, who in the end offers him nothing. The narrator realizes that he needs to take responsibility. When he calls out for help in the middle of the river which threatens to pull him down, he makes an active decision to take responsibility for his life, and admits to his weaknesses. Because he did not take an active role, refused to admit any responsibility, and neglected to acknowledge his weakness—his love for Hosna—she is dead. In a very real sense, he is the only one who could have saved her, by standing up for her, but he was too busy looking down on the villagers. The narrator is stranded because the world is changing and he does not know whom to follow: empty idols or aging heroes. He cannot combine the local

with the global, the old ideals with the new ones, because one cannot simply be substituted for another. In order to change the way of thinking, old traditions need to be understood first. The narrator cannot simply override or ignore patriarchal traditions and take female agency and control for granted. He is not willing to act as a bridge, a unifier between the old and the new, the local and the national, and thus Hosna has to make a desperate attempt at change. It does not need a revolutionary act of change; any type of resistance to expose the oppressive forces of power construction will do. The masculine approach of conquering and dividing, invading and penetrating, leads to violence and aggression in a world that becomes increasingly smaller. I read this narrative as a warning against presupposed hierarchies, especially if they are based on gendered and traditional ways of belonging. As a testament to the time it was written in, but equally valid in 2009, *Season of Migration to the North* emphasizes the continuing negotiations of power. In a global world, characterized by a multiplicity of encounters, power and identity cannot remain stable. They need to grow out of and outgrow old values and grand narratives.

This work then, written in the turbulent years of decolonization, portrays a world that is in upheaval. The African or Arab is trapped. He is not part of the Western world, and has not found his place among his fellowmen either. Dictatorships are arising, the post-colonial state has failed to deliver, and the West offers no consolation either. At the same time, this novel depicts a world about to erupt. It is still closed away in a room, but it exists. East and West still don't quite know how to handle each other, but they are being forced to. The Western powers have pulled out of most of their colonies, but the colonials are coming to Europe. It is a turning point in the traditional trajectories of migration. What happens when the Arab comes to Europe? What happens when the state is reversed? What happens to the Arab homeland when its best people leave? The suspense and the lingering fear and chaos underlying Patricia Highsmith's novel has come to a boiling point in this work. The West has become a target, not only a destination. This

target is not only physical, but literary, as Salih, and other post-colonial African writers, also write back and against images of the West. No longer is it only the Western eye that sees and describes, but multiple gazes become available. *Season of Migration to the North* mirrors this multiplicity as it includes the village, the capital, and the world and resonates with other works written about and from The Maghreb. It makes use of the stereotypes invoked by Wharton's travelogue *In Morocco* and puts an ironic spin on them. It also addresses sexuality as a commodity and a means of power as we see it in *The Sheltering Sky*. Salih's novel challenges ingrained values in a changed world, like *The Tremor of Forgery* does. And finally, it resonates with *Memory in the Flesh* in its analysis of gendered forms of belonging and responsibility and the question of the return to the homeland.

**The (Im)possibility of Building a Nation:
Of Algeria and *Memory in the Flesh*⁸⁶**

Memory in the Flesh appeared first in Arabic in 1985. It was then translated into English by Baria Ahmar Sreih and later revised by Peter Clark. Its journey from Arabic to English is indicative of its overall cultural ambiguity. That the novel was disseminated to a wider audience through the medium of English before it was rendered into French is not an accident. Most Algerians still feel alienated when it comes to writing in French—the language of their colonizers for more than 130 years. That Ahlam Mosteghanemi, who comes from a French-speaking family, deliberately chose to write in Arabic instead of French (her mother tongue) is also quite telling insofar as she wanted to reclaim a legacy, and more importantly perhaps, a *turāth* (heritage) that was sullied when the French ruled Algeria. Her choice of language, and therefore ideology, is articulated thus: “Only language and emotions are capable of restoring and rebuilding a new Algeria.”⁸⁷ Réda Bensmaïa, another Algerian writer and author of *Experimental Nations, Or, The Invention of the Maghreb*, goes further in asserting that the act of remaking a nation, a process he calls “reterritorialization, . . . was to occur through the use of literary Arabic; through bilingualism (French for the sciences and for technology, literary Arabic for the ‘soul,’ identity, and origins” (15). *Memory in the Flesh* consolidates the thesis developed by Bensmaïa in that it is both explorative and poetic, experimental and disturbing. Conflating characters and the nation, the narrative aims at reviving the memories of a forgotten people.

⁸⁶ Reprinted by permission of *College Literature* (see Appendix).

⁸⁷ In the dedication of this novel, Mosteghanemi continues this trend when she writes: “And to the memory of my father, who may find someone there who knows Arabic to read him this book, his book.” Since the novel went from Arabic straight to English, the father would not have had a chance to read it in French even many years after its publication. On her family and father’s reception of her work, see Ahlam Mosteghanemi, “Writing Against Time and History,” *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers* (1998).

Coming across a photo of Ahlam, Khalid, the painter, who used to be deeply in love with Ahlam, decides to tell a story. This he does by jotting down remembrances of things past while laying to rest his feelings for his beloved. In the process, his remembering, as Toni Morrison would have it, inevitably leads to remember Ziad, his poet-friend from Palestine, who, it seems, caused the break-up between him and Ahlam. The same goes for the various relationships between the other characters; they are brought about, determined, and come to an end according to each character's understanding of Algeria. They use their art of telling and each other to construct a place—a home of sorts. In its exploration of reclaiming a nation and establishing belonging in a post-colonial and transnational world, this novel resonates with the works discussed in previous chapters. First of all, it elaborates on the South-North and East-West migration that Mustafa and the narrator undertake in *Season of Migration to the North*. Khalid, the main character in Mosteghanemi's narrative, like Mustafa, has left his native land and lives in the empirical motherland, France. Like Ingham and Wharton, Khalid is an artist who uses his paintings as mediations between exile and home, primarily intent on recreating Constantine, his native city, in Paris, his adopted city. As art and the role of the artist in the depiction of others and the construction of belonging play a central role in this novel, my reading of *Memory in the Flesh* aims to highlight the failure of artificial constructions, especially if they are based, as in the case of *The Sheltering Sky* and *Season of Migration to the North*, on imposed national and gender hierarchies. Like in the earlier works, much of the inner conflict of the male characters in this novel relates directly to the body and desire. The body in a way has become a text, a palimpsest of the nation, and a marker of identity. By foregrounding the role of the body and the conflict between artistic creation and bodily procreation, my reading aims to complicate notions of violence in the encounter and interrogate the function of responsibility in claiming a nation. While art serves as a traditional lens through which we can express ourselves and depict the

other, it erects a barrier, an artificial distance. Only by claiming his blood ties and accepting his body as part of the controversial and sometimes abusive post-colonial nation can Khalid achieve a sense of closure and belonging.

As we have seen, the construction of the other seems to constantly return to the imaginary realm, whether it be writing or painting. Art allows one to create connections that go beyond the personal. The connection between self and other in the nation, for example, has been explored quite fully by critics like Benedict Anderson, Homi Bhabha, Salman Rushdie, Roberto Gonzales-Echevarría, and Edouard Glissant.⁸⁸ Réda Bensmaïa has called writings that both create and map the new nation “inscription[s] in the country (to come)” (150). This inscription is not purely textual and takes on emotional and physical connections as the words “little by little constitute a *political and social cartography* that will serve as an identity card, a map of the heart, a cadastre, and finally an inventory of cultural and geographical sites” (*Experimental Nations*, 150). As the nation has inscribed itself onto the bodies of Khalid, Ahlam, and Ziad, so these three bodies replicate the action and inscribe themselves back onto the nation. Nicole Brossard and Daphne Marlatt have called exactly for that; “To write the body active in its own intelligence, writing its way of being in the world, and hence how it sees it is to move suddenly inside what has been seen from outside . . . To write the in-between, where the fixed positions of the self and other interact, re-defining what each represents in a shifting play of perspectives” (“Only a Body to Measure Reality By,” 16). Khalid paints the bridges of Constantine over and over again, Ziad writes poetry, and Ahlam writes novels. Again, this connection to the homeland takes on physical dimensions. The brush and paintings literally compensate for the loss of Khalid’s arm. Not only has painting played a major role in his recovery from the amputation, but painting and

⁸⁸ See Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1991), Bhabha’s *Nation and Narration* (1990), Gonzalez-Echevarría’s *Myth and Archive. A Theory of Latin American Narrative* (1990), and Glissant’s essay on “National Literatures” in his book *Caribbean Discourses* (1989).

the brush become physical extensions of Khalid's body. While the missing arm signifies a changed and broken relationship to his country, the painting as therapy should help to restore this balance to Khalid's surroundings and himself, as the doctor explains it to him: "You've got to build a new bridge with the world through either painting or writing . . . If you prefer painting, then paint. It can reconcile you to things around you and to the world that has changed in your view because you have changed and are looking at it, touching it with only one hand" (36). Only by accepting and actively engaging with what he is missing, can Khalid heal himself, a concept reminiscent of Hegel's trope of negativity.

The journeying subject of Hegel's *Phenomenology* also seeks its own actualization, but finds that this does not happen without the paradoxical assistance of negativity. The human subject does not exhibit greater potency through an unobstructed expression of selfhood, but requires obstruction, as it were, in order to gain reflection of itself in its environment, recognition of itself by others. Hence, actualization only occurs to the extent that the subject confronts what is different from itself, and therein discovers a more enhanced version of itself. The negative thus becomes essential to self-actualization, and the human subject must suffer its own loss of identity again and again in order to realize its fullest sense of self. (*Subjects of Desire*, 13). Speaking of Malek Haddad, "son of Constantine, Mosteghanemi writes, "who swore after the independence of Algeria not to write in a language that was not his. The blank page negated his existence. He died by the might of his silence to become a martyr of the Arabic language and the first writer ever to die silent, grieving, and passionate on its behalf."⁸⁹ Here, the writer not only underlines her choice of writing in Arabic but also links language and violence to national belonging. I will

⁸⁹ See Lisa Suhair Majaj, Paula W. Sunderman, Therese Saliba's introduction to their collection of essays *Intersections: Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels* (2002) for an overview of Western reception of Arab novelists. Also see Margot Badran and miriam cooke's anthology *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing* (2004) and Daphne Grace's *The Woman in the Muslim Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature* (2004) on some of the more recent criticism regarding the one-sided Western representation and reduction of Arab women.

come back to the role of the body in *the novel* as a locus of the complex construction of an individual's cultural, historical, and national belonging. For now, the further pertinence of what I am discussing is of course this set of questions: Is national belonging important in a globalized world? Is language and/or art sufficient to invent a nation with an identity? What is it in the narrative about the body that can illuminate the question of identity? And finally: Is it possible to represent and imagine a whole nation—say, Palestine, in its complexity and variety—what the late Edward Said aptly called “permission to narrate”? How fragile is Algeria as a nation, a concept imposed from above and what are we to make of the nation as fragments? How heroic are the main protagonists in the novel and what is the symbiosis between text and event as they appear in the narrative? How far can the subaltern go to reclaim a *tur'āth* (heritage) without writing herself away from her people? These are some of the matters I hope to address not in a linear but *organic* way. To do so, I find myself discussing certain dominant themes, patterns, and images I had not anticipated when I first read *Memory in the Flesh*.

I.

My intention (and method) in analyzing this narrative aims at constituting a sense of the interplay between the theoretical, physical, and artistic body in constructing national belonging. While it starts out as a love letter to a woman, the novel slowly unravels the idealization of the Arab homeland and forces the narrator to reconstruct what it means to be Arab and Algerian. As the love between Khalid and Ahlam proves treacherous, so emerges the Algerian city of Constantine. No longer does it live in the beautiful signs like the mother's bangle or the bridges crossing the city alone, but in corruption, poverty, and jail. As a symbol for the Arab homeland, Constantine does not allow for compromises or beautifications but demands to be understood in its complexity. It is in this sense that it cannot be captured, whether in literature or art. In the end, it remains aloof and without compassion. This relationship to the city becomes an emblem of the

characters' search for national identity both at home and abroad. To clarify the point I am making I want to draw on "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History" where Michel Foucault introduces "the body [as] the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration" (*Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 148). Judith Butler, on the other hand, notes that Foucault's task of genealogy is to "expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body" (*Subjects of Desire*, 236). She goes so far to deconstruct the relation between the body and identity. I quote her to make my point:

What I would propose in place of these conceptions of construction is a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as a *process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*. That matter is always materialized has, I think, to be thought in relation to the productive and, indeed, materializing effects of regulatory power in the Foucaultian sense. (10)

For Butler, the body constitutes the boundaries of the self that need to be shaped and explored forever. Here, identity is not fixed but needs to be reinvented. Its creation and imagining via the physical human body has expanded to include the symbolic body of literature.

Elsewhere Ahlam Mosteghanemi links writing with a personal exploration, what she calls "a continual examination of the 'acceptable,'" and, similar to Butler, compares this exercise to a continuous self-reflecting process, which she names, "a review and continual questioning of the self, in other words, an everlasting adventure" (82). However, she clarifies that this quest is not of a purely personal or artistic nature, but is inevitably political, since ". . . poetry and country are [her] primary cause" (84). As she translates the needs of her physical body onto the page, the text becomes an expression of desire, and indeed an extension of the body in the way Roland Barthes views it.

Apparently Arab scholars, when speaking of the text, use this admirable expression: *the certain body*. What body? We have several of them: the body of the anatomists and physiologists, the one science sees and discusses: this is the text of grammarians, critics, commentators, philologists (the phenol-text). But we also have a body of bliss consisting solely of erotic relations, utterly distinct from the first body: it is another contour, another nomination; thus with the text: it is no more than the open list of the fires of languages ... Does the text have human form, is it a figure, an anagram of the body? Yes, but of the erotic body. The pleasure of the text is irreducible to physiological need. (*Pleasure of the Text*, 16-17).

Here, the erotic body seems to flow between the desire to know oneself, the desire for the body, and the desire of creating and enjoying the written body. The concept of desire brings together physical attraction and *be-coming* between the body and the text. This idea chimes with the title of the novel: *Memory in the Flesh*. It introduces memory and love as a concept that lies *underneath* the skin and thus stands in direct contrast to the artistic rendering of these memories. At the same time, the title signifies the personification of memory, and thus the reflection of one's own desires onto the body of another. A similar metaphor can be found in Abdelkebir Khatibi, who articulates the role of the body in the deconstruction of binaries. Bensmaïa conveys his thought as follows:

In one of the most beautiful passages of *Maghreb pluriel*, Khatibi suggests that as subjects of the new materialist narrative—the new Hikayat—“no gods will attend our deaths, no angels, no devils. Our subversion ... is to make heaven and hell come tumbling down in a thought of Otherness.” It is therefore no longer being that Khatibi wishes to paint, but becoming, the becoming of the body, of the flesh—the eternal “passibility” [sic] of man. (*Experimental Nations*, 145).

Once again the body literally becomes the meeting ground between two cultures and ideologies and bears the fruits or scars of these unions. Only through these corporeal experiences with the

other can the body find its place and identity. Taking refuge in the body of art only, especially in depicting the other, renders experiences irreducible and erects a barrier between the artist and his or her surroundings, as we have seen in Wharton's case. By challenging and accepting the other in thought, the artist can then challenge one's notion of the self, as Ingham has done. Only once he physically comes in contact with Abdullah does he also move into the Arab quarter, experiencing Tunisian life on his body. We see a similar process of redemption at work in Mosteghanemi's novel. The projection of one's own desires onto the bodies of others cannot lead to mutual recognition, but only to self-reflection. Once Khalid examines his connections to his homeland more critically and experiences Constantine on his own skin, he can find a sense of belonging and home.

My reading of *Memory in the Flesh* introduces the body as object of desire, as an allegory for the nation, and a symbol for the physical connections to and responsibility for one's country and its people. The most unconditional and contradictory role of the body in the novel—and in contemporary Arab-Western relations—is that of the sacrifice for the nation: the martyr. Ziad, the Palestinian poet in the novel epitomizes the artist and revolutionary who makes the liberation of Palestine his absolute priority. Palestine's future becomes Ziad's main personal, political, and artistic goal and marks him as a martyr right from the beginning: "Such men as Ziad were born in different Arab cities, belonged to different political ideologies, but all were somehow related to your father. To his steadfastness, his pride, and his Arab feeling. They all died or were to die for the Arab nation" (101). His martyrdom and cultural belonging are inscribed on his body when he dies. Ziad's homeland is the "Arab nation" as a whole and not one country like his native Palestine in particular. As Lisa Suhair Majaj, Paula Sunderman, and Theresa Saliba have explained in the introduction to their collection of essays *Intersections: Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels*, this imagined Arab community needs to be understood in

the “turbulent post-colonial context of the post-1960s, a period marked in the Arab world by the rise of national liberation movements, the defeat of Arab nationalism, the fragmentation of Arab identity, and the increasing militarism of the Israeli state” (xix). Even though Mosteghanemi published the novel in 1989, Khalid’s memories and his meeting with Ziad are rooted in the political circumstances of the 1960s. Throughout the narrative, therefore, it is not only the belonging to one country in particular that emerges as the desired goal, but one’s contested place in the Arab homeland.⁹⁰ The various struggles for independence and the creation of the state of Israel contributed to a pervasive fear that the Arab world was under attack, and Ziad decides to fight back by becoming a militant.

Only by dedicating his life—and death—to the cause of the liberation of the whole Arab homeland can Ziad hope to achieve change. Single victories, like Algeria’s independence from France, are promising signs of hope but do not signify the liberation of the Arab *umma* or nation. Ultimately, only by destroying his body can he valorize his absolute and ongoing commitment to this cause. Michel Foucault has explained in *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice* how “the destruction of the body is ... the occasion of the manufacturing of values, the moment of the ‘disassociation’ which gives rise to abstraction and to the subject itself as an abstraction” (150). So while Ziad’s activism is important and inspiring, only his death takes his commitment onto a symbolic level that transcends individual experiences and abstracts them into historical significance. The central role of his body and the physical connection to his homeland characterize Ziad. His relationship to his native city, for example, highlights his absolute belonging and commitment. To him, Gaza is a dream worth dying for. While he wanders from city to city, “[Ziad] was never at ease where he was, as if cities were only railway stations where

⁹⁰ The term “Arab world” is inadequate and overly general as it glosses over geographical, political, and religious differences between the various nations in the Maghreb and Mashriq. I am using it in this context to point to this generalization as it has been fostered by Western media. Most of the chapter will be discussing Algeria as one specific Arab country and use the term Arab as a personal cultural identifier.

he was waiting for a train” (128) and only Gaza has been pursuing him, “to the extent that it plucked [him] out of all other cities” (139).⁹¹ He leaves his fiancée in Algeria in order to join the PLO, and also renounces Ahlam, the woman in the love triangle in *Memory in the Flesh*, for his martyrdom. Love for Ziad stands exclusively for his homeland; no woman can take that place in his heart. In fact, the homeland is both woman and home, which makes “Palestine [...] his only mother” (163). By claiming a physical and bodily connection to his homeland, he fills the void left by his real mother, who is buried in an anonymous mass grave, and reclaims his *droit du sol* as a son of Palestine.

Similarly, Ziad’s poetry assumes a physical and bodily dimension. Like Khalid, Ziad at first uses his art to reconnect to his homeland, but realizes that only by sacrificing his body for the nation can he assert his place in Palestine’s history. Consequently, his writing emerges most strongly and clearly when he is dead. The suitcase with his unfinished poems takes on a huge presence in Khalid’s life—almost bigger than Ziad when he was alive. Not only have they survived after Ziad’s death, but because of Khalid’s decision to publish them, the words defy mortality altogether. As the streets in Constantine are named after martyrs, reminding modern Algerians of these national sacrifices, so will Ziad’s poems inspire new fighters and immortalize a fate that inevitably leads to death. His creative body outlives his destroyed physical body, as Judith Butler explains in *Subjects of Desire*: “We are recognized not merely for the form we inhabit in the world (our various embodiments), but for the forms we create of the world (our works); our bodies are but transient expressions of freedom, while our works shield our freedom in their very structure” (57-58). As the paintings become a physical substitute for an extension of Khalid’s body, Ziad’s poems become his reincarnated thoughts. More than merely a literary

⁹¹ In fact, Ziad’s obsession with Gaza and Palestine is reminiscent of Mustafa’s fixation on Jean Morris—both characters give their lives for their objects of desire in the end. Both Gaza and Jean Morris, moreover, signify the lack of belonging as Gaza is an occupied territory and Jean Morris refuses to be controlled by Mustafa.

immortalization of Ziad's body, however, his poems are very physical and speak about bodily needs and desires. One poem in particular illustrates the conflicting relation between these various forces pulling on Ziad's heart:

On my body pass your lips
Where only swords have passed.
Woman of fire, light me up
Love brings us together one time
And death pulls us apart another
And a handful of soil rules us always...
Lust brings us together
Then one day
Pain pulls us apart when it becomes as big as a body
I become one in you
Woman of soil and marble
I watered you, then wept for you and said...
Princess of my love
Princess of my death
Come! (169-170)

Most of the emotions and feelings have specific physical connotations, like lust, pain, and the single focus on the body—the injured, the contested, the desired, the cold, and earthly body respectively. The novel leaves it purposefully ambiguous whether this poem provides proof of Ziad and Ahlam's love affair, or whether it is a political allegory for Palestine. The “woman of soil and marble” is able to refer to Ahlam as a cold and noble Arab woman, whereby the soil denotes the common culture; or, of course, the marble and soil can describe Palestine and its ancient cities and monuments, whose soil is being contested. The pain separating the two lovers described in the poem can imply Khalid as the third person in the love triangle or it can mean Ziad's ultimate sacrifice for Palestine. As he conjoins his fate with hers in martyrdom, he offers up his body—only his body stands between his desires and ultimate sacrifice. At the same time, the body and/or pain after a sexual union also point sharply to the image of a birth and thus to

motherhood. As the nation gave birth to him as a national subject and Arab, so now does he offer his body in return.

The third body mentioned in the poem can also stand for the actual text and communication of ideology. Susan Sellers and Ian Blyth have explained how Cixous's novel *The Third Body* gives space to a new ideology in "the way in which the 'third body' of the title appears to take shape as a form of 'feminine' writing. Meditating on the effects of sexual difference, perhaps while making love, perhaps while dreaming about making love . . . the narrator reports: 'At the intersection of our tongues there comes to us a third body, at a place where there is no law'" (*Live Theory*, 38). The commitment to and longing for an Arab homeland then becomes a new body in the poem, mirroring the body of poems that will live on after Ziad's death. It is exactly this ideology that makes the text productive and "fecund" as Roland Barthes explains: "The text needs its shadow: this shadow is a *bit* of ideology, a *bit* of representation, a *bit* of subject: ghosts, pockets, traces, necessary clouds: subversion must produce its own chiaroscuro" (*The Pleasure of the Text*, 32). Even as the author is dead, his poems regenerate and produce new ideas. And yet, while they carry the seeds of immortality, these ideas cause Ziad's death. He is a resistance fighter, and his opposition to powerful countries and organizations makes him a target and a martyr. The paradox then is that while he gives birth to new ideas and inspires generations of Arabs, the body he produces is his death sentence. Mosteghanemi herself has warned against the very real threat in and of written words:

For eternity we have been writing knowing full well that in the final analysis every book awaits a checkpoint searching our thoughts, interpreting our dreams, lying in wait for us between sentences, explaining our silences and the gaps between our words. What is new is that we used to write for an anonymous reader whereas now we write for an anonymous killer who condemns us according to his mood. . . . Whereas we used to dream of living one day with what we write, we now dream of not dying one day

because of what we write. (“Writing Against Time and History,”
87-88)

Mostheganemi goes even further and seems to find the final validation of writing in martyrdom, for all the dangers she encounters and ideas she expresses through her writing “[are] not worth remembering and [do] not equal one drop of blood of al-Taher Ja‘ut nor Yusif Sabti or any of the martyrs to Algerian writing” (“Writing,” 89). Martyrdom, and not only national belonging, therefore, can extend to the written word.

Mosteghanemi’s comment can be read as reflecting on her own writing. Firstly, by idealizing the martyrs we encounter in this novel, Mosteghanemi valorizes martyrdom in general. Secondly, since poetry and country are her primary concerns, we can deduce that this novel also bears a direct political message and that her text is recreating and critiquing a nation and homeland. Her decision to write in Arabic underlines the national and political undertones in her creative work. Without reducing her novel to a political message, since *Memory in the Flesh* stands out for aesthetic reasons, the narrative investigates the constructions of homeland in general. In a globalized world such a question has almost universal value. How do we re-connect to a homeland that we left behind many years ago? What constitutes culture? How important are our roots and origins in finding our identity? In the current Western-Arab polarization, how do we construct the other? Too often do we resort to easy oversimplifications when we construct communities, whether that means overemphasizing things we share to reinforce a sense of unity, or exaggerating the *otherness* of outsiders to use difference as a unifier.

II.

Interestingly enough, national belonging is also gendered for Khalid. He associates positive acceptance with the motherland, and cruel exploitation and self-serving attitudes with the fatherland. Both of these associations are directly related to the body. The motherland

invokes the actual bond with one's nation, an emotional umbilical cord of sorts. The fatherland, however, stands for abstract principles and rules to be learned and obeyed. This connection is removed, stern, and rational, rather than emotional. Only after he returns to Constantine and faces the real post-colonial Algeria does he "realize that you can be orphaned by your nation. Some countries exercise humiliation, harshness and oppression, tyranny and selfishness. Some countries lack the idea of motherhood. They are only like fathers" (189). While I will return to the gendered understanding of the body and the nation below, Khalid's feminization of the nation resonates with Muslim family perceptions and situates his definitions of the motherland and the fatherland in the cultural context of the novel. Referencing Philip Slater's study on the mythical figure of Hera,⁹² Fatima Mernissi has explained that

In societies that institutionalize a weak marital bond, the mother-son relationship is accorded a particularly important place and vice versa. In Muslim societies not only is the marital bond weakened and love for the wife discouraged, but his mother is the only woman a man is allowed to love at all, and this love is encouraged to take the form of life-long gratitude. (*Beyond the Veil*, 121)

This love for the mother mirrors the connection to the motherland and mother-tongue, cultural and national signifiers that establish and acknowledge belonging. While the fatherland traditionally implies national pride and strength, the motherland equals roots and unconditional love. One fights for the fatherland, but sacrifices everything for the motherland, for while the first is strong and active, the latter implies weakness and helplessness. The specific idea of motherland thus coincides with the idea of the vulnerable Arab world in the late 1960s, both of which demand absolute and unquestioning loyalty. As a child owes life to his or her mother, so love for the homeland is always presupposed and innate.

⁹² Philip E. Slater, *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

Put in psychological terms, the ideas of mother and motherland are closely related. Judith Butler points out that “matter” and “mother” share common roots in Latin: “The classical association of femininity with materiality can be traced to a set of etymologies which link matter with *mater* and *matrix* (or the womb) [...] The classical configuration of matter as a site of *generation* or *origination* becomes especially significant when the account of what an object is and means requires recourse to its originating principle” (*Bodies that Matter*, 31). The loss of the mother signifies not only an emotional loss but the loss of one’s origins, raising questions about one’s identity and belonging as a whole. If the physical mother is dead, then a new allegiance needs to be formed, an even stronger bond with the motherland, in order to “matter” and to “mean,” to belong (*Bodies that Matter*, 32). For Khalid, the loss of the mother results in an identification of the homeland with motherhood; the motherland becomes a substitute for the mother’s love. “The revolution was entering its second year and I was in my third month as an orphan. I cannot remember now exactly when the country took over the character of motherhood and gave me an unexpected and strange affection and a compulsive sense of belonging” (14). His mother’s death inspires Khalid to join the revolutionary forces, which explains in part the strong emotional and almost physical bond between him and his homeland. He is willing to give his life for Algeria’s independence, to differentiate himself as a son of Constantine. This is nowhere better articulated than in the loss of his arm during the war of liberation. By now Algeria has inscribed herself on his body indefinitely. The missing arm becomes his main mark of identity. He divides his life into the whole years and the broken years, and can only forget about his handicap when he is in art galleries, “where eyes focus more on my work rather than my missing arm” (43). It is in this sense that Khalid’s diversion from his person is twofold. He might be ashamed of his handicap, but since he is exhibiting his art in France, his body is also

“abject” because it is Arab.⁹³ His mark is double.⁹⁴ The second mark is clearly negative since it ostracizes and alienates him from other French citizens, especially considering the low social standing of North Africans in Paris. Moreover, the mark of the martyr has become a site of contestation.

There was a time when the missing arm used to be a proud public statement of national sacrifice; it has now become an embarrassing sign of personal pain and isolation. His body as a cultural marker has lost its significance and signals the fluidity and complexity in the construction of national belonging and identity.

During the first years of independence [...] soldiers enjoyed some respect and the war handicapped had some prestige around ordinary folk. They inspired admiration rather than pity. Nobody was expected to offer any explanations or to tell his story.

We carry our memories in the flesh and that required no explanation.

Today, a quarter of a century later, one is ashamed of the empty sleeve hidden timidly in the pocket of a jacket, as though trying to conceal a private memory and apologize for the past to those who have no past. The missing hand disturbs them and takes away their appetite. (43)

I quote this passage at length because it illustrates how the body has become the palimpsest of the nation. It no longer signifies, but functions rather as a surface to be inscribed with meaning by others, like the post-colonial new Algerian elite on the one hand and the Parisian constituency

⁹³ In her interview with Irene Costera Meijer and Baukje Prins, which was published in *Signs*, Judith Butler has made it clear that abject bodies don't only refer to sexuality: "The abject for me is no way restricted for me to sex and heteronormativity. It relates to all kinds of bodies whose lives are not considered to be 'lives' and whose materiality is understood not to 'matter.' To give something of an indication: The U.S. press regularly figures non-Western lives in such terms. Impoverishment is another common candidate, as is the domain of those identified as psychiatric 'cases'" ("How Bodies Come to Matter," 281).

⁹⁴ Interestingly, the double mark as an individual and as a foreigner seems to counteract the double meaning of nationalism as Mona Fayad has explained it: "The association of nationalism with death is double. Nationalism is the death of subjectivity, but it also implies sacrifice" ("Strategic Androgyny," 171). While nationalism diminishes the individual, Khalid's missing arm becomes a marker that makes him stand out and recreates rather than destroy him.

on the other. While his missing arm used to mark him as a martyr, an active participant in his nation's history, his empty sleeve now hides nothing but a disability. The broken body exists no longer as a sign of national martyrdom; it has become a personal indictment. His arm, while a personal and public identification at once, also accuses his countrymen who fought with him and since then have taken advantage of their part in rebuilding the nation. They have benefitted from their new role in Algeria to enrich themselves rather than bettering the life of all Algerians. His missing arm not only marks his allegiance to Algeria but also stands as a protest against the hijacking of the revolution by those who call themselves the "revolutionaries." Khalid's disability entitles him to receive a truck from the government as a sign of recognition for his sacrifice, but he refuses the alms of a nation that prefers to buy him out rather than invite him to become part of her history. As his paintings desperately attempt to connect him to his homeland, the Algerian press, and with it "the only person who really mattered to [him], the Algerian reader" (118), largely ignore his exhibition. Khalid wants his homeland to acknowledge that he is Algerian and to unearth the old ideals and goals of the freedom fighters during the revolutionary war. Instead, his paintings are worth nothing and his "broken body is nothing but a display" (44). His paintings and his body remain trivial sites of inscription. His motherland where he belongs has revealed its fatherly qualities.

His broken body symbolizes his broken relationship to Algeria. On the one hand, he works and lives in exile in France. His injury coincides with his exile, since he has to leave Algeria for Tunisia in order to receive medical treatment for his arm. The moment when Khalid enters national history as a martyr, Algeria expels him since it cannot provide the appropriate health care. Moreover, his alienation from post-colonial Algeria and its self-important and corrupt ministers signifies another break from his homeland. Even more importantly, the country he looked to for belonging does not exist any more. The free and independent Algeria, the

motherland, existed in the minds of the *mujahideen* and in Khalid's paintings, but has not become a historical reality. Algeria, the broken dream, mocks Khalid's broken body. The body of the martyr remains a spectacular bill board that various groups use to their advantage, a means to another end, a signified but never a signifier. It is in this sense that the constant national connotations of his missing arm deny Khalid his own personal identity, because they reduce him to a symbol of the nation and its ideals.⁹⁵

An even more obvious example of the easy merging between a private individual and a national symbol emerges in the character of Ahlam. This conflation of country and woman is partly due to her close ties to the nation through her body. Since she is the daughter of Si Tahir, a prominent freedom fighter in Algeria, and the niece of Si Sharif, an influential member of the new Algerian elite, her life becomes inextricably linked to Algeria. Her initial connection to Khalid, who gave her the name "Ahlam" when she was born, reminds us of the social bond that substitutes her relationship with her biological father. She willingly continues this legacy when she agrees to marrying Si X, an emerging member of the new elite, and thus to publicly consolidate her future with that of the nation. By dedicating the last night before her wedding to Khalid, she aims to bridge past and future allegiances to her country—both times through the body. Si Tahir's blood ties find their continuation in the virginal blood that seals her pact with the new nation on her wedding night. More than a blood pact, the stained sheet symbolizes yet another broken body. Her hymen has been broken in the name of the new Algeria. While this is only the most visible sign of her fracture, Khalid detects an earlier disconnection that has to do with the nation and the blood that ties her to it. As his dreams were amputated together with his

⁹⁵ As I have mentioned elsewhere, Fredrik Jameson has argued for the centrality of the national allegory in post-colonial literature, and we see a fictional treatment of this allegory in Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children*, for example, where Saleem symbolizes the newly born nation of India. Conversely, Bapsi Sidhwa in her Pakistani novel *Cracking India* presents Ayah as an allegory for the young and attractive nation.

arm, so Ahlam's childhood had been cut short and taken away from her. Even the memories of her father, who is so symbolic of the nation, are not hers alone to keep, for Si Tahir "became the property of the whole of Algeria" (67). All the memories that are exclusively hers are those that she carries in her flesh; her blood establishes her fixed place in Algerian history. As Khalid mourns the loss of his motherland, Ahlam is searching for her father and her fatherland.⁹⁶

Indeed, their searches seem to complement each other, and throughout Khalid's professions of love, Ahlam blends with the homeland he longs for. "You are the woman who cloaked my nostalgia with madness, who gradually assumed the features of a city and the contours of a country" (5). Similarly, he draws a portrait of Ahlam in the form of the Rope Bridge in Constantine with its people, lights, and shadows to reflect the maturity he sees in her. He explains: "I felt as if I was painting you, just you. It was you with all your contradictions. I was painting another copy of you, more mature, yet more complex . . . I was painting with an amazing zest and perhaps with a secret lust. I wonder if it was then that lust for you slipped into my brush without my knowing it?" (89). Rather than exploring and trying to understand her as a woman, Khalid conflates Ahlam with his homeland and bodily desires. By becoming obsessed with her, Khalid allegorizes Ahlam and transforms her body into a blank canvas that represents Algeria. This projection of her can be read in Butlerian terms as a stage in the process of self-identification, where the love for another marks the estrangement from oneself, and at the same time, this created other becomes a mirror image of the self, which should aid in the healing of the subject. Butler explains:

Bodies only become whole, i.e. totalities, by the idealizing and totalizing specular image which is sustained through time by the

⁹⁶ Ahlam does not love Algeria unquestioningly, as is characteristic of the love for one's motherland, but she is curious and skeptical. While everybody imposes her belonging to Algeria onto her, she consciously decides to choose her allegiance. While the idea of motherland thus connotes self-sacrifice and presupposes life-long gratitude, the notion of fatherland implies pride and rational decisions.

sexually marked name. To have a name is to be positioned within the Symbolic, the idealized domain of kinship, a set of relationships structured through sanction and taboo which is governed by the law of the father and the prohibition against incest. For Lacan, names, which emblemize and institute this paternal law, *sustain* the integrity of the body. (*Bodies that Matter*, 72)

Khalid in fact names Ahlam literally when he acts on Si Tahir's orders and registers her birth and name at the magistrate. While this is a fatherly act when Ahlam is an infant, Khalid names her again, as a lover does, when he meets her years later in Paris. He calls her Constantine and Algeria, but will not use her official name. He thus emphasizes their shared origins, but refuses to acknowledge her specific blood ties, since he wants to make her his own, to make her his motherland, where he "matters" and belongs.

As he compares Ahlam to his homeland, he has to use his body to imagine and experience her. Since his body is permanently linked to the nation, his connection to Ahlam has to be physical as well.⁹⁷ "With my lips I was painting the outline of your body. With my masculinity I was painting the outline of your femininity. With my fingers I was painting all that the brush could not reach. With my one hand I was possessing you and changing the curves of your body to make them fit mine. Woman! You became my homeland" (120). This passage emphasizes the role of the body in constructing and shaping national belonging in the other person. Khalid uses the trope of the body in order to allude to their essential similarities. In Paris especially they are both marked as Arabs and foreigners, and this commonality makes them the same. Khalid's art is not enough in capturing his homeland; he must construct Ahlam and Constantine with his fingers and his one arm, his marker of Algerian identity. Khalid hopes that their mutual fragmented memories and identities will match and fill in the missing pieces. Only

⁹⁷ When I write about desires and physical closeness, I do not exclusively mean sex. Rather, this physical closeness that Khalid desires is enmeshed with his perception of his own body and his (non)belonging to the nation.

by recognizing and becoming two in one can the self become whole again. This dialectic of self-recognition is central to H  l  ne Cixous’s theory when she argues that “the other in all his or her forms gives me *I*. It is on the occasion of the other that *I* catch sight of *me*; or that *I* catch *me* at: reacting, choosing, refusing, accepting. It is the other who makes my portrait. Always” (*Rootprints*, 13). By affirming Khalid’s body and national identity, Ahlam is meant to fill up the emptiness and make him fully Algerian and Arab again. By essentializing their Algerianness in the body, he aims to create new roots for himself. He can live in Paris and find his homeland in Ahlam because she personifies his memories of Algeria. However, the politics of identity are complex and the inscription of one’s ideas unto another cannot happen directly, but rather involve what Homi Bhabha has called the “third space”:

The subject of the discourse of cultural difference is dialogical or transferential in the style of psychoanalysis. It is constituted through the locus of the Other which suggests both that the object of identification is ambivalent, and, more significantly, that the agency of identification is never pure or holistic but always constituted in a process of substitution, displacement or projection. (*Location and Culture*, 233).

In his longing for Algeria, an Algeria that only exists in his mind and artistic expression, Khalid sees Ahlam as Bhabha’s “third space.” She and her body become the substitute for the homeland; she is the sight of Khalid’s dreams for Algeria.

This projection of one’s desires and dreams unto another does not provide immediate fulfillment, but rather takes the subject beyond the self into a larger community. Only by belonging and establishing one’s place in this larger community, say Algeria, or Arab culture, can the individual then negotiate the political conditions of the present, or Bhabha’s “collusive present” (12). The body comes to matter in Bhabha’s view because this process of identification is rooted in the “desire of the other” (74), which elides person and place. What is interesting is

that Khalid chooses Ahlam, a woman, for this projection and object of desire. The ambivalence lies in the double desire of the woman and the nation/national belonging. For Bhabha, on the other hand, has declared this alienation as the traditional site of woman: “The ‘unhomely’ does provide a ‘non-continuist’ problematic that dramatizes—in the figure of woman—the ambivalent structure of the civil State as it draws its rather paradoxical boundary between the private and the public spheres” (14). By naming Ahlam and making her his homeland, Khalid hopes to establish his place in Algerian history once again.

The naming practices and projections onto Ahlam, however, are problematic.⁹⁸ Firstly, while Ahlam is the main addressee and obvious subject of the novel, the reader only hears Khalid’s voice as narrator and writer. This limited perspective not only necessarily distorts the representation of Ahlam but Khalid resurrects her out of his memory for a specific purpose: “Let me admit to you at this moment I hate you and that I had to write this book to kill you” (28). Here, the narrative aims to undo the visual images of the paintings. In either case Khalid actively and consciously (de)constructs Ahlam.⁹⁹ Ironically, in his one-sided and idealized construction of the woman and a nation, Khalid mirrors French imperial writers: “Perceived as a mix of sensuality and proud purity, of oasis and desert, Algeria became a catalyst for writers wanting to break with Parisian culture. It was, in a sense, a terrain of experimentation” (*Experimental Nations*, 1). Similarly, Edward Said has defined the complexity of culture and the problematic of projecting it onto others, for while culture constitutes a source of identity, it has a “combative” nature since it “differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’ almost always with some degree of xenophobia”

⁹⁸ As we have seen in the previous discussions of gendered constructions of the nation, power, and belonging, this approach always relies in oppressive and hierarchical constructions of self and other.

⁹⁹ It should be noted that the figure of the woman at the center of a novel is quite common in Arab literature, as Amal Amireh explains in her essay “Framing Nawal El Saadawi”: “The Egyptian novel, although mostly written by men, was from its beginning a ‘woman-centered’ genre. Women were main characters or main problems, as is clear from some of the early titles, such as *Zaynab* (Haikal 1914) and *Sarah* (al-Aqqad 1938). The theme of love and the question of woman’s position in society were central to these novels and other early examples of the genre” (55).

(*Culture and Imperialism*, xiii). Said seems to suggest that the projection of our culture and dreams unto others always relies on a wish to conquer and dominate.

Since, especially in orientalist depictions of others, these binaries are most often created in art, such as writing a travelogue or in paintings like Delacroix's famous works of Algerian women, the artistic representation immediately raises a flag. By raising Ahlam out of his memory, he necessarily kills her, since he can only present his representation, his view of her. In his paintings, and then later in his letter, therefore, he prefers the artistic depiction of the woman in flesh in blood. Ahlam can never speak for herself, assert her own desires and wishes, but is always already predetermined by Khalid. Like Mustafa who has to paint Jean Morris in order to capture her because her body eludes him, so do Khalid and Ziad resort to the brush and pen in making Ahlam their own.

III.

Both Khalid and Ziad intimately link the motherland and the loss of the mother with their love for Ahlam. She becomes the object of desire for the two of them, but also a major inspiration for their art, the bridge between their bodies and the nation. Ziad starts to write feverishly after he meets Ahlam, and Khalid exhausts himself in painting Constantine's bridges when Ahlam leaves him for the summer after giving him a passionate kiss. By possessing Ahlam's body and constructing her in their respective arts, Khalid and Ziad aim at recovering their homeland, their mother(land)s.

This notion of the motherland, alas, is treacherous, for the idea of motherhood is intricately linked with sacrifice from when her child first "colonizes" her body. From prenatal nourishment to the giving of life, the mother's body gives and sacrifices, but never expects anything in return. In this sense Khalid's gendered nation and especially the memories of his own mother render his idealizations of Ahlam problematic. While he is fascinated by her strong

will and creativity, her main attractions are her culture and ancestry. The very first encounter in Paris is symptomatic of his narrow perspective.

Before your words reached me, my eyes were drawn to the bracelet that adorned the naked wrist you held out to me. It was a piece of jewelry from Constantine, recognizable from the bright yellow of its gold and the distinctive engraving. It was a bracelet of the kind that, in the old days in eastern Algeria, could be seen on the wrist of every woman and in the trousseau of every bride. I stretched out my arm to you without completely taking my eyes off it. And for a split second my mind went back a lifetime to my mother's wrist and the same bracelet that never left it. (30)

Here, Khalid's observations already insinuate all the connections he will create between Ahlam, his mother, and Algeria, but his comments also introduce the first glimpse of the problematic construction. The words between them, though quoted in direct speech in the novel, take on a secondary meaning, and rather than materializing as a person in front of Khalid, Ahlam immediately becomes a symbol. Instead of returning her gaze, Khalid's vision turns inward to his past and blood. He reduces Ahlam to the bangle, a symbol of Constantine, which strips her of her individuality and actual presence. Since the bangle was worn by "every woman" in Constantine, it constitutes a cultural rather than an individual marker.¹⁰⁰ Khalid's comparison between the bangle and his missing arm limits both of their identities to only one part of their bodies—the arm and the wrist respectively—and thus exposes the necessarily fragmented perception of construction of both their identities. Moreover, his empty sleeve is a public and personal marker while the bangle seems to melt into the general image of Algerian women.

¹⁰⁰ The bangle, moreover, also connotes women's sacrifice for the nation in general. Marnia Lazreg, for example mentions this historical event that directly involves Algerian women and their jewelry: "One of the spectacular measures taken by Ben Bella was to request in 1963 that women donate their gold and silver jewelry to help the National Bank to rebuild its reserves, at a time when national currencies were measured according to the gold standards ... This means that the state asked a sacrifice of women, and women complied in great numbers" (*Eloquence of Silence*, 146). The bangle thus reinforces the woman's sacrifice for the nation and her tacit and subdued participation in the liberation struggle.

This attitude not only sheds light on Khalid's idealized and simplified image of the nation but also immediately invokes a common and problematic trope in post-colonial literature: Women as metaphors for the nation and women's bodies as sites of national struggle.¹⁰¹ The ideal woman suffers and sacrifices herself for the nation and her sons. Even more to the point, Africa is intimately linked to the concept of motherhood as the cradle of civilization, the origin of all humanity. Marnia Lazreg in particular situates this allegorization in Maghrebian literature: "Women as tropes for culture, identity and nation will continue to be used in postcolonial society. Well-known contemporary authors such as Mohammed Dib, or Kateb Yacine, wrote of women as symbols of the nation suffering from the inequities of the colonial order, or the redemption of a colonized society searching for its soul" (*Eloquence of Silence*, 188).¹⁰² Women often equate culture because they are the traditional keepers of the family and embody "cultural authenticity" (Lazreg 225). This common depiction has its roots in the colonial occupation of Algeria when France was using Algerian women to "frenchify" Algeria and, ironically, was further propagated by traditional and locally rooted revolutionary groups like the F.L.N. (National Liberation Front in Algeria) and religious movements in "the 1984 Family Code [which] is an expression of women's identifying with a culture perceived to be in danger in its transformation towards an abstract 'Western' model" (Lazreg 225). It is the woman's burden to defend traditional values against any outside contamination; the conservation of native culture is her highest goal. By focusing exclusively on their common nationality and culture, Khalid

¹⁰¹ One of the most famous examples is probably the concept of Mother India (Bharat Mata), which depicts India as the figure of the suffering mother. For more detailed research in this context, see Sangeeta Ray's *En-Gendering India: Woman and Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives* (2000), Kumari Jayawardena's *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (1994), Vijay Mishra's article "The Texts of Mother India" (1989), Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid's *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (1989), Sandhya Shetty's article "(Dis)figuring the Nation: Mother, Metaphor, Metonymy" (1995), Nalini Natarajan's essay "Woman, Nation, and Narration in *Midnight's Children*" (2004).

¹⁰² It should be noted here that not only men use this trope; it can also be found in Simone de Beauvoir, *Djamila Boupacha* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), which is the story of a female resistance fighter during the Algerian Revolution. See also Assia Djebar, *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, (London: Quartet Books, 1997).

reduces Ahlam to his images of the nation and subjects her to his notions of woman and motherhood. Ahlam may be Si Tahir's daughter and an Algerian, but she is also a young, Westernized woman living in Paris, who goes to the university and has her own aspirations and dreams. In his initial fascination for her, Khalid overlooks all of these attributes, happy to have reconnected with his past, family, and nation. This simplistic reduction emerges most clearly when Khalid paints Ahlam in the form of Constantine bridges and she does not recognize herself in them. "As I painted those bridges, I thought I was painting you. But in fact, I was only painting myself. The bridge was simply an expression of my situation that is forever in suspense. I was unconsciously reflecting onto it my worries, my fears, my turmoil" (137). His reflections onto the canvas mirror his projections of nostalgia onto Ahlam. Like the orientalist travel writer or painter, Khalid does not see who is in front of him, but only recognizes the parts of Ahlam that remind him of his own dreams.

This projection becomes even more problematic if we view it from an objective point of view. Khalid hopes for Ahlam to become like his mother, a very subjective and selfish wish—as if voiced by a child. For Khalid's mother, while being a source of stability and unquestioning love for her sons, had a life equally determined by men. It is only in the last part of the novel, when Khalid physically returns to Constantine and revisits his past without nostalgia, that he confronts his mother's unhappiness. He wanders through the streets of Constantine and finds himself in front of brothels, which trigger family memories:

That was where father spent his last fortune and his manhood. . . . I tried not to look at a place that was for years the reason for my mother's private pain and anguish: probably one of the sorrows that killed her. . . . My father was no longer there to inhibit me from entering. He was gone, but he had left an excellent history behind those walls, like any other respected prosperous Constantine man of his times. . . . Father embroidered his adventures with scars and bruises on Mother's body. (204)

The memory of his mother is not only that of a goodhearted woman, but a woman who has sacrificed and suffered. She has given her body for her children and to her husband, who used it only to beat her before he buried her. She died young and humiliated. If the country is an extension of the family that the woman is supposed to protect and uphold, this passage clearly supports Marie-Aimée Helie-Lucas's assertion that "nationalism, socialism and religion were used as tools for the elaboration of anti-women state policy" (*Opening the Gates*, 111).¹⁰³ As Khalid remembers his mother's pain, the thought of the women inside the brothel also carries a spark of sympathy: "It was behind those walls that presentable but wretched women disappeared, only to reemerge old and ugly, spending their money on orphans and the poor in a final bout of repentance" (204). It seems that the only people who escape these hidden places unscathed are the men, who embroider their shoulders with their manliness by trampling over women's bodies. Interestingly, while Khalid can, to a certain degree, feel some empathy for these women, he is no longer able to find a connection between these women and Ahlam. If she represents Algeria and Arab women, then where, among the places he has visited so far, is her place in Algeria? For Khalid only sees two types of women: the ones outside the brothel, victims like his mother, and the ones behind the forbidden doors, who take advantage of what life gives them and feel no pain.

These two oppositional figures of women have been common tropes in literature. In 19th-century American literature, for example, women stereotypically emerged either as the Angels in

¹⁰³ Marnia Lazreg has criticized Helie-Lucas for her statement and instead called for historical research that addresses the nuanced participation of women in the liberation struggle. It should also be noted that Ahlam Mosteghanemi clearly emphasizes her loyalty to her country and patriotic duties while de-prioritizing her status as a woman when she writes: "Poetry and country are my primary cause. As for being a woman, that is my problem alone" (*Writing against Time and History*, 84). Nevertheless, nationalism more often works against women rather than furthering them and supporting their rights after independence, as Daphne Grace and Evelyn Accad have shown repeatedly in their works.

the House or the femmes fatales, the “mothers” and the “whores.”¹⁰⁴ In Arab literature, Fatima Mernissi has explained a similar distinction and simplistic reduction of women. Referencing Imam Ghazali in her book *Beyond the Veil*, she describes the importance of women’s purity for the community and social order: “The Ghazalian theory directly links the security of the social order to that of the woman’s virtue, and thus to the satisfaction of her sexual needs. Social order is secured when the woman limits herself to her husband and does not create *fitna*, or chaos, by enticing other men to illicit intercourse” (39). Even more importantly, women themselves, and not their actions alone, are associated with *fitna*, a concept that parallels the Western notion of femmes fatales or femmes vitales.

The irony is that Muslim and European theories come to the same conclusion: women are destructive to the social order—for Imam Ghazali because they are active, for Freud because they are not. ... Islam took a substantially different path. What is attacked and debased is not sexuality but women, as the embodiment of destruction, the symbol of disorder. The woman is *fitna*, the epitome of the uncontrollable, a living representative of the dangers of sexuality and its rampant disruptive potential. (44)

When Khalid realizes that Ahlam is not a woman like his mother, he has doubts about her “purity.” He suspects her of having had a sexual affair with Ziad and can only think of her as treacherous and manipulating. Once Ahlam asserts her own agency and resists Khalid’s definitions and reductions of her, she becomes a threat to him. When she, many years after the events described in the novel, publishes a book, Khalid answers with the letter that forms the

¹⁰⁴ May Welland and Ellen Olenska, the two characters in Wharton’s novel, serve as perfect examples for this distinction. The Angel in the House originally denoted the ideal Victorian woman as pure, pious, and obedient, but has been critiqued as a trope for women’s oppression and inferiority to men by prominent writers such as Virginia Woolf in “Professions for Women” in *Collected Essays* (London: Hogarth, 1966), Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977) Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale, 2000).

content of *Memory in the Flesh*. He gives his book this title to kill her off, to cut her out of his memory and his heart.¹⁰⁵

This process of identification, as Butler and Bhabha have explained, is based on the Hegelian concept of dialectics, which Hélène Cixous exposes as one-sided. Her critique of Hegel transfers to Khalid's perceptions of Ahlam. While it is dialogic, the subject alone has agency and the other remains a mirror, a blank surface that only reflects what the subject wants to see. In *The Newly Born Woman* (1986), Cixous accuses this Hegelian dialectic as patriarchal: "In the (Hegelian) schema of recognition, there is no place for the other, for an equal other, for a whole and living woman. She must recognize . . . the male partner, and in the time it takes to do this, she must disappear . . . The good woman, therefore, is the one who 'resists' long enough for him to feel both his power over her and his desire" (79-80). In fact, Khalid's decision to write this love letter comes about when Ahlam's latest novel is published. She is his inspiration to write long after their love for each other has vanished. "Before you, I never wrote anything worth mentioning. Because of you, I put pen to paper" (2). And yet, this inspiration is immediately based on the construction of Ahlam and their story together, Khalid's version: "It is my right now to choose the way in which my tale is told . . . How is it that the white surface of these transformed pages is from the huge black canvasses still leaning against a studio wall that was once mine?" (2). His writing and painting complement each other in achieving the same purpose: to (de)construct Ahlam according to his own wishes, to recreate her in a way that fits his own portrait of her. Even more importantly, the specific inspiration to write this letter lies in the publication of her novel. He puts pen to paper to counter her narrative. Writing in particular has been identified as a woman's weapon by Cixous, who has linked the written word to the body

¹⁰⁵ Ahlam asserts earlier in the novel that she writes stories in order to kill off people in her past. By writing about them, she can let go of them and transform them in her mind into characters. She asserts control over them. Menissi has alluded to this specific form of control and agency in *Scheherazade Goes West*, where she argues that Poe kills off Scheherazade in one of his stories because he is disconcerted by her power and her sexuality.

explicitly when she urges women to put their voices into the world: “Write your self. Your body must be heard . . . To write. An act which will not only ‘realize’ the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her womanly strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal” (*The Laugh of the Medusa*, 250). It seems then that Khalid is scared by the idea that Ahlam is reclaiming her body in her narrative. She has given her body in marriage to Si X, a member of the new Algerian elite, but her past and identity are hidden in her novels. Since the female body has been historically the ground for struggles,¹⁰⁶ only the creative body, her writing, can restore Ahlam’s full identity. She is telling her story and refuses to be a blank surface. Khalid aims to assume control over her one last time by countering her novel with his letter.

IV.

While this essay thus far has explored the various constructions and deconstructions of the self, the other, and the nation from a distance, the conclusion will consider the last part of the novel, where bodies return home and have to re-examine their homeland without the lens(es) of nostalgia. The return to Constantine signals the break with melancholy and idealization. Ahlam gets married to Si X in her native city and invites Khalid to her wedding. The wedding closes the door on any possibility of a future for the two of them and so signals an emotional break for Khalid, who is still in love with Ahlam. The wedding also brings about an ideological break: Ahlam sells out to the new elite, marrying a rich and influential man because her uncle and the legacy of her father demand it. While Khalid and Ziad try to cling to the old ideals of a liberated

¹⁰⁶ Cixous explains the function of the body in writing as a response to history: “In body.—More than men who are coaxed toward social success, toward sublimation, women are body. More body, hence more writing. For a long time it has been in body that women have responded to persecution, to the familial-conjugal enterprise of domestication, to the repeated attempts at castrating them” (*The Laugh of the Medusa*, 257).

and honest homeland that makes room for all of its citizens, Ahlam joins the new elite regardless of her father's ideals. In addition to these painful realizations, the wedding brings about a final and very important break: the return home. Khalid is forced to go back to his homeland and to confront the city and the country he has been dreaming about and reconstructing from a distance. As Ahlam gives her body in marriage to Si X and Algeria, so does Khalid decide to see, touch, smell, feel, and hear a city he has only painted. The return to Constantine proves a great disillusionment but also a liberation and the final arrival in his search for national belonging. The wedding forces Khalid to physically return to Constantine, to release Ahlam from his memory, and, most importantly, to re-evaluate his own role and responsibility in the post-colonial Algeria. Rather than a romantic celebration, the wedding is a political marketplace where new titles and positions are being sold to the highest bidder under the devious cover of love. For Khalid, it is a brutal awakening, but an awakening nevertheless.

Oh Constantine! ... Here was my homeland finally before me. Was this really my home? ... I sat and looked at them and heard their complaints and their mutterings. Not one of them, it seemed, was happy. Was it not ironic too that they complain and criticize and curse the nation? Extraordinary! They have all crawled into high positions. Are they not part and parcel of the corruption? (232-233)

Even though the brutal collision of his constructed homeland with its incompatible reality shocks and pains him, Khalid resolves to stand his ground and not to give in to the power frenzy: "I defy them all, the pot bellies, the bearded ones, the bald ones, those with countless stars on their shoulders, those to whom I have given much and for return they have raped you before my very eyes" (237). He realizes that his defiance from a distance was useless; he can only change the future of his country by taking an active role within it.

Khalid cannot find his Constantine at this wedding, but he wanders around the city in search of his homeland by looking "at every stone with love. I greet every bridge, one by one. I

ask news of families, of the saints, and of their menfolk, one by one” (237). Even though he feels out of place in Constantine, he willfully creates his own homeland again. The painter in him observes and investigates the small things and people surrounding him. He has stopped using his memory as inspiration and thus no longer remains stuck on bridges, suspended between here and there, Constantine and Paris. He has physically given his body back to Algeria and starts to inscribe his memories and ideas onto the city. For years he had painted Constantine’s bridges, because they reflected his own suspended status as exile. When he touches the stones, hears the people’s voices, and crosses the actual bridges in Constantine, he realizes his ties to the city: his childhood years and his family. Rather than art, it is his brother Hassan and the realistic memory of his mother that make Constantine come alive and assert his role in it. He is no longer passive and removed, but the object of his desire is right in front of his eyes, and Khalid realizes that he needs to learn to love Constantine and the Arab homeland in all its complexity and not as a victim that has been invaded and used by others. He gave his arm for the country once, but she now demands his whole being in all her contradictions. By focusing on his missing arm, Khalid neglected the rest of his healthy body. In the same way, he has defined his relationship to Algeria and Constantine by his absence, by what is missing. Now that he can appreciate Constantine in its fuller, more complex, and more personal reality, he can also accept his body and his responsibility.

Khalid carries other memories of Constantine in his flesh, though; memories that will not idealize either the nation or suffering and that only emerge when he physically confronts his past, such as his observation of the brothels. Rather than a personal experience, his mother’s suffering and the underlying currents of sexuality Khalid encounters are symptomatic of his homeland. While he remembers the country’s mothers most often while he was in Paris, he encounters mainly debased lust and illicit desire: “Such inherited baseness is everywhere, in the eyes of

most women who are hungry for any man, and in the nervousness of men who piled their lust until they burst out with the first woman they meet. I had to resist my animal desires that day and not quit the city that was gradually pulling me down” (218). While his earlier memories focus on the holy and motherly woman, Khalid can only see “whores” and “adulterers” in the streets of Constantine. This change in his attitude certainly mirrors his changed feelings toward Ahlam whose body has been sold for political reasons, but it also hints at the complexity of the homeland. Khalid needs to overcome the dichotomy of “good” and “bad” women in order to grasp the idea of the *real* woman. Only late in the novel does a truly human woman emerge: ‘Atiqa, Hassan’s wife. Khalid refrains from idealizing her; she is neither goddess nor demon, but a hardworking loyal wife whose greatest ambition it is to live in a more modern home and own a refrigerator. The Algerian woman is not the bearer of Arab culture or the scapegoat of patriarchal nature, but a human being who has to struggle to put food on the table every day.¹⁰⁷

In order to understand Algerian reality, the novel seems to suggest that Khalid has to physically experience it; to not only carry the memories in his flesh, but to feel them by touching his skin and confront them face to face. Khalid finds his homeland by letting go of abstract notions of the nation and belonging, which enables him to live his life in relative harmony. Only the concrete experience brings true understanding. As Bensmaïa explains:

The Chinese “word” or ideogram for red is based on something everyone KNOWS, meaning that the production of even a general idea passes through the most concrete experiences of things, through sensation even. For Pound, poetry proceeds from a “logic of sensation” (in Deleuze’s sense) and aims at emotionally charged psychic experiences and not at general, unembodied (desingularized) concepts. (*Experimental Nations*, 60)

¹⁰⁷ Regarding the role of women in the Maghreb, see also Fatima Mernissi’s *Doing Daily Battle: Interviews with Moroccan Women* (1988), which details the misconceptions of the role women play in the nation and culture of Morocco. Mernissi explains how women are perceived as passive and protected, when they are in fact the main providers and in general see themselves as the stronger sex.

Khalid starts to accept the embodied realities and refrain from abstract, or unembodied, principles. As his images of the nation and woman have become more complex, Khalid starts to find his place in Constantine. He starts to embrace his body when he decides not to give in to seductive invitations and he is “not ashamed of [his] right hand that day. I had a feeling of restlessness when I realized that, after all that had happened to me I still respected my body” (218). Even though he cannot consume his relationship with Ahlam and his missing arm has been an ambiguous marker of identity, Khalid will not throw away his body and his life. He understands that there are no simple solutions, and Khalid embraces his body because he finally starts to accept the complexity of his self and his homeland.

Not only does Khalid realize his reality, but so does the reader. Especially for a Western audience, who has overall a limited and rather stereotypical image of The Maghreb, it is vital to acknowledge and celebrate this complexity. In contrast to Jameson’s definition of what he calls Third World literature as necessarily allegorical, Bensmaïa has identified a different task for writers of the subaltern voices:

What characterizes the work of third-world writers is not so much the politico-allegorical dimension of what they write. Rather, this work is better characterized by their renewed challenge of anything that tends to reduce the history of the third world and consequently the history of their countries to a kind of picture postcard, a case or a simple moment in the master text of Western reason’s history. Not having inherited a preordained history, or perhaps because they inherited a history that a certain rationality has always already allegorized, these writers placed themselves almost instinctively on the side of a writing difference rather than on the side of a history of identity/sameness. (*Experimental Nations*, 79-80)

The postcards in Bensmaïa’s text strongly invoke Khalid’s paintings of Constantine, his personal and idealized version of his homeland that remain fixed in time and present the whole picture.

They are whole and complete while Khalid's identity and homeland are not. Not only is the formation of identity a continuous process, but also Algeria and the Arab homeland have not completed their formation. "Algeria of today 'is not a place of history.' It is a place in the process of becoming, a place to be made, constructed, (re)written. In order for this place to happen, to be able to enter history, however, it is imperative that we wrest it from the commonplaces that have been stuck on it" (*Experimental Nations*, 80-81). It is mandatory to release these places from the allegories that have been attached to them and which fixed them on a blank canvas. The outcome is yet to be determined but the process creates history. It is in this sense, too, that Homi Bhabha emphasizes the impossibility of understanding culture through simple solutions:

The migrant culture of the "in-between," the minority position, dramatizes the activity of culture's untranslatability; in so doing, it moves the question of culture's appropriation beyond the assimilationist's dream, or the racist's nightmare, of a full transmissal of subject-matter; and towards the encounter with an ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity that marks the identification with culture's difference. (*Location and Culture*, 321)

It is not the finished product that counts, but the understanding of difference in the search.

Culture cannot be translated or pinned down, but can only be experienced gradually by breaking down dichotomies and allegories; by living it in the flesh and blood.

Khalid is forced to rethink his *watàn* when he has to confront other memories that involve both his country and his body. Al-Kudya, for example, represents both the ideals of independence and the corruption of post-colonial Algeria.

Al-Kudya prison was part of my first memories that time cannot delete. ... I entered them again as I had one day in 1945 with fifty-thousand other prisoners who were arrested after the demonstration of the Eighth of May. ... Should I forget those who entered the

prison and never emerged: their bodies remaining in the torture chambers? ...Many years passed before I entered another prison, but that one was under Algerian control. The prison had no address, and Mother was unable to come and visit me, as she had in the past, weeping and begging help from every prison guard. That was al-Kudya prison. (208-211)

Al-Kudya prison stands for the continued violence and the unnamed martyrs who died a solitary and brutal death within its walls. This prison and the people who perished in it are part of Constantine and its history as much as Si Tahir, but in a little darker and less glorious way. While his missing arm still marks him as a son of Algeria, many scars that were inflicted in the name of the nation remain invisible and buried.

Another forgotten and painful reminder to post-colonial Algeria is Khalid's brother, Hassan. When Khalid joins the revolutionary forces and later leaves Algeria, he abandons his brother, his blood relation. Khalid's disillusionment with his homeland is a brutal reality for Hassan. Hassan does not have the luxury of wallowing in nostalgia, but must provide for his big family on the meager salary of a school teacher. Khalid is too proud to accept the government truck he deserves because of his injury, and Hassan is barely able to feed his family. As he limits his vision of Constantine to bridges and his image of self to the missing arm, Khalid identifies the homeland with his dead mother and ignores his living relation to Algeria. While Khalid is a guest of honor at Ahlam's wedding—an important national event—Hassan falls victim to random violence as he gets his chance to finally act on Khalid's political connections. The real Algeria is not a merciful mother who provides for all, but a daily struggle for survival in a corrupt world. Khalid can no longer afford to be proud when he finally takes responsibility by burying his brother. The city swallows him after having robbed him of his mother, his love, and now his brother. And yet he realizes the continuum of history and the active engagement it demands. Oppression and colonization are not over, and even more importantly, the sides are not

always clear. “Si Tahir died at the hands of the French. Ziad died at the hands of the Israelis. Here is Hassan who dies at the hands of Algerians” (257). Algerian history and achievement in this novel are being measured in the numbers of bodies that are found rotting here and there. And yet, each body and its sacrifice is different, thereby disrupting the illusion of a unified nation. Hassan is an example of the many anonymous bodies that are being sacrificed in the new nation, yet this sacrifice does not make him a martyr. Ironically, it seems to be France, the unspoken Other, that determines value and martyrdom. Si Tahir, who dies in the Algerian Revolution, joins the name of martyrs on street plates and in the nostalgic remembrance of the nation. Ahlam and Khalid are esteemed members of the new Algeria, but their success at home seems to be measured by their success in France. Hassan looks up to Khalid, who lives in an artist’s loft in Paris, has no responsibilities and ostensibly enough money from his art. In Constantine, Khalid would not have enjoyed these luxuries.

Ahlam, then again, lives in Paris under the care of her uncle, the ambassador—a position of great national value, but one that dictates life abroad, away from home—and her French education seems to improve her status as an Algerian bride. Even Ziad, who had not been able to write in his restless travels from one place to the next, finds a time of creativity and rest in Paris. He will write his legacy and leave it with Khalid in a suitcase before he fulfills his calling and dies a martyr in Palestine. Hassan and ‘Atiqa’s late introduction in the novel serves as a reminder that the concept of nation building remains an abstract privilege. Their bodies suffer from the very real needs and corruptions of the post-colonial nation as they live in poverty and don’t see any hope for a better life. Hassan and ‘Atiqa do not have the luxury of contemplating national belonging but concentrate on survival. In doing so, they disrupt any noble or idealized notion of the Arab homeland and the post-colonial nation. The memories that Khalid has carried in his flesh flow onto the page and the canvas only to prove futile. He cannot paint and imagine

Algeria, but he needs to collide head-on with its reality. What remains are more broken bodies that represent the broken dreams of a country, but also inspire hope as they are fragments that might lead to a new whole.

In the end, *Memory in the Flesh* de-constructs the notion of a unified, finished, paintable country, and highlights instead the process of a nation in-becoming and people in-between. That is at bottom a cause worth fighting for because it gives a chance to the writer that is Ahlam Mosteghanemi to reclaim a legacy, and, in doing so, sets her energy free. The working through of this technique also enables her to represent the world of her native Algeria as it struggles to strike a fine balance between a sordid past and a painful present. Is the intense effort worth the pain of narration, we are not sure. We are, however, certain of her determination to tell the story with its own inertia, its own demands, constraints, and internal logic; and indeed, its hopes and impediments.

Both American and Arab novels illustrate the ways characters struggle to define their identity amid changing images of their nations in an increasingly transnational world. It is the travel abroad, the confrontation with another culture that prompts the questioning of one's values and sense of belonging. Even though the various journeys presented in the novels so far spring out of different motivations, the characters reflect on their native cultures. Wharton dialogues with America as Europe's stepchild; Port and Kit function as national allegories for a conflicting image of the United States after World War II; Mustafa resurrects mythic images of Africa in London that are completely divorced from his personal experience of the Sudan; finally, Khalid lives in Paris but obsesses over re-creating his homeland from afar through art and by projecting his desires onto Ahlam. As we have seen, the more the characters are able to question, reject, and revise imposed notions of identity, the easier it is for them to recognize the Other and to find their own place. The body thus far has been one of the tropes implicit in the encounter between

cultures and projections of culture. While the interracial relationships in *The Sheltering Sky* and *Season of Migration to the North* functioned both as acts of oppression, as in the case of Port and Mustafa, and as acts of liberation for Kit, Hosna, and Jean, this notion of interracial love forms the central theme in Ahdaf Soueif's *Map of Love*. She presents a utopia of border crossings and transnational understanding and friendship. Like *Tremor of Forgery*, and *Memory in the Flesh*, however, Soueif's novel questions traditional forms of family and patriarchy as she blends texts, bodies, and voices.

**Entangled Histories, Entwined Bodies:
Friendship and Family in *The Map of Love***

In a time of scrutiny of all things Arab, Ahdaf Soueif makes her contributions as a journalist, critic, and fiction writer. She has tried to shed light on Arab culture and history, intent on straightening out images cultivated by the Western media and in general performing the role of a mediator between East and West, namely between the Middle East, America and Europe. Her countless contributions to various newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *The Observer* testify to her mission of raising awareness for Arab countries and politics in the West. Even though she resides in London, Soueif has travelled to Palestine on extended trips in order to report on the current situation in the occupied territories; she has spoken out against American and British policies in the Middle East, and shed light on controversial issues like veiling and terrorism.¹⁰⁸ In publicly bridging the gap between the Arab and the Western world, much of her writing foregrounds the various projections and misconceptions about the other culture as well as the individual who moves between cultures.

While her journalism illuminates some of the concepts in contemporary relations between the East and the West, Soueif has also explored transnational and cross-cultural problems in her various collections of short stories and her two novels. All the fictional works pursue ideas similar to those in her theoretical pieces: *Aisha* (1983), for example provides fragments of an Egyptian woman's life both in her interactions with her home community and her life abroad in Scotland. In fact, the protagonist re-emerges in part as Asya in Soueif's second work, the novel *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992). In this narrative, which includes many autobiographical elements, the protagonist marries an Egyptian but when she goes to England to study for a Ph.D. in

¹⁰⁸ A collection of these political and journalistic pieces can be found in *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground* (2004).

linguistics, Asya has a passionate relationship with a British man, which breaks up her marriage. Asya, therefore, represents the modern educated and worldly woman who is in search of desire and passion. Soueif continues to explore the intersection of cultures in an increasingly globalized world in *Sandpiper* (1996), a collection of short stories that voices perspectives of Western and Arab women as they meet each other and engage with the other culture.

While the various short story collections provide glimpses of transcultural encounters, *The Map of Love* traces the shared histories of Great Britain, the United States, and Egypt over a century through personal and political/historical encounters. This novel provides a deeper look into the connections between individuals and cultures across cultures and seems to investigate whether the fragmentary encounters depicted in her short stories, can be prolonged and form a generational text, a new founding myth. This novel brings together the various cultures discussed in previous chapters and aims to show their shared histories, families, and friendships. True to the image of Mezzaterra, this novel presents a marketplace of encounters, where there are no clear foreigners, and characters travel to the East and to the West, the North and the South within the same country and across continents. Exile, return, travel, and transnational migrations all exist simultaneously. Omar is an Egyptian composer living in New York. Isabel is a New Yorker who travels to Cairo in order to interview people about their thoughts on the dawning millennium. Amal, then again, lives in Cairo but has returned to her native city only recently. Her sons and ex-husband still live in Great Britain, where she spent many years of her life. The experience of these contemporary characters, moreover, is interspersed and completed by voices from the past that illuminate the common ground between Omar, Amal, and Isabel and construct a new sense of family and friendship. The principal voice from the past is Anna Winterbourne, who came to Egypt in the early twentieth century in order to recover from an illness and a failed marriage. The British woman falls in love with an Egyptian nobleman, they get married, and

Anna stays in Cairo until her husband's death. Anna's experiences reach us through letters, written to her friends back home, but also through the words of her sister-in-law, Layla, who fills in the gaps in the narrative and provides an alternate perspective to the story. In addition to the various love stories and genealogies that Amal and Isabel trace in their ancestors' documents, contemporary Egyptian voices fill in the narrative, like those of the people in the rural village of Tawasi, of the doorkeeper's wife in Cairo, of the local politician and friend Tareq and prominent voices of Egyptian intellectuals and activists.

Rooted in very concrete historical situations, and mixing cultures both in content and form, *The Map of Love* becomes a statement about the potential of change and an exploration of the successful cross-cultural encounter on a variety of levels.¹⁰⁹ Though almost utopian in places, *The Map of Love* presents the reader with a hopeful view of intercultural encounters by merging English¹¹⁰ and Arab culture in language, form, plot, and characters. This narrative therefore opens a space for communication and meaningful interaction where characters, no matter their origin or nationality, see and understand each other. Forging sisterhoods and committing to difficult lovers, the characters in this novel exemplify postmodern hybrids and migrants. In contrast to earlier works and encounters discussed in this dissertation, *The Map of Love* offers a glimpse into possible interactions and commitments to each other that transcend national, historical, and personal markers of identity. The narrative also harkens back to critiques and forms of friendship that I have already elucidated in previous chapters. For example, this novel

¹⁰⁹ While my reading has emphasized the cross-cultural encounter in the previous chapters, this novel centers on the encounter and interracial love, family, and friendship.

¹¹⁰ I use the term English here to denote the commonality between American and British culture, since the Western characters from these regions are very similar and parallel in the text itself. In a broader sense, one might argue that they stand in for the West in general, but due to the concrete historical situations—the British occupation of Egypt and the neocolonial endeavors of the United States—Soueif seems to consciously parallel the two nations. Moreover, the language and the form of the novel that she merges with Arabic, lends itself to the common denominator of English.

plays on the (hetero)sexual mixing of cultures, like *The Sheltering Sky* and *Season of Migration to the North*. Like these novels, I argue, *The Map of Love* in the end dismantles the family myth. Even though it includes many romantic elements and ostensibly revolves around various courtships and love relationships, I read this novel as an attempt at a founding narrative and history for a transnational world. In order to do justice to the simultaneous and multi-directional migrations of people in the 21st century, Soueif revises national narratives by mingling and blending the histories and people of America, Europe, and North Africa. The characters' desperate struggle to find a sort of national belonging I have traced in the previous chapters seems to culminate in this narrative in the question whether such identities are still relevant. In other words, in a transnational world where borders are contested but have also become increasingly irrelevant,¹¹¹ what influence does the national image have on our sense of self? How does this novel deal with themes and identity markers that pose serious hindrances and obstacles in the encounter between cultures in the works discussed previously? What exactly makes an encounter "successful"? In other words, what can we, as readers and scholars, expect to take away from hybrid texts? Most importantly, are hybrid texts mainly a stylistic genre, or do they offer a new approach of reading transnationally? Can this approach inform only our reading or can a new understanding of "others" through the encounter spill over into the "real" world? If we want to foster a new kind of understanding between cultures and peoples, is it possible to rely on traditional constructions of identity, such as the family, or are these approaches always already flawed? My analysis of *The Map of Love* will explore some possible answers to these questions and investigate the ways in which this novel critiques, constructs, and redefines the self and the other through the encounter.

¹¹¹ On the one hand, many border disputes are still very heated. On the other hand, it is much easier and common to travel from one country to the other, to live and work in a country that is not one's homeland, and to forge alliances across countries.

II.

The Map of Love is a true postmodern novel as it mixes a variety of genres and perspectives in order to piece together multiple story lines. Isabel, a young and wealthy New York woman, plans to interview Egyptians on their plans and expectations for the impending millennium and thus approaches Omar al-Ghamrawi, a charming and worldly conductor, who has lived most of his life in New York but is originally from Egypt, for possible contacts and leads. When asked why Isabel has chosen Egypt as her research subject in particular, she expresses respect for the country's past: "It's like going back to the beginning. Six thousand years of recorded history" (19). This reference to history foreshadows the overall tone in the narrative, which uses the past to validate Egypt's history and to excavate *shared* histories, in contrast to Edith Wharton, for example, who equates Morocco with the past in order to emphasize Morocco's inferiority to France and to highlight the inherent difference between the two cultures. In this narrative, the past is immediately linked to the shared future of the characters, as Isabel goes to meet Amal, Omar's sister, and brings with her an old trunk that was left in her mother's apartment. Amal, the main narrator,¹¹² slowly assembles the various pieces of correspondence, private thoughts, and historical documents to trace the love story of Anna Winterbourne and Sharif al-Baroudi a century earlier.¹¹³ The reader follows both stories at the same time, the ancestral love story of Anna and Sharif and the contemporary relationship between Isabel, Omar, and Amal, which transcends temporal, spatial, and ideological borders between the West and the Arab world.

¹¹² I call Amal the main narrator, because much of the story is narrated not in her voice, but consists of letters and diary entries written by Anna Winterbourne and her sister-in-law Layla al-Baroudi. So while Amal arranges the various pieces of information and serves as the narrator for the twentieth century storyline, the ancestral love story is narrated by Anna's and Layla's voices.

¹¹³ Ruth Praver Jhabvala's novel *Heat and Dust* (1975) has a very similar plot: also here an Englishwoman, Olivia, falls in love with an Indian prince and marries him. Similar to Soueif's narrative, also in *Heat and Dust*, Olivia's granddaughter comes to India fifty years later, drawn by the ancestral love story.

Many critics have complimented Soueif for her dynamic depiction of global encounters and her breaking through of binary fixed oppositions. Joseph Massad, for example, has highlighted the fluidity in the encounter and investigation of the other—a process that transcends colonial hierarchies: “The journey of her characters is not one where liberation is the necessary telos, but rather the complex process through which the unfolding of desire(s)—sexual, social, economic, and political—is shaped by the characters themselves and all that surrounds them” (7). Even though Anna and Sharif meet during the time of the British occupation of Egypt, they do not meet as colonizer and colonized or English and Arab. Rather than focusing on the colonial imposition of power, desire here is motivated by love and friendship; i.e. a genuine interest in and attraction to the other person as an individual. Traditionally, the colonizer uses sex and desire to spread his influence rather than signify acceptance and integration into the local community. By rupturing traditional uni-dimensional power trajectories, *The Map of Love* seems to suggest a new way of thinking about transcultural encounters.

Because of the re-negotiation of power hierarchies between Westerners and Maghrebians, critics have categorized *The Map of Love* specifically as post-colonial. Anastasia Valassopolous sees the main post-colonial markings in the novel in its contradictions, when she claims that “Soueif suggests that it may be possible to escape the imperialist ideology though it may not be possible to ever negate the intermediary stage of being an orientalist” (32). It is both the remainder of orientalist thought and the conscious attempt to fight imperialism that prompt Valassopolous to classify *The Map of Love* as post-colonial theory come to life in fiction. The various bits and pieces of the whole story represent the multiple factions of post-colonial theory and thought and constitute an attempt at overcoming imperialist ideologies with the inherent doubt of ever achieving such a breakthrough. Valassopolous underlines the ideological dilemma post-colonialists face. Other critics, like Geoffrey Nash, are not satisfied with this classification

of Soueif; he contends that the author also transcends post-colonial theory and writing by offering a radically new encounter—a meeting between equals. “Soueif’s concern . . . seems not only to be about rewriting a colonial encounter from the point of view of the colonized, but also to posit an alternative, a meeting of equals, as embodied in the coming together of the mixed, aristocratic couple” (320).¹¹⁴ Nash obviously refers here to Anna and Sharif, and yet it is not only the institution of marriage and sexual love that facilitates this meeting between equals, but the multiplicity of similar encounters that cements the continuation of equality among the characters. As the characters are critical of their national and cultural identities and react to local political and historical circumstances, *individual* identities take center stage. *The Map of Love* chronicles the meeting of strangers in various parts of the world who have to battle their ideological and social baggage, so to speak, in order to renegotiate their place in a transnational world and to write a unified de-nationalized history.

By setting her novel in Egypt at a very specific point in history, Soueif seems to follow Said’s call to analyze shared histories in literature, as Tara McDonald has explained in her essay “Resurrecting Isis”: “Soueif blends romance with Egyptian history, politics, and myth to create this complex plot, and the plot successfully illustrates how mythical roles unite the generations despite external and internal conflicts” (163). For history, as the author has explained in an interview, takes on a very active role in this novel.¹¹⁵ It becomes almost a character on its own—

together with politics. In order to understand the history and politics of the time, however, we

¹¹⁴ While all the main characters in this novel are definitely privileged, I do not think that their social status necessarily serves as a point of special interest for this dissertation, as all characters discussed in the previous chapters are educated, financially independent, and free to decide their own lives, i.e. nor burdened by families, or other obligations.

¹¹⁵ In an interview with Joseph Massad, Ahdaf Soueif explains the role of history and politics as fundamental to the novel’s purpose: “Part of what *The Map of Love* is about is how much room personal relationships have in context of politics and history. And so history and politics are as much players as the characters—maybe even more so” (83).

cannot isolate certain incidents but need to look at the bigger picture. Soueif conspicuously melts together the past, present, and future, pointing to the possibilities of change.¹¹⁶ She refuses to accept history as a passive report of things that happened, and similarly emphasizes the present as history in the making.

Even though the novel has not received much criticism since its publication, (despite it being a finalist for the coveted Booker Prize), most critics and reviewers agree that *The Map of Love* offers a new insight into the colonial, post-colonial, and trans-national encounter. Fictionalizing post-colonial theory and challenging imperial ideologies, Ahdaf Soueif rewrites history in order to analyze and investigate the possibility of a meeting ground between equal players from different cultures and countries in history. This chapter will take these preliminary observations a step further and show just to which extent Ahdaf Soueif melds together Egyptian, British, and American histories, cultures, and characters. My reading analyzes how the characters transcend national identities. Even if the characters don't believe in their difference, and rather emphasize their sameness, outside pressures such as political and social factors render the continuation of these relationships between equals only temporary. I locate the construction of new attitudes and relationships that would permit for a lasting cross-cultural relationship in the critical exploration of the family trope. While the extended family serves as a symbol for the larger global interconnection between cultures and people, the nuclear family does not promise any lasting understanding and connection because it is based on traditional, and thus patriarchal and colonial, hierarchies.

¹¹⁶ Susan Darraj has also commented on the continuity of history in her reading of Amal, the narrator: "As she retells the story of her and Isabelle's common ancestors, Amal becomes a reincarnation of Scheherazade, who does not create stories herself, but retells them and highlights their magic [...] *The Map of Love* gives voice to the untold story of women—both colonizers and colonized—during British imperialism and their ability to transcend the differences of language, culture, and religion that the 'spirit of the age' forbade" (102). Ancient Arabic story-telling traditions therefore empower Amal as a narrator and at the same time transcend colonial strictures by giving voice to female witnesses of the time.

The family as a metaphor for the nation permeates our language and culture. From the “founding fathers” to fighting for the “fatherland,” we understand abstract notions such as the nation by comparing it to the family. In this image the governing body functions as the parents (mostly the father) and the citizens conversely are the children. The fatherland, as I have alluded to in my discussion of *Memory in the Flesh*, functions as punisher and protector and we encounter it primarily in political and military discourse. This notion of the family is linked intrinsically to patriarchy, as they share an inherent hierarchy and traditionally have excluded the other such as the woman, the queer, the disabled, and so on. In order to counteract these traditional approaches, I foreground the prominence of homosocial friendships and extended blood ties, rather than the romantic involvement in *The Map of Love*.

This novel uses the trope of the extended family to signal the shared histories of Egypt, Great Britain, and the United States and invites close analysis and minute attention to the various levels of encounters between these cultures. This emphasis on the family then functions as an ancestral connection for the characters in the novel and poses the possibility of a foundational common history that transcends national boundaries. Not only is such analysis relevant for literary or post-colonial literature, but it bears direct significance for our current life and approach towards other people, and Arabs in particular. Sadly enough, fictional characters sometimes drive home the point more concisely and urgently than any newspaper article, as Soueif has pointed out in her interview with Michael March: “It is quite interesting how people can be sympathetic to a character in a novel and indifferent to people in life. I think I have always looked at life as though it were a novel.” For when we read a novel we identify and sympathize easily with the characters, the others, we encounter amid the lines of the text, regardless of their nationality and religion. We recognize the similarities between us and the

characters as they strive for love, acceptance, and success. Ironically, however, we don't extend the same courtesy to living human beings.

III.

The dual love story between Anna Winterbourne and Sharif al-Baroudi at the turn of the 20th century and the parallel love affair between Isabel Parkman and Omar al-Ghamrawi present the most obvious encounter between East and West. Equally important in this encounter, though mostly ignored by critics and reviewers so far, are the female friendships across cultures: Anna and her sister-in-law Layla provide the ancestral narrative to be excavated, while Isabel and Amal make up the contemporary setting. Even though the romantic relationships between men and women in this novel attest to the absolute commitment to the other culture and will live on in the respective children born from these unions, the female friendships provide the initial entrance point into the other culture and will facilitate the continuation of these bonds.

Layla is Anna's first Egyptian contact, and she introduces Anna both to her brother and to Egyptian high society later on. When Sharif falls in love with Anna but is held back by his nationalist sentiments, Layla prods him to overlook what seems to her superficial identity markers. She comments on the happiness of another interracial couple, hinting at the possibility of similar marital bliss for Sharif and Anna.

“Madame Hussein Rushdi is a Frenchwoman. There's a difference.”

So I asked innocently, “A difference between what?”

“A Frenchwoman and Englishwoman—in our circumstances,” he said.

“Ah, but you always said we should judge people as individuals,” I said, “not as examples of a culture or a race.”

“So one should go with one's own feet looking for trouble?” he asked.

“I think in this case,” I laughed, “trouble has come looking for you.”

“Thank you, my sister,” was all he said. (243-244)

Even though Sharif's doubts and fears are fully justified and will materialize as real dangers later in this novel, Layla enables Sharif to commit to a wife who shares his concerns and ideals,

regardless of her nationality. She has met and kept in contact with Anna, and together they have nursed a friendship where national and other imposed markers are not relevant. They have found their meeting ground, and Layla invites Sharif into the circle.

This friendship between Anna and Layla mirrors Amal and Isabel's bond a century later. Even though Omar was the cause for the two women to meet, Amal provides the key to Egyptian society and the inner family circle for Isabel. She teaches her Arabic, welcomes her to live in her apartment in Cairo, introduces her to Egyptian intellectuals and activists, and even takes her to the family property in the rural village of Tawasi, where Amal presents Isabel as Omar's fiancée. Amal thus grants Isabel access to Egyptian history, culture and politics. Isabel, conversely, opens up the door for Amal to their shared family history. She signifies the past and future of the al-Ghamrawi family by providing the documents, letters, artifacts, and personal items that tell the tale of Anna, Sharif, and Layla and by bearing Omar's child, Sharif al-Ghamrawi—past and future united. It is thus the intimate interaction between the two women that excavates their common histories and families. Both must navigate past and present, foreign cultures and politics, and personal hardships. While Isabel provides the documents, Amal is able to translate them: they depend on each other. By working together they help each other, give voice to their female ancestors, and build a shared future.

One incident in particular showcases Isabel's vital role in straddling past and future at the same time. Isabel returns to the abandoned house of Sharif al-Baroudi and to her amazement finds the door to the shrine open, even though it was cobwebbed and completely deserted the last time she and Amal had visited the house of their ancestors. When she enters, she finds an old sheikh and a maid, who give her a tapestry. When Isabel tells Amal about it, they go back to the house only to find the entrance to the shrine heavily locked and without any sign of recent activity. While the surrealism of this incident leaves Amal doubtful and skeptical, the tapestry

given to Isabel at the inexplicable place complements the two tapestries that Amal's brother Omar and Isabel already own. Anna wove the three tapestries, which taken together depict Isis, Osiris, and Horus with an Arabic inscription, thus "symbolically conjoining Pharaonic and Islamic ciphers" (152), as Amin Malak has aptly observed. The tapestry symbolizes ancient and modern Egyptian culture, and Isabel has provided the missing piece, which represents Horus, the child, and completes the phrase.¹¹⁷ Isabel therefore unites the past and the present by completing the partial message. In a sense then, the tapestry—like the various letters, documents, and conversations that make up the plot of this fragmented novel—becomes a meeting ground that acknowledges and demands the interaction of all characters. Sharif provides the phrase and inspiration, Anna weaves it, Omar and Isabel hold the pieces, and Amal recognizes the relation between the three different pieces and their oneness, as they all form part of one tapestry. No one character's action is more important than the other's and only through the collaboration of all characters does the tapestry come to life. The repetition of the number three, moreover—the tapestry has three panels, the characters at the turn of the century are Anna, Layla and Sharif, while we also follow three contemporary characters, Amal, Isabel, and Omar—signals the transcending of the romance and the traditional heterosexual love relationship, which only involves two parties. From a political view point, of course, the number three indicates the shared histories and encounters between three continents, Africa, Europe, and America, as a

¹¹⁷ This missing piece of tapestry also foreshadows Isabel's larger role in the narrative. She not only finds the child Horus on the ancient canvas, but will herself give a son to this family when she becomes involved with Omar. Besides, Isabel, in many ways is a child herself. She is literally the child of Anna's granddaughter; she might be the child of Omar as later parts of the narrative reveal, and lastly, she displays the positive naivety and innocence both in her travel to Egypt and in her relationship with Omar that resembles a child's good will. Even geographically, the relative youth of her country of origin, makes the American character more of a child in contrast to the ancient cultures of Egypt. Interestingly, this inversion speaks directly to manifold post-colonial tropes. The child is usually associated with the coming-of-age of the postcolonial nation state rather than a dominant world power. The Western traveler sits on treasures she cannot appreciate or understand without the help of the older, more cultured, postcolonial nation. While I don't think that Soueif tries to simply inverse old binaries, she responds to them nonetheless by dismissing them and recasting relationships in a new model.

symbol of global interactions between cultures, which have been distilled mostly to the pair or the East and the West, for example. It is the interaction and collaboration of a variety of characters and cultures then that can bring about a new history, as symbolized by the woven panels.

The tapestry is only one of the many markers that transcend initial otherness with proof of shared histories and common families. So, when Anna wakes up in a strange house after having been the victim of a misguided kidnapping, she only needs to catch a glimpse of the sleeping Layla to identify her as a “sworn sister” (135) before the two women even say a word to each other. The relationship between Omar, Isabel and Amal serves as an even better example. While Isabel and Amal had never met before and are introduced to each other by Omar, they quickly discover their common family ties. Their family histories cross in the encounter between Layla, Amal’s grandmother, and Anna, Isabel’s great-grandmother. When Isabel bears Omar’s child, moreover, Amal is not only a distant cousin but the new baby’s aunt. Isabel and Omar are even more entwined as they are not only distant cousins and parents, but they might be father and daughter since Omar had a relationship with Isabel’s mother around the time that she got pregnant with Isabel. While the incestual aspect may be confounding at first, I read it mainly allegorically as symptomatic of all the relationships in the Mezzaterra. The underlying family ties signify the common ground the characters share and undermine the inherent otherness and strangeness.¹¹⁸ While I will not go so far as equate this extended family to the greater family of humanity, the blood ties emphasize shared histories and—maybe even unknown to the characters—past encounters that continue to shape our lives and invite us to explore these histories together.

¹¹⁸ Bessie Head deploys the same trope in *The Cardinals* in very similar way as Soueif does.

These shared histories are not purely personal, but inscribed in larger political circumstances that demand negotiations of power and identities, just as the personal love stories are mirrored by hateful relationships between the respective countries. As Anna and Sharif commit to a shared future, their respective countries are joined in a less joyful union. England has been occupying Egypt after the decline of the Ottoman empire, and the Egyptian elite has been struggling for independence. Similarly, as Isabel and Omar conceive a child together, the U.S. embassy in Cairo falls victim to a terrorist attack in response to the neo-colonial activities of the United States in the Middle East. While critics like Fredrik Jameson have commented on the inherent link between the political and personal lives of characters in Third World literature,¹¹⁹ the relationship between the personal and political is much more localized here, since Soueif very consciously situates the events of the novel not in time periods that were marked by obvious political events, but rather historical periods that are rife with expectations and hope. I will explain the historical periods and their significance for Egypt more in detail below, but politics in this novel is not an unseen force that disrupts the life of victimized common people. Instead, characters struggle against the national politics and the politics of identity that threaten to reduce them to national symbols instead of allowing them to assert their personal identities and their inherent role of agents in history.

History and politics form part of the encounter; they facilitate and hinder personal relationships at the same time. Sharif al-Baroudi's uncle has been the leader of the famous 'Urabi rebellion¹²⁰ and Sharif himself is actively involved in Egypt's independence movement.

¹¹⁹ See Jameson's essay "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" for a more detailed explanation of this connection

¹²⁰ The 'Arabi uprising is a historical fact and has been described in detail by historians like Magali Morsy. In short, 'Arabi Pasha was the leader of an Egyptian nationalist uprising against the Ottoman reign in Egypt in 1882. The ailing Ottoman empire was ruling through the Khedive Tawfiq who himself had lost much of his power. While the 'Arabi Pasha uprising led to the temporary exile of the Khedive and short-lived euphoria among Egyptian

Similarly, Omar is an outspoken activist for the Palestinian cause. Anna, on the other hand, has had a part in the political movement on both sides. Her first husband Edward joins Great Britain's colonial expedition in the Sudan, which leaves him depressed and confused upon his return. In fact, he will not speak about his years in the Sudan until he dies prematurely. When, as a result of his death, Anna travels to Egypt to recover from her grief, she takes up an active role in the Egyptian independence movement at the side of her new husband Sharif al-Baroudi. She translates, communicates and provides useful information from the English press thereby becoming a voice for Egypt in England. On more than one level, the characters grapple with their personal and national identities when they encounter the other culture.

While the encounter and mutual assistance of Anna and Sharif in particular might seem utopian and idealized, the novel as a whole is less optimistic about the possibility of shedding one's culture and simply slipping into another. Even though Anna uses her language skills and European contact to promote Egyptian independence, her nationality and background—which enable her active involvement in her husband's political agenda—are the primary causes for Sharif's assassination. All her work for Egyptian independence stands in the shadow of her nationality and compromises Sharif in the eyes of his compatriots. By marrying a member of the occupying force, Sharif invites doubt upon his personal convictions. In fact, not only is her nationality the indirect cause for her husband's death, but she cannot even remain in Egypt after the assassination because it would be unsafe for her and her daughter Nur. If Sharif decided to disregard her nationality and embrace the person underneath, his compatriots do the exact opposite: they cannot or refuse to look beyond Anna's white skin and English accent. Rather

nationalists, it unfortunately also opened the door to the British, who entered Egypt under the pretext of peacekeepers. In their tow was the Khedive who exiled and executed many members of the 'Arabi uprising. As described in the novel, 'Arabi was allowed to return from exile approximately 30 years later, but had lost his legendary status in Egypt by then.

than reading this rejection of Anna as a racist or discriminatory action, I see it as an exposure of the idealistic nature of Sharif and Anna's relationship and the utopian character of Anna's border crossing.

The tragic end of Anna and Sharif's marriage does not stand alone; most heterosexual partnerships in the novel suffer. Amal does not talk much about her marriage, but we do know that she is separated from her husband and expresses no desire or longing for him. Isabel, moreover, has finally convinced Omar of committing to a relationship, but that decision largely stems from Isabel's pregnancy, and Amal makes it clear that Isabel might be looking at their relationship through rose-tinted glasses. "When would [Omar] come? When would he call? Isabel is not worried, but she has not known him long enough. Beloved by many, hated by many, but essentially solitary. How else could he have ended up—living in that no-man's-land between East and West?" (515). The East and West cannot be bridged as easily as Anna and Isabel would like. Like Anna who was not fully aware of the consequences their marriage might have for Sharif, Isabel disregards the danger of Omar's controversial convictions. In fact, this danger comes to bear in Amal's foreshadowing of his death.¹²¹ While the men cut solitary figures in their political landscape and pay for their convictions with their lives, the women remain by themselves. Even though their intercultural love affairs seem to promise a happy global future for them initially, their marriages are precarious.

However, this pessimistic depiction of inter-cultural marriages does not negate the possibility of cross-cultural understanding in general. For while these relationships last, they provide fleeting moments of happiness and lasting changes in the characters' political and

¹²¹ Even though Amal cries out for her brother after she has read of Sharif's death and is worried because he has not called, her feelings mirror those of Anna who cries out for Sharif before they bring him into the house. She knows that he is hurt before she finds out from anybody else. The baby Amal carries in her arms, her little nephew, while providing hope and sustaining the fragile hybridity and connection between the two families and the two cultures, also seems to serve as an indicator of Omar's actual death.

personal lives. Both relationships in fact result in children. In fact, the tragic ending of the marriages¹²² points to the fact that marriage and/or sexual encounters constitute only *one* type of trans-cultural encounter. The thought that two individuals can only recognize and understand each other across cultures if they engage in a physical relationship or are in love with each other is indeed troubling, for it would not allow for any other meaningful encounter. So then, it is not only cross-cultural marriages that are failing in *The Map of Love*, but local ones, which indicates the instability of traditional family metaphors. Sharif's father, for example, abandons his still relatively young wife for the solitude of a holy shrine in order to hide from the consequences of his participation in the 'Urabi rebellion. Yet another example comes in the form of Amal's friend and love interest Tareq who shows his infatuation with Amal very openly even though he is married and has children. Rather than viewing the deaths of Omar and Sharif as symbols for the impossibility of a globalized harmonious future, they invite us to look for meaningful encounters outside of heterosexual relationships.¹²³

IV.

The ending of the novel affirms the female continuation of the tradition. Even though Amal just had a vision of Omar's death, calm permeates the scene as she walks her little nephew: "Sharif is cradled in Amal's arms as, once again, she makes her way with him down the long, dark corridor. She holds him close, patting his back. Whispering. 'Hush, my precious,' she whispers, 'hush...'" (516). Even though the men in this novel have a habit of dying or

¹²² Even though Omar and Isabel are not married, I refer to their relationship as such because it mirrors Anna and Sharif's relationship.

¹²³ Indeed, this trend away from heterosexual relationships towards alternate forms of friendship, family and love can be traced from *The Tremor of Forgery*, to *Memories in the Flesh* and this novel. Only when the characters embrace the alternative notions can they find their place in the world and interact constructively with others. Throughout the works discussed in this dissertation, moreover, heterosexual relationships are flawed. While they replicate colonial and orientalist attitudes in *The Sheltering Sky* and *Season of Migration to the North*, romance and desire are completely missing in Wharton's travelogue but form central critiques in her fiction.

disappearing,¹²⁴ the women are looking to the future. Isabel is working on an article about people's expectations for the new millennium and the two women pick up the family tradition when they go to Tawasi with the baby. They reconnect with the land and will hold together. In fact, this perspective contradicts Margot Badran's emphasis on Anna as the "pivotal figure," and her dismissal of Amal and Isabel "mainly as foils" since they fail to become "two, fuller and more intriguing characters" (31). While Anna is the focal point of the narrative, Amal and Isabel play a more central role than Badran grants them.

In fact, an emphasis on the female relationships and friendships in the novel provides a direct correlation with Marie-Luise Pratt's figure of the social exploratress. She distinguishes between the male and female traveler, defining the women's role thus: "If the men's job was to collect and possess everything else, the women travelers sought first and foremost to collect and possess themselves. Their territorial claim was to private space, a personal, room-sized empire" (159-160). Bourgeois women in 19th-century England and the United States were quite educated and socially engaged, even though they were not allowed to take an active political position. When these women left their homes and encountered other cultures, they used their abilities to help the locals and to assert their own private life and social position. This definition of the social exploratress certainly fits all three women in this novel. Specifically for Anna the journey and her years in Egypt mean health, happiness, and independence. Anna's life in England is hardly enviable. Her parents die when she is still very young, and her husband leaves shortly after their wedding for a colonial war in the Sudan only to return in a state of shock and depression from

¹²⁴ As already discussed, Sharif and Omar both lose their lives because of their political convictions; Edward, Anna's first husband has to die in order for Anna to go to Egypt and for the actual story to begin. Also the other men are conspicuously absent, however: Sharif's father retreats into a shrine, disconnecting himself from his family and public life, Amal's husband and *sons* live in Great Britain, Isabel's father died a long time ago and her brother's early death leaves her mother heartbroken. Even Sir Charles, Anna's surrogate father, becomes more and more distant in her letters and finally dies. In fact, the only male remaining in the end is the baby Sharif.

which he will never recover. Even though Anna finds great support in her father-in-law Sir Charles and her friend Lady Caroline, she feels alone, and, even worse, useless. She cannot help in her husband's recovery, nor does the marriage bring a child that would distract her and keep her busy. Caught up in overwhelming feelings of self-doubt and guilt, she falls seriously ill. When she finally recovers, her father-in-law suggests a trip abroad as a way to forget about her sorrows. Anna chooses Egypt because she has been fascinated by the paintings of Frederick Lewis at the Kensington museum, which have provided the rare solace in her lonely days. Her whole life having depended on someone else and having looked out for other people, this journey constitutes a first step in the assertion of her own happiness.

This conscious step of making her own decisions is intricately linked to Egypt. She projects her longing to escape from England and her oppressive role as (unloved) wife onto Egypt. This projection mirrors orientalist attitudes as we have seen them in traditional travel narratives like Wharton's where the Western character finds a fairy-tale world and spiritual healing in the "Third World." Anna thus first needs to recognize and confront latent orientalist attitudes before she can immerse herself in the "real" Egypt. She does so through her interactions with the other British colonials in Cairo. Rather than feeling swept up in the national feelings of her compatriots when abroad, she detects a growing distance from them and yearns for the hidden Egyptian life. "Nothing, it seems to me, could be further from the spirit of the desert than life at the Agency—indeed, while you were there you would not know you were not in Cadogan Square with the Park a stone's throw away instead of almost paddling in the waters of the Nile" (70). She is not interested in simply continuing her British life under the Egyptian sun, but wants to learn about the country she is visiting. Her compatriots' orientalist and condescending comments about Egyptians prompt her to form her own opinion on the native culture—without

the mediation of British or tourist guides. What made up the bulk of the travel writer's notes and observations lacks interest for Anna:

I have climbed the Pyramids and danced at the Khedive's Ball. I have visited the Bazaar and the Churches and the Mosques and witnessed the processions of the religious orders and played croquet at the Club at Ghezirah. I know a few words of the language and I can mark many streets by the houses of people with whom I am now acquainted, but there is something at the heart of it all which eludes me—something—an intimation which I felt in the paintings, the conversations in England, and which, now that I am here, seems far, far from grasp. (102)

Anna cannot establish a connection with the tourist sites and the constant English presence. Rather than looking for the magic, as Edith Wharton does, Anna is looking for the “real,” the local life that she is interested in. Even though her initial interest in Egypt might be rooted in traditional orientalist connotations of North Africa—such as the paintings and the promise of spiritual healing—she is determined to interact with the local culture and people on her own terms. It is not the fantastic and exotic quality that attracts Anna to Lewis's paintings, but the personal connection she feels when she looks at his images. Egypt in these paintings does not stand for the other, but for the self, a place where she belongs and will live happily for a time.

In fact, we can read her rejection of the tourist sites as being rooted in the inherent masculinity of these places. Since social exploratresses tend to view the other from the inside of a drawing room, rather than through excursions (like the naturalist and capitalist), the places she has visited are unsatisfactory because they are not “female” spaces. She is accompanied by lecturing British men to towering and important historical buildings, but the intimate conversation in the refined space of a traditional Arab woman's quarter, as depicted by Frederick Lewis, has escaped her. These tourist excursions thus reinforce the imposition of national and patriarchal hierarchies. They have been declared the official sites and thus are worth visiting; this has been predetermined. Anna cannot choose her own locations, places where she would feel

more comfortable. The constant flow of information and interpretations pouring from the mouths of her well-meaning compatriots aim to lecture her on the subject of Egypt rather than engaging her in a conversation. I would argue that the intimacy Anna experienced in the paintings relate to a sense of belonging, of being accepted and respected. She can find that in genuine conversations from one person to another, but not in ostentatious displays of knowledge, connections, and prejudice that characterize the British Agency in Cairo. As long as she stays connected to what is a colonial and patriarchal institution, she can only perform and propagate the values inherent in that institution.

Ironically, Anna has to temporarily disguise her own femininity in order to find a female space. Her initial attempt to wander further into Arab territory entails her shedding her gender as she has to dress like a man in order to be able to travel by herself. Like Kit's strip in the desert and her consequent cross-dressing, I read Anna's male apparel as her willingness to re-evaluate her role and identity also on a national level. She not only substitutes her skirts and petticoats for male garments, but replaces her Western clothes with Arab attire. When Sharif Basha brings her with him to the desert, Anna accompanies him in the disguise of a young Arab who speaks French.¹²⁵ Even though it is a man who offers her the above disguise—the man, moreover, she will marry and whose culture she will assume—Anna's temporary renunciation of her clothes and her language foreshadow the future forging of her own identity. If she can only have the experiences she desires and assert her own will when she stops looking British, the disguise signals the oppressive nature of her native culture and the complex struggle in negotiating a new sense of self, as the disguise is only a cover-up and offers her a temporary freedom. While this scene thus signals the first step in Anna's transformation, it also indicates the constant struggle in

¹²⁵ Kit's escape forms the somewhat ambiguous end to the novel, while this desert trip stands at the beginning. It almost seems as if one narrative picks up the thread of the other. Where the earlier novel did not see any more interaction, this narrative develops possibilities.

balancing her sense of self with that imposed on her by others. For, from the point of view of the Egyptian elite, it is her role as Sharif's wife that serves as a disguise. Like a wolf in sheep's clothes, she can only be a British woman and thus their enemy. Anna, for a time, becomes part of the local culture and contributes to the local community and politics—in her case the nationalist movement—but never truly becomes a member of Egyptian society and has to leave Egypt forever after Sharif's assassination. She was only welcome as long as her husband could be her protector. The female protective space she longed for in Egypt is still determined by patriarchy.

Similarly in need of a safe space, Isabel decides to start her project in Egypt because she feels alone and somewhat confused with her life. Her project about the millennium marks her own indecisiveness. Isabel's father, with whom she was very close, died several years earlier. Now her mother is in a home because she suffers from Alzheimer's disease. Isabel does not have a warm relationship with her mother, who never fully recovered from the death of her son who died before Isabel was born. Growing up, Isabel has to compete unfairly against the ghost of a sixteen-year-old perfect brother. Neither Isabel nor the narrator ever mentions friends—most of her acquaintances are of a more casual nature. More than anything, her mother Jasmine has become a ghost from the past that Isabel can relate to even less now that her mother's disease has trapped her in early memories of Jasmine's life. In order to get her mind off her worries about her mother, she dives into the project. In addition to functioning as a source of anxiety for Isabel, Jasmine's illness indicates the disruption of history. Her disease, specifically linked to the loss of memory (and identity) symbolizes the fragmented nature of national histories. They are selective and incomplete, and thus threaten to exclude those who don't fit neatly into their categories like Isabel who can never take a place equal to her brother in her mother's vanishing memories. As Isabel ostensibly embarks on a project that is concerned with the future of a country—and the world—she also unearths a common past and memory. Jasmine, though no longer remembering

her daughter, stores at her house the documents that tell the story of her grandmother, Anna Winterbourne. Like the role of artistic explorations in Mosteghanemi's novel, these written words are dusty and useless until they come alive in the collaboration between Alam, Omar, and Isabel. The history unearthed in Jasmine's trunk links the three characters in friendship and in the flesh.

In many ways Isabel thus resembles Anna and her decisions mirror that of her great-grandmother. When Omar consoles Isabel after her mother's death, she is helpless and vulnerable, but also on the way to recovery. "He took her in his arms: a beautiful, forlorn, parentless child. He poured her a drink. He rubbed her cold hands and breathed on them. He took her in his arms again. I imagine she held on to him and wept and he kissed her tear-drenched face and then her mouth and she held on to him as though for life itself" (343). Omar becomes her anchor, but she herself finds her safe haven in her own works and ideas. She goes to Egypt by herself, finances her own trip, and finally sorts out the past that has been so confusing for her. While she does not get as politically involved as Anna does, she actively supports Amal. If Isabel started out as a confused, and maybe spoiled, child, by the end of the narrative we see an independent, strong woman and mother. Unlike Anna, Isabel will not have to leave the country after Omar's death. In fact, she seems to have her own permanent place in Egypt with Amal. Because she participates in Egyptian life out of friendship to Amal, and not because of marital obligations—no matter how cherished—Isabel's place in Cairo is not as temporary as Anna's.

Lastly, their shared mission of excavating their ancestral narrative helps Amal to take on a more active role in her life and in Egyptian politics. The text does not provide much information about Amal's marriage, her sons, or her life in Scotland. At the beginning of the novel, however, she represents the third lonely woman. She is separated from her husband and constantly daydreams in vain about her sons calling or visiting her. Even though she is back in

her home country and the city she grew up in, she feels alienated and alone. She does not go out, only interacts with Tahiyya, the doorman's wife, and does not really know what to do with her life. Her monotonous days are interrupted only by rare phone calls from her brother Omar and visits from a peasant who reports on life in Tawasi and brings her the dividend from her land. When Amal starts to unearth her own history and that of Isabel, she also accepts a more active role both in her personal life and in her public role as a landowner. First of all, her life temporarily becomes more purposeful when she dedicates herself to compiling and translating Anna's notes, letters, and diary entries. It is not only Anna's story she is retracing, but also that of her grandmother, Layla. She is consumed by her task, and like her grandmother a century earlier, Amal completes the occasional gaps in the narrative. Even though this role might seem marginal, as both Egyptian women seem to add to what is de facto the life of a Western woman, their function as mediators, and even more to the point, as sisters, marks their centrality in the novel. Amal breathes life into Anna, Layla and Sharif's forgotten story and at the same revives her own life and happiness. Her apartment is no longer a hiding place from the world, but a study with a purpose. More important still is her active involvement with the people at Tawasi. As the landowner, she also bears responsibility for the *fellaheen's* safety. So, when a group of men from Tawasi are imprisoned without any reason, she herself confronts the police commander and demands their release. Towards the end of the novel she is in the process of re-opening the local school and decides to stay in the rural village in order to better oversee her projects. She has found her place and her purpose with the peasants of Upper Egypt. She becomes so independent in her role that she refuses Tareq's advances, even though she likes him. She will not become a second wife or mistress. As critic Amin Malak has explained, "Amal, while not entirely ignoring sexual attraction, sublimates the preoccupation with the body toward a genuine concern for those

she could help in her ancestral village, Tawasi” (156). In other words, Amal—in contrast to Isabel and Anna—does not need a man to find satisfaction in her life.

While some have critiqued the lack of gender criticism in Soueif’s fiction, and have attributed this lack to a fear of misrepresentation, the novel makes a very clear statement about gender roles.¹²⁶ The fact that Anna never complains about wearing a veil or staying in the company of women, is not so much an attempt to gloss over gender inequalities in Arab society, as it is a conscious answer to these stereotypes. The veil and gender segregation has been discussed by Arab feminists at length, but even more so by their Western counterparts. It is exactly the exclusive focus on the veil and the oppression of women that the West has exploited in promoting its image of the Arab world as a backward and uncivilized culture, a culture in dire need of Western ideals. The veil too often has become a part of neo-colonial discourse and a trope for Western hegemony to remain a neutral symbol.¹²⁷ Even though life in Egypt might come with certain restrictions, all three women find a more meaningful life there with and through the other. Anna’s confinement to certain parts of the house and certain members of society is not very different from her English life. She also needs a chaperone in England and serves mainly the purpose of wife. It is not the physical confinement but the emotional and psychological limitations and hardships in the life of an English woman that make her miserable. While she can move about as she wishes, Anna mainly wanders around the gardens of the estate and religiously visits the Kensington Museum of Art, captured in her mind and heart by Edward’s illness. On the contrary, in Egypt Anna may not physically share the company of other

¹²⁶ See especially Margot Badran’s essay “Post/Colonial Politics, Post/Colonial Desire.”

¹²⁷ Most recently, the U.S. war against Afghanistan showcases the artificial emphasis on the veil and women’s rights. While women’s rights were at the center of the war propaganda, not much changed for the women in Afghanistan after the war was over and the Taliban defeated. Moreover, the veil is a very complex symbol that goes beyond simplistic similes of oppression, as the research of Fatima Mernissi, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Margot Badran, and Daphne Grace among others has shown.

men but her role in her marriage and in society is much more active and meaningful. She is a true equal with her husband, sharing his ideas, plans and concerns, even though she may not always be in the same room with him. *The Map of Love* does not circumvent gender issues, but rather exposes Western prejudices of Arab inferiority.

All three women in this novel reclaim their lives, their personal identity in the encounter with the other. They give each other a new purpose, the key to a new society, and the necessary skills to navigate it. Remarkably, it is a sisterhood that is being forged, a completely collaborative process. Critics in the so-called Third World have long complained about the easy assumptions and equations Western feminism makes, which still implies the inferiority of the Third-World woman.¹²⁸ Chandra Mohanty warns explicitly,

What binds women together is a sociological notion of the “sameness” of their oppression. It is at this point that an elision takes place between “women” as a discursively constructed group and “women” as material subjects of their own history. Thus, the discursively consensual homogeneity of “women” as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women. This results in an assumption of women as an always-already constituted group. (65)

Woman as a perceived inferior to man is a theoretical concept. Discourse on women, therefore, cannot equate women’s oppression across the globe. In fact, Western women see the “liberation” of Third-World women often as a component of global sisterhood, but this approach ignores the underlying orientalism. Sisterhood cannot be presupposed; Mohanty makes it very clear that “it must be forged in concrete historical and political praxis” (67). The women characters in *The Map of Love* exemplify such a sisterhood. Almost as a reply to Western feminism, which postulates the white woman as the savior of the colored woman, in this novel the Egyptian women are the

¹²⁸ For a more in-depth analysis of the strains between Western and Eastern feminism, see Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj, Paula W. Sunderman, Theresa Sahlib, Marnia Lazreg, Evelyn Accad, Fatima Mernissi, Deniz Kandiyoti, and Gayatri Spivak among others.

teachers and facilitators. Amal and Layla teach Anna and Isabel Arabic and accept and introduce them into their families and societies.

While romantic encounters constitute the initial attraction to the other culture, extended family ties and non-sexual friendships cement the rather fragile bonds and foster a more active engagement in personal and political developments. While these women do have a personal motive in travelling to another country and meeting other cultures, this motive is not of an exploitative nature and invites the other to participate in this quest. The heterosexual relationships fail in this novel because they do not offer a practical solution for cross-cultural understanding in general. Those are personal encounters that cannot be replicated by people who are not in love. The sexual encounter is steeped too much in colonial, orientalist, and patriarchal attitudes to function as a valid common ground. The forging of sisterhood—whether biological or emotional—offers a viable alternative to the traditional model. As the text gives each character her own voice, they interact also on the textual level and thus answer Mohanty’s call to “move beyond the ideological framework in which even Marx found it possible to say: They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (81). Rather than the Western woman commenting on the Egyptian woman, the text itself is a collaborative exercise, guided by an Arab voice.

V.

The intent to let cultures and people speak for themselves and to pose the possibility of complex and fragmentary identities becomes manifest both in the genre and in the format of *The Map of Love*. The text immediately invites the reader to unravel the stories at heart and emphasize the intermingling not only of cultures, but of languages and stories. The novel is written in English and yet so infused with Arabic style, expressions, and popular culture that it becomes difficult to extract one from the other. In fact, the back of the book even dons an

impressive glossary. Moreover, the learning of Arabic and little didactical bits about Arab culture and music form an intrinsic part of the narrative. As Amal instructs Isabel in Arabic, the reader gleans a mini lesson. Interestingly, one of the tutorials links the Arabic language with the overall feminist tone of the novel.

As she slows down behind a mule-drawn cart, she smoothes the paper out on the steering wheel and examines it. She reads:

Umm: mother (also the top of the head)

Ummah: the nation, hence ammama: to nationalize

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

A blank space, and then

Abb: father

“And that’s it?” Amal says, handing the paper back as she sees her way clear, shifts into second gear and overtakes.

“That’s it,” says Isabel, “unless you can think of something else.”

Amal frowns, concentrating, murmuring, “Fatherhood, fatherly. No, I can’t think of anything.”

“So two terribly important concepts,” says Isabel, “nationhood and religious leadership, come from ‘mother.’” (165)

This discussion of the overall importance of Arabic words linked to female images and ideals reflects the novel as a whole, where women’s friendships outlast heterosexual relationships. As Fatima Mernissi explains in *Beyond the Veil*, this matrilineal continuation of female concepts in important social functions, “expresses the old Arab belief that women had the gift of giving life while the male’s role was ‘pure sexual pleasure’” (78). While the men in this novel certainly provide more than pure sexual pleasure, it is the women who allow for the continuity and stability of relationships. In other words, while the men might facilitate or inspire encounters, the women transform these fleeting moments into lasting and meaningful relationships. By tying this concept into a linguistic discussion, moreover, Soueif highlights the translation and interpretation of concepts from one culture into the other. The discussion is carried out in English, yet it is concerned with Arabic language and culture. More importantly, a gender-segregated society, where much of a woman’s happiness and comfort depends on her female in-laws, understands

the concept of female friendship on a different level from a heterosexually-oriented Western society. Language and culture are closely intertwined.

The conglomerate of forms and influence emerges strongly also in the novel's structure. It is divided into four sections, which are titled "A Beginning," "An End of a Beginning," "A Beginning of an End," and "An End." The use of the indirect article harbors post-modern notions of the multiplicity of voices and meanings.¹²⁹ Rather than proposing "the" beginning, it is merely one in a myriad of possible beginnings. The section titles thus underline the fictional character of the novel and situate the individual voices at the same time into an array of stories. As the novel narrates one of the possible stories to be told in the encounter between America, Europe, and North Africa, it points at the same time to the many accounts that are still untold. If this one story exists, then surely there must be others like it. The various fragments making up this multiplicity further emerge in the divisions between chapters. The chapters are numbered but have no titles; instead, little epithets and quotations introduce the main idea or atmosphere. These epithets, taken from Arab, Egyptian, British, African, and American literature and philosophy—some written in English, some in French—point to the conscious intertwining of destinies.¹³⁰ Cultures have never existed in isolation, but have always brushed and rubbed against each other. In the end, all great works of literature and philosophy address human concerns that remain relevant over time and space. Rather than reinforcing binary distinctions between the English and the Arabs, the novel constantly undermines these differences and plays on the commonalities between the two cultures.

¹²⁹ This concern for the multiplicity of voices of course resonates with Salman Rushdie's work in particular.

¹³⁰ Even though the use of the French language never stands in the foreground of the action, it facilitates communication between Anna and Sharif, which helps to deflect the animosities between Egypt and Great Britain. The French language becomes a neutral meeting ground for both of them. In Soueif's other novel, *In the Eye of the Sun*, however, French permeates the narrative more strongly and the choice of language in that text signifies more directly in the characters' quest for love and desire.

The text itself is a hybrid, as it moves back and forth between cultures, negotiating and comparing influences and prioritizing process over product. The ending of the novel offers no new insights, and the rather anti-climactic last lines I quoted above indicate the importance of what comes before. When Amal reads the last lines of Anna's and Layla's diaries, she already knows that Sharif will die because that knowledge has been transmitted to her through her family's history. Rather than finding out what happens in the end, this novel investigates the process and the interaction of getting there. While it does move back and forth in time, it also provides stability. It becomes a place where all characters are welcome and the reader is invited to share actively in the story. He or she is not allowed to passively follow the love story, but must remain open to listening to political discussions he or she might not understand without a basic knowledge of Arab and Egyptian history. In that interaction, the novel as text appears as Mezzaterra and mirrors in its various layers, "the palimpsest that is Egypt" (*Map of Love*, 64).

By applying the concept of Mezzaterra, moreover, my reading points to the inherently Arabic qualities in this novel despite its Western form. Genre scholarship has linked the rise of the novel to the emergence of bourgeois culture in the West, which brought about the printing press, privacy, and leisure. Ian Watt, for example, has postulated how the creation of the European nation state created a middle class that, without aristocratic obligations and yet comfortable enough not to work, found themselves with considerable leisure on their hands. Reading became a wide-spread pastime as the printing press enabled fast and cheap duplication and dissemination of texts. The setting up of individual households without a large entourage of servants and visitors, moreover, contributed to an increased interest in the personal life and the individual motivations of the bourgeoisie, which marked the first themes of early novels.¹³¹

¹³¹ For more theoretical scholarship on the rise of the novel, see also Marthe Robert, Franco Moretti, Georg Lukacs, Jose Ortega y Gasset, and Michael McKeon.

While it cannot be determined what exactly constitutes the first novel, the general consensus in the West and the East retains the novel as an inherently Western genre. In Arabic literature, as M. M. Badawi explains, poetry, which values form over content, was the preferred literary form until the middle of the nineteenth century. In fact, *The Map of Love* exhibits some marked Western elements. First of all, it is written in English and not in Arabic. Soueif highlights the Western qualities of the novel in particular by integrating the letters. The letter as a bourgeois means of communication reflects one's inner thoughts and desires and reminds the reader of the arguable initiation of the novel, or at least its rise on a popular level, like Richardson's *Pamela* or Goethe's *The Sufferings of the Young Werther*. At the same time, a great part of Anna's private writings and correspondence with her family and friends at home takes on the tone of travel writing, another inherently Western genre.

As much as it is Western, *The Map of Love* is an Arab narrative, too. Its post-colonial features of writing back to the West, of recreating and revising history from the local point of view, are all linked specifically to Arab culture. Secondly, Soueif situates her narrative in very specific historical situations: the years 1899 to 1913, and March 1997 to August 1998. By providing specific dates for the settings in the novel, Soueif emphasizes the specificity, locality, and historicity of the events. The fictional characters are situated in real historical situations. The earlier years are set in a relatively quiet time in Egyptian history, when the British are occupying Egypt and Lord Cromer heads the local government. During these years arises a nationalist movement that, still inspired by the 1881 'Urabi rebellion against the Ottoman empire, wants independence for Egypt but finally falls into many rivaling factions. The various sides of the nationalist movement are divided on practical issues as well as on ideological ones. Some look to the Ottoman empire and the Khedive as possible alliances against the British, since they at least feel culturally close to Turkey and share their belief in Islam. Others want to involve France as

Britain's enemy, while still others aim for complete independence, without any alliances. Halim Barakat, in writing about this period in Egyptian history, has pinpointed the central conflict:

The movement to reconcile *salafiyya* [traditional Arab values] and modernism is often overlooked, despite the fact that it has always represented a significant trend in contemporary Arab culture. This movement has attempted to combine authenticity with modernity by reviving sound elements of Arab heritage and maintaining an open mind about the future and other cultures. (198)

The differences between the various nationalist factions lie at the heart of modern Arab culture still: how to modernize and advance without shedding traditional and cultural values? How much of the West can a nation absorb without becoming Western? Naturally, this question not only arises in history, but spills over into literature. In his essay on "Arabic Novels and Social Transformation," Halim Barakat identifies this search as one of the main characteristics in contemporary Arabic literature.

While the Palestinian uprootedness and the 1967 defeat generated a mood of reflective criticism and self-confrontation, the Algerian revolution and to some extent the Egyptian resistance of the 1956 invasion inspired enthusiasm and self-confidence. On the whole, however, the general inclination that permeated Arabic literature has been one of the desperate search for a new order, and in the direction of restructuring and rearrangement of society, rather than reflection and maintaining or promoting the established order" (126).

He further explains that the Arab author will use the concept of alienation in order to find a new order. Viewed in this light, *The Map of Love* (like *Memory in the Flesh*) becomes an investigation of Arab yearning and change. The temporal setting of the earlier part investigates and analyzes the various possibilities of change for the nation at its inception. Sharif does not commit to any one of the factions, which indicates the novel's emphasis on the search and analysis rather than the promotion of one value over another. The whole atmosphere, rather, is one of suspension. The nationalists are convinced and impassioned, but nothing ever happens. People change their allegiances or lose interest altogether, and in the fourteen years chronicled in

the novel the nationalist movement will not facilitate any political change.¹³² And yet, it is exactly this tension and the discussions over religion versus secularism and the extent of Western influence to be allowed and welcomed that emerges strongly in Arabic literature today.

In fact, Arab nationality in itself bears great similarity to the concept of Mezzaterra.

Halim Barakat explains Arab nationality and identity as fluid, and “in a state of becoming.”

I seek to portray society as changing rather than static. The forces of the change are explained in terms of internal and external contradictions, renewed historical challenges, encounters with other societies, the discovery and development of new resources, and invented or borrowed innovations. In this process, the West has served more as a challenge than as a model to be emulated. (*The Arab World*, 13)

The contradictions and challenges Barakat mentions in this passage invoke the contact zone as well as Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, as they show the interaction of a variety of influences and convergences of different factors and convictions. The interactions of different cultures are especially significant for Arab nations, due to their geographical positions as Barakat further explains.

The centrality of the Arab world in ancient and modern times has qualified it to serve as an important nodal point in human history. It has acted as a passage connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe. It has produced some of the most important intellectual, cultural, and religious contributions of recorded history. It is this position at human and geographic crossroads, and not merely its oil and other resources, that makes the Arab world so strategically significant. (*The Arab World*, 31)

At the crossroads of major civilizations, the creator of important sciences and art, and a one-time world-dominating colonial power, Arab nationhood takes on a central role. It has known the influence of different cultures and is intent on moving on without losing its own.

¹³² In fact, even Lord Cromer’s resignation can be credited to the nationalist movement as it resulted from a shooting and subsequent hanging of innocent villagers in a rural village in Egypt.

Alas, one of the more violent clashes between the Arab and the Western world emerges in the contemporary time period chronicled in the novel, roughly a one-year span from 1997 to 1998. It is set amid the bombing of the American embassy in Cairo and the subsequent raids in the rural parts of the country. These events emphasize the lingering tensions between an all-powerful West and an impoverished East as well as the helplessness of the common people in confronting the state and police powers and the danger in becoming a “terrorist” for refusing to comply with official rules or for the simple reason of being poor and vulnerable. The villagers of Tawasi are being rounded up as “terrorists” even though they are hardly aware of any bombings in Cairo. Only when Amal asserts her power as landowner and calls on her influential friend Tareq do the police release the peasants—not before having beaten and tortured them. The situation in general is bristling. Amal and Isabel go through countless road stops on their way from Cairo to Tawasi, and Isabel’s nationality in conjunction with her travel in such remote areas of Egypt immediately raises suspicion. Again, while it seems relatively easy for two people to form friendships, political and historical situations and events can make such friendships very difficult, if not dangerous.

The chronicles of past and contemporary Egyptian, British, and American history in the novel serve as more than a dramatic background or juxtaposition to the characters’ encounters. The historical facts lend the narrative authenticity, as it preserves and critiques Egyptian, British, and American culture. In what Roberto Gonzalez-Echevarría has called “myth and archive,” the novel preserves the history of a nation in order to make it into a founding myth. By writing the events from the Egyptian side, Soueif recreates them in and for Egyptian history, and by producing them in writing they will be preserved for future readers, thus forming part of the founding myth of the nation. Rather than founding a new myth for the Arab nation only, I argue that this novel—and others like it—serve as a new foundational myth: a myth that is not tied to a

nation and a national consciousness, but to a global consciousness that recognizes the intermingling of cultures and their mutual influences onto each other. Since national and personal actions and destinies in reality are intricately entwined, we need a new foundational myth, an ancestral narrative that is utterly inclusive.

The location of this myth necessarily cannot be limited to one nation and has to include all cultures and nations involved. Amal's role as the narrator and critics' frequent comparisons between her and Scheherazade serves as a case in point. Susan Muaddi Darraj, for example identifies a post-colonial motive in this juxtaposition:

As she retells the story of her and Isabelle's common ancestors, Amal becomes a reincarnation of Scheherazade, who does not create stories herself, but retells them and highlights their magic [...] *The Map of Love* gives voice to the untold story of women—both colonizers and colonized—during British imperialism and their ability to transcend the differences of language, culture, and religion that the “spirit of the age” forbade. (102)

While I would argue for more agency and creativity for both Scheherazade and Amal in their respective narrative roles,¹³³ Darraj's remark anchors *The Map of Love* in the limbo between Arabic and Western literature. Even though *The One Thousand and One Nights* is a collection of Arabic stories, written in Iraq and Egypt, it functions very prominently also in Western depictions of The Maghreb, as show Wharton's travelogue and Mernissi's adaptation of this classic heroine in a Western world. In a way, this migration of the text is symptomatic of literature in general. No text remains fixed in its time and history, but becomes appropriated across cultures and time. The specific reference to Scheherazade in this case, though, emphasizes

¹³³ Amal simply translates some of the letters and notes, but actively imagines some occurrences both in 19th century Cairo as well as 20th century New York. She completes the narrative with her thoughts, creations, and knowledge, which goes beyond the role of simply being a narrator. Also, Scheherazade, while narrating stories she knows, uses these tales to showcase her own knowledge. If she was simply a narrator, but did not have the necessary religious education and creative wit, she could never keep King Shahrayar's attention nor persuade him that there are pious and faithful women in the world.

the impossibility of a text existing and signifying in one culture alone. The moment it becomes a representative work, such as *The One Thousand and One Nights*, is also becomes more complex and more problematic. Darraj's equation of Scheherazade with Amal, however, confirms the centrality of Amal's character. Yes, Anna's story is more romantic and extraordinary, but Amal, if she is a modern Scheherazade, is the narrator and protagonist at the same time. Like *The One Thousand and One Nights*, this novel interweaves various stories and instructs the reader in Arabic culture—through Scheherazade. The tales are interesting in themselves, but the work as a whole gains a different level of significance if we keep the purpose in mind, to convince King Shahrayar of the piety and honor in women and thus to refrain from killing Scheherazade. Scheherazade remains in the background during most of the work, but she is still a central character. Most importantly, in her weaving of tales, Scheherazade slowly changes the king's condemning view of women and pushes him gently into a more tolerant frame of mind. Because of her stories, he refrains from killing any more women. Scheherazade has created a new future. Her role is thus vital though not obvious in every story she tells. In the same way, if we foreground only Anna's character, we tend to orientalize the narrative, showing interest foremost in the familiar figure of the European woman and not in the transformative quality of the encounters between cultures throughout.

The novel's aim of becoming a meeting ground for all Arabs, as well as Westerners, constitutes itself in its inclusiveness. While most of the characters are part of the higher social classes and most of the action takes place in Cairo, Soueif consciously inserts different classes, cultural groups, and geographies. The nationalist discussions form one part of this multiplicity of perspectives, but the inclusion of Tahiyya, the doorman's wife, as a simple blue-collar woman, the various Egyptian intellectuals in the café where Isabel interviews them, and the peasants in the village of Tawasi expand the spectrum. Moreover, the novel has settings in urban, rural, and

desert areas of Egypt, very private and utterly public spaces in New York, and country estates in England, embracing a varied geography and landscape. Each geographic group has its own code of behavior and leaves its own distinct mark. The city, mostly in the form of the metropolis, stands for the melting pot of civilizations and positive intermingling of knowledge and culture. Mecca and Madinah, moreover, are the cradles of Islam; they stand for tradition and modernity at once. The peasant, on the other hand, is the one closest to the land. Family structures are significant for the *fellaheen* as well as loyalty to the landowner. The fertile banks of the Nile and rich soil form as much a part of Egypt as the grand metropolis with its educated and political elite. Lastly, the desert dweller, or Bedouin, relies on the tribal structure. The Bedouin's life is mostly nomadic, and he takes pride in honesty and independence. "An integral part of the particular form of solidarity emphasized by Bedouin is the emphasis on individual independence, autonomy, freedom, and dignity. Bedouin are also egalitarian and tend to express themselves freely and to honor their word no matter what the cost" (*The Arab World* 53). The rural and desert areas in Egypt offer a counter perspective to metropolitan centers of Cairo, New York, and London, constructing a more inclusive foundational myth across gender, race, and class.

VI.

By involving and presenting a variety of view points from England, Egypt, and America, *The Map of Love* focuses on the complexity of the encounter and participates in a sort of nation building. This search for identity in a transnational world, however, is fragmented and layered, and it can only be fruitful if we explore the whole picture and forge alternative bonds between cultures. There are no isolated histories and private individuals; rather we are all caught up in each other's (hi)stories as we participate in and engage with each other. *The Map of Love* investigates meaningful encounters and highlights the fragmentary and interactive nature of such a process. Once we present the possibility of understanding and sympathizing with the other on

an equal level, we need to incorporate a variety of elements. Only a pastiche will do justice to the varied components that influence and shape our identity. To think of ourselves as isolated beings who are rooted in one culture, one language, one history, has become more and more unrealistic. Even if we remain in our countries and never aim to go beyond our familiar horizons, we are not spared foreign influences. We may be selective in what we consider to be our histories and national identities, but novels such as *The Map of Love* point to the futility of such narrow-mindedness, without idealizing these encounters between strangers. While it certainly envisions the concrete possibility of creating lasting and meaningful relationships across cultures and languages, it is not blind to the dangers inherent in these endeavors. Too often the immersion into another culture means the expulsion from another, and yet it is impossible to know one's identity without being trapped in national, political, or linguistic markers. On more than one level *The Map of Love* also presents the implausibility of stable identity markers that separate people from each other. It refuses to be categorized as purely romance, travel writing, or historical fiction; it certainly lends itself to all of these readings if one chooses to approach the text selectively, but the final strength lies in the incorporation of all these elements and issues. By transcending boundaries in content and form, *The Map of Love* constitutes a Mezzaterra, a meeting ground among cultures, where we temporarily recognize and understand the other and thereby recognize and understand ourselves.

In comparing my reading of *The Map of Love* to the other works discussed in the pervious chapters, several tropes and similarities emerge in the way the various texts construct and challenge identities through the encounter with the other. It is a given that no productive encounter between cultures can come about if there is no clear conception of one's own culture. Especially in a transnational world, the sense of self is very often contested because traditional markers of identity, such as the nation, gender roles, and class, are changing their position in

existing power hierarchies. In some cases this change stems from personal decisions and standpoints, such as Edith Wharton's precarious relation to her native country, the United States, and Khalid's simultaneous longing for and rejection of Constantine and Algeria. In other instances, as is the case with *The Sheltering Sky*, *The Tremor of Forgery*, and *Season of Migration to the North*, it is political forces from the outside that produce a change in traditional hierarchies. Not all characters make a personal decision to go against the grain, but they are swept up in a social or political movement and need to find their role in the new environment. It seems that the return home constitutes a sort of evidence for Khalid, Mustafa and the narrator, and Ingham and Jensen that they have found their place and have negotiated the various conflicting forces within themselves. Their sojourn in a different country, therefore, helps them to re-see their own culture and their lack of critique of their home countries and native values. For other characters, then again, the return home is undesirable, like for Edith Wharton, Anna Winterbourne, and Kit Moresby. A return home for them constitutes a compromise, a return to the beginning, rather than the apex of their transformation.

Gender roles and patriarchal structures seem to provide the cause for this difference in the meaning of the return home. Especially the female characters engage in complex struggles, as they have one more battle to fight: the definition against and revision of feminine conceptions. Wharton, Kit, Hosna, Jean, and Anna all reject or at least actively struggle with their gender. Wharton presents herself in the masculine role of the pioneer, and Hosna and Jean openly reject masculinity, which leads to their deaths. Kit and Anna, moreover, signal their transformations with the shedding of their conventional clothes and language. These characters' struggles in conjunction with the overall critique of the family trope and love relationships in the works discussed in this dissertation seems to indicate that we need to find completely new lenses and perspectives if we want to read encounters productively and promote the idea of shared histories.

For while the construction of identity in all of these cases is complex and layered, there is no essential difference between American, European, and Maghrebian characters as they all feel alienated and struggle to belong. The homeland, whether America or Algeria, is a problematic concept, especially in a transnational world. Is it even possible to find a homeland, or can we only experience fleeting moments of recognition and belonging?

As my discussion comes to an end, I am not sure whether this question can be answered definitively. The texts in this dissertation, however, show that there is a need for more inclusiveness. Especially because the existence of the homeland is uncertain, we need to find other safe spaces. Instead of separating national narratives and writing from within cultures, I believe in reading literature *between* cultures and advocate the approach I call Mezzaterra. It allows for the complexity of reality, the interplay between various texts, and for greater understanding between cultures. Every small moment, no matter how fleeting, in which we can recognize the other and transcend fixed constructions of power and identity, we engage in a productive transnational encounter and create the groundwork for a new foundational myth that is not tied to the nation or to patriarchy. While this dissertation forms part of the project of revisionary history, it aims to propose new ways of reading for the future.

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Appendix: Letter of Permission

From: "College Literature" <COLLIT@wcupa.edu>

To: "Tanja Stampfl" <tstamp1@lsu.edu>

CC:

Subject: RE: Request for Permission to Reprint

Date: Thursday, February 12, 2009 10:05:35 AM

Dear Tanja,

Permission is granted for reprinting your article as long as full citation appears. Your article will be published in January 2010, Vol. 37.1 of College Literature. It will be a special issue entitled Embargoed Literature.

Best,

Elizabeth

Elizabeth Alex Lukens
Editorial Assistant
College Literature
210 E. Rosedale Ave.
West Chester University
West Chester, PA 19383
elukens@wcupa.edu

From: Tanja Stampfl [mailto:tstamp1@lsu.edu]

Sent: Wednesday, February 11, 2009 10:16 PM

To: College Literature

Subject: Request for Permission to Reprint

Dear Kostas Myrsiades,

my article "The (Im)possibility of Telling: Of Algeria and Memory in the Flesh" was recently accepted for publication in College Literature. This article forms part of my dissertation, which I will defend on March 10, 2009 at Louisiana State University. For this reason I would like to ask your permission to reprint the article as chapter 5 in my dissertation.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Tanja Stampfl

Vita

Tanja Stampfl is a native of South Tyrol, in Northern Italy. She studied English and Spanish language and literature at the University of Innsbruck before she came to the University of New Orleans in the year 2000. Initially taking classes as an exchange student, she decided to pursue a Master of Philosophy in English literature at the same institution. She concentrated on 19th century and early 20th century American literature in her studies and wrote her thesis on the figure of the woman artists in Louisa May Alcott's fiction. Upon completing her graduate degree, she worked as an adjunct instructor at the University of New Orleans and taught various levels of composition. In 2004 Tanja came to Louisiana State University where she entered the doctoral program as a teaching assistant at the English department. She passed her General Exams in May of 2006, where she chose the Theory of the Novel, Post-Colonial Theory and Practice, and Postmodernism as her areas of specialization. These fields of study and her dissertation reflect her research and teaching interests in the intersection of race, gender and culture in World Literature.