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## ARTICLE

# Mixing Genres to Overcome the East/West Divide: Lifewriting in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* and Edward Said's *After the Last Sky* and *Out of Place*

Valerie Kennedy

Bilkent University, Ankara, TR  
kennedy@bilkent.edu.tr

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Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* and Edward Said's *After the Last Sky* and *Out of Place* can both be seen as examples of what Max Saunders calls "autobiografiction." In these works, Soueif and Said use a mixture of fiction, autobiography, and historical reporting to critique Western/Orientalist representations of Eastern "Others" and to suggest the need for new approaches to human relations across the East/West divide. Ironically, however, at times the authors themselves use Orientalist categories, although they both search for common ground between East and West.

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**Keywords:** Lifewriting; Orientalism; Imperialism; Colonialism; Egypt

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## Introduction

*The Map of Love* (1999) by the Egyptian novelist, Ahdaf Soueif, as well as Edward Said's *After the Last Sky* (1986) and *Out of Place* (1999), can all be considered as different forms of lifewriting. *The Map of Love* can be seen as a version of autobiografiction as defined by Max Saunders, while *After the Last Sky*, subtitled *Palestinian Lives*, offers a photographic and textual memoir of both Said's own experiences and those of the Palestinian community more generally, and *Out of Place*, subtitled *A Memoir*, fits the definition of a formal autobiography given by both Philippe Lejeune and Saunders.<sup>1</sup> Saunders defines autobiografiction as a synthesis "of auto/biography and fiction" (13),

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<sup>1</sup> See also Jolly, who says that the term "life writing" implies an "openness and inclusiveness across genres, and ... encompasses the writing of another's life" (2001), ix, and Metta, for whom the term includes "autobiography and biography, fictional and non-fictional" as well as "poetic representations of these life narratives" (2010), 18.

and his description of what he calls “*framed pseudo-autobiographical works*” (219) seems to fit Soueif’s novel. He describes such works as “incorporat[ing] fictional first-person material (diary entries, journals, letters, travelogues, etc.) within another narrative” (Saunders 219), which is exactly what Soueif’s novel does. Moreover, Saunders argues that “autobiografiction ... plays a major role throughout colonial and postcolonial literature,” and that “Its transformations of history and fact can make it a potent form in identity politics and resistance to oppression” (12). This, again, describes *The Map of Love* very effectively. As for Said’s works, for Lejeune, “the autobiographical pact” (3) supposes “that there is *identity of name* between the author (such as he figures, by his name, on the cover), the narrator of the story, and the character who is being talked about” (12). However, Saunders argues, rightly, that in formal autobiography, despite the unity of the name of the author, the narrator, and the protagonist, there is a split between the narrating “I” and the “I” whose experiences are being narrated, a split which “is heightened by the time-gap between the narrating and the narrated selves” (503). This can be seen in Said’s *Out of Place* and occasionally in *After the Last Sky*. Moreover, as Saunders also observes, certain “forms of documentary writing ... turn life-writing into testimony not of the self alone but of society” (510), which is what Said does in relation to the Palestinian community in *After the Last Sky*.

In all three works, Soueif and Said use a mixture of the genres of autobiography, fiction, and historical reportage to critique Orientalist visions of Eastern “Others” often based on negative binary Eurocentric oppositions and to suggest the need to envisage alternative ways of constructing human relations across the East/West divide.<sup>2</sup> Ironically, however, at times Soueif and Said themselves use Orientalist categories to represent some Egyptians or Palestinians. In *Orientalism*, Said asks: “Can one divide human reality ... into clearly different histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly?” and, further: is there “any way of avoiding the hostility expressed by the division, say, of men into ‘us’ (Westerners) and

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<sup>2</sup> King (2010), 146, Malak (2000), 157, Nash (2010), 82, and Wynne (2006), 65 draw attention to the revision of Orientalist perspectives in Soueif’s novel, but they do not explore the relationship between this and the mixture of fiction and lifewriting in the work.

‘they’ (Orientals)?” (45). In Soueif’s *The Map of Love* the autobiographical or pseudo-autobiographical elements (in the form of Anna’s and Layla’s journals, newspaper articles, and emails) are presented as fiction: they are framed by the fictional conventions of the division into Parts and Chapters, as well as by the use of epigraphs.<sup>3</sup> In Said’s *After the Last Sky*, his own individual experiences are extended to but also contrasted with those of a group (the Palestinians) and presented in a mixed-media form that juxtaposes various forms of textual content and photographs. In *Out of Place*, Said’s individual past is framed by his account of the discovery that he has leukemia and his consequent desire to record his life in writing. Autobiography, thus, takes on a form very similar to that of a retrospective first-person nineteenth-century novel, where the retrospective narrator is clearly distinguished from the earlier self or selves undergoing the experiences narrated.

The following comparison between these works as examples of lifewriting is partly motivated by the parallels between the two writers’ lives and situations. Both Soueif and Said occupy the “in between state” described by Said in the “Introduction” to *Culture and Imperialism*, where he says that as “an Arab with a Western education,” he grew up feeling that he was a part of “more than one history and more than one group” (xxx, xxxi). Like Said, Soueif was educated in both Egypt and Britain, and in the “Preface” to *Mezzaterra* (2004), she says that she is “a bit of this and a bit of that” (5). The two writers are similar in that they come from relatively privileged, educated classes in their respective communities. They also knew each other: Said was something of a mentor to Soueif, reviewing *In the Eye of the Sun* favorably, while Soueif has stated her admiration for Said’s work on a number of occasions.<sup>4</sup> These autobiographical links are reflected in a textual connection in *The Map of Love*, where Sharif Basha al-Baroudi and Omar al-Ghamrawi

<sup>3</sup> As Malak (141, 145), Massad (1999), 75, and Nash (67, 68, 70) have noted, many of Soueif’s works contain autobiographical elements.

<sup>4</sup> For Said’s review, see “The Anglo-Arab Encounter,” *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*. London: Granta Books (2001), 405–410. Soueif expresses her admiration and affection for Said in her review of *Out of Place* and in the two short pieces, “Edward Said, My Friend,” and the “Address in Memorial Event for Edward Said”; see *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground*. New York: Anchor (2004), 251–60, 315–16, 317–19.

are clearly avatars of Edward Said in their position as outsiders and in their critiques of British and French imperialism, American neo-colonialism, and the Zionist colonial enterprise. However, since Katherine Callen King has provided a thorough and inclusive account of the resemblances between these three characters, I shall not discuss this topic here.<sup>5</sup>

### **Overcoming Orientalist Divisions through Personal Relationships and Textual Connections**

In *The Map of Love*, Amal al-Ghamrawi's fictional account of her reading of Anna Winterbourne's journals is intertwined with the story of her friendship with Isabel Parkman, who becomes involved with Amal's brother, Omar. But these two narrative strands are also framed by initial chapters in the three major parts of the novel that are narrated in the third person, and this third-person frame contains various other narratives. These include Anna's and Layla's journals, quotations from Egyptian newspapers, British travel guides, the text of a (fake) letter supposedly written by Egyptians plotting to overthrow the British colonial rule in Egypt, an essay by Sharif al-Baroudi, and emails between Amal, Isabel, and Omar. Soueif uses this mixture of genres and narrative modes contrapuntally to criticize Orientalist discourse and colonial policies, which are also criticized by various characters and narrators.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, there are significant parallels between colonial and postcolonial events and politics that add to the critique of the two periods in which the novel takes place, namely 1897–1913 and 1997–1998. Said coins the term “contrapuntalism” in *Culture and Imperialism*, where he argues that an analysis of the “Overlapping

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<sup>5</sup> See “Translating Heroism: Locating Edward Said on Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*” in *Edward Said: A Legacy of Emancipation and Representation*, eds. Adel Iskandar and Hakem Rustum. Berkeley: University of California Press (2010), 142–58.

<sup>6</sup> Burt, “*The Map of Love*, Ahdaf Soueif,” *Feminist Review* 69 (Winter 2001), 153, also identifies the novel as a critique of imperialism. Drawing on Mary Louise Pratt's concept of “transculturation,” that is, the process whereby “subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture” (*Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London and New York: Routledge, (1992), 6) in order to create their own narrative, D'Alessandro argues that Soueif's novel presents personal relationships that become “the vehicle for a transcultural vision of the Other” (406). See also Hassan, “Agency and Translational Literature: Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*,” *PMLA* 121.3 (2006), 756.

Territories” and “Intertwined Histories” (1) of imperialism and colonialism requires rereading “the cultural archive ... not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts” (59; see also 384). Soueif adapts Said’s model of contrapuntal reading to writing, and she juxtaposes Eastern and Western texts and perspectives to dramatize and criticize British colonialism in Egypt, as well as the Egyptian resistance to it and the oppression and inequalities in postcolonial Egypt and, more distantly, Palestine.<sup>7</sup> But the novel also dramatizes the overcoming of barriers between East and West through the el-Baroudi family relationships, especially those between Anna and Sharif, Isabel and Omar, and, less obviously but perhaps more interestingly, between the increasingly close relationship between Amal and Anna as Amal reconstructs the events of Anna’s life, revealing that Anna generally overcomes her initially Orientalist view of Egypt and Egyptians. It is this textual relationship I will focus on, after first examining the novel’s critique of British colonialism and the postcolonial situation of Egypt.

The political critique in *The Map of Love* is made through comments by the characters and through parallels between the colonial and postcolonial contexts. British colonial policies are criticized throughout by Anna and her father-in-law, Sir Charles Winterbourne, before Anna goes to Egypt (13, 27, 31, 33, 39). Later, the criticisms focus on Lord Cromer and his policies on agriculture, taxation on Egyptian industries, etc. (257, 261, 267, 367), as well as the Anglo-French Entente Cordiale (392–93) and the violence after the Denshwai incident (423–30). The arrogance and ignorance of Cromer’s Oriental Secretary, Harry Boyle, is made clear in the fake letter of rebellion he writes in an absurd form of Arabic that he believes to represent “the picturesque, flowery language of the East” (493) and that Sharif and his friends mock (417–20). Amal and her friends criticize late twentieth-century American and Israeli

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<sup>7</sup> Two recent critics of *The Map of Love* have considered it contrapuntally: both D’Alessandro and Wynne relate the novel to the travel writing of Lady Duff Gordon and Lady Anne Blunt and to the Oriental paintings of Frederick Lewis. However, to my knowledge, no one has compared the novel to Said’s memoir or to *After the Last Sky*, although Nash relates the novel to Said’s “argument for ‘contrapuntal’ readings of literature” (81).

policies in relation to Palestine (223–24, 229) and the actions of the Egyptian government (223–30). Some of the most effective political criticism occurs in the parallels between the politics of the two historical periods. The most significant parallel is that between late nineteenth-century and late twentieth-century demands for reform in Egypt, a parallel that is explicitly drawn by Dr. Razmi in the Atelier scene (227). But there are several others worth analysing. The first is related to the problem of the fundamentalists: in the late nineteenth century, they oppose the foundation of the School of Fine Arts as indicating a betrayal of Islamic ideas to Western practices (261, 263–66), while in the late twentieth century, the bombs set off by the Islamist insurgents provide a pretext for the Egyptian government's imprisonment of innocent people (176, 225–29). Similarly, the anxiety regarding the ongoing Zionist takeover of Palestinian land in the earlier period (259–60, 378–79) is paralleled by the concern about Israel's encroachment on Egyptian agriculture and politics (abetted by American influence) in the latter one (202, 222). Finally, the parallel between colonial and postcolonial injustice and oppression—symbolized by the Denshwai incident of 1906 and its aftermath—is linked to the detention of el-Ma'ati and the other laborers in 1997 (423–30, 436–43). This final parallel is particularly emphasized, as the two events are narrated consecutively.

Turning to Anna and Amal, and to Anna's Orientalist views, Anna's first impressions of Egypt are derived from the paintings of Frederick Lewis, and to some extent she never relinquishes the images depicted in his work. However, from the beginning, our first encounters with Anna's view of Egypt are distinguished from the more xenophobic and/or imperialist views of characters like her maid, Emily, Mr. Sladen (who is writing a book on Egypt), and Lord Cromer, the Consul-General himself. Furthermore, Anna rejects the closed world of the British in Cairo and the "Cook's travellers'" view of Egypt (212), notes similarities between the worlds of upper-class English and Cairene society, joins in Sharif's mockery of Orientalist stereotypes, and even reverses the Orientalist perspective on occasion. Anna learns to see beyond the Orientalist stereotypes with which she arrives in Egypt, and she becomes what Wail S. Hassan calls "an ideal(ized) Western observer of, and participant in, Egypt's struggle for independence" (759, and see D'Alessandro 406), although arguably she retains

some Orientalist perceptions. Sharif also overcomes his anti-British feelings to accept Anna as his wife.

At first, Anna's descriptions of Egypt in her letters home are, as Amal says, "a little self-conscious, a little aware of the genre – *Letters from Egypt, A Nile Voyage, More Letters from Egypt*" (58), suggesting that Anna is aware of the conventions of Victorian travel writing. Indeed, Graham Huggan calls *The Map of Love* a "counter-travel narrative" (quoted in D'Alessandro 400), an idea developed by D'Alessandro, who points out Anna and Amal's references to the *Letters from Egypt* of Lady Duff Gordon (Soueif *ML* 101, 107, 68; see also D'Alessandro 402). D'Alessandro, however, does not note that the *Letters* represent one of the more tolerant and open-minded texts of Victorian travel writing, as Billie Melman observes (51, 105–06, 154–55) and as Soueif herself says in an interview with Paula Burdett.<sup>8</sup> Anna, thus, begins by describing the procession that greets the the Greek Orthodox Church's new patriarch as "interesting and picturesque" (57). She then provides a long description of the Bazaar as "quite overwhelming" and "exactly as [she has] pictured it," except for the smells, which are nonetheless "of a piece with the whole scene," and she goes on to list the herbs, spices, perfumes, noise, and the bargaining (67). The exoticism of this scene, however, is then contrasted with Emily's fear that she and Anna "would be abducted" and "sold as slaves, for it is well known that Cairo is a great centre for that trade" (68). The final clause, about the slave trade in Cairo, represents Emily's point of view, as is underlined by Anna's comment that "My [Anna's] assurances have proved of no avail," as well as by her statement that Emily will henceforth refuse to go into the Bazaar "except under British guard!" (680). This incident perhaps looks forward to the later mockery of such Orientalist stereotypes as "The wicked Pasha" and his "black eunuchs" by Sharif and Anna in the early days of their relationship, as re-imagined by Amal (153–54). The exoticism of Anna's early view of Egypt continues after she is abducted and taken to the al-Baroudi house, where she initially perceives it as belonging to the world of "[her] beloved paintings [by Lewis]" or "one

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<sup>8</sup> See "Ahdaf Soueif: Talking about *The Map of Love*." *EnterText* 1 (3) (2001), 102–03, where Soueif calls Lady Duff Gordon's *Letters from Egypt* "very broad-minded," the product of a writer who "opened [herself] up to the culture," unlike many others.

of the [*Arabian*] *Nights* of Edward Lane" (137; see also 134–35 and D'Alessandro 402). Much later, when she is about to marry Sharif, Anna thinks she "*can draw on [her] beloved Frederick Lewis for inspiration*" in "*the choosing and fashioning of the furnishings*" for her new home (324), thus transforming the harem into a version of the Victorian home.<sup>9</sup> Here, Anna seems to domesticate and commodify Orientalism, although this is not portrayed as criticism but, rather, as suggesting an immersion in her new life.

Anna's initial exoticist Orientalism can also be seen in her description of Egyptians' abrupt transitions between silence or immobility and frenetic activity, in her awareness that living among her compatriots in Cairo is not living in Egypt, and in her commentary on the desert. In relation to the first, she observes that "the peace and the restiveness [of Egyptians] alike [are] incomprehensible to me" (97), although even here her description is not judgmental. Moreover, she is aware from an early stage that living among the British in Cairo cuts her off from Egypt. At the end of Chapter 9, she realizes that "at Shepheard's Hotel ... still I am not in Egypt" and that "there is something at the heart of it all which eludes me – something – an intimation of which I felt in the paintings, the conversations in England, and which, now that I am here, seems far, far away from my grasp" (102). While this could be interpreted as a version of the Orientalist stereotype ("the mystery of the East"), later events and passages in the novel suggest that it represents a real desire to understand Egypt and its culture on Anna's part. For example, when she is indeed abducted (although not to be sold into slavery), she believes her young male abductors when they assure her that they are neither "robbers nor brigands" but have "political motives." She says, "It was a great pity that I was not able to converse with them, and find out the nature of their grievance" (106–7). Again, in her descriptions of the Sinai desert, Anna reverts to Orientalist stereotypes such as the desert's vastness, its ability to suggest prayer and peace of mind (190, 197, 213), and its "simplicity and ... grandeur" (236). But

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<sup>9</sup> Yeazell suggests that Lewis's paintings enabled this home/harem connection because of the viewer's familiarity with the interiors of "Dutch genre painting" which Lewis's harems resemble (227) and the presence of Eastern objects in bourgeois Victorian homes (2000), 302 n 44.

these perceptions are at least partially validated, if not endorsed, by contrast with other European assessments of the desert and its people quoted in the novel. In the middle of Anna's journal descriptions of her desert journey, Amal quotes a passage from "Anna's Thomas Cook," denouncing any ideas of "romance" in connection with the desert and its people as "delusions" and describing the Bedouin in a series of negative stereotypes: "rude, ignorant, lazy, and greedy," uncivilized, and violent, although showing "simplicity, thoughtlessness, and good humour" (209). Similarly, Anna's perspective on Egypt and Egyptians is contrasted with that of Mr. Sladen, the writer, who tells Mrs. Butcher that the positive characteristics of the Ancient Egyptians are now "Completely degraded" (98). Anna also declares her unwillingness to see the desert "with a company of Cook's travellers" or with "[her] own kind" (212–13), and after her marriage, she states that she has no desire to "provide a detailed picture of 'life in the Harem'" (354). This anti-Orientalist position is developed further when Anna, dressed incognito as a Muslim/Egyptian woman for the beginning of her journey into the Sinai desert with Sharif, watches a group of English aristocrats pass by and describes them as "bright exotic creatures, walking in a kind of magical space, oblivious to all around them" (195). In this scene the Orientalist trope of cross-dressing or adopting native dress is used to reverse the Orientalist perspective: it is the English aristocrats who become "exotic."

Amal al-Ghamrawi first insists on the separateness of her story from those of Anna and Isabel (11), but there are many connections between the three women's stories and many points at which two characters (most notably, but not only, Amal and Anna) merge.<sup>10</sup> Anna and Amal's experiences are frequently brought together; and in retelling Anna's story, Amal comes to identify more and more closely with her. The third-person narrator describes the way that "Anna's words flow into her [Amal], probing gently at dreams and hopes and sorrow she had sorted out, labelled and put away" (4, and see 11, 44), emphasizing that Anna's

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<sup>10</sup> Both Amal and Isabel regret not having known their mothers well (119, 205), and Amal constantly reminds Isabel of Omar, because of their shared physical features, expressions, and body language (165). Moreover, Omar's affair with Isabel's mother and his relationship with Isabel (358–60, and see 53–54, 343), like Amal's romantic fantasies of Anna's husband, Sharif, link two different generations.

story makes Amal relive her own past. Indeed, reading Anna's account of her courtship with Edward, Amal says "she could have been me ... What difference do a hundred years – or a continent – make?" (12). On many occasions, Amal uses the dramatic present tense to evoke Anna's almost hallucinatory presence beside her and the merging of two individual lives. For example, after Edward's death, Amal imagines, "Anna mends. The face that looks up at me as I turn from the kettle in the kitchen is no longer quite so haunted, quite so pale. The step I hear in my corridor is quicker and lighter, the rustle of the silk dress more crisp" (45, and see 89, 100).

Later in the novel, Amal's retelling of Anna's life not only creates a close relationship between Amal and Anna but also makes connections between the novel's critique of British colonial policies and postcolonial global politics. When several German tourists are killed by a bomb set off by Islamic insurgents in Cairo, Amal leaves the city and goes to the family house in Tawasi, thinking that she will be "away from all this" and "with Anna" (408). A little later, Amal's identification with Anna develops into a sexual fantasy about Sharif al-Baroudi, Anna's husband and Amal's great-uncle. This fantasy is explicitly linked to both colonial and postcolonial political oppression when seventeen of Amal's laborers are arrested after another bombing by Islamic insurgents, which kills many people, mainly foreign tourists, in Luxor in 1997 (436–37). Amal tries and fails to have them released (although her friend, Tareq el 'Atiyya, who has better political connections, later succeeds (442–43)). After her failure, Amal takes refuge in talking to the portrait of Sharif: "'You see? You see, ya Sharif Basha?'" (442). She continues: "And his dark eyes look back at me and behind them lie el-Tel el-Kebir and Umm Durman and Denshwai and it seems to me that he does indeed see and I want—oh, how I want to be in his arms—" (442).

By linking the Egyptian government's oppression of its own people in 1997 with the imperial battles of Tel-el-Kebir (1882) and Omdurman (1898), as well as the incident at Denshwai (or Denshawai) (1906), the passage quoted above where Amal addresses Sharif's portrait connects the critique of British colonialism with the novel's portrayal of the late twentieth-century oppression of the Egyptian people by their

own government. These events are referred to elsewhere in the novel. The Denshwai incident, when the tension between British officers and the inhabitants of the village of Denshwai results in the death of one villager, the wounding of several others, and the detention of two hundred and fifty of their fellows, for example, appears in Anna and Layla's journals and in Amal's imaginary reconstruction of discussions between Anna and Layla, as well as between Sharif and his friends (423–430). Here, autobiografiction meets historical record: the novel's account of the Denshwai incident is accurate even in its small details, such as the pigeon shooting that initiated it, the British officer who probably dies of heatstroke, the Egyptian fellah who is shot for supposedly killing him, and so on.<sup>11</sup> The incident is also accurately identified by Husni Bey al-Ghamrawi (and confirmed by Anna) (428, 433) as one of the reasons for Cromer's resignation. Earlier, the massacre of the Mahdi's men at the battle of Omdurman (or Umm Durman) is identified as the cause of Edward Winterbourne's trauma and his death (35). The battle of Tel-el-Kebir (30), involving the Egyptian army's defeat by the British, is shown to have led to the British occupation of Egypt and the installation of Cromer as Consul-General (32), a figure who, according to Hassan, is the metonymic focus for Soueif's novel's critique of British imperial history (764). In the last pages of the novel, reflecting on late twentieth-century global politics, Anna and Amal merge once again as Amal quotes Anna's words:

Sudan should not be partitioned. Clinton vows to avenge America on Ben Laden. Albright threatens action against Iraq. Torture in Palestinian jails .... *It is very hard*, Anna had written a hundred years ago, *not to feel caught up in a terrible time of brutality and we – Amal edits – are helpless to do anything but wait for history to run its course.* (512–13)

By referring to actual historical events within a fictional framework, suggesting not only a family connection but also similar perspectives on the part of a Western

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed account of the Denshwai incident, see <https://global.britannica.com/topic/Dinshaway-Incident>).

woman (Anna) and an Eastern woman (Amal), Soueif criticizes colonial and postcolonial politics and Orientalist oppositions between the West (Britain and America) and its Eastern Others (Egypt in this case, but also the Palestinians). The marriage between Sharif and Anna and the relationship between Isabel and Omar also suggest the overcoming of East/West barriers.

Said's *After the Last Sky* and *Out of Place*, similarly, use lifewriting to link personal lives and political events, although they offer fewer possibilities of overcoming the East/West divide than Soueif's novel. *After the Last Sky* contains a mixture of genres—commentary on photographs, an account of individual and family history, and historical, political, and literary analysis—to re-present the situation of the Palestinians after their expulsion from Israel in 1948. *Out of Place*, like the fictional autobiography of nineteenth-century novels like *David Copperfield* or *Jane Eyre*, is characterized by the divisions between Said as retrospective narrator and his earlier selves. *After the Last Sky* deals with the Palestinian community as a whole, while in the "Preface" to *Out of Place*, Said says he feels that the book, which addresses events in his life between 1935 and 1962, "ha[s] some validity as an unofficial personal record of those tumultuous years in the Middle East" (xiii). Said shares this sense of tumultuous events despite the fact that his family's experience is not typical of the total dispossession that many Palestinians faced after 1948. As he says in *After the Last Sky*, "My immediate family was completely insulated by wealth and the security of Cairo, where we were living then" (115).<sup>12</sup>

Despite his family's atypically privileged position, Said uses his mother and his paternal aunt, Nabiha, as well as his own memories and reflections, throughout

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<sup>12</sup> In *Out of Place*, Said states that his family did not discuss the Palestinian situation when he was growing up (1999), 116. He defines his family as part of the mixed pre-war Levantine culture of Cairo: "We were all Shawam, amphibious Levantine creatures whose essential lostness was momentarily stayed by a kind of forgetfulness ... By the end of the forties we were no longer just Shawam but *khawagat*, the designated and respectful title for foreigners, which, as used by Muslim Egyptians, has always carried a tinge of hostility" (195). "*Shawam*", as Mardelli explains, "is the plural form of *Shaami*, a geographical label for the people who inhabited Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan during the Ottoman Empire" (2010), np. *Khawagat*, as Masquelier and Soares say, "refers to Copts and Egyptians with foreign ancestries as well as foreigners from the West," implying that such people are "outsiders" (2016), 120.

both works, to reveal connections between personal lives and the larger Palestinian community, thus criticizing colonial and postcolonial policies. In *After the Last Sky*, Said initially relates his brief references to his mother's experiences to his recognition that "the crucial absence of women" in his text is "a fundamental problem" (77) because an understanding of women's position is essential for "fully understand[ing the] experience of dispossession [of all Palestinians]" (77; see also 78). The story of his mother's passport being "ripped up" by "a British official," who tells her, "You will now travel on your husband's passport" illustrates the Palestinians' dispossession and expulsion. Said explains that in effect, the British official means that "this negation of your separate identity will enable us to provide a legal place for one more Jewish immigrant from Europe" (78). In *Out of Place*, Said's mother's passport causes her to be routinely subjected to delays and questions when traveling because, unlike the rest of the family whose members have American passports, she has "a Palestinian passport that was soon replaced with a Laissez-Passer" (118). Said notes, "When we did finally pass through, the meaning of her anomalous existence as represented by an embarrassing document *was never explained to me* as being a consequence of a shattering collective experience of dispossession" (118, my emphasis). This highlights his earlier ignorance regarding the political significance of these events versus his later awareness, as well as the distance between his earlier and later selves that is central to *Out of Place* as a whole.

Another significant figure in *After the Last Sky* and *Out of Place*—who enables Said to criticize the situation of the Palestinians before and after 1948—is his paternal aunt, Nabiha. In *After the Last Sky* Said describes his aunt's work on behalf of the Palestinian refugees in Egypt, explaining that her wealth meant "she could rely on her own resources to some extent" (117), but that she also had to deal with Egyptian officialdom: "she was always upset by the unfeeling apparatus of the Arab state, to say nothing of the Egyptian bureaucracy. Palestinians were not given residence permits, work permits, or travel papers" (117). They were, thus, stateless. *Out of Place* is more explicit in revealing the time gap between Said as narrator and his earlier self, thus revealing the split between the younger Said's lack of political awareness and his later perception of the influence that political events had on his family. He

says, “It was through Aunt Nabiha that I first experienced Palestine as history and cause in the anger and consternation I felt over the suffering of the refugees, those Others, whom she brought into my life” (119). However, at the time, aged thirteen and a half, he says that he “do[es] not recall ever clearly thinking that all this woeful spectacle was the direct result of politics and a war that had also affected [his] aunt and [his] own family” (120, my emphasis). He also comments on the clash between both “the pre- and post revolutionary [Egyptian] governments” declarations of support for Palestine and their failure to “nurture” the Palestinians (instead “deplet[ing] them further” (121)), though he does not state whether he was aware of this at the time or only later, when he was older.

Both works also criticize the colonial and postcolonial situation of the Palestinians through Said’s memories and reflections. In *After the Last Sky*, Said combines reflections on Palestinian literature with memories, political critique, and photographic images. For example, Said’s evocation of Emile Habiby’s novel, *The Pessoptimist*, and specifically a character named Isam al-Bathanjani (Isam the Eggplant) causes him to remember his family’s fondness for eggplants, especially those from Battiri. As a retrospective narrator, however, looking back at those “tiresome paeans to Battiris,” Said says that now, whenever he sees produce that is grown on Palestinian land but exported by Israeli companies, “the carefully wrapped eggplants are emblems of the power that rules the sprawling fertility and enduring human labour of Palestine” (28). This reflection is accompanied by a photograph of Palestinians packing eggplants with the caption, “Gaza, 1979. Farm using refugee labor” (28–29). The combination of commentary and image reinforces the point. Another example of the criticism of the colonial influences on Palestinians concerns Said’s own surname and Palestinian names more generally. He says, “I, like many Palestinians, am the product of a society of names constructed and trafficked according to European norms” (88). He continues by arguing that, like his father’s adoption of the name “*Said*” on his return from the USA in 1920, “the given names that exist today are the product of the British mandate (1922), the Zionist presence, the national awakening – forces requiring countable statistics and reified (and hence taxable) populations, divisions, and classifications” (91). The comment explains what the expression, “European norms,”

implies. In *Out of Place*, too, Said's autobiography is connected with Palestinian history on several occasions. Examples include his family reactions on the day preceding the thirtieth anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, that is, November 1, 1947 (107), his aunt Nabiha's actions on behalf of Palestinian refugees after 1948 (118–22), the problems caused by his mother's passport, which is first Palestinian, then Lebanese (117–18, 132), the varying fortunes of his father's business depending on the vicissitudes of Middle Eastern politics (126–29), and the effect of the Lebanese Civil War on his family life (263, 269).

Souief also criticizes Zionism and the state of Israel, expressing solidarity with the whole Palestinian community. Like Said's real-life aunt, Nabiha, whose wealth and connections allow her to help poorer Palestinian refugees in Cairo, *The Map of Love's* Amal relies on her social status as a landowner to place her in a position of relative power. When the school at Tawasi is closed, she succeeds in having it reopened, albeit with help from her fellow landowner and friend, Tareq 'Atiyya (126, 442–43). Moreover, just as in *Out of Place*, Said contrasts the pro-Palestinian rhetoric of successive Egyptian governments with the lack of material support for the refugees, so Souief documents the threat posed by Zionism in both the historical periods in *The Map of Love*. In the novel, in relation to the period of 1897–1911, there is criticism of the Zionist project in colonizing Palestine that led to the creation of the state of Israel (259–60, 315–17), while in 1997–1998 Amal and others are critical of Israel's intrusions into Egyptian agriculture and other aspects of the country's economic life (202–03, 422–23, 476–77). In different ways, both Said and Souiei underline the vulnerability of the Palestinians.

At times, however, Said and Souief themselves use Orientalist categories. In *After the Last Sky*, for example, Said describes rural Palestinians' lives as "essentially timeless and anonymously collective," and the people as "a population of poor, suffering, occasionally colorful peasants, unchanging and collective" (88), although shortly afterwards he rejects "the timeless East" or "the miserable lot of women in Islam" as captions for photographs of rural Palestinian women (93). He admits that his perception of rural Palestinians is "mythic" (88), probably because he is "perhaps an extreme case of an urban Palestinian whose relationship to the land

is basically metaphorical ... [and he] view[s] the Palestinian rural community at a very great remove" (88), elsewhere stressing his distance from rural Palestinians (18, 130, 138–39). Thus, he perpetuates some of the Orientalist stereotypes he had analyzed in *Orientalism*. Something similar can be seen in Soueif's works. In *The Map of Love*, at times Anna and even Amal seem tempted by Orientalist stereotypes (see above pp. 6–10). Some of Soueif's early short stories also view rural Egyptians through Orientalist lenses. Discussing "Her Man" and "The Wedding of Zeina in *Aisha* (1983)" with Joseph Massad, Soueif admits that, "genuinely for me these stories describe an exotic world" (86). She also recognizes that the stories "do present Egypt or the East in terms that perhaps the West is very comfortable with: as a world that is very traditional, very close to magic, ritualistic, a little brutal, and very sensual—our world as perceived by aficionados of the *Arabian Nights*" (86): in a word, as Orientalist.

### **Divisions and Connections between East and West in Narrative Structure and Themes**

In addition to criticizing Orientalist divisions and colonial and postcolonial policies and politics, *The Map of Love* suggests the possibility of overcoming divisions between East and West. Said's *After the Last Sky* and *Out of Place*, however, emphasize divisions rather than connections. Soueif uses the novel's epigraphs both to criticize Britain as a colonial power and to suggest the overcoming of East/West divisions. By contrast, *After the Last Sky* is primarily focused on the divisions in Palestinian experiences and indeed mirrors these in its contrasting use of photographs and different types of written text. Similarly, in *Out of Place*, Said records the realization of his split identity and the gap between his older and younger selves' reflections on his earlier experiences.

The epigraphs in *The Map of Love* criticize colonial and postcolonial policies; however, they also suggest connections between East and West. These epigraphs are drawn from both Eastern and Western sources, although of twenty-nine, only nine are Egyptian. The combination of East and West, paired with the ironic juxtaposition of epigraphs from European sources with Egyptian characters and situations, are key elements in the contrapuntal structure of Soueif's novel. Many early epigraphs refer to the developing romances between Anna and Sharif or Isabel and Omar. For

example, Aphra Behn's words, "Oh what a dear, ravishing thing is the beginning of an Amour!" (15), occur just before the chapter where Isabel meets and falls in love with Omar. Furthermore, the first meeting between Anna and Sharif is preceded by the "Ancient Egyptian prayer," "May you enter favoured, and leave beloved" (131), suggesting that love overcomes Orientalist and colonial or postcolonial divisions.

Other epigraphs refer to the Egyptian situation and often criticize imperial perspectives on it. The epigraph to the book as a whole, taken from Gamal 'Abd el-Nasser's 1962 *The Covenant*, is used to highlight the ignorance of British imperialists' views of Egypt. Nasser's text identifies the period of 1900 to 1914 as one "when the Colonialists and their collaborators thought everything was quiet," while in fact it "was one of the most fertile in Egypt's history" because "A great examination of the self took place, and a great recharging of energy in preparation for a new Renaissance" (np). Sometimes the epigraphs comment acerbically on the undesirable and unexpected consequences of imperialism for the colonizers. For example, in the third chapter's epigraph, Hilaire Belloc sardonically states, "Whatever happens, we have got/The Maxim gun, and they have not" (25), introducing the account of Edward Winterbourne's psychological collapse after the battle of Omdurman and suggesting that superior imperial weaponry cannot guarantee psychological stability. Much later, Lord Cromer's self-congratulatory observation, "The want of gratitude displayed by a nation to its alien benefactors is almost as old as history itself" (405), precedes the chapter where the Egyptian peasants of Denshwai suffer British colonial injustice, an incident that ultimately forces Cromer to resign. This epigraph from Cromer is surrounded by a series of others, which include comments by real-life nineteenth- and twentieth-century Egyptian writers and politicians—Arwa Salih, Mustafa Kamel, Boutros Ghali Basha, and Negib Azoury—that emphasize the historical Egyptian resistance to the British colonizers. One example can be found in the epigraph to Part 2, "An End of A Beginning," which reads, "One class of tale is typically Egyptian. These tales are distinguished by three characteristics: they are picaresque, feminist, and pantheist" (163). It is directly attributed to Ya'qub Artin, an Undersecretary in Cromer's colonial administration. However, Artin's statement is, in fact, quoted by George Young in the "Author's Introduction" to his 1927 book,

*Egypt*.<sup>13</sup> The attribution of this epigraph to Artin extracts his words from the Western text, thus liberating them from the context of imperialist travel writing and restoring agency to the colonized author.

Said's *After the Last Sky* and *Out of Place* also reveal divisions, but in this case there seems to be little possibility of connection. *After the Last Sky* is primarily concerned with the representation of the Palestinians as a group and with Said's meditations on fragmentation in narratives of Palestinian history and experience. Nicholas Tromans argues that the book's photographs are used as a strategy "to ... [disrupt] the predictable narratives carried across from fiction into journalism" and so avoid the creation of "a unifying story leading somewhere conclusive" (180). Indeed, Said argues in the "Introduction" that "the interplay of text and photos, the mixture of genres, modes, styles—do not tell a consecutive story, nor do they constitute a political essay" (6). He further notes that he has "quite consciously designed ... an alternative mode of expression to the one usually encountered in the media, in works of social science, in popular fiction," that is, "a personal rendering of the Palestinians as a dispersed national community" (6). In the final phrase, the oxymoron captures the contradiction between the recognition of separateness ("dispersed") and the need or desire for unity ("national community").

Said seems to vary between three attitudes regarding the divisions in Palestinian narratives: he recognizes that they are inevitable given the Palestinians' dispersed situation; he endorses them as an appropriate means of representing dispersal and dispossession; but paradoxically, he also expresses a sense of unease with them as placing the Palestinians at a disadvantage vis-à-vis Zionist or American narratives about the Middle East. At the beginning of the book, there are repeated assertions regarding the inevitability of divisions in Palestinian narratives because of the dispersed nature of the Palestinian people. Said says, "no clear and simple narrative is adequate to the complexity of our experience" (5), and he adds that the Palestinian story is one that "cannot be told smoothly" (30) because of the

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<sup>13</sup> Young's *Egypt* also provides the epigraph to Chapter Nine and compares the "story of Turkish, Albanian and British rule in Egypt" to the story "of a public man with a clever wife" (85).

“dispossession [and] dispersion” of its people. The “shards of Palestinian life” (46), “the scattered truth of our lives” (138), the Palestinians’ “fragmented dignity” (145), and the fact that they are “migrants” or “hybrids” (164), Said argues, means that “essentially unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary forms of expression should be used to represent us” (6). He also describes much Palestinian writing as characteristically composed of “broken narratives, [or] fragmentary compositions” (38), claiming that Palestinian writers experience difficulty in finding an appropriate narrative form. “Since our history is forbidden, narratives are rare; the story of origins, of home, of nation, is underground” (20), he says, anticipating his later self-description in *Out of Place* as someone divided into two, whose more significant self was hidden, inaccessible, or “underground” (284). Said’s description of many Palestinian narratives as fragments is paralleled by Soueif, who suggests that these narratives reflect their authors’ sense of urgency. Quoting the Palestinian writer, Liana Badr, on Israeli control over many aspects of Palestinians’ lives, she says in *Mezzaterra*, “Perhaps that’s why so many [Palestinian writers] are turning to the essay, or to what they call ‘fragments’: literary responses to events that, as writers, they need to speak of immediately without waiting for the desired transfiguration into fiction or poetry” (325).

But alongside Said’s apparent acceptance of fragmentary narratives in *After the Last Sky*, there is a series of complaints on his part at the absence of any “major history of Arab Palestine and its people” (106 and see 165), and more specifically of the lack of “a coherent account of how [Palestinian peasant culture] has been shaken, uprooted in the transition to a more urban-based economy” (94). Said deplores the Palestinians’ “passive, scattered incoherence” as opposed to the Zionists’ “urge to record and systematize” (96), and he seems to mourn the fact that “the local attentions of Palestinians—to their work, families, teachers, and friends—are, in fact, so many potential breaks in the seamless text, the unendingly unbroken narrative of U.S./Israeli power” (144); that is, the Palestinians’ focus on personal and local matters cannot challenge U.S./Israeli hegemony. At other moments, however, Said admits that the problem may not be general but, rather, personal. He admits, “Perhaps I am only describing *my* inability to order things coherently, sequentially, logically,”

because “I write at a distance. I haven’t seen the ravages. If I had, possibly there would be no difficulty in finding a simple and direct narrative to tell the tale of our history” (130). Shortly after this statement, however, he rejects any account that interprets all the evidence as one “sequential tale of misfortune,” “the plot of a logically unfolding conspiracy against us,” as all resulting from “one original trauma” as a “paranoid construction” (130), thus finally endorsing fragmentary accounts over coherent stories—“Fragments over wholes,” as he says later (150). Needless to say, such contradictions underline the divisions in both the writer and the text.

In *Out of Place*, Said often focuses on his own fractured subjectivity, which takes several forms: first, the division into “Edward,” and “a quite different but dormant inner self” (19 and see 87, 169, 217, 236); secondly, the gap between Said as narrator and his younger “experiencing” self; and thirdly the gap between Said’s younger self and his experience as a young man in his twenties or thirties.

The first split lies between the “Edward” who is “a creation of his parents,” and who, he argues, had to be created because “his parents were themselves self-creations: two Palestinians with dramatically different backgrounds and temperaments living in colonial Cairo as members of a Christian minority within a large pond of minorities, with only each other for support” (19). There are many references to his own self-division. At school in America, says Said, “The split between ‘Edward’ (or, as I was soon to become, ‘Said’), my public, outer self, and the loose, irresponsible fantasy-ridden churning metamorphoses of my private, inner life was very marked” (137). This private self is also described as being “beneath the surface” (230) or “underground” (284). Towards the end of his time at Princeton, Said describes his divided self as “unaccomplished, floundering, split in different parts (Arab, musician, young intellectual, solitary eccentric, dutiful student, political misfit)” (281). As a retrospective narrator, however, Said declares that he prefers these divisions “to the idea of a solid self,” because they, “at their best ... require no reconciling, no harmonizing ... they are always in motion, in time, in place, in the form of all kinds of strange combinations moving about, not necessarily forwards, sometimes against each other, contrapuntally, yet without one central theme” (295). The word “contrapuntally” links Said’s description of the self to the critical practice he had laid out in

*Culture and Imperialism* and to Soueif's writing in *The Map of Love*, suggesting the close connection between personal experience, autobiography, and critical/political writing in both writers' works.

Like his self-division into the social façade of "Edward" and his inner self, the split between Said as retrospective narrator and his earlier selves pervades the text. There are frequent oppositions between "then" and "now" (44, 57, 65). In describing his ignorance of the origin of his mother's excellent English, for example, he says, that he "hadn't any idea *then*" (5, my emphasis), where it came from. More significantly, while describing a journey by car from Cairo to Jerusalem in 1942, he says, "*at age six and a half*" "[t]he political, to say nothing of the military, meaning of our situation were beyond me" (26, my emphasis; for other examples see 44, 57, 65, 198). At other moments, he records his ignorance, saying, "I had no idea" (111) or, "I had very little idea" (113–14) about the significance of a friend's Jewishness, for example, or about the real identity of a family friend. Finally, there are moments when Said as retrospective narrator recalls an earlier self's realizations about an even younger self. For example, he does not realize "until twenty years after his [father's] death" that he and his father were the same age when they first went to the US (8); again, it was not until he "was in [his] early thirties" that he became aware that his father's mantra of "Never give up" could be seen as egotism (9).

## Conclusion

Soueif's *The Map of Love* and Said's *After the Last Sky* and *Out of Place* re-examine the question posed in *Orientalism*: Is there "any way of avoiding the hostility expressed by the division, say, of men into 'us' (Westerners) and 'they (Orientals)'"? (45). Soueif's novel's depiction of the bitterly divisive imperial policies of Cromer in Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and of the precarious and oppressive political situation in Egypt at the end of the twentieth, registers the extreme difficulty of overcoming such hostilities and divisions. The romances between Anna and Sharif, and Isabel and Omar, offer hope of East/West understanding. When Sharif is assassinated, however, Anna and her daughter return to England and at the end of the novel, the reader does not know whether Omar is still alive, and his death would obviously mean the end of the relationship between

him and Isabel. Both of these endings suggest the fragility of East/West connections. *After the Last Sky* sees no end to the divisions among Palestinians, in part because of Israeli politics and the dispersal of the Palestinians; moreover, Said's attempt to create an alternative, non-Orientalist view of the Palestinian people falters at times because of his distance from them. *Out of Place* documents Said's own location in between Eastern and Western cultures and sometimes relates his experiences to those of the Palestinians; however, it offers no prospect of reconciliation between East and West.

Despite the "bleak picture" of Western/Arab relations in 2004, Soueif says in the *Mezzaterra*, "Hope lies in a unity of conscience between the people of the world for whom this phrase itself carries any meaning" (21), her phrasing repeating Sharif al-Baroudi's words in *The Map of Love*. Writing about colonial Egypt, he says: "Our only hope now – and it is a small one – lies in a unity of conscience between the people of the world for whom this phrase itself would carry any meaning" (484). Indeed, in *Mezzaterra*, this hope is embodied in the title itself, which Soueif explains as meaning "a spacious meeting point, a common ground with avenues into the rich hinterlands of many traditions" (6), and which she identifies as having existed in Egypt in the 1960s. "A version of this common ground," she declares, "is where we all, finally, must live if we are to live at all" (9). Somewhat differently, in *Out of Place*, Said states that he prefers "intellectual belief" to "passionate loyalty to tribe, sect, [or] country" (280), although he seems to recognize that this will be a solitary position. Soueif and Said's works testify to the small hope of the "unity of conscience" among public intellectuals and other inhabitants of the "mezzaterra."

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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