

RIGHTING/REWRITING ARAB HISTORY IN ARAB AMERICAN NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT: *Arab nation is one of the most ancient nations in the world. Their history goes back to The Bronze Age (3200–1300 BC). However, such a history is totally distorted as it was written according to the whims of the colonizers. Arab history has been massively transformed; their culture deprecated and entirely disparaged; their wealth plundered. However, some Arab and Arab-American writers have started a mission to rewrite the deformed history of Arabs. One of these writers is Samia Serageldin, whose novel The Naqib's Daughter is a rewriting of the French invasion of Egypt in 1798. The present article argues that Egyptian history has been defaced by the colonial powers and that Serageldin has succeeded in bringing to light the false claims of the colonists. The article maintains that the novel is a counter-discursive postcolonial novel, in which Serageldin attempts to right and rewrite the history of Egypt from the point of view of Egyptians themselves. The article aims also at analyzing The Naqib's Daughter in terms of the contemporary political developments in the Arab world and the role played by world superpowers in shaping and reshaping the contemporary history.*

KEY WORDS: history, colonialism, Egypt, French invasion, rewriting

INTRODUCTION

Arab nation is one of the most ancient nations in the world. Their history goes back to The Bronze Age (3200–1300 BC). Such a long history has been a subject-matter for many Western writers. Every year thousands of books are published on Arabs and their history in various languages. However, these writings are totally defaced and such histories are distorted and written according to the whims of the colonizers. Arab history has been massively transformed; their culture deprecated and entirely disparaged; their wealth plundered. For centuries, the Western writers have strived to destroy the image of the Arabs in their writing. And they succeeded. Today, for political and economic reasons, the image of Arabs in the west is worse than ever. Arabs are depicted as uncivilized, backward and camel riders. They are religious fanatics, extremists and terrorists, Da'ishis, members of ISIS and so on. A reading of the orientalist's writings about the Arabs and Middle East reveals a summa of the damage that those writings have done to the image of Arabs.

Now it is time for Arabs to write and rewrite their own history and emend all those distortions and right the falsifications. And it is time to expose the falsifications and biases in Western writings. They have to rectify their distorted image. The aim of their writings is to enlighten readers about and show the effects of the writings of the orientalist and to expose the hidden propaganda in these writings. Edward Said has done a great job in this aspect. In fiction Samia Serageldin seems to be one of the first Arabs writing in English to tackle such an issue. She has taken upon her the responsibility to rewrite the Egyptian history particularly the period that covers the French invasion of Egypt between 1798-1801.

Egypt: A History of Colonialism

It is a well-known fact that Africa is the cradle of humanity. The first hominids appeared in Africa over 4 million years ago. Studies show that humans passed through the Nile Valley as early as 1.8 million years ago. However, it was between 50,000 and 100,000 years ago that modern humans permanently settled in the Nile valley. These humans lived on hunting. Around 5000 BC, however, this began to change, and agriculture was introduced. These people developed a settled agricultural life and more unified society (Horning, 2018, pp. 12-13). This led the way to creation one of “the world’s first urban-based, hierarchical, and complex societies” (Tignor, 2010, p. 9). Some historians use the term pre-dynastic to describe the early history of Egypt before the rise of the nation-state. The Pre-dynastic period lasted from around 5000 BC to 3100 BC. According to Nicole Horning (2018), the first known nation-state was founded in the Nile valley in around 3000 BC. This nation-state coalesced with the political unification of Upper and Lower Egypt. The native Egyptian rule lasted until the sixth century BC when Egypt was invaded by Achaemenid Empire.

While the Egyptians have been able to create one of the greatest empires and civilizations of the world, the fact remains that they were under foreign rule for thousands of years. Because of its unchallenged fertile and arable land as well as its geographical and strategic importance, the land of Egypt has attracted numerous outsiders, always as invaders. It has been a fascination that impelled many countries to invade it. Achaemenid, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Ottomans, French, and British have ruled over the country. The year 525 BC marks the end of the native Egyptians’ rule over their own land. What follows is a long history of colonialism that lasted till the 20th century. In other words, the sixth century BC marks the beginning of a long non-native rule of Egypt. In 525 BC, Egypt was conquered by Achaemenid Empire. After conquering the Middle East, Cambyses undertook the conquest of Egypt, which was the only independent state in the Middle East. The Egyptian army was defeated in a decisive battle at Pelusium. The Achaemenid rule over Egypt came to an end in 332 BC when Alexander the Great, conquered the country.

Alexander invaded Egypt in 332 BC. He was considered as a liberator. During his short stay in Egypt, he founded Alexandria which became the capital of the Ptolemaic Kingdom. Alexander died in 323 BC and his sudden death marked the end of his rule over Egypt. By 306 BC Ptolemy, Alexander’s childhood friend announce himself king of Egypt and established the Ptolemaic dynasty which ruled Egypt for 300 years. It ended with the death of Cleopatra VII.

In 30 BC the land of Egypt became the property of the Roman Empire. Egypt became “the Empire’s breadbasket” supplying the Romans with various kinds of grains. In addition to grain, Egypt supplied the Empire with many other things such as flax, glass, papyrus, and other finished goods. It was during the Roman rule that Christianity was introduced to Egypt. In 330 AD, Constantinople became the new capital of the Roman Empire and adopted a new name The Byzantine Empire. Egypt remained part of the Byzantine Empire until it came under Arab control in the 7th century.

One of the most important events in the history of Egypt was the conquest of Arabs in 640. Amr ibn al-As, an Arab general led the Muslim army and defeated the Byzantines at Heliopolis near today’s Cairo. Within two years, the Arabs conquered most of the Egyptian land and brought Islam to the country. Muslim remained in control of Egypt for six centuries.

Then in 1517, Egypt was conquered by the Ottoman Turks and became a province of the Ottoman Empire. Once again, the rulers spoke a different language from the ruled, whose language has become mostly Arabic. However, the rulers still Sunni Muslims like most Egyptians. Though the language was different, both the Egyptians and Turks shared a number of things such as religion and common values. Some historians consider the Ottoman period as the darkest age in Egypt's history. In the second half of the 18th century, Egypt suffered a number of setbacks such as natural disasters, Mamluke revolts, sectarian strife, and Bedouin raids. Many farmers and peasants left their villages and turned to a nomadic lifestyle due to the heavy taxes. Food grew scarce, and some people due to starvation ate dogs, cats, and dead animals and reportedly even their own children (al-Sayyid Marsot, 1984, p. 15). The Ottoman rule lasted until 1798 when France invaded Egypt under the leadership of Napoleon.

The French young general, Napoleon Bonaparte as a leader of the French campaign to Egypt landed near Alexandria on July 1, 1798. The Mamluke knights with their swords and on horseback and foot soldiers bearing scythes and swords could not stop the well-armed French army. After 20 days, the French entered Cairo. When Napoleon invaded Egypt, the Egyptians had no means to resist him. However, the British and the Ottomans signed a defensive alliance treaty and sent an expedition to drive the French out. In August 1799, Napoleon sailed back to France and became the head of the country. The leadership of the Egyptian expedition was turned over to General Jean-Baptiste Kléber and after him General Jacques Abdallah Menou. Due to plagues and diseases, the French troops suffered too much. In March 1801, a joint Anglo-Ottoman force defeated the French. In 1802, Britain and the Ottoman Empire signed separate peace treaties with France.

The last colonial power to colonize Egypt was Great Britain. Britain wanted to guard its routes to India. In June 1882 riots broke out in Alexandria and the commander of the British fleet fired on the city. The British ships bombarded the Egyptian fortifications on the shores of Alexandria. The British fleet immediately entered the Suez Canal. On September 13, 1882, the British forces met the Egyptian army at Tel-el-Kebir and won decisively. They occupied Cairo and other major cities. British rule lasted from 1882 to 1952 when the Egyptian revolution took place and the British were expelled.

What this brief sketch of the history of Egypt shows is that the country has suffered too much under foreign rule. Throughout history, "Egypt's power, prosperity, cohesion, and intellectual glory have declined and revived many times" (Goldschmidt Jr, 2008, p. 60). Its people have long lived in misery and have been subject to vicious treatment at the hands of foreign rulers. However, being subjected to the foreign rule "has nothing to do with their qualities as a people. Nor does it detract from the greatness and important legacy of the civilization their ancestors had created long before the Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans or Turks ruled" (Horning, 2018, p. 10). According to Nicole Horning (2018), "research has shown a culture that was full of proud, resourceful, hardworking, and accomplished people who created the world's powerful first nation-state" (p. 10). Egyptian people and culture stand today as one of the greatest civilizations the world has known. This greatness has been acknowledged even by the colonial powers themselves. "We know the civilization of Egypt," says Balfour, "better than we know the civilization of any other country. We know it further back; we know it more intimately; we know more about it. It goes far beyond the petty span of the history of our race, which is lost in the prehistoric period at a time when the Egyptian civilisation had already passed its prime" (quoted in Said, 1978, p. 32).

The most prominent quality of Egyptian civilization is its perpetual character. It has been enduring for thousands of years. “Egypt,” writes Lionel Casson (1969), “was one of the earliest of the ancient lands to weave the threads of civilization into a truly impressive culture. More to the point, it sustained its achievements unabated for more than two and a half millennia—a span of accomplishment with few equals in the saga of humanity” (p. 11). Casson adds:

Egypt was ancient even to the ancients. It was a great nation a thousand years before the Minoans of Crete built their palace at Knossos, about 900 years before the Israelites followed Moses out of bondage. It flourished when tribesmen still dwelt in huts above the Tiber. It was viewed by Greeks and Romans of 2,000 years ago in somewhat the same way as the ruins of Greece and Rome are viewed by modern man. (p.11). In the fifth century B.C., Herodotus, the great Greek historian made a tour of ancient Egypt and wrote of “wonders more in number than those of any other land and works it has to show beyond expression great” (Gardiner, 1964, p. 3). Herodotus is echoed by Lionel Casson (1969) as he writes: “Antiquity, vast and richly textured, cloaks the land of Egypt” (p. 11).

Why this Period

The question here is: if Egypt has been subject to such a long history of colonialism, why does Serageldin choose this period in particular to write about it? In other words, what is the significance of writing a novel about the French invasion of Egypt? The answer lies in the fact that throughout the history of Egyptians and Arabs, the political, economic and cultural encounters with the west have taken many shapes and forms. The historical roots of such encounters in the modern period are generally understood to go back to the French invasion of Egypt in 1798, when Egypt found itself at the cross-currents of European interests and competitions. Pointing out the significant impact of the French invasion on the Arab world, Serageldin writes:

The French invasion of Egypt over two hundred years ago remains the prototypical clash of civilizations between the West and the Islamic Middle East in modern times. It laid the template for future such conflicts, from the fatal dynamics of an occupation to the explosive aftermath of an evacuation. The pattern continues to repeat itself in today’s headlines, as American troops evacuate from Iraq. It bears a closer look. (Serageldin, personal communication, January 12, 2019).

For Serageldin all western colonial endeavors in the Middle East are the same, just a repetition of the first episode acted by Napoleon. Besides, Arab nationalists, intellectuals and historians have seen the French occupation as the first intrusion of western imperialism in the Arab world. Edward Said (1978) in his seminal work *Orientalism* argues that the French occupation of Egypt “inaugurated a distinctively *modern* constellation of power, knowledge and geography: that it was ‘an enabling experience for modern Orientalism’” (p. 122). Elsewhere Said (1978) writes that Napoleonic invasion of Egypt.

was in many ways the very model of a truly scientific appropriation of one culture by another, apparently stronger one. For with Napoleon’s occupation of Egypt processes were set in motion between East and West that still dominate our contemporary cultural and political perspectives. And the Napoleonic expedition...provided a scene or setting for Orientalism, since Egypt and subsequently the other Islamic lands were viewed as the live province, the laboratory, the theater of effective Western knowledge about the Orient. (pp. 42-3)

Said adds that Napoleon's "plans for Egypt...became the first in a long series of European encounters with the Orient in which the Orientalist's special expertise was put directly to functional colonial use; for at the crucial instant when an Orientalist had to decide whether his loyalties and sympathies lay with the Orient or with the conquering West, he always chose the latter, from Napoleon's time on" (Said, 1978, p. 80). Moreover, he opines that after Napoleon's expedition, "Europe came to know the Orient more scientifically, to live in it with greater authority and discipline than ever before" (Said, 1978, p. 22). Said also points out to Napoleon's expedition to Egypt as a significant turning point in the history of both colonialism and orientalism.

No doubt, the invasion has marked a turning point in the history of the Arab world. Disasters have followed one another till today. Though most of the formerly colonized areas are free nowadays, parts of the Arab world such as Palestine are still under western hold. Moreover, the French invasion marks the beginning of a new relation between France and Arab world:

Coming in the wake of the French Revolution, it also marked the beginning of a newly asymmetrical relationship between post-Enlightenment, revolutionary, and 'modern' France and an Arab-Muslim world imagined by French writers, travelers, soldiers, and politicians as backward, irrational, and fanatically superstitious. (French Colonialism, Middle East, 2007, para. 3)

Further, the significance of the expedition lies in its huge size and being the first invasion in modern age: "The invasion of Egypt by Napoleon in the summer of 1798 was the first great seaborne invasion of the modern era. At the time, it may well have been the largest ever launched in the Western world" (Strathern, 2009, p. 1).

Napoleon's expedition which was born, in part at least, out of a textual imagination since his adolescence when he started reading Volney and others, refigures the "relationship between knowledge and power" (Abu El-Haj, 2013, p. 64) In other words, the invasion shows that conquest and the acquisition of scientific knowledge are both essential. Further, Napoleon's attaché included some of the brightest minds in France known as savants. It is the first time in history that the alliance of war with scientific knowledge happens. Hence the significance of Serageldin's novel emerges from the significance of the French invasion itself.

False Claims, Malicious Intentions

In *The Naqib's Daughter* Serageldin exposes the true cause behind Napoleon's expedition to Egypt. Though his real aim is to "deal the English a blow to the heart," (Serageldin, p. 1), he falsely claims that his motive is to "bring the light of liberty to an ancient civilization buried in the sands of ignorance and Oriental despotism" (Serageldin, p. 2). He claims that he had come to free the Egyptians from the oppressors (the Mamlukes). Such a false claim has been popularized by French historians such as Dominique Arago who characterizes the aim of the expedition as "To offer a succoring hand to an unhappy people, to free them from the brutalizing yoke under which they have groaned for centuries, and finally to endow them without delay with all the benefits of European civilization" (cited in Strathern, 2009, p. 4). The Egyptians have to be freed from tyranny and it was the duty of the French to free them.

Actually, the French expedition in Egypt is one of the most unique expeditions in the annuals of history. In addition to the military personnel, Napoleon's Army of the Orient is accompanied by a cadre of civilian experts—engineers, surveyors, translators, and scientists. No enterprise, writes Serageldin, "has been

undertaken in such a lofty spirit, or a campaign so carefully prepared, or a dream cherished for so long” (Serageldin, p. 2). Napoleon has read every treatise he could lay his hands on (particularly Volney’s books) about Egypt’s religion, history, philosophy and science. Napoleon has read these books because as Edward Said says, “it was clear to Napoleon” that these texts “were effective texts to be used by any European wishing to win in the Orient” (Said, 1978, p. 81). Such texts “constituted a handbook for attenuating the human shock a European might feel as he directly experienced the Orient: Read the books, seems to have been Volney’s thesis, and far from being disoriented by the Orient, you will compel it to you” (ibid).

Indeed, the inclusion of the savants in the expedition suggests a wish to bring enlightenment but Napoleon’s aim of such inclusion is totally different. He has brought them only to communicate, to administer, to adjudicate, to tax and to identify cultural treasures to be sent to France. Moreover, the inclusion of the savants in this enterprise adds a moral cover for the invasion: “Bringing scientists along gave credence to the ideal of this *mission civilisatrice*. Claiming to bring French-style culture and democracy to Arabs ruled by non-Arab tyrants offered moral cover for the invasion” (Burleigh, 2007, p. viii). Actually, the sheer size of the expeditionary force and the size of the war fleet sent to accompany it, all suggest that the French intent is to conquer and occupy the country and loot its treasures. This is overtly stated in the letter that Keleber wrote to Dugua (two Generals in Napoleon’s Army) in which he says, “my dear General, we must squeeze Egypt as a lemonade seller squeezes a lemon, and when we have extracted the last drop, both in monies and in kind, we will have barely enough for our needs under the circumstances” (Serageldin, p. 131). Serageldin, revealing the hypocrisy of the French, quotes Napoleon in her epigraph to the prologue: “Soldiers! You are about to undertake a conquest of incalculable consequences for civilization and commerce! You will deal the English a blow to the heart” (Serageldin, p. 1). The two statements made by the two leaders of the enterprise show the real aim behind the expedition: robbing the Egyptians and securing the interests of France in the region. The second one in particular shows, as mentioned above, how colonialism in the Arab world is the outcome of competition between the European powers.

Napoleon was a man intoxicated by ambition. His ambition was the creation of an oriental empire. “We must set off for the Orient; that is where all the greatest glory is to be achieved,” Napoleon says (Strathern, 2009, p. 3). Here Napoleon spoke about the orient in general and not only Egypt. He adds that “I saw the way to achieve all my dream” (Johnston, 2016, p. 13). He harbored the dreams of following in the footsteps of Alexander the Great. As Edward Said (1978) says: Napoleon’s “military successes that had culminated in the Treaty of Campo Formic left him no other place to turn for additional glory than the East” (p. 80). Moreover, since his adolescence, Napoleon had been haunted by the Orient. This is evident, Said (1978) argues, from all of his writing and conversation that he was steeped...in the memories and glories that were attached to Alexander’s Orient generally and to Egypt in particular. Thus the idea of reconquering Egypt as a new Alexander proposed itself to him, allied with the additional benefit of acquiring a new Islamic colony at England’s expense. (ibid).

It is clear that by invading Egypt, the French “sought colonial power and commerce, at the dawn of the modern global economy” (Burleigh, p. vi). They thought that conquering Egypt would be the first step toward establishing a Grand French Empire that will encompass lands from Africa and Asia (ibid). So, the claim to free the Egyptians from the Mamlukes and civilize them has been a cloak or veneer under which the French hid their vicious intension of plundering and pillaging the Egyptian peasants.

The Tartuffe

Samia Serageldin sarcastically attacks Napoleon's religious hypocrisy in her novel. Actually, the most interesting thing about Napoleon is his readiness to use any means that will help him achieve his goal. One of these means is his fake claim that he is a Muslim. This religious hypocrite reminds one of *Tartuffe* which is the title of a play by Molière and the name of the principal character. Napoleon never embraces Islam and would never do so but he understands the value of Islam for Muslims and tries to get some acceptance among the conquered Egyptians. He also knows that Egyptians will never accept to be ruled by non-Muslims. Hence, he starts learning Koran and Islam teachings. Describing Napoleon's preoccupation with learning Koran, Strathern (2009) writes:

As the invasion fleet sailed east across the Mediterranean, Napoleon would lie in bed reading...His principal reading was from Koran. Like Alexander the Great before him, he intended to absorb the religion of the people over whom he would rule. He insisted that, if necessary, he himself was willing to become a Muslim—an intension that, at least initially, he would show every sign of wishing to fulfill. However, it should also be noted that in Napoleon's shipboard library, Koran was shelved under 'politics'. (p. 5) From the moment Napoleon's army appears on the Egyptian horizon, efforts are made to convince the Egyptians that the French are also 'true Muslims'. He does his best to convince Egyptians that he is fighting for the sake of Islam. "Napoleon tried," writes Edward Said (1978), "everywhere to prove that he was fighting *for* Islam; everything he said was translated into Koranic Arabic, just as the French army was urged by its command always to remember the Islamic sensibility" (p. 82). He cautions his troops to respect Islam, Koran, Muhammad, and Muslim customs and warns them to show respect for women as Muslims treat their women differently and will never tolerate with anyone who harasses their women. Napoleon knows that to keep the fury of the Arabs inert, he has to avoid two things religion and women. To mollify and conciliate the Egyptians, Napoleon, after conquering Cairo, distributes a proclamation in which he writes:

Egyptians, they will tell you that I come to destroy your religion; it is a lie, do not believe it. Answer that I have come to restitute your rights, punish the usurpers; that I respect, more than the Mamlukes, God, his prophet Muhammad and the glorious Koran...Tell the people that we are true Muslims. (Serageldin, p. 20).

Furthermore, in order to leave the impression of being a "true Muslim," he summons all the senior *ulema* (Islamic religious scholars) in Cairo to form a *diwan* (council) of clerics. He would meet with them regularly and discuss the fine points of the Koran and profess his greatest admiration for Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. In fact, Napoleon's formation of the *diwan* does not stem from his love of Islam but from his realization of the power that the *ulema* enjoy in Islamic world. Therefore, his intension is to use the *ulema* to help him subdue the natives. In return, these ulemas were given full military honors by Napoleon, and allowed to be flattered by his admiration for Islam and Mohammed and his veneration for Koran. Moreover, after conquering Cairo, he paraded with his generals through the city dressing in the same style as the Mullah. What is amazing is that this worked, and soon the Egyptians seemed to have lost its distrust of the occupiers.

Moreover, he orders his men to show tolerance for Egyptians' religions, faiths, mosques, customs and women and never contradict them. To the Egyptian populace at large, he has prepared two arguments. The first asserts that the French purpose is to cleanse Egypt of a regime that has brought only oppression,

tyranny, exploitation, and misrule to the Egyptian people. The second argument is that the French are not hostile to Islam.

In fact, Napoleon seizes each and every opportunity to show the Egyptians that he is a Muslim. For example, during the Nile festival, he seizes the opportunity to win the hearts and minds of Cairenes by pouring money into the celebration. Then his proclamation starts: “Inhabitants of Egypt! The French adore the Supreme Being, and honor the Prophet and his holy Koran! The French are true Muslims. Not long since, they marched to Rome and overthrew the Pope, who excited the Christians against the professors of Islamism” (Burleigh, 2007 p. 65). Another example is when he is informed that the Mawlid al-Nabi (birthday of the Prophet) is occurring a few days later, he gives orders that it be celebrated, though the Cairenes are not in mood to celebrate. Napoleon, acknowledging this fact, says: “the citizens of Cairo are not celebrating it this year, in silent protest at our presence” (Serageldin, p. 48). During the festival, he takes part in prayers retaining a respectful mien during Koranic recitations. His purpose is not a glorification for a Muslim occasion as much as to achieve further aims.

In reality Napoleon does not embrace Islam. All he wants is to lull and mollify the Muslims. He uses Islam as a means to achieve his goals. His hypocrisy is clear when he declares that I saw the way to achieve all my dream...I would found a religion. I saw myself marching on the way to Asia, mounted on elephant, a turban on my head, and in my hand a new Koran that I would have composed to suit my needs. In my enterprises I would have combined the experiences of the two worlds, exploiting the realm of all history for my own profit. (Strathern, 2009, p. 6) .

His Koran is tailor-made to suit his needs only. He was proud of his fraudulence and religious dupery, and never regrets such acts: “This was quackery, but it was quackery of the highest order...Change of religion for private interest is inexcusable. But it may be pardoned in consideration of immense political results” (Burleigh, 2007, p. 79). To misuse the religion of the conquered and use it for your needs is deemed politically effective by Napoleon. Speaking about Napoleon’s hypocrisy, de Bourrienne says: Everything he said about Muhammad, Islamism, and the Koran to the leading men of Egypt, he laughed at himself. But he enjoyed having his sayings repeated, and that those sayings related to his [claimed] religious convictions be translated into beautiful Arabic prose, through which he aimed to gain the sympathy of the inhabitants. (cited in Lahoud, 2009, p. 165).

Serageldin attempts to expose this religious and immoral hypocrisy. She tries to bring to light the duplicity of European colonizers. For personal gains, they are ready to change their religion, their tradition and even their identity.

The Subaltern Speak

As a postcolonial text, Serageldin’s novel does not ignore the feelings of Egyptians during those critical moments in the history of Egypt and does not overlook the role played by Egyptians in fighting the colonialists. Conquering the Mamlukes, Napoleon becomes the master of Egypt and, being the new leader of Egypt, he starts implementing the goals of his expedition. First, he confiscates the property of Mamluke amirs—the former rulers of the country. Houses, gardens, farms, lands and goods now belong to the French State. The palaces are divided among the French Generals along with whatever is inside—women, money, gold etc. Second, he starts to levy a heavy taxation on almost everything. The Egyptians find

themselves forced to pay heavy taxes to the French administration. Taxes are applied on every aspect of commerce and heavy fines are levied for every sign of resistance to the French regime. Of course, it is the peasant majority who ultimately would bear the cost of French colonization. Even Lady Nafisa's—the wife of Murad Bey, a Mamluke leader—pleas to exclude the *sabils*—mosques, almshouses and orphanages, as these are intended for the poor people who may get angry at such an action—from taxes are rejected. Seeing the exploitation in which the French have indulged, she wonders: “Did the French even realize how unpopular the measures they were taking would make them, imposing taxes on the very charities the poor relied on for shelter and water, schooling and hospice care? They should not be surprised if there were an uprising of the people” (Serageldin, p. 73). Nafisa's prophecy soon comes true. The taxes imposed on the charities raise people's anger and awaken them into a violent revolt. Blind, sick and poor people gather forming the first insurrection.

The insurrection gives Napoleon a justification to use force against the poor Egyptians. It also discloses his real, ugly face. He soon starts his campaign to instill fear among the indigenous people to get them obey his orders. He distributes posters saying that anyone who would show enmity towards me or quarrels with me acts with a deluded mind and preserve thinking; he shall find no saviour from me in this world nor from the hands of God in the next. The sensible person knows that our acts were ordained by God. He has decreed in eternity that I come from the West to Egypt to destroy its tyrants and to carry out the order I was charged with...The time and day will come when it will be evident to you that all my acts and rulings were by irrevocable divine decree. (Serageldin, pp. 93-4).

Reading this proclamation, it is easy for everyone to notice the colonial belief of fulfilling the mission of God on earth. By associating himself with God, Napoleon becomes God's agent on earth; indeed, it goes further, “seeming to appropriate the divine attributes of Mercy and Omniscience” (Serageldin, p. 94). Napoleon becomes God's deputy on earth and any act that irritates him will cause God's anger. Further, he is claiming supernatural powers that determine the fates of others not only in this life but also in the next. He even claims that he knows what is in people's hearts: “I could demand an accounting of every one of you concerning the most secret feelings in his heart; for I know all, even what you have never told anyone” (Cole, 2007, pp. 216-217).

The first insurrection enables the French to realize that their propaganda about coming to Egypt as “friends of Islam” and “liberators from Mamluke tyranny” has been an illusion, and that vigilance and repression would be necessary to maintain control of the cities. It has also provided them with a pretext to use violence. To enhance urban security, the French start disarming the population and dismantling the old wooden gates that stood at the entry to most urban quarters and neighborhoods to allow their troops move freely. They also start attacking the city of Cairo. The heavy artillery fires down at the city Cairo until entire quarters are destroyed. Houses, mosques, shops, everything is razed to the ground. They do not differentiate between the fighters and the civilians. When asked not target the civilians, Menou, one of the French Generals, says “Guns and bombs have no mind to distinguish between evildoer and good man (Serageldin, p. 156). Their immediate target is the Azhar Mosque because the demonstration has started from there. Seeing the atrocities of the French, Egyptians realize that “Nothing will come of this but ill-feeling” (Serageldin, p. 44). Acts of violence and counter-violence occur. Seeing the dread losses on the two sides, Nicolas Conte realizes that “the severity of the repression had bred hatred and dread in equal measure, and that it would not be long before the balance tipped in the favour of the former” (Serageldin, pp. 87-88). Such an acknowledgement demonstrates that violence used by the colonized is always reactive

and that resistance always arises out of unbearable atrocities unleashed by the hegemonic powers. Immediately when the illusion of peaceful coexistence dissolves, both sides resort to force.

Serageldin's novel shows how the moment violence starts, it becomes impossible to stop it. When informed about the savagery of the French, the Turkish Sultan declares war on the French and emphasizes it the duty of every Muslim to resist what he calls the "sudden unjust attack" of the French on Egypt (Serageldin, p. 66). In reaction to the Turkish Sultan's declaration of war, Napoleon orders his men to have at least five or six heads cut off in the street of Cairo every day. "So far we have dealt with them gently to counteract the terrifying reputation that preceded us. Today, on the contrary, we must take the proper tone with them to make these people obey; and for them, to obey is to fear," Napoleon declares (Serageldin, p. 67). Only the next day the cortege of the new police chief wound its way along the streets carrying cut heads on the ends of their pikes—the heads of the poor *fellahin*. Since then, whenever Bartholomew, the new chief of police, is sent out to patrol to catch spies and marauders, he rounds up anyone he can find and beheads them and brings the heads back to please his French masters.

Moreover, the Ottoman Sultan's call for jihad alarms Napoleon, who quickly reveals to his soldiers that they "couldn't maintain the fiction that we were in Egypt with the Grand Seigneur's blessing for much longer. But we must be prepared to deal with the population on a hostile footing from now on; sedition must be avoided by any means necessary" (Serageldin, p. 66). Thereafter his troops raze houses, bridges, *wikalas* (trade agencies) and mosques to build roads and fortification in their places. "Pounding resonated from dawn to dusk, and the dust barely settled overnight as the French threw up a ring of garrisons around Cairo" (Serageldin, p. 92). The French "trained their guns on the city as if they would obliterate it from the face of the earth" (Serageldin, p. 137). Consequently, "Cairo was one continuous scene of devastation, the bones of the city were laid bare, and even the bones of the dead in their coffins were exhumed when the city of the dead was razed" (Serageldin, p. 152). Even the trees are not safe for they are being cut down to make wagons and barricades. After six weeks of constant bombardment from the French forts, day and night, the houses are reduced to piles of rubble where the very streets are no longer distinguishable. However, Napoleon's atrocity does not subdue the Egyptians as he has hoped. Instead, the Egyptians lose all dread of the French. They walk the streets insulting, cursing and mocking the French troops. Schoolmasters along with their pupils march in bands around the city, reciting insolent rhymes against the French and their supporters, chanting: "Victory to the Sultan and death to the Fart Rumman" (Serageldin, p. 123). Cairo erupts in a general insurgency for the second time.

The second uprising coincides with the arrival of the Ottomans and the English. Napoleon's defeat in Syria, the plague that has consumed almost half of his troops, the Ottoman and English armies all have combined against the French. Napoleon is cognizant of the disaster waiting for him and, therefore, he secretly goes back to France leaving his men in Egypt. Though the French would remain in Egypt for another two years, they have lost their power and are only negotiating a safe evacuation. Their original plans are now in tatters. The Egyptians have not welcomed them as they presumed. Napoleon's immediate successor is General Kleber. His first priority has been to arrange for a French evacuation so he starts negotiation with Ottomans and the Mamlukes. But Kleber's assassination ends all these negotiations. Kleber is succeeded by General Jacques Menou. The new General is less interested in leaving Egypt and soon he attempts to make the French occupation permanent. So, battles start again between the Mamlukes, the Turkish and the English on one side and the French on the other. Finally, the French are defeated and forced to leave Egypt.

The novel shows that force and oppression do not silence the colonized. Instead, such intrusive violence binds them. In re-narrating the Egyptian resistance and struggle for freedom, the novel shows the Egyptians solidarity in the face the intruder. It shows how their love for the motherland binds them together and blurs the line between class differences. It becomes clear to Napoleon that his dream of subjugating the Egyptian will never come true.

Colonialism Then and Now

In an interview, Samia Serageldin says, “I originally started reading about the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt right after the Iraq war started, seeking the perspective that history lends to current events” (Serageldin, personal communication, January 12, 2019). She then elaborates bringing to light the ‘parallels’ that exist between the two occupations: “Then and now, the geopolitical, strategic and imperialist rationales for invasion are cloaked in idealist sentiment: to bring freedom from despotism and the lights of the Enlightenment, or Democracy, to the natives. There is also the expectation of being welcomed by the occupied people” (Serageldin, *ibid*). It becomes clear that *The Naqib’s Daughter* is an allegory for Bush’s Iraq War. Though it openly criticizes the French occupation of Egypt, the story is just as applicable to the 21st century American occupation of Iraq particularly when the latter seems to be a reflection or a replica of the former. The following corresponding claims will make the point comparable. Napoleon gives three justifications for invading Egypt: first, the Mamlukes are collaborating with an enemy of Republic, the British monarchy which is the sole enemy of France; second, the rulers of Egypt are damaging France’s own commerce by extorting taxes from its merchants; third, the Mamlukes rule tyrannically, having never been elected, and oppress their subjects whom Napoleon intends to liberate. The same trios of justifications has been pronounced by Bush. First, Saddam Hussein is colluding with al-Qaeda, America’s primary enemy, to humiliate America. Hence, the liberation of Iraq is a crucial advance in the campaign against terrorism which will remove one of the most reliable allies of al Qaeda, and cut off a source of terrorist funding. Furthermore, Bush claims that his troops will track Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction again implying that Iraq poses a threat to the interests and security of the U.S. Second, Saddam, Bush claims, is endangering the positive interests of the ‘Republic’ in the region and finally he lacks legitimacy because his rule is despotic. Bush’s promise is, then, to establish a government of, by, and for the Iraqi people. Napoleon, too, establishes a governing council in Cairo declaring it as the representative of the Egyptian people than the Mamlukes.

Moreover, both the French and the Americans have expected that the newly conquered would exhibit gratitude to their foreign occupiers for bringing them freedom and democracy. They believe that their victims would welcome them with open arms. Napoleon laments that the Mamlukes tyrannized over the unfortunate inhabitants of Egypt and therefore they would cherish the liberty he is bringing them. “Conte had no doubt that they would be welcomed by the Egyptians, to whom they would come as liberators rather than conquerors, bearing the incomparable gift of the Rights of Man,” writes Serageldin (Serageldin, p. 2). In the same way, Dick Cheney, the main actor behind invading Iraq, openly declares that “Iraqis would welcome Americans as their liberators” (Mawusi, 2010, p. 80). Actually, such expectations are the outcomes of their identical enthusiastic ignorance and ideological blindness.

Both the general and the president have thought that victory in their colonies would be achieved swiftly. Believing in their powers, they see the Arabs as an easy prey to be caught. Despite their advanced weapons, however, they are astonished to see the Arabs against them. The Egyptians with the support of the English and the Ottomans have been able to deal the French a very severe blow that forced them to

withdraw within three years. In Iraq, only a few months after the invasion, the sullen anger of the Iraqis manifests itself in the continuous attacks against American soldiers. This reveals one important fact about the two occupations: their pre-invasion views of Arabs are highly ill-informed. Instead of being welcomed, they are resisted by all means fair and foul. Such resistance has given both the French and the American a pretext to use force to tame the conquered. Napoleon razes entire areas to domesticate the Cairenes. In the same way, America bombs Iraq destroying everything from sewage to airports and has killed till now over one million civilians. This brings forth another similarity between the two misadventures: both began with supreme arrogance and ended in thorough fiascos.

Nevertheless, it was the rhetoric of freedom and democracy that appealed to the two leaders. Napoleon proclaims to the overwhelmed Egyptians that he has come to liberate them from the oppression of their rulers, and bring them Western ideals of freedom and democracy. He professes respect for the Islam and denies any intention of waging a holy war. Immediately upon reaching Cairo, Napoleon distributes a proclamation in which he claims to that he has “come to restitute your rights, punish the usurpers” (Serageldin, p. 20). Similarly, Bush’s administration says it invaded Iraq to bring democracy and freedom and help the Iraqis get rid of the tyrant Saddam Husain. In 2003, from the deck of a great ship called the *USS Abraham Lincoln*, similar to Napoleon’s *L’Orient*, George W. Bush declared, “Today, we have the greater power to free a nation by breaking a dangerous and aggressive regime. With new tactics and precision weapons, we can achieve military objectives without directing violence against civilians” (Bush, 2003, CNN). In the same year, he declared that the Americans have come only to liberate the Iraqis from a cruel and violent dictator. The overthrow of a tyrannical regime and the liberation of an oppressed people are constant refrains in the addresses of both the general and the president, who felt that the liberated owed them a debt of gratitude.

It is no wonder then to see Bush repeat the same rhetoric because such lame justifications have been trotted out over the last two centuries by a succession of European and American leaders whenever they want to go to attack. Actually, the resonances and repetitions in history never come as much of a surprise. That history repeats itself with only roles exchanged is a common phenomenon. Bush’s invasion of Iraq which is a repetition of old-styled colonialism in the Middle East launched by Napoleon in 1798 is just a case in point. One implication of these familiar rhetorical turns has all along been that democratic countries have a license to invade any country they please, assuming it has the misfortune to have an authoritarian regime overlooking the contradiction in their ideology for democracy to conduct a brutal military occupation against another country in the name of liberty is too contradictory and hypocritical to the concept of liberty itself. Yet, they are ready to launch aggressive wars in the name of democracy, despite the myth that democracies do not typically wage wars of aggression. Ironically, some absolutist regimes are remarkably peaceable though they are among the most authoritarian regimes in the world today. It is this hypocrisy of the west—to civilize and liberate while the ulterior motive is extending the military, strategic and economic power overseas—that invites Serageldin to write her novel.

Righting/ Rewriting History

In this section, I discuss the ways in which Serageldin has rewritten the historical accounts of Napoleon’s invasion to call attention to the making of history. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said explored the impact of mainstream culture on colonialism and imperialism. He explored the role of the novel in the colonial and imperial enterprise. Said argues eloquently that “stories are at the heart of what

explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world, they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history” (p. xii). This is the case with Samia Serageldin. Serageldin is a novelist of history because she cannot overlook the contexts which are also the co-texts of her novels. Serageldin looks for themes in Egyptian history. She has written two novels, both of them are historical. *The Cairo House* (2000) deals with Egypt’s recent history—Egypt during independence, the rule of Nasser, and Sadat. The second novel *The Naqib’s Daughter* (2008) deals with the French invasion of Egypt. Serageldin believes in the power of fiction in reclaiming one’s identity both personal and national. If fiction helps in re-creating accounts of past events, then it can also recreate identity. History, in Serageldin’s novel, is used as a quest for national identity. It is not just the identity of the author but the identity of the entire Egyptian nation.

In *The Naqib’s Daughter*, Serageldin uses fiction to challenge the history of Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt. Her novel is an attempt to salvage the Egyptian history that colonialism has taken off or manipulated. The novel critiques the fabricated colonial portrayal of the Egypt and Egyptians and at the same time creates a voice for the powerless Egyptians. This is an urgent, inevitable historic mission and Serageldin responds to this urgency and inevitability hoping to put the record straight. Napoleon claims that he has undertaken the whole enterprise just to civilize the Egyptians and free them. This implies that the Egyptians are “uncivilized” so that they must be civilize and “meek slaves” living a humiliated life under the Mamlukes rule and must be freed. The French look down on them and disdain them. Egyptians are seen as careless, dirty, submissive individuals who lack forethought and prudence. They are opposite to the French man who is rational, wise and reasonable, and has the right to intervene, like God, and to civilize the savage. *The Naqib’s Daughter* attempts to rebut such false claims. The novel seeks to correct the negative image of Egypt constructed by the French.

Serageldin is engaged in reversing or overthrowing the dominant colonial ideology advocated by the colonial discourse. She is deeply involved in writing to debunk the opinions, images, and ideologies put forward by European/French writers regarding Egyptian history, culture, society, language, etc. She is determined to carry forward her counter-discourse against French colonial discourse in order to prove that Egypt is one of oldest civilizations in the world and that Europeans are self-interested whose claims to free and help the Egyptians are just false claims to hide their real intentions. Her chief aim is to correct the misrepresentation of Egypt. This mission—to restore the damaged history—is very important not only to reveal the truth but also to restore the dignity and identity of Egyptians. This is the mission of all postcolonial writers.

Actually, Serageldin’s novel is a rewriting of the French texts written by the savants questioning the colonialist assumptions underpinning those writings. The novel also offers Serageldin an opportunity to newly interpret and reassess the French colonial texts. Approximately 160 savants (civilian scholars and scientists) accompanied Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt. These scientists wrote *The Description de l’Égypte* (*Description of Egypt*) which is a series of publications of 37 books, appeared between 1809 and 1829. The volumes claim to catalog all that is known of ancient and modern Egypt. Serageldin believes that such people had no right and are not authorized to write the other. She thought it her responsibility to speak on behalf of her own people. In this sense, the novel challenges Euro-centric history of Egypt and also rejects the ‘historical objectivity’ made by European/French masters. It is a rejection of the colonizer’s history altogether.

Moreover, Serageldin's engagement with history could be seen as a resistance power against the claims such as diasporic "unbelongingness" that is ascribed to diasporic writers. The notion of cosmopolitan sensibility is generated by experiences of liberalization, transnationalism and globalization. It is a kind of proving one's identity also. History is a powerful tool to carve out one's identity as One's identity is realized in tracing or constructing and establishing a history. It shows that though Arab diaspora writers are living far away from the mother land, they still identify themselves with their origin. They will never abandon their roots.

CONCLUSION

In her novel *The Naqib's Daughter*, Samia Serageldin has been able to bring to life the vanished world of French occupation of Egypt and in so doing, explores the complex and dangerous relationship between occupiers and occupied. The novel covers the three-year occupation of Egypt by the French, depicting the conflicts and tensions within the Egyptian society as well as Egyptians' attempts to free the motherland. It also exposes the atrocities committed by the French during those three bloodstained years.

The Naqib's Daughter shows that the colonizers, alligators of civilization, do not hesitate to use, whatever means: they may practice hypocrisy and change their identity to fit the colonized one and they may practice deception to show themselves as saviors to an Islamic Community as Egypt. They are experts in wearing masks that hide their ugly faces. The novel exposes those ugly faces of the colonizers. It is a call for Arab postcolonial writers to redress the balance by righting and rewriting their own history which is tarnished and transformed by the colonizers. Novels such as *The Naqib's Daughter* are clear signs that the "single story" of Arab history which was created by European colonialism is over. Regardless of the many obstacles, Arab writing in English have a significant role to play inside and outside the Arab world. The novels also shows all western colonial endeavors in the Middle East are the same, just a repetition of the first episode acted by Napoleon. Colonialism is all the same in ancient times and today. They may differ in the means but the goals are almost the same. Then and now colonial powers have never navigated the seas and oceans for the sake of the natives. Outwardly they may claim that they aim at liberating, civilizing, aiding—or whatever term they may use—the natives but inwardly they have sailed to fulfill their goals and interests.

We need to form and develop a corpus of counter-discursive writing which will help Arabs regain belief in their distorted identity and culture. We Arabs, more than any other nation, need to write back and expose the falsifications and fabrications that have been developed against us. There is an urgent need for us the Arabs to counter the false representation of our history, religion and culture in the west. Media especially social media, literature and history have all to unite and rewrite the Arabs. The second half of the story has to be written and none will do the job if we do not do it ourselves. The number of texts written in English that address the colonial enterprises of the west are so rare. We have a few texts written by Arab Americans but these texts are not enough. Arab writers in the Arab world have to address this critical issue and try to write in world languages so that their story hidden for long times will be known. We have to change these images and show the world the real, lovely and peace-loving image of Islam. Here the novel reflects an emerging consciousness in the Arab world. It is historical, cultural and political consciousness.

What is remarkable about *The Naqib's Daughter* is its adherence to historical events. It is nearly a straight history with actual people as the main characters and real events form the plot with imagined characters and events, if there is any, being included only when necessary to flesh out and explain history. As a result, it displays too little imagination and too thin creativity. Serageldin has been able to amplify, reconstruct, elaborate and extend events of prior-existence. However, the novel's ample use of the existent materials have diminished its nature as pure fiction for the novel has only woven those materials in a fictional fabric. Her seriousness about history has, in order to clarify her uses of sources and the accuracy of her fictionalizing, compelled her to append to the novel a historical note at the end of the book which intended, without doubt, to defend the novel as soberly accurate to history and to help the reader understand it in its historical context. She further adds an extensive glossary of Arabic terms. Hence, the novel is better described, perhaps, as fictionalized history than historical fiction.

Serageldin uses characters from both sides, the colonizers and the colonized, to show the ideological as well as the political conflicts between the two parties. Constructed as a montage of narration, dialogue, and interior monologues, the narrative invites one to try to understand the testimonials given in the context of war and freedom struggle. Serageldin succeeds in reporting objectively the events of the struggle for independence and the freedom fighters' role in those events. However, the suffering of the ordinary people is not actually visited in the novel, except in the connotations of beheading, firing canons, protests, exile and oppression of high levies.

The Naqib's Daughter is a novel with real characters and setting. Its story is placed firmly within a particular place and time. Samia Serageldin describes and illustrates this history via the lives and experiences of characters who once were real people. History tells us blankly the sum of their efforts, the eventual victory against the French in 1801. But via fiction, she gives us far more than this. We feel history develop via the experience, the detail, the suffering, the commitment, the inadequacies and the treachery of people who lived through the time. Cairo, as depicted in the novel, has all types of people: freedom fighters, collaborators, colonial officers, beautiful girls and ambitious men. There are Christians, traditionalists, Muslims, Bedouins, old codgers and plenty of others who claim to be human. Acts perpetrated by the colonial administrators and their lackeys are sometimes nothing less than raw sadism. They seem to be motivated by a keen, though unjustifiable, sense of superiority. The novel allows the reader to relive the French invasion and the war of liberation from inside.

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