



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***CONSTRUCTION OF A REVISIONARY SELF IN TRANSFORMATIVE
CONTACT ZONES IN AHDAF SOUEIF'S NOVELS***

NEDA FEKRI

FBMK 2014 32



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**By
NEDA FEKRI**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, University Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

March 2014

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DEDICATION

To what I have lost in this gaining



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Abstract of thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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By

NEDA FEKRI

March 2014

Chairperson: Associate Professor Noritah Omar, PhD

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

This study explores *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) and *The Map of Love* (1999) by Ahdaf Soueif to examine the narration of 'contact zones,' or transformative spaces for the construction of a new, revisionary self. The characters in the two novels are travellers, not only in the sense of geographical movement, but also in their metaphorical travels through cultural products. It is the characters' relations to these cultural products that constitute contact zones. The examination of the self-as-subject in these contact zones indicates how characters from different cultures (i.e., Eastern and Western) come to know each other based on the hierarchised Western discourse of binarism. The novels reveal how binarism has become institutionalised in the East, that is, by Easterners self-conceiving as supine, docile, passive and inferior. In this binary discourse, therefore, the perpetuator of binarism is not only the West, but also the East, with its self-loathing and idolisation of the former. Accordingly, my study explores Soueif's middle ground, called *mezzaterra*—that is, moving from binary to non-binary discourse, as visualized in Soueif's novels but has never received critical attention in earlier studies done so far. In fact, my study fills a niche that is critical so that Soueif's novels would be appreciated more on the background of her own theoretical points explored in her nonfiction. The construction of this common ground occurs in what Pratt terms the contact zone. The self has the ability to control cultural concepts within this contact zone through the 'art' of transculturation and autoethnography, based on Pratt's "grand rules for communication." This leads to the construction of a revisionary self in the *mezzaterra*. The characters that fail to do so, however, succumb to the 'peril' of the contact zone, by becoming fully assimilated into the other culture they are encountered with. Hence, my study highlights how a new revisionary self, Eastern or Western travellers or travelleses, can be constructed on the narrated contact zones that in a broader sense reflects how Soueif herself has become a revisionary self. Soueif and the selected characters studied in this thesis, indeed, interrogate what the dissertation calls binarism promoted by the West as they aim to be "transformative" by creating more egalitarian and more honest cultural relations with cultures different from their own.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PEMBIKINAN DIRI YANG REVISIONIS DALAM ‘ZON SENTUH’
TRANSFORMATIF DALAM NOVEL-NOVEL AHDAF SOUEIF**

Oleh

NEDA FEKRI

Mac 2014

Pengerusi: Prof. Madya Noritah Omar, PhD

Fakulti: Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi

Kajian ini meneroka novel *In The Eye of the Sun* (1992) dan *The Map of Love* (1999) karya Ahdaf Soueif, dengan meneliti penceritaan mengenai ‘zon sentuh’ (*contact zones*), atau ruang transformasi bagi pembinaan diri yang baru dan revisionis. Watak-watak dalam kedua-dua novel adalah pengembara, bukan sahaja dari segi pergerakan geografi, tetapi juga dari segi pengembaraan metafora mereka melalui produk budaya. Didapati bahawa hubungan watak-watak ini dengan produk budaya yang ditemui mereka telah membentuk zon sentuh ini. Analisis diri-sebagai-subjek dalam zon sentuh menunjukkan bagaimana watak-watak dari budaya yang berbeza (iaitu Timur dan Barat) mengenali satu sama lain menerusi wacana Barat yang dominan, terutamanya wacana kebinaran berhierarki. Novel-novel ini mendedahkan bagaimana kebinaran telah diinstitusikan di Timur, sehingga diri dibayangkan sebagai mempunyai sifat mengalah (*supine*), terlalu menurut kata atau submisif (*docile*), pasif dan berkedudukan rendah (*inferior*). Dalam wacana binari ini, pengukuhan kebinaran didapati bukan sahaja berlaku di Barat, malahan di Timur, yang seterusnya membawa kepada kebencian diri (Timur) dan pendewaan Barat. Justeru, kajian ini meneroka jalan tengah Soueif yang dipanggil ‘*mezzaterra*’, iaitu pergerakan daripada wacana binari kepada wacana bukan binari. Pembikinan titik persamaan ini berlaku dalam ruang yang diistilahkan oleh Pratt sebagai ‘zon sentuh’. Menurut “peraturan agung komunikasi” Pratt, setiap ‘diri’ berupaya mengawal konsepsi ‘kesenian’ (interaksi budaya) dalam zon sentuh ini melalui proses “*transculturation*” dan “*autoethnography*”. Ini membawa kepada pembikinan diri yang revisionis dalam *mezzaterra*. Sebaliknya, salah satu risiko zon sentuh ini ialah watak-watak yang gagal berbuat demikian akan diserap sepenuhnya ke dalam budaya lain.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 6 March 2014 to conduct the final examination of Neda Fekri on her thesis entitled "Construction of a Revisionary Self in Transformative Contact Zones in Ahdaf Soueif's Novels" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U. (A) 106] 15 March 1998, The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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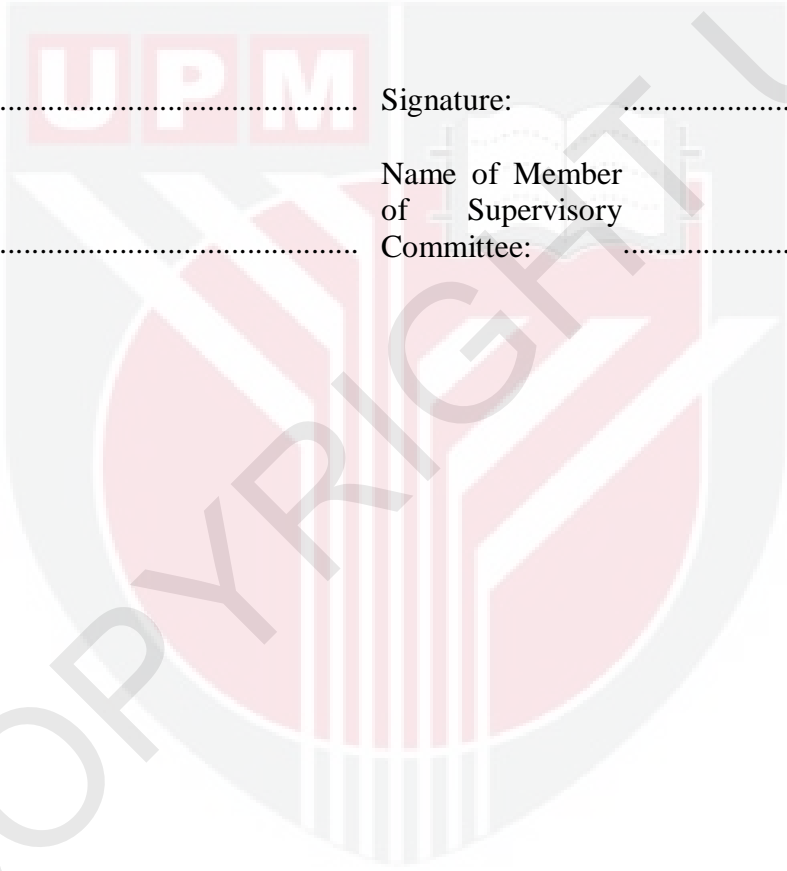


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PROLOGUE

Reasons to be more

The caterpillar to the butterfly:
We are from the same family.
But you are beautiful and light.
Why?

The butterfly to the caterpillar:
I am beautiful,
because discovering the world
with your wings makes you beautiful.
I am light,
because I fly
with the wind.

The caterpillar to the butterfly:
Why tell me this?

I have no wings.

The butterfly to the caterpillar:
Believe it or not,
you will have wings,
if you are willing
to let die your old self
for a new one.

- Isabelle My Hanh Derungs



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“[I am] like hundreds of thousands of others: people with an Arab or a Muslim background doing daily double-takes when faced with their reflection in a Western mirror.” Ahdaf Soueif

1.1 Overview

This study examines the construction of contact zones between characters from Eastern and Western cultures in Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) and *The Map of Love* (1999). In accordance with Mary Louis Pratt's formulation of the 'contact zone' in treating the relation among either "colonizers and colonized" or "travellers and travelleses" (6), the selection of characters in the novels are travellers and travelleses (people who are visited by the travellers) from either the West (England, America, and Italy) or the East (Egypt). As the characters are from two hierarchised cultures, their thoughts and deeds initially reveal how little they truly know of each other—given that Western binarism has kept their cultures apart, with little chance of communication—and also of themselves. In fact, the novels convey how binary discourse is not only perpetuated by the Western characters (as representatives of Western culture), but also through the consumption, acquiescence and institutionalisation in Eastern culture.

However, the Eastern or Western characters in the novels gain the chance to become travellers or travelleses in cross-cultural encounters, thereby constructing contact zones. Both Eastern and Western travellers and travelleses will then be scrutinised according to two processes introduced by Pratt with regard to the contact zone—namely, the 'art' and 'peril'. These reveal not only the intrinsic values of the contact zone, but also its shortcomings based on the asymmetrical power relations between the two cultures. The values or 'art' of the contact zone are emphasised by Pratt as the "ground rules for communication," and can manifest as "autoethnography, transculturation, critique, collaboration, bilingualism, parody, and vernacular expression" as "the literate art of the contact zone." (*Imperial* 618).

In this way, the study analyses the struggle of the self as the subject in the contact zone to see if the Eastern or the Western traveller or travellee can apply this literate 'art', that is to say, control cultural conceptions, and thereby change the space of Western hierarchised binarism into a non-binary space. In other words, the characters will be examined to see if they can, conceptually, become an inhabitant of the *mezzaterra*—by becoming revisionary selves, who possess an understanding of both the other and themselves. It needs to be reiterated that on this common ground, the specificities of each cultural group are not flattened out or homogenised, unlike

in the process of cultural assimilation. In this transformation, the two cultures collide, though the differences between them are never elided.

It is relevant to note here that Soueif has always paid special attention to European travel writing, both fictive and non-fictive.

There is a genre that I really am very interested in, which is travel writing, done by women, English women, mostly Victorian, and of course they are varied, from people with very set, very colonial attitudes, to people who were very broad-minded and opened themselves up to the culture that they were coming to see. Like Lucy Duff Gordon who ended up living there until she died. And you can see them changing as you go through the letters, you see a different character evolving, and I really like that whole genre. (*Mezzaterra* 102-3)

As the excerpt indicates, Soueif highlights the potential of travelling and travel writing as a chance for “changing” and “evolving.” Such possibility for change is actually substantial. James Buzard, for instance, maintains how travelling may broaden the traveller’s mind; make one “a citizen of the world” (99-100) or even a better citizen at one’s home country. In this way, the “changing” and “evolving” can be related to the struggle of travellers and travelleses to control the cultural concepts they encounter in the contact zone; and in the context of the present study, to see if they can live together in the *mezzaterra*.

My study demonstrates that cross-cultural encounters do not just occur with actual travelling, in the sense of geographical movement from one place into another. Even cultural products—such as films, literary texts, paintings and in the case of the novels studied, one character’s travelogue—that are described in the novels provide a space for cross-cultural encounters. This kind of cross-cultural encounter happens when a character, from either the East or the West, becomes involved with the cultural products of the other culture. The cross-cultural space provided by the cultural products creates another form of the contact zone that warrants analysis—in the case of the travelogue as cultural product, for instance, the reader functions as an ‘armchair traveller’ who does not make any actual movement, but travels metaphorically into the consciousness of the writer, who is another character in the novel. As Leila Baradaran Jamili in *Virginia Woolf* (2006) notes, reading is comparable to taking a journey as

the reader or the armchair traveller is caught up in a dialectical conversation between his pre-knowledge and the knowledge of the text by means of which he tries to understand the experience of the writer. (1)

Accordingly, reading a travelogue, as well as other cultural products narrated in the novels, can be considered as means for the characters to travel metaphorically and being placed in a cross-cultural encounter, which forms a space for a contact zone. The expectation for “dialectical conversation” in this contact zone provides the

character with the same chance for transformation, like an actual traveller or travellee. I would explore in the chapters of discussion how these two modes of travelling as actual and metaphorical are both influential in my exploration of the self as the subject in the contact zone, due to their complementary consequences narrated in the novels.

1.2 Background of the Study

Postcolonial critics have tried to reveal attempts to represent the West as the culture par excellence, in contrast to other cultures. The term ‘postcolonial,’ in an extended meaning defined by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2008) encompasses “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (2). These imperialistic projects, in fact, have long framed hierarchal power relations between the cultures of the East and the West based on binary discourse. The greatest tool for Western binary discourse is the manipulation of the cultural concepts to shape a normative representation of reality. Despite the theoretical emphasis on the impossibility of separation among cultures, where “individual cultures are never cocooned from the dynamic flow of cultural interchange” (Ashcroft 24), the presence of the Western/non-Western cultural binarism—manifesting as sovereignty/democracy, self/other, centre/margin—is still undeniable, which in turn results in dichotomisation and antagonism. Consequently, the binary discourse does not allow for harmonious relations between the East and the West, as evident in many military conflicts around the world today. As is well-known, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1977) places the Western colonial and Oriental other in a binary relation. Said validates his findings by analysing Western writings at the time of its encounters with colonised cultures, and reveals a cultural perception that is based on an oppositional relation between the Occident and the Orient (*Orientalism* 43). In this way, Said highlights how this “man-made” (5) imperialist ideology authorises Western superiority to facilitate, stabilise, and legitimise their dominance. Hence, ‘Orientalism’ is defined as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” (Sardar 68). As Said notes, there is a “persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arab-Islamic peoples and their culture” (*Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* 347).

Ahdaf Soueif, as the most prominent contemporary Egyptian Muslim writer and cultural-political critic examines the relation between the two binarised cultures (West/East) in her non-fictional *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground* (2004). Soueif, who lives in England in self-imposed exile, wrote the book to “to add my [her] voice to that of Edward Said” (*Mezzaterra* 10), chiefly because of her concern over the strife and injustice existing in the world, spurred by the deterioration of authentic human relationships. Soueif explores how “the political direction” (8) of the world and the Western media are responsible for the “misrepresentation” of the East (3). The Western (mis)representation has made a “skewed accounts of my [her] history and culture” (3), that is based on stereotypical images presented of and to the East. Soueif reveals how the Western political (mis)representation of cultures is the cause for the present feeling of “antagonism” (8) between people from different cultures in their encounters, which she claims, has become a “path to constant conflict, to grief and misery” (22). Soueif explains how

the Western media and even Western literature are relentlessly supporting the demonisation of Eastern cultures, especially by way of the (mis)representation of Arabs and Muslims. Citing the plight of the Palestinian people, Iraq and “every ‘Third World’” country (*Mezzaterra* 15), Soueif proves that “the effect of American policies on the Arab world has been the complete opposite of their states’ aims” (14). Soueif questions American promises of a ‘peace process’ “to bring ‘democracy’ to the Arabs” and calls on the US administration and the British government to define their use of terms, such as ‘sovereignty’, ‘democracy’, ‘freedom’, ‘stability’, ‘peace’ and ‘terrorism’, and explain why those terms are used “in the context of their dealings with the Arab world” (5).

In an interview with Manal el-Jesri, Soueif discloses more about the status of her culture within Western binarism:

The West has always wanted the same thing from our part of the world: our resources. But the attack is worse now because it is a *unipolar world*. That’s why I think it’s such a ferocious attack on us, and not just in terms of bombing but also in cultural terms. There is a serious attempt to *discredit our culture*. (*Scheherazade Tells All*; emphasis added)

Soueif’s emphasis on the “discrediting” of her culture by the “unipolar world” is the disclosure for imperialistic attempts to perpetuate and reconstitute cultural binarism. Soueif proposes, in response, the need for a more strategic approach “to open a window into another culture” (*Mezzaterra* 15), or what she terms the “*mezzaterra*.” Her term combines the two Italian words for “half” or “middle” (*mezza*) and “world” or “ground” (*terra*), which literally implies a middle ground. Although Soueif envisions the present *mezzaterra* as “a bleak, bleak picture” (21), her hope is that the people of the world will be able to construct their own *mezzaterra*, or “an area of overlap, where one culture shaded into the other, where echoes and reflections added depth and perspective, where differences were interesting rather than threatening, because they were foregrounded against a backdrop of affinities” (*Mezzaterra* 7). Accordingly, the chief method of that Soueif proposes to construct this *mezzaterra* is to counter Oriental binary discourse.

In fact, Soueif’s hope for the construction of a non-binary amicable space between people of different cultures may seem an idealistic if not impossible solution to many present-day conflicts. Nevertheless, she still believes that it is a necessity. This is because the persistence of Western binary discourse, if taken to its logical conclusion, would entail the death of all other cultures.

[In] today’s world, separatism is not an option. In order to stay alive we will all eventually end up on some form of common ground. However, the loudest voices that are heard are those that deny the existence of this, who shout that a ‘clash of civilizations’ is taking place (*Mezzaterra* 10).

My study argues that the employment of Pratt's theory of the contact zone to a close reading of Soueif's novels makes the latter's aims more justifiable. Pratt's theory was first presented in her *Imperial Eyes* (1992), in which she introduces the concept of the contact zone, which refers to "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (4). In other words, a contact zone is a space in which the intersection of opposed, dichotomised, or binarised cultures takes place. Based on Pratt's theory, the subjects in the contact zone can gain enough power to 'control' and reconfigure cultural concepts to allow for non-binary discourse—which is a necessary task, if they want, in Soueif words, 'to stay alive.'

In this way, the cross-cultural encounter between the East and the West, occurring in different ways, can be analysed by using the concept of the contact zone. Of course, due to the power relations between the two groups, this encounter implies special vulnerabilities not only in relation to the colonial form of expansions and imperialism, but also with regard to the (mis)representations of what the Occident makes of the Orient. In this way, the East-West encounter may indicate a threat to the (re)institutionalisation of cultural binarism and the (re)dichotomisation of East/West, when at present, the Western discourse is the only discourse operating in this space. Based on Pratt's theory, the subject can, by way of controlling cultural concepts, change the threat of the dominance of Western discourse into an opportunity for the construction of non-binary discourse. Despite the "conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" in the contact zone, Pratt highlights the specificity of it as a space "in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish on-going relations"(6). Accordingly, this space helps the construction of an in-between space in contrast to binarism, in which only the West is privileged.

Accordingly, Pratt considers two subsequent processes related to the transformative potentiality of these contact zones. Firstly, the (re)construction of (Eastern) subjects based on the ideological needs of (Western) surveillance power. This process indicates how Pratt does not dismiss the intrinsic vulnerability of a given cross-cultural encounter due to shortcomings and threats, which she terms the "perils" of the contact zone. In this process, the subject accepts whatever the other culture—in this case, the Western—offers in full assimilation. Secondly, Pratt highlights the active struggle of the subjects who can control cultural concepts in the contact zone based on "a group of rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect," or "a systematic approach to the all-important concept of cultural mediation" (618). In this way, these rules for communication become means by which, rather than just mimicking the modes of representation in full assimilation, the subordinated subject appropriates the modes of representation once applied by the surveillance subject for his/her own purposes of self-expression or even intervention when required. The aim of appropriating creates an opportunity to control cultural concepts. This active co-presence and interaction of two cultures and ideologies are considered by Pratt to be the "art of the contact zone" which can dismantle the Western perpetuation of cultural dichotomisation through binarism. In this way, Pratt highlights how the

contact zone can be “the best site for learning that it can be” (“Arts of the Contact Zone” 3), to be able to change the one-sided story of Western hierarchised binarism.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Soueif’s non-fictional works reveal her serious concern regarding the future of her culture, specifically in terms of the present hostile relations between the hierarchised and dichotomised cultures of the East and the West; as she notes, “some have sought to invade and grab territory and others have thrown up barricades” (*Mezzaterra* 9). She adds that she is “troubled” when “in almost every book, article, film, TV or radio program that claimed to be about my part of the world...I was constantly coming face to face with distortions of my reality” (2). Such a distorted representation can be attributable to the institutionalisation of the Western hierarchised discourse of binarism. Accordingly, this study argues how Soueif, as an intellectual in self-imposed exile, feels driven to strive for a transcendence of the evident limitations of the morally suspect binary discourse of “us versus them(ism),” and “to place the current conflicts in the arena where they belong: politics and economics” (10).

The concept of cross-cultural encounter with regard to the theory of contact zone is only introduced and never fully explored in existing studies on Soueif’s fictional works. The related literature fully explores how the studies on Soueif’s novels are limited to the analysis of a handful of characters of the fictions, sans any methodological framework for the framing of the cross-cultural encounters between the Eastern and the Western voices. Moreover, these studies do not address the constructed transformative space of the contact zone in the novels, and the possible chances for the self to control cultural concepts, and thereby transcend Western binary discourse.

It must be stated here that it is Rasheed El-Enany’s critical introduction of Soueif’s works on the theme of cultural encounters that inspired my present study. Although El-Enany introduces Soueif as a writer who is herself, independent of her work, “an advertisement for the cultural encounter of East and West” as her novels portray “the encounter through female eyes” (200), he is critical of this cultural encounter in *In the Eye of the Sun*, calling it “an aborted, half-baked attempt” since “there is a clear intention of symbolism to interpret reality” (202). He also finds the presence of the Western Lady Anna in Soueif’s second novel, *The Map of Love*, to be her “fictional answer to the cruelty of history” (203), in terms of representing the other voice of the British Empire that is “too rare” as the voice of “openness to the subjugated other” (203). To El-Enany, such rare voice is as capricious as Soueif’s notion of “a map of love,” which envisions no cultural boundaries. Regardless, the examination of these cross-cultural encounters in Soueif’s nonfiction remains significant. Accordingly, my study considers the two novels complementary in the construction and narration of the contact zone as a fictive manifestation of Soueif’s aim to create a non-binary *mezzaterra*.

1.4 Scope and Limitation of the Study

As noted above, the present study involves a close reading of Soueif's novels as *In the Eye of the Sun* and *The Map of Love*. These two bulky novels that are the only novels written by Soueif cover such a detailed bi-vocal exploration as the first novel is 816 and the second one is 544 though the e-book that is used in page numbering in this thesis is approximately 800 pages. For the intention of reading and decoding the contact zone as a transformative space, I believe that Soueif's novels are the most suitable ground for exploration, as they present representatives from the two binarised cultures, containing as they do Egyptian, Italian, British and American characters. Such bi-vocal narration is largely absent from Soueif's short stories, and will thus be excluded from this study. Additionally, Soueif's short stories have not received "much interest among reviewers" (Hassan 162).

1.5 Research Objectives

With regard to the Eastern and the Western encounters in Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* and *The Map of Love*, my claim in the present study is that her most relevant contribution to postcolonial study is her casting of a new interpretation of the common ground, or *mezzaterra*. In this *mezzaterra*, the self, whether Eastern or Western, can gain control of cultural concepts that have been historically framed as binary by the West. This control can then be used to challenge the existing configuration of binary cultural relations that is commonly complemented by feelings of antagonism and hostility. The possibility for constructing this *mezzaterra* that is based on non-binary cultural relations can be supported with the employment of Pratt's contact zones, specifically in terms of the 'art' and 'peril' of the one's transformation to a revisionary self in this space. Accordingly, the objectives of this study are:

- i. To examine the asymmetrical power relations between the Eastern and the Western characters in the novels, with regard to the notion of Western binary dichotomisation, either as perpetuated by the West itself or consumed and institutionalised by the East;
- ii. To unravel differing constructions of Pratt's contact zones, not only in terms of cross-cultural travelling between Eastern or Western travellers and travelleses, but also as a space of cross-cultural encounter with cultural products from both cultures;
- iii. To scrutinize the struggle of the self, in both Eastern and Western characters, as the subject in the transformative space of contact zone, who can control cultural concepts for interaction in the forms of transculturation and autoethnography (the conceptual 'art'), that leads to the becoming of a revisionary self and an inhabitant of Soueif's *mezzaterra*; and
- iv. To highlight the failure of the self in the transformative space of contact zone due to the full assimilation through the lack of control over Western-framed cultural concepts (the 'peril'), that leaves the self somehow vulnerable to the consumption of whatever the primary surveillance culture offers in cultural binarism.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Generally speaking, the interpretation of a literary corpus in a structured framework enables readers to “get beneath the accumulated crust of misinterpretation...and take a stand in the center of what is said and unsaid” (Richard 147). Accordingly, this study is a new reading of Soueif’s novels that centralises the hitherto unexplored struggle of the self as the subject in the contact zone for the construction of a revisionary self to become an inhabitant of Soueif’s own conception of the *mezzaterra*.

Existing studies on Soueif’s fictions highlight her attempt to represent her cultural identity in different ways, in terms of language, narrative technique, cultural translation, historical events, and the revitalisation of historical figures. Other studies attempt to deconstruct the Orientalist image of the Arab Muslim women. My critical exploration on earlier critical works on Soueif’s fictions done by earlier critics (Albakry and Hancock, Boccardi, Carillo, Chakravorty, D’Alessandro, D’Alonzo, Darraj, Davis, El-Enany, El-Feky, El-Jersi, Fadia, Hamdy, Hassan, King, Luo, Maleh, Massad, Miller, Mohsen, Morsy, Nash, Oldmeadow, Trabelsi, Vallasopoulos, and Wynne) categorized as cultural identity and cross-cultural encounters as well as travelling are fully explored in the chapter of literature review. While my study posits a significant paradigm regarding the two cultures of the East and the West that power relations disadvantage the weaker culture. That is why the politics of perception and presentation as perpetuated by the stronger Western hegemony should be countered and contested by those who have been subjugated, buried, deformed and demonized. On the other hand, although the concept of transcultural encounter is addressed by some critics like Tasnim and Wynne, Soueif’s novels are never explored complementarily, and not in relation to the *mezzaterra*—which appears to be Soueif’s overriding aim, as evidenced in her non-fiction. In the present study, these ellipses are explored to see if the self can indeed take control of cultural concepts in the contact zone, which are constructed not only by cross-cultural travelling, but also through encounters with cultural products.

As noted above, Soueif’s desires a *mezzaterra* chiefly because the Western discourse of binarism has thus far resulted in unfortunate antagonism and hostility. Hence, Soueif’s objective is to create a rhetorical and cultural space, in which the self can take control of cultural concepts and be able to transform the existing oppositionality in Western discourse into a non-binary discourse. Such a contact zone will become a zone for the construction of a new subjectivity, with a new non-binary perspective as a revisionary self through an on-going process of self-reconstruction and self-redefinition.

In this way, the inadequacy of existing critical analysis of the transformation of Soueif’s characters in the contact zone—in their struggle to forge a *mezzaterra*—is the chief motivation behind the present study. In this way, the notion of the contact zone for cross cultural travellers and travelleses is ideally suited to the analysis of Soueif’s novels. Furthermore, Pratt’s theoretical macro map for the transformation of the subject in the contact zone is defined and objectivized by specific cultural acts as

either the ‘art’ or ‘peril’ of contact zone. In this way, the success or failure of the self in controlling cultural concepts within the contact zone leads to the construction of the revisionary self, or a *mezzaterran* inhabitant who has transcended the Western binary discourse.

1.7 Organisation of the Thesis

The study is divided into six chapters. The present chapter as the first chapter of my thesis introduces the topic and provides a general outline of the theoretical background, the problem statement as well as the objectives of the study. Furthermore, the scope of the study, as well as its location within the body of existing research is discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Two, the literature review, also contextualises the present study within the body of related studies, but in greater detail. This chapter first explores the notion of cultural identity and its relation to (mis)representation and binarism. Earlier studies on Soueif’s fictions reveal how fictions are considered as chances for the representation of the writer’s cultural identity. Furthermore, as related to the present study, the concept of cross-cultural encounter and travelling is explored further, in tandem with existing studies of Soueif’s novels that address the issue.

Chapter Three tries to reveal enough information about Ahdaf Soueif’s life and oeuvre. In fact, Soueif’s socio-cultural and political milieu that has shaped her world-view are discussed in this chapter based on various discourses cited about her.

Chapter Four is focused on the exploration of the theoretical concepts employed in my study of the novels. To understand the constructed Western hierarchised binary relation, I use Said’s analysis to show how binarism is not only perpetuated by the West, but also consumed and institutionalised by the East. Such binary power relations are the precondition specified by Pratt for the application of the theory of contact zone. Furthermore, I explore related key terms with regard to Pratt’s methodology of the transformative contact zone. I will then discuss Soueif’s exploration of the cultural relation and her objective for the construction of a *mezzaterra* as a common ground that can be supported based on Pratt’s theoretical concepts.

I have divided my textual analysis into two distinct chapters, so that the two possibilities of the aftermath of the encounter envisioned in Pratt’s theory can be more tangible. Thus, Chapter Five will be focused on a selected character in Soueif’s early novel, *In the Eye of the Sun*, to lay bare the female Arab Muslim character’s encounter with the other culture, primarily through her involvement with cultural products, which function as a contact zone for the character. When that character then becomes a traveller, her cross-cultural encounter with the travellee creates another contact zone. My discussion explores the cultural relation between the two groups of characters from two cultures that is based on binarism, indicating an

asymmetrical power relation. From there, I will attempt to decode the character's struggle to control cultural concepts by considering the 'art' or 'peril' of the contact zone. The character's struggles in the contact zone will reveal the possibility for the construction of a revisionary self.

Chapter Six examines Soueif's most celebrated novel, *The Map of Love*. In the close reading of the novel, the instances for the formation of contact zone are highlighted. Very much like the previous chapter, some cultural products help the formation of a cross-cultural space, along with geographical encounters as travellers or travelleses. The transformative nature of the contact zone is then considered in accordance with the characters' struggle in controlling the cultural concepts that they encounter within. Their struggles for cultural interaction, in the face of the 'art' of the contact zone, opens up a possibility for the construction of a revisionary self.

In Chapter Seven, I conclude how the cross-cultural space of the contact zone is not only made possible by travelling, but also through cultural products, that can be considered as vessels for metaphorical travelling. The chapter will also address if the revisionary selves that are created from these cross-cultural encounters are then able to occupy the non-binary space of the *mezzaterra*.

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