

Cultural Imperialism Revisited

Translation, Seduction, Power

One of the ways to get around the confines of one's "identity" as one produces expository prose is to work at someone else's title, as one works with a language that belongs to many others. This, after all, is one of the seductions of translating. It is a simple miming of the responsibility to the trace of the other in the self.

Translation is the most intimate act of reading. I surrender to the text when I translate.

—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation"

Much as I hesitate to air the intimate apparel of (post)coloniality in general and of mainstream (post)colonial Egyptian intellectual subjectivity in particular, do so I shall—with a little help from the Moroccan literary theorist ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Kiliṭū (Abdelfattah Kilito). Kiliṭū opens *Lan Tatakallama Lughatī* (2002; *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language*), a provocative excursus into the psychological underbelly of translation in the medieval and modern Arab worlds, with a prologue that speaks volumes to a central argument of this book. Citing the example of Muṣṭafā Luṭfi al-Manfalūṭī (1876–1924), an influential early-twentieth-century Egyptian man of letters known for his “free” retranslations of others’ Arabic translations, Kiliṭū notes that al-Manfalūṭī knew no European languages and wrote a neoclassical Arabic that appears, to the naked eye, “steeped in tradition.”¹ “Nevertheless,” he observes, “every one of [al-Manfalūṭī’s] pages whispers the same question: how do I become European?”² Al-Manfalūṭī’s “Arabic-only” posture, Kiliṭū suggests, evades the charge of surrender to Europe. Yet his vi-

carious translations of European literature betray an anxious need to register the arrival of European colonial modernity in Egypt, to bring Arabic into the fold of the modern by folding Europe into Arabic. The paradox of al-Manfalūṭī's dress glosses the tragic two-facedness of his seemingly "resistant"—yet translated—Arabic. On the covers of his books, Kiliṭū tells us, al-Manfalūṭī flaunts his "traditional garb—turban and cloak—and seems to ask, Aren't I an Azharite?"³ Through his chosen self-representation, he styles himself a product of al-Azhar, Cairo's millennium-old Islamic institution of higher learning, and thus an "authentic" exemplar of the Arab-Islamic literary tradition. Beneath, however, he sports European underwear—of which, "those with intimate knowledge of him assert," he was "fond."⁴ Concludes Kiliṭū, "European dress is al-Manfaluti's secret passion [*sirru al-Manfalūṭī*], an unspeakable secret because it clings to his body, to his being. It does not appear on the cover of his books any more than the names of the European authors he adapted."⁵ Europe enters Egyptian bodies and books under domestic cover, cloaked in Arabic. As Kiliṭū observes, the question he puts in al-Manfalūṭī's mouth, "How do I become European?" is one that al-Manfalūṭī never poses explicitly. Kiliṭū raises that occulted question to an audible whisper.

If, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues, "translation is the most intimate act of reading," small wonder that Europe should be al-Manfalūṭī's intimate apparel—the undergarment of his Arabic. What the translating (and thus translated) colonized mimics, in this scenario, ultimately is not—or not only—the colonizer but *himself*. It is his own Europeaness that he camouflages, not his nativeness. This is because his origin—his original—already has been translated *into* "Europe." To invoke one of Walter Benjamin's metaphors for the relationship of translation to original, the cloak of the Azharite is but a royal robe whose folds drape loosely around the original—the European undergarment.⁶ The colonized preserves the sovereignty of his native *I* ("Aren't I an Azharite?") by surreptitiously equating himself with the European *I*: by fusing himself to the sovereign colonizer (hence the clinging underwear). Since the Egyptian's native body and being are fused to the European, to be himself he must "play" himself—don the royal robe of the Azharite. But if mimicry can turn to menace, as Homi Bhabha argues it always does, the European threatens to peek out.⁷ That is, if we look closely enough.

As both an instrument of and a response to cultural imperialism, translation exercises its greatest power in the transubstantiating zone

of seduction, beyond the pales of pure identity—a forced homology of meaning, the tyranny of what Jacques Derrida has called the “transcendental signified”—and pure difference: a supposedly liberationist, yet equally forced, preservation-in-transit of the literalness of the word, the regime of Derrida’s “transcendental signifier.”⁸ These two poles—or poles—still dominate postcolonial theories of translation, which are just beginning to break free of their tautology.⁹ Often translation is understood as a bipolar choice between foreignization and domestication, hitched to an understanding of imperialism as an equally bipolar dynamic of domination and resistance. Even Bhabha, who early refused a simple politics of colonial imposition and anticolonial “writing back,” favors the oppositional native. Hence Bhabha describes the language of mimicry, a hybrid native idiom that bespeaks both “civility” to and “civil disobedience” of the colonizer, as a mode of “spectacular resistance.”¹⁰ In the mid-1990s, Lydia Liu drew on Lisa Lowe’s critique of an East/West divide premised on “a static dualism of identity and difference” (Lowe’s phrase) to argue that prevailing trends in postcolonial theory risk “reducing the power relationship between East and West to that of native resistance and Western domination,” ignoring the permeability of the boundary.¹¹ Rethinking the politics of translation under colonial conditions, she concluded that “a non-European language does not automatically constitute a site of resistance to European languages.”¹²

Liu’s insight has been slow to catch on. Writing of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Chinese translations from Western literatures, Lawrence Venuti suggests that the domesticating translation—which conceals its foreign provenance, passing itself off as nontranslation—is more dangerous to the target culture, more likely to surrender translator and audience to foreign ideology because it so deeply absorbs the foreign into the familiar body. Venuti implies that foreignizing translations, which consciously attempt to transform the target culture by making visible the introduction of the foreign, encourage a more selective—and critical—appropriation of the translated text into the target culture.¹³ Richard Jacquemond disagrees. For Jacquemond, early Egyptian translations from French literature, which deeply acculturated French originals to Arabic literary conventions and Egyptian cultural norms, were not just the freest translations but also the most freeing; they suggest that Egyptians still held France at some epistemological distance. By contrast, he contends, later Egyptian translations from French—more faithful to the originals and thus more likely

to foreignize the target language, to contort Arabic to approximate French—index the beginnings of French hegemony over Arabic.¹⁴ Both Venuti and Jacquemond imply that the resistant translation is the desirable translation, one that avoids the surrender that Spivak imputes to the seductions of translation. Their investment in resistance drives their diverging views of domestication: Venuti holds that the seemingly intact native signifier conceals surrender to the colonizer; Jacquemond, that it betokens greater resistance to that surrender. Neither, however, fully answers this critical question: What happens when a “native” signifier binds to a “foreign”—especially a colonizing—signifier to shore up the power of the native *through* the power of the foreign? Through the example of al-Manfalūṭī’s unbroken native Arabic, which couples overt self-assertion and self-preservation to covert intimacy with the language of the dominant European, Kiliṭū makes us wonder whether resistance to translation and surrender to translation might not in fact translate one another. The muse of European culture has visited and seduced the Egyptian translator. In its wake, it has left a clinging relic behind, and clinging to that a certain fondness. Affect complicates resistance.

In a 1990 interview with the *Sunday Times* of London, the Nobel Prize-winning Egyptian novelist Najib Maḥfūẓ (Naguib Mahfouz, 1911–2006) spoke out loud al-Manfalūṭī’s “secret passion”—the translational fascination of much modern Egyptian literature with European literature. Maḥfūẓ was asked about the influence of Charles Dickens, Honoré de Balzac, and other European novelists on his writing. His reply was arch. “Yes, we know Western literature here,” he said. “In fact, we love it too much.”¹⁵ That Maḥfūẓ wrote only in standard literary Arabic makes some imagine him a purist. Yet he is acutely aware that the language of his novels is anything but pure, that modern Arabic—long in love with European languages and literatures—is in fact “contaminated” by that love’s excess. Maḥfūẓ himself was weaned on the imperialist adventures of Sir Walter Scott and H. Rider Haggard, which he read in Arabic translation, and on the sentimental fictions of none other than al-Manfalūṭī, whose ornate Arabic prose style left its mark on his first novels.¹⁶ Thus he readily concedes that Western literature has shaped modern Arabic literary creativity. For, like others of his era, Maḥfūẓ—who lived to witness British rule, the nationalist revolutions of 1919 and 1952, and three generations of postindependence statehood in Egypt—was heir to the Egyptian literary “renaissance,” or *nahḍa*, of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. To reestablish Egypt’s preeminence in the family of nations, the ex-

ponents of that renaissance pursued a paradoxical strategy of cultural revitalization. They translated European texts and called on Egypt to emulate the modes of literary, philosophical, and scientific exploration that seemed to underpin Europe's imperial dominance in their country and elsewhere. Yet they marshaled these emulations of Europe to renew the faded glory of indigenous cultural heritages—Pharaonic, Arabic, Islamic—and to restore Egypt to pride of place in modernity. For most of the elite Egyptian intellectuals of the *nahḍa*, becoming modern was never a question of abandoning Arabic and writing in the languages of their European colonizers—in French or English. The *nahḍa* unfolded in translation: it transported French or English into Arabic. Thus it appeared to “preserve” Arabic—all the while *translating* it.

Unlike Algeria—where French suppression of Arabic over some 130 years left many acutely conscious of language loss—Egypt could hide such loss in the illusion of unbroken Arabic, could imagine imperialism irrelevant to the emergence of its modern Arabic literature. As late as 1996, the translation scholar Bashīr al-ʿĪsawī could contend that Arabic in Egypt had always been impervious to empire. “The Arabic language,” he writes,

has suffered the shock of long waves of military and epistemological conquest by neighboring states whose peoples do not speak Arabic. Yet it did not surrender very long, as its European-language counterparts did, to the influence of occupation, [nor did] it fling itself into the arms of colonialism [*fī aḥḍāni al-isti'māri*]. If no less than 60 percent of the English language is taken from French, the [borrowed] percentage is nil in the case of the Arabic language in Egypt, which the French occupied for almost one hundred years, followed by the British, who occupied it for seventy-four years. Arabic in Egypt remained intact; nothing of what entered English when the French occupied it for only one hundred years ever entered Arabic.¹⁷

Most striking here is al-ʿĪsawī's transhistorical comparison of post-1798 Egypt to post-1066 England, of the fate of Arabic after Napoléon Bonaparte (hereafter Napoleon Bonaparte) to that of English after William the Conqueror. Egypt is said to be less colonized than its former colonizer, England. In only one century of Norman occupation, England is said to have lost most of its “originary” tongue and absorbed almost two-thirds of its modern language, whereas Egypt—occupied by the French, according to al-ʿĪsawī, for the same duration—is imagined to have lost nothing and gained nothing. The French, of course, did not actually occupy Egypt for one hundred years; Napoleon's military presence lasted a mere three (1798–1801). Yet al-ʿĪsawī suggests that Egypt

was dominated for roughly the same number of years by the French and the British, more often the acknowledged—and reviled—colonizer. He appears to base his premise of a “long” French occupation on the fact that France influenced Egyptian culture well after its military presence in Egypt had ended. Yet he exempts one key element of culture—language—from such influence. Intent on proving the immunity of Arabic to colonial influence, al-‘Īsawī dismisses the impact of French domination on the Arabic language, thereby leveling the politically unequal field between French and Arabic and thus the distinction between a dominant France and a dominated Egypt. Further, he marshals the supposed “common” denominator of French domination to level any distinction between Arabic and English and thus also between a dominated Egypt and a dominant England. Al-‘Īsawī thus upholds two fictions: first, that colonial Egypt can be “compared” to—rendered equal to or greater than—its European colonizers; and second, that Egypt suffered no linguistic or cultural losses to imperialism. Though he fiercely denies the eros of cultural imperialism—to which his insistence that Egypt never flung itself “into the arms of colonialism” ironically alludes—al-‘Īsawī ultimately cements its seductive logic, which dissolves the inequality of colonizers and colonized in the possibility of their “likeness.”

While most Egyptian literati of the nineteenth and early twentieth century decried the military, economic, and political violences that European imperialism wreaked on their land, many resisted the notion that Europe also was doing cultural violence to their understandings of language and literature and to their broader ways of thinking and knowing. Often they imagined their relationship to European aesthetics and epistemologies in terms of “love,” not subjection. This imagination persists: even in al-‘Īsawī the denial of love points to the excess of love’s presence. Yet one cannot dislodge this humanist “love-logic” of literary-cultural traffic from the frame of empire. Elite Egyptians transported European culture into Arabic at a time when Europe wielded growing power over the Arab-Islamic world; their awareness of that power, however disavowed, moved them first to look to European knowledge for *self-validation*, then to emulate European epistemes, and finally to translate both themselves and Arab-Islamic cultural forms toward ever greater Europeaness.

If attraction, assimilation, even love are dominant refrains in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Egypt’s literary and cultural response to a colonizing Europe, why is this so? How do the emergence and the persistence of this ideology of “love” challenge the domina-

tion/resistance binary of empire and postcolonial studies? And given the centrality of translation in modern Egypt's cultural encounter with the West, how might translation be connected to this ideology of "love"? These are central questions that I engage in this book. *Disarming Words* explores why the colonized tend to "love" their colonizers as often as they hate them and how seduction haunts both empire and decolonization. Early philosophers of decolonization like Frantz Fanon have asked this question under various guises, and several contemporary studies inch us toward a fuller understanding of the ways in which the literatures and cultures of modern European empires claimed the psyches of the peoples they colonized.¹⁸ Still, empire and postcolonial studies often read cultural artifacts as instruments of domination—read the literary canon, philosophically speaking, as "cannon." The field is less attentive to the dynamics of cultural attraction between presumed enemies. Understanding cultural imperialism as willful imposition—not attractive proposition—the reigning discourse conceals the undertow of seduction, which often transmits colonial culture. By reading cultural imperialism through resolutely instrumentalist lenses, I argue, we mystify the *exchange*-value of literature in colonial contexts as *use*-value. In doing so, paradoxically, we fail to understand how colonial powers and their (post)colonial interlocutors have mystified the *use*-value of culture as *exchange*-value, how they have converted instruments of coercion into those of seduction and thereby solicited—and often elicited—the complex "love" of the colonized and their (post)colonial heirs.

Analyzing the cultural afterlives of two modern colonial occupations of Egypt—the French, in 1798, and the British, in 1882—this book re-examines the psychodynamics of translation in (post)colonial Egypt to propose new understandings of cultural imperialism in general and of Orientalism in particular.¹⁹ Current understandings of both, influenced by the work of Edward Said, tend toward the impositionist and the unilateral: impositionist, because Saidian postcolonial studies generally views cultural imperialism as a mere extension of military imperialism; unilateral, because it posits Europe as "doer" (the grammatical and political subject of empire) and the Arab-Islamic Orient as "done-to" (empire's object).²⁰ I suggest that Orientalism did not simply do violence to a passive, feminized Arab-Islamic world; it also *translated Europe* into Arab-Islamic terms, tempting its Egyptian interlocutors to imagine themselves "masculinized" masters of the Europeans who were mastering them. For Egyptians of the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century, Orientalist scholarship often dissociated European knowledge

from European power by reassociating Europeans with Arabic and Islam. As a translational form of cultural imperialism, Orientalism appeared to affirm Egypt's Pharaonic and Arab-Islamic pasts as unbroken, still vital—uncolonized.

The dynamics of identification that I propose here diverge somewhat from those that Abdeslam Maghraoui and Stephen Sheehi describe in early-twentieth-century Egypt and in early- to mid-nineteenth-century Syria, respectively, and more closely approximate those that Thomas Trautmann discerns in colonial Bengal. According to Maghraoui, the drive of liberal intellectuals in 1920s Egypt to attach their country to Europe—linguistically, culturally, even racially—doomed their democratic nationalist vision to failure. These intellectuals, he rightly observes, were “trapped in the language of the Other.”²¹ Yet Maghraoui concludes that they remade Egypt in a European image because they had learned to see themselves through European Orientalism's denigrating eye.²² In a more complex reading, Sheehi suggests that the *nahḍa* “subject develops a self-consciousness that exists for itself but is ‘determined’ through the European Self and apart from the Arab Self,” such that “only the supplemental mediation of the European Self can bestow knowledge, and thereby mastery and subjective presence, to the modern Arab.” Sheehi implies that a desire for self-determination—in the strong sense of “mastery”—drove the modern Arab to retrieve himself through Europe, whose imperial power in the nineteenth century incarnated sovereignty. Moreover, he limns a connection between that desire and the logic of reciprocity. Citing the Syro-Lebanese intellectual Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1819–83), who willfully recast the modern Arab imperative to imbibe imperial European knowledge as a mere cycle in a long-alternating current of exchange between “kin,” Sheehi flirts with the possibility that “equivocality,” or the “reciprocity of exchanging knowledge between East and West,” may have submitted Arab subjectivity to a Hegelian logic of “universal history.”²³ Yet he stops short of theorizing the lure of “reciprocity”—and the perception of *self-value* at its core—for Arab intellectuals of the *nahḍa*, and thus its implications for a new understanding of empire's power to invoke—and evoke—the native will to be master. Though rich, his reading—like Maghraoui's—ultimately foregrounds perceived self-lack and recesses perceived self-value, suggesting that the former motivated the fission of the Arab self and the fusion of its “better” half to the European. While such a conclusion unseats the “resistance” paradigm of postcolonial studies, it does little to complicate the “domination” paradigm that is its corollary.

Toward a richer theory of the entrapments of language, I argue that Orientalist discourse attracted Egyptian intellectuals because it appeared to *validate* the Arab-Islamic even as it denigrated it, putting European and Egyptian on an illusory footing of “equal” exchange. The language of the Other captivated Egyptians only when they imagined that it sounded like the language of the self. Then the terms of Egypt’s self-affirmation (and self-abasement) could translate Europe’s. This reception of Orientalism echoes the nineteenth-century Bengali response that Trautmann describes. Critiquing the Foucauldian power/knowledge paradigms of Said’s *Orientalism*, Trautmann shows how early British Orientalism invented linguistic and ethnological family trees that traced Sanskrit and English to a common Indo-European source and constructed Aryan affinities between Indians and Englishmen.²⁴ This construction of kinship—first marshaled to naturalize India’s colonial bond to England, then denied once Britain held sway over India—he calls “a love story.”²⁵ Unraveling the love-logic at work in an Orientalism usually understood as simple “domination,” Trautmann argues that this “love” is less political fact than “political rhetoric,” and the relationship it inscribes is decidedly unequal.²⁶ My reading of Trautmann suggests that Orientalist scholarship might predict the desired differential of British imperialism—the “superiority” of Briton to Indian—by flashing before its Indian interlocutors the seductive mirage of another relationship: the equality, indeed superiority, of Indian to Briton. For the differential equation that underpins the Aryan/Indo-European “love story” also operates in reverse. To nineteenth-century Bengali Hindus, Trautmann notes, “the Aryan idea seems . . . a source of kinship (Aryans = Indians + Europeans) for some writers and of difference, superiority, and greater antiquity (Aryans = Hindus) for others.”²⁷ Thus, I suggest, the power of the Aryan idea lies in its capacity to make the copula of kinship—“equivalence”—between Indian and Briton oscillate. What Trautmann limns is an affective economy that empowers the colonized to declare themselves “equal to” or “greater than” the European—through the prism of an Orientalist thesis itself attractive because it issues from the gaze of the colonizer.

French and British Orientalist projections of affinity with Arabic, Islam, and the ancient Egyptian engender similar fantasies of modern Egyptian sovereignty—at once equality with and superiority to Europe—in a global field that imperial Europe ultimately controls. As I read the political “love story” that translational seduction writes, the modern Egyptian subject finds a way to make the Egyptian or the Arab-Islamic

past “compete” with the European future on the fundamentally unequal ground of a colonial present. While I submit that the political rhetoric of affection between colonizers and colonized rarely describes political fact, I contend that the enthusiasm with which at least some nineteenth-century colonial subjects in Egypt (as in Bengal) received such rhetoric suggests that rhetorical *affect* can translate into political *effect*. Studying the friendships that Britons and Indians transacted across geopolitical lines in the nineteenth and early twentieth century—affective bonds that crystallized in transnational anti-imperialist movements—Leela Gandhi offers compelling evidence of the liberationist, anticolonial politics that *philoxenia*—love of the foreigner, the stranger—enables.²⁸ While anti-imperialist alliances of the kind that Gandhi describes also play out in the literary-political history of colonial Egypt—witness the insurgent affiliations of Muṣṭafā Kāmil and Juliette Adam, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt and Aḥmad ‘Urabī, Aḥmad Shawqī and Hall Caine—their exploration lies beyond the scope of this book. My focus is not on the anti-imperialist dimension of *philoxenia*. As important (and unjustly neglected) as that dimension is, I am interested here in exploring the more counter-intuitive and less optimistic possibility that the “love” extended to the foreign—by the European to the Egyptian, then by the Egyptian to the European—might more deeply colonize than liberate.

Reading the literary record of post-1798 Egypt, I argue that Egyptians were moved to “love” and to translate the cultures of their colonizers when those cultures presented themselves to Egyptians in “loving” translation. The French and the British were most attractive to Egyptians when they “spoke” the idioms of Arabic, Islam, or Egyptianness—when they translated themselves, or were perceived to have translated themselves, into imitations of their colonial targets. As Egyptian intellectuals came to see their colonizers and themselves as translatable—or exchangeable—terms, they could in turn “love” those colonizers enough to translate French or English idioms and ideas. In so doing, they negotiated a complex and often conflicted surrender to the ideology of European supremacy and to the imperatives of European colonialism. The case of Egypt, I contend, suggests that cultural imperialism might be better understood as a politics that lures the colonized to seek power *through* empire rather than against it, to translate their cultures into an empowered “equivalence” with those of their dominators and thereby repress the inequalities between those dominators and themselves. This politics I call *translational seduction*.

In reinterpreting cultural imperialism as a politics of translational

seduction, I conjoin Jean Baudrillard's notion of seduction to Spivak's understanding of translation. In *De la séduction* (1979; *Seduction*), Baudrillard suggests that diversion, or leading astray, is at the etymological root of *seduction*: the word derives from the Latin "*se-ducere*: to take aside, to divert from one's path."²⁹ For Baudrillard, seduction—although often metaphorized through the sexual—is fundamentally not about sex. Rather, it is a semiotic and intersubjective strategy of displacement, a mastery of diverted (thus diverting) appearances. Hence he pronounces seduction a power that exercises itself through the subtle manipulation of illusion, a "war game" played for sovereignty at the level of the sign.³⁰ To seduce is to make the grammars of both signs and ontologies dance: to make the polarities of subject and object oscillate such that they blur, and the mastered can fancy himself master.³¹ The seducer's very strategy, then, consists in creating the illusion that she is the object of seduction—without ever actually succumbing to object status—and in making the true object of seduction, the seduced, believe himself the seducer.³² Baudrillard recognizes that the pull of seduction for the seduced lies less in the attraction of seeing oneself the object of desire than it does in the attraction of seeing oneself as the seducing subject, as the sovereign who calls the shots of exchange. "Seduction," he writes, "is sovereign"; whoever commands its capacity to reverse signs—its "flotation of the law that regulates . . . difference" between polarities—can displace, in theory if not always in fact, the power of another and divert it to his or her advantage.³³ Yet Baudrillard never extrapolates the theoretical possibilities of seduction to translation or to colonial politics (two directions in which its semiotic and intersubjective operations point).

By contrast, Spivak's "The Politics of Translation" dubs the ontological and ethical transformations a translator undergoes in translation "one of the seductions" of the act.³⁴ She notes—suggestively—that translation calls on the translator to abandon authorial autonomy for surrogacy, to "work at someone else's title," to "surrender to the text" that she or he translates.³⁵ Spivak, however, does not connect the seductions of translation to the operations of cultural imperialism. To be fair, she writes in this essay of translating a native Bengali tongue whose intimacy has been lost to her as an Indian-born academic living in (post) colonial diaspora, not of the transfers of power at stake when a (post) colonial subject translates a colonizer's language—or vice versa. When she does address the geopolitics of translation, it is to condemn the "First World" feminist translator who approaches the "Third World"

woman's text as a native informant, blind to the text's rhetoricity—the texture of its language and its literary context—and attentive only to the anthropological information that it can deliver about the presumed plight of the non-Western or nonwhite female subject. That is why she valorizes a foreignizing praxis of translation in which the translator surrenders to the (presumably) alien signifiers of the original and channels their manners of meaning. Still, Spivak's suggestion that translation *seduces* the translator into surrendering self-identity to the text that she or he translates, into “miming . . . the responsibility to the trace of the other in the self,” hints at the ways in which a colonizer might use translation to usurp the ontological and territorial “title” of the colonized—and the ways in which a native translator might surrender his or her “title” to the colonizer by rendering the latter's idioms into his or her own.³⁶ A “trace of the other in the self” there might always be, but a colonizer who wields disproportionate power over the colonized can exploit that trace to hegemonic advantage, use it to lure the colonized into confusing self with Other and thus into fusing their “identity” to that of their dominator.

What I share with Baudrillard is a desire to articulate forms of power that color outside the lines of domination and resistance and that understand the “in-between” as something more complex than a hybrid of the two. My treatment of seduction in this book, however, parts ways with Baudrillard's on two counts. First, I do not share his nostalgia for feudal aristocracy. Suspicious of the ideological regimes of power and production installed by the French, the Industrial, and (implicitly) the Bolshevik Revolutions, Baudrillard aligns seduction with the aristocratic values of the eighteenth century. He counterpoises seduction to the “fallen” and “subaltern” post-nineteenth-century values of “sexuality, desire and pleasure,” which he imputes to the “inferior classes” of the bourgeoisie and the petite bourgeoisie.³⁷ Specters of the defining event of Europe's long nineteenth century—the French Revolution of 1789—hover over this disturbing class(ist) analysis, and longing for an ancien régime of desire is indeed one bias along which Baudrillardian seduction is cut. Second, I reject Baudrillard's tendency to divorce seduction from history and thus also from the dynamics of oppression. He describes the “feminine”—the principle of seduction—as “blank,” “without history.” To my mind, a seduction-theory of cultural imperialism holds explanatory power only if it recognizes that seduction *itself* is a force exercised unequally. While Baudrillard may insist on seduction's infinite reversibility, I maintain that not all historical ac-

tors hold the material power to temporarily suspend their identities in otherness—to set power adrift in a play of appearances—yet ultimately to restore themselves, in the realm of the actual, to dominance over others. The seduced will be seduced by the illusion that he or she can be—is—the seducer. But the real seducer is one whose illusions can call for backup. That seducer asserts (and ultimately regains) power by twice arresting exchange: first to create the illusion that sovereignty redounds to the seduced, then to restore the real by making sovereignty rebound to himself or herself. In other words, some political actors are more empowered than others—precisely because of their position in history—to make the *affective* attraction of their antihistorical “self-Othering” hold *effective* force over (indeed, within) others. Baudrillard would have us understand the feminine not as that which opposes the masculine but as that which seduces it, displacing it from within.³⁸ So too, I argue, must the antihistorical power of seduction be understood within, not outside, history—as that which seduces history rather than that which opposes it.

By articulating Baudrillard’s theory to Spivak’s so that each finishes the other’s incomplete sentence, we begin to see how a politics of translational seduction might divert the language, epistemes, and very being of the dominated to approximate those of the dominator. Indeed, this book engages precisely these three forms of translation: *interlingual*, the rendition of one language in another, whether understood as a transfer of “common” sense or as an evocation of the peculiar sensibility that attaches to one language’s manner of meaning in another tongue; *intercultural*, the transaction of epistemic “equivalence” in economies of cultural exchange; and *intersubjective*, the translation of one’s self to resemble an Other’s, as in Fanon’s rephrasing of the Hegelian dialectic. In thus invoking the full polysemy of *translation*, I take care to historicize the term, exploring the unequal exchange of languages, of intellectual and spiritual idioms, and of subjectivities that underwrote both modern French or British efforts to seduce Egypt into empire and Egyptian receptions of that colonial enterprise. Reading the operations of translation within the frame of colonial history, I argue that translation is perhaps the most seductive of imperial powers. Translation, after all, forges from two differences the *appearance* of equivalence: its fundamental syntax is “ $x = y$,” or “ x ‘is’ y ,” where the verb of being is functions in linguistic terms as a *copula* equating subject to predicate. Yet if in all translation a slash haunts that copula’s equal sign with the specter of the not-equal, such that “ $x \neq y$,” or “ x is (not really) y ,” I

argue that it does so all the more profoundly under colonial conditions, where geopolitical inequality compounds linguistic nonequivalence. Thus the translational seduction I locate at the heart of cultural imperialism is consummated in what I call the “copulation” of the colonizer and the colonized. This coupling is a differential equation of the two: a transformation of the disempowered into the delusory “likeness” of the empowered. If seduction knows yet disavows the power differential—the slash—between the terms it brings into “equivalence,” its upshot, “copulation,” forgets that differential entirely. In this economy of translation, I argue, the colonized lose themselves *in* the colonizer in order to regain their “sovereign” selves.

While 1798 is hardly the definitive “beginning” of modern Egyptian literary history, the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt that year inaugurated just such a translational relation between the modernities of Europe and of the Arab-Islamic world. Napoleon circulated a proclamation, in Arabic and mimicking Qur’ānic style, that assured the predominantly Muslim people of Egypt that the French were “sincere Muslims” like them. Such words—translating not just French into Arabic, but Christian Frenchness into Arab-Islamicity, and preceding the force of arms—disarmed Egyptian intellectuals, whether they believed Napoleon a friend or took pains to dissect his language and prove his enmity. Napoleon’s “self-translation” into Arabic seduced colonized Egyptian Muslims into desiring French precisely because it identified with them in the guise of their *precolonial* selves, still in possession of a “sovereign” language (Arabic) and culture (Islam). It dangled before Egyptian eyes a tantalizing homology between the “subjects” and “objects” of empire, between the *I* who would be conqueror and the *you* who would be conquered. “I am you,” Napoleon’s Arabic declared. Over a century later, Evelyn Baring, first Earl of Cromer, who effectively ruled Egypt as British consul-general from 1882 to 1907, drew lessons from the French strategy. In *Modern Egypt* (1908), Cromer hints that to win Egypt, England must shed its matronly respectability and become an “attractive damsel” like France, manipulating—like Napoleon—the appearance of intimacy.³⁹ Only then, he says, will Egyptians spurn French embraces and rush headlong into England’s open arms.

For more than a century after Napoleon’s occupation ended in 1801, the narrative of Egyptian-European “equivalence” that his colonial proclamation activated would continue to seduce Egyptians into believing that they never had lost their cultural self-determination, that Arab-Islamic and European civilizations could engage one another as equals,

free of the Napoleonic “pre-text” of domination. Under that spell generations of Egyptian intellectuals—first as warily intrigued receivers of French and British “self-translations” into Arab-Islamicity, then as often admiring translators of European literature into Arabic—would attach themselves psychologically to European empire. The earliest exemplar of this dynamic is Ḥasan al-‘Aṭṭār’s rhymed-prose narrative “Maqāmat al-Faransī” (*Maqāma* of the French, c. 1799), a theorization-in-fiction of the translational dynamics of Napoleon’s proclamation. Here an Egyptian narrator, initially terrified of the French, becomes powerfully drawn to them when a French scholar addresses him in Arabic—specifically, with an extract from *al-Burda* (The Mantle), a thirteenth-century Egyptian panegyric to the Prophet Muḥammad. Intoxicated by this invocation of his past, the narrator begins to fancy *himself* the seducer; he hallucinates the French as the feminine love objects of his erotic gaze and refers to them (largely) in the grammatical feminine, forgetting the fact that *he* is the object of their (masculine) colonial power. By tale’s end we find him working with Napoleon’s Orientalists on a bilingual French-Arabic dictionary and composing an Arabic panegyric to the French scholar himself, containing a “word or two of their language [French].”⁴⁰

Like al-‘Aṭṭār’s fictional narrator, many intellectuals of the Egyptian *nahḍa* responded to French and British identifications with Arabic, Islam, or Egyptianness with the mimetic desire to translate themselves, in turn, into Frenchness and Englishness. This they did largely within the skin of Arabic, which made it all too easy for them to disavow their mental colonization. First, disarmed by the illusion that Arabic might yet be “equivalent”—even superior—to French and English despite the European languages’ advantage under empire, they imagined it possible to learn their colonizers’ tongues and to translate European literatures into Arabic without seeing that doing so might endanger their own cultures. Second, by adapting European literature and thought as models for an Arab-Islamic “renaissance,” they believed that they could fill the imagined literary and philosophical “lacks” that had left their world lagging behind the European and had enabled Europe to dominate them. *Disarming Words* engages both of these phenomena. Rather than offer a full history of literary translation in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Egypt, however, or a direct account of the rise of the novel and other “modern” Arabic literary forms during that period, this book traces the emergence of a peculiarly (post)colonial psychology of translation in Egypt through a series of pivotal literary translations,

translation theories, and translational fictions. I show how intellectuals often attached Egypt to Europe *through* translation even as they imagined themselves empowering Egypt to “compete” with Europe *by* translation. Ultimately, I argue, the translated word—luring the self to forget itself (if not its language) in the memory of another—annexes a colonized people far more effectively than arms.

In this translational dynamic, resistance also figures. Not all Egyptian intellectuals of the period produced translations, and not all embraced the Westernization project so avidly. While I focus on dominant discourses of translation and literary production in the Egyptian *nahḍa*, those discourses did not reign absolute. One can cite many contrapuntal figures in the Egyptian context, from the political satirist ‘Abd Allāh al-Nadīm in the 1850s to the neoclassicist poets Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm and Aḥmad Shawqī and the journalist-novelist Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Still, I would note that specters of translation and comparison haunt both the Arabic literary praxes of these writers and their representations of the Arab encounter with European modernity. In one biting satire published on the eve of the British occupation (1881), “Lā Anta Anta wa Lā al-Mathīl Mathīl” (You Are Not Yourself, nor Is the Copy a Copy), al-Nadīm attacks the Frenchification of the Egyptian because it threatens to reproduce him as a bad “copy”—bad translation—of the French original he mimics.⁴¹ Ibrāhīm, for his part, laments the cultural dispossession of Arabic in “al-Lughā al-‘Arabiyya Tan’ī Ḥaẓẓahā bayna Ahlihā” (The Arabic Language Laments Its Fortunes among Its People), published in 1903.⁴² Like much of Ibrāhīm’s verse, this poem retains the Arabic *qaṣīda* (ode) form, yet takes pains to prove Arabic poetry a fitting vessel for “modernity.” Similarly, while Shawqī’s powerful *qaṣīda* “Wadā’ Lūrd Krūmir” (1907; “A Farewell to Lord Cromer”) attacks British colonialism in Egypt, it extols the civilizing mission of Egypt’s post-Napoleonic Ottoman rulers—Mehmed Ali (Muḥammad ‘Alī) Pasha and Khedive Ismā‘īl, both francophile—and thus upholds the ideology of colonial modernity.⁴³ These works too, then, reflect the strain of the dominant. Finally, although al-Muwayliḥī’s *Ḥadīth ‘Īsā ibn Hishām, aw Fatra min al-Zaman* (The Tale of ‘Īsā ibn Hishām; or, A Period of Time, 1898–1902, 1907, 1927; *A Period of Time*) adapts the medieval Arabic form of the *maqāma*, its narrative is translational: it represents a Cairo whose Ottoman form has been overwritten—in just fifty years—by a new social order at once fast decolonizing (turning “Egyptian”) and fast re-colonizing (becoming “European”).⁴⁴

DOMINATION, RESISTANCE, AND THE COLONIAL “IN-BETWEEN”

By listening for the attraction that colonial translation might represent for the (post)colonial subject, I hold the door between domination and resistance ajar not simply for the structural collusion of the two—as Bhabha does—but also for the interposition of translational seduction *between* the two and thus for the reinterpretation of cultural imperialism I advance in this book.⁴⁵ On the threshold between domination and resistance, a power that diverts both steals in. The colonizing text that wields this power mobilizes affect—the attachment of the colonized to themselves, which in politicohistorical terms is also an attachment to their lost sovereignty—to strategically re-present the colonizer as the most flattering “likeness” of the colonized. Such a translational mobilization of affect lures the colonized into *loving the colonizer as they would themselves* and thus into embracing the very power that all too often they are imagined merely to “resist.”

This book, then, stands in contrapuntal relation to Edward Said’s understanding of the impact of European cultural imperialism on the modern Arab-Islamic world. Said’s theory of cultural imperialism generally hews to a domination/resistance binary. In this schema, culture is a discursive armament that colonizers almost always impose and the colonized almost always oppose, though their attack on the imposed culture may turn its very terms. Following Said, I suggest that the politics of translation in post-1798 Egypt cannot be extracted from the colonial power that frames them. I argue, however, that we cannot understand the effects of cultural imperialism in terms of imposition alone. Only by crossing the “come-hither” with the “or-else” of both French and British imperialisms and their Egyptian receptions, I suggest, can we expose the impact of these imperialisms on Egyptian ideologies of translation and literary transformation and explain why Egyptians have translated European literatures so Janus-facedly—why one *I* has gazed longingly North and West even as the other has looked defiantly East and South. Here I agree with John Tomlinson, who wonders why cultural imperialism rests “on the idea that alien cultural products and practices are *imposed* on a culture,” although often their receivers “don’t perceive them as an ‘imposition.’”⁴⁶ Arguing that this idea wrongly presupposes the “autonomy” of cultures, Tomlinson calls us to see cultural imperialism as “*loss* rather than . . . *imposition*”: a loss he ascribes to “*the failure of the processes of collective will-formation.*”⁴⁷ My reading, however,

attempts a more complex theorization of culture “loss.” I posit that loss as a function of the very *will* of the colonized to rediscover their “autonomy” through the colonizer’s *I*: a will motivated by their apprehension of the colonizer’s force.

In *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), Said suggests that culture drives politics less by imposition than by affirmation. As a “quasi-autonomous extension of political reality,” he writes, “culture serves authority . . . not because it represses and coerces but because it is affirmative, positive, and persuasive.”⁴⁸ Elsewhere, however, he correlates culture to coercion, declaring all texts—all artifacts of culture—undemocratic. “Texts,” he insists, “are fundamentally facts of power, not of democratic exchange.”⁴⁹ While they stage as equal the discursive relation of speakers (writers) to hearers (readers), Said argues, that relation is “far from equal in actuality,” a fact that texts “dissemble” in “an act of bad faith.”⁵⁰ Here Said edges close to Émile Benveniste, who (as I show in chapter 6) argues that the speaking *I* claims the moment of discourse as its own and in that instant subordinates the *you* of the hearer to its own authorial and authoritative intention. Said ultimately contends that “far from being a type of conversation between equals, the discursive situation is more usually like the unequal relation between colonizer and colonized, oppressor and oppressed. . . . Words and texts are so much of the world that their effectiveness, in some cases even their use, are matters having to do with ownership, authority, power, and the imposition of force.”⁵¹ In this economy, cultural affirmation and persuasion figure only as alibis for imposition—indeed colonial domination. Having defined all culture as, in effect, cultural imperialism and constrained its operations to imposition, Said must imagine resistance as its polar opposite. He wisely rejects Michel Foucault’s intimation that the power wielded by authority (imposition) and the power wielded against it (resistance) are morally equivalent. Yet his solution is to pose a relation in which the twain never meet. “Resistance,” he writes, “cannot equally be an adversarial alternative to power and a dependent function of it.”⁵²

I share Said’s conviction that resistance is morally nonequivalent to domination and thus never simply power in reverse, but I question his radical separation of the lexicons of resistance and power. To Foucauldian symmetry and Saidian asymmetry, I would oppose *transymmetry* as a more helpful way to understand both the exercise of and the response to cultural imperialism. In transymmetry—the *a*/symmetry of translation—culture-as-imposition and culture-as-resistance are mutually, but

not equally, constitutive; resistance, I would argue, more often derives from imposition, works through and displaces it (as Bhabha suggests), than the other way around. If dominant culture disassembles its impositionist tendencies in order to pretend to affirm its would-be subjects, and if resistance culture in turn wears but tears the logic of imposition in order to make itself persuasive to the dominant, is not cultural power on both sides of the colonial divide seductive?

The binary opposition of domination/resistance also marks Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), both a sequel to and a divergence from his *Orientalism* (1978). *Orientalism* had characterized European knowledge production about the Arab-Islamic world, especially between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, as "a form of discursive currency by whose presence the Orient henceforth would be *spoken for*."⁵³ Here the European Orientalist speaks and dominates, and the fictive "Orient" is silenced and acted upon. While Said insists throughout *Orientalism* that we are not to mistake the fictive "Orient" for the real—that European representation of the Arab-Islamic world has little to do with that world itself—it is clear that, thanks to the conjunction of Orientalist scholarship with colonial Realpolitik, this fictive "Orient" shades into the real Orient and to some extent determines it. As Said himself concedes, "Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West."⁵⁴ Thus he seems all too aware that the intersection of European knowledge with power has created much of what passes for contemporary Arab-Islamic reality, that the legacies of European Orientalism in fact have produced *him*; "much of the personal investment in this study," he confesses, "derives from my awareness of being an 'Oriental.'"⁵⁵ In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said overcorrects critical misperceptions of his arguments in *Orientalism* by opposing resistance to domination. Where *Orientalism* presupposes the power of European scholarship to will its vision of the "Orient" over the real Orient—with nary a reply, it seems, from the latter—*Culture and Imperialism* insists that imperial domination always met its corollary, decolonizing resistance, wherever it sought to assert its political will. "Never was it the case," Said writes in the later work, "that the imperial encounter pitted an active Western intruder against a supine or inert non-Western native; there was *always* some form of active resistance."⁵⁶ If modern European imperialism began with a "voyage out" to non-Western lands, the non-Western decolonization movements of the mid-twentieth century represent what Said calls "*the voyage in*": a "conscious effort to enter into the discourse of . . . the West,

to mix with it, transform it.”⁵⁷ Such a definition of resistance implies its hybridity—however strategic—with imperialist discourse. Yet Said goes on to posit decolonizing resistance as always and only a radical “alternative” to the historical logic of domination, retracting his intimation that it might also *couple*—“mix”—with hegemonic discourse. Once again, he insists on the radical asymmetry of resistance to power.

So assiduous a separation between domination and resistance requires an equally studied forgetting of the space between. That forgetting is all the more curious when we observe that Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* both introduces and enacts the praxis of contrapuntal reading, with which Said himself proposes to render “the *overlapping* experience of Westerners and Orientals, the *interdependence* of cultural terrains in which colonizer and colonized co-existed and battled each other through projections.”⁵⁸ While Said closely explores the ways in which culture secured the consent of British, French, and other colonizing societies “for the distant rule of native peoples and territories,” he attends less deeply to the operations of hegemony in the cultures of the colonized.⁵⁹ Still, he suggests that the colonized too might experience imperialism as something more than coercion, as a structure that seeks (and sometimes gains) their consent and does so to troubling ends. Here he defines imperialism as “an ideological vision implemented and sustained not only by direct domination and physical force but much more effectively . . . by *persuasive means*, the quotidian processes of hegemony,” describing these processes as an “interaction among natives, the white man, and the institutions of authority” that passes from “‘communication to command’ and back again.”⁶⁰ Indeed, as Said observes, “many of the classes and individuals collaborating with imperialism began by trying to emulate modern European ways.”⁶¹ As one instance of such “collaboration” he notes the proliferation of educational missions in the colonial period, missions like those that Mehmed Ali Pasha, Ottoman viceroy of Egypt from 1805 to 1848, sent to Paris and London during the first half of the nineteenth century. “The primary purpose of these early missions to the West,” Said observes,

was to learn the ways of the advanced white man, *translate his works*, pick up his habits. . . .

An entire massive chapter in cultural history across five continents grows out of this kind of collaboration between natives on the one hand and . . . representatives of imperialism on the other. In paying respect to it, acknowledging the shared and combined experiences that produced many of

us, we must at the same time note how at its center it nevertheless preserved the nineteenth-century imperial divide between native and Westerner.⁶²

Said, then, reduces the impulse that drives the colonized to translate the words, culture, ways, and being of his or her colonizer to mere “collaboration” and quickly dismisses it as such—though he later notes that that impulse occasionally took an anti-imperialist turn. Yet his reading of collaboration, which insists finally on the “imperial divide” it reinforces, does not explain why the subjects of empire so avidly abet their cultural colonization, nor how those subjects negotiate the terms of their transformation as they study, translate, and (falsely) approximate “the advanced white man.” Collaboration (at least insofar as Said deploys the term) serves only the interests of empire, never those of its subjects. Yet clearly “collaboration” must appeal to the self-interest of the colonized—as much their *ontological* as their material self-interest—if they are to join forces with their dominators. The discourse of a dominant culture disarms the dominated into subjection whenever it can seduce them into imagining their dominators at once equal to and greater than themselves, excite them to love their dominators as not just their selves, but their “best” selves—possessed of the new/old knowledge and power to reinstate themselves as the sovereigns they once were.

Given that both culture and imperialism in Said realize their colonial effects through the play of domination and suasion and that resistance too achieves its libratory effects by interleaving contestatory historical visions with dominant ones, why then does he ultimately refuse the ground that is most “hybrid”—that connects the voyage out to the voyage in—in thinking the relationships of culture to imperialism and decolonization? While he declares that “an entire massive chapter in cultural history across five continents grows out of . . . collaboration” between “natives” and “representatives of imperialism,” he writes only its preface in *Culture and Imperialism*. He prefers to lay the body of that chapter to rest in a premature grave—notice that he calls us to “[pay] respect to it”—and return his gaze to the twin poles of imposition and resistance. I would suggest that Said does not write this “massive chapter” because it touches the self too intimately: it inscribes, after all, the “shared and combined experiences that produced many of us,” including the “Oriental” Said. To write this chapter would be to explain why he, though aware of the imperial ugliness in which so many Western cultural artifacts are implicated, nonetheless must confess the attraction of—his attraction to?—these images of imperial authority, powerfully

seductive despite their powerful testimony to the objectification, exploitation, and murder of fellow humans. The unwritten chapter would tell us why, having inventoried many such objects, Said concludes, “The list is long and its treasures massive.”⁶³ The missing “massive chapter” would illuminate, in other words, the *massive value* that the (post)colonial subject attaches to the colonizer’s culture. To grant politically ugly objects aesthetic brilliance, Said repeatedly invokes their complexity. It is this complexity he must disavow to quiet the ghost of aesthetic—indeed humanist—valuation that haunts his otherwise trenchant political critique of imperialism.

Although Timothy Mitchell writes in Said’s intellectual footsteps, he travels further. He shows us how—through the processes of emulation and translation to which Said gestures—European ideas of “discipline” and “order” infiltrated Egyptian social thought and organization in the nineteenth century. Not content to assume the intractable resistance of the native signifier (as al-Īsawī is, or as Said might be), he takes the Arabic word as a pressure point at which we might feel its surrenders to colonial reoccupation, if only we press hard enough. Alongside the evolution of other keywords, Mitchell traces that of the Arabic term *tarbiya*, which originally referred to “nurture” or “rearing” but during the nineteenth century came to signify “education” in the colonial mold, as intellectual reformers like Rifā‘a Rāfi‘ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and ‘Alī Mubārak introduced into Egypt the Benthamite regimes of discipline they experienced as students in Paris between the 1820s and the 1840s. Mitchell ascribes such lexical transformations—translations in which old words reattach to new objects—to a broader shift in Arab-Islamic understandings of the relationship between signifiers and signifieds: a shift that transpired in the crucible of colonial power. Noting that Arab-Islamic thought traditionally had refused the Cartesian mind-body dualism implied in the modern European separation of words and things, he suggests that the rising currency of European epistemes in nineteenth-century Egypt encouraged Egyptians to see both word and world as “divided absolutely into two.”⁶⁴

Mitchell’s reading of the reconception of signification itself in nineteenth-century Egypt is compelling, and I consider its implications in chapter 5. What interests me here is how deeply his argument about colonial power comes to rest on the very logic of absolute twoness that underpins Said’s understanding of Orientalism. According to Mitchell, what distinguishes the “modern political order” of colonialism “is the effect of seeming to exclude the other absolutely from the self.”⁶⁵ “What Orientalism offered,” he maintains,

was not just a technical knowledge of Oriental languages, religious beliefs and methods of government, but a series of absolute differences according to which the Oriental could be understood as the negative of the European. These differences were not the differences within a self, which would be understood as an always-divided identity; they were the differences between a self and its opposite, the opposite that makes possible such an imaginary, undivided self.⁶⁶

In this reading, the power of Orientalism to consolidate the putative “superiority” of the European and to produce the non-Western subject as a colonizable “inferior” resides in the architecture of radical difference it erects between West and East. Here Orientalism replaces an integral conception of self, in which the self contains its own difference, with a self/Other dualism. No doubt Orientalism, from the standpoint of the European, enforced such a fiction of absolute separateness between the excluded Oriental and a European self purified of all disquieting traces of the Oriental within. I would suggest, however, that this interpretation of Orientalist knowledge production did not necessarily extend to the non-Westerner who received it. To the Egyptian, Orientalist writings on Arabic literature and on Islam often suggested that the European was interested in him and perhaps even needed him, for his world continued to offer some insight that the European—despite his world dominance—did not yet possess. As I note in chapter 3, seeing a French Orientalist like Silvestre de Sacy produce books in Arabic only encouraged an Egyptian intellectual like al-Ṭaḥṭāwī to imagine the world as a series of likenesses in which the Oriental could be understood as the “equivalent” of the European—not, or not immediately, as Mitchell’s series of “absolute differences.” So powerful was this effect of similitude, in fact, that the Egyptian *willfully* overlooked the differences that Orientalist scholarship sought to install between himself and the European, forgot the lacks (backwardness, irrationality, disorder) that colonial discourse imputed to him. In that overlooking, the Egyptian reproduced himself as “an imaginary, undivided self”: not just a self undivided from its precolonial sovereign self but also—in the same breath—a self undivided from colonizing Europe. If the colonizing European, as Mitchell maintains, consolidates “its uncorrupted and undivided identity” by excluding the Oriental from himself and forgetting “the dependence of [the self’s] identity upon what it excludes,” the colonized Egyptian—I argue—often redeems the perceived cultural integrity lost to the interruption of European colonialism by *counting the European as himself* and thus eventually by including himself in the

European.⁶⁷ Forgotten are those aspects of the self that cannot include the foreign, cannot be synchronized with it. For ever threatening Egyptian identification with the European is the gnawing intimation of lack that the Egyptian has banished to a space beyond “likeness”: beyond the translational union of West and non-West effected by Orientalist cultural production, which a Saidian understanding of Orientalism as domination cannot quite explain. The European typically shunts lack onto an “Oriental” outside; the elite Egyptian intellectual positions both himself and the European on the inside and casts the lack attached to him onto a “bad” Oriental alter ego who no longer can count in the mainstream nation’s self-fashioning.⁶⁸

TOWARD THE EROTIC AND

Spivak’s call on the self to surrender itself in translation enjoins humility on the dominant but holds peril for the dominated. For where does the colonized translator fly after she or he bids the self good-bye? Into the master-Other. If, for the colonized, the eros of translation fabricates a dangerously seductive “likeness” in the face of difference—the deep difference power makes—then the politics of (post)colonial translation beg retheorization, as much for the future of comparative literary studies and translation theory as for the future of postcolonial studies. Rey Chow, for one, has argued that the crisis of comparative literature today lies in the field’s unexamined assumption of “parity” between languages.⁶⁹ Chow dismisses debates about translation as “unhelpful” to her critique, as these generally traffic in “an unhistoricized notion of language and language users.”⁷⁰ Yet translation is the whispering double of comparison in her work. The chief target of Chow’s critique, after all, is the logic of supplementation that underpins the conjunction *and* in the comparative paradigm “Europe and Its Others”—what I would call the traditional province of a postcolonial studies centered on domination and resistance. This inclusive *and* can add an infinity of “other” (read: non-European) cultures to the space of comparison without engaging the ways in which those “other” cultures have negotiated their relations with the European and thus without dislodging European supremacy; as Chow asserts, the paradigm “stabilizes Europe as the grid of intelligibility to which may be added more and more others.”⁷¹

I would argue that this logic of supplementation also describes the imperial universalism that continues to haunt translation theory, even

at its most sensitive to the incommensurability of languages. For the logic evokes the relationship between languages-in-translation that Benjamin adumbrates in “The Task of the Translator”: the notion that languages supplement one another in their modes of intention, such that in their supplementarity they together approximate “pure language.”⁷² Tejaswini Niranjana, Samuel Weber, and Naomi Seidman variously have tried to rescue Benjamin from charges of theological utopianism or high humanist universalism by stressing that his “pure language” is induced—or add-uced—from multiplicity rather than deduced from origin.⁷³ Still, the Babel narrative—intelligible primarily to Western (or at least Judeo-Christian) readers familiar with the Hebrew Bible, as well as to readers “Judeo-Christianized” through a process of Westernizing acculturation—remains the subtext of Benjamin’s zone of supplementarity, his fissured vessel of “pure language.”⁷⁴ Although, in Benjamin’s conception, languages differ in the ways they mean, it is not always clear that that difference includes the differential positions of languages themselves within global geopolitics or global capital. As a Marxian historical materialist, Benjamin could not have been indifferent to these forces. Yet in his schema of linguistic supplementarity the specter of political inequality between languages remains just that—a specter, not a material presence.

Against the neoimperial logic of supplementarity that subtends the paradigm “Europe and Its Others,” Chow proposes that of “Post-European Culture and the West.” This new paradigm, she argues, recenters global relations in worlds beyond Europe while recognizing that “even in the seemingly narcissistic . . . preoccupation with itself,” the (post)colonial culture typically “contains, in its many forms of self-writing, imprints of a fraught . . . relation of comparison and judgment in which Europe haunts it as the referent of supremacy.”⁷⁵ In this geography of colonized selves realizing themselves *through* imperial Europe, I include the modern Arab world in general and modern Egypt in particular. Here too “the conjunction *and*” does not inscribe what Chow calls “complacent” supplementarity, but registers a historically troubled *affective* relation between the “post-European” subject and a West that has intruded onto its history, violated its relationship to its own past, destroyed its capacity for self-determination.⁷⁶ The *and* of “Post-European Culture and the West,” argues Chow, is a “neurotic *and*”: “a cluster of lingering ideological and emotional effects.”⁷⁷ She contends that the West invades the “Rest” not on the axis of space alone—governed by a homogenizing *and*—but most acutely on the axis

of time, where a differentiating *and* traps the post-European culture in a hierarchical relation “between this ‘always already’ present that is Europe, on the one hand, and the histories and traditions it must now live as its pasts, on the other—pasts that nonetheless continue to erupt as so many suppressed indices of time with forgotten and/or unfinished potentialities.”⁷⁸ As I read Chow, time—more recursive than space—is less assuredly decolonizable.

In attributing the neurosis of (post)colonial temporality to “lived historic violation,” however, Chow associates the “neurotic *and*” with rape. Her reading echoes Said’s final diagnosis of the psychology of Orientalism from a Western perspective. In the “British and French experiences of and with the Near Orient, Islam, and the Arabs,” he initially discerns an “*intimate, perhaps even the most intimate, . . . relationship between Occident and Orient.*”⁷⁹ Yet his last word goes to the battle posture of confrontation: “What seems to have influenced Orientalism most was a *fairly constant sense of confrontation* felt by Westerners dealing with the East.”⁸⁰ What if we were to refuse Said’s choice and take intimacy more seriously as a colonial force, enmeshed—through its semiotic avatar, translation, which Spivak describes as “the most intimate act of reading”—in the West’s confrontation with the Arab-Islamic East? What if Chow’s neurotic *and* is also an erotic *and*, perhaps even an erotic *is* that moves conjunction toward a conjugation of the *Is* of colonized and colonizer?

Violation is incontestably the material beginning—and the material end—of colonial encounter. It does not always tell us, however, how the experience of colonialism translates native time. This book maintains that cultural imperialism often does the greatest violence to native time not by raping the native’s histories, traditions, or pasts but by *flattering* these. I suggest that the “neurotic *and*” produces such anxiety for the post-European subject because love has been part of its conjunction. In Arabic linguistics, after all, the conjunction *and* (*wa*) is termed *ḥarf ‘atf*—literally, “a particle of bonding.” And the implied bond is affective: *‘atf* denotes emotion, especially sympathy. *Disarming Words* proposes, then, that we shift our gaze from a colonial politics of mere rupture—violation or rape—to a politics that welds rupture to rapture: a colonial politics of seduction, which also institutes rupture but does so by making its object believe that rupture is coterminous with the past, that subject and object are one and the same. Thus, as I argue in chapter 2, falling into “love” is not just the outcome of seduction, but the contestation of its effects: a struggle to wrest the affective bond

of the erotic *and* away from bondage, to translate the colonized love object “flattered” by the colonizer into the *subject who loves*, to bend seduction’s alluring proposition of a continuity of colonized object and colonizing subject (the “equal to”) toward a reassertion of that object’s superiority to the subject (the “greater than”).

In placing post-1798 Egypt at the center of my analyses and reading France and Britain around this center, I abandon the comparative paradigm Chow calls “Europe and Its Others” in favor of what she dubs “Post-European Culture and the West.” To the neurotic *and* of violation and confrontation, however, I couple the erotic *and* of translational seduction—the oscillating copula of the verb *to be*—and explore its power to bind the colonized to the colonizer, to make the latter haunt the former as what Chow calls “the referent of supremacy.” Comparative literary studies of translation, empire, and postcoloniality can gain much from exploring sites positioned, like Egypt, in the colonial “in-between,” for such sites compel critical attention to the interplay of the effective and the affective, of force and seduction, in empire and decolonization. Throughout its periods of French and British domination, Egypt was also, officially or loosely, linked to the Ottoman Empire: thus it was doubly colonized from 1798 to 1801, during the French occupation, and again from 1882, the beginning of British occupation, until 1914, when it became a British protectorate.⁸¹ Between 1922 and 1952, Egypt was nominally “independent,” yet ruled by descendants of Mehmed Ali who remained subject to British dictates. Moreover, as al-‘Īsawī, Mitchell, Khaled Fahmy, and others have suggested, Egypt remained in “semicolonial” bondage to Europe throughout much of its Ottoman nineteenth century, even between periods of direct European occupation. Certainly France continued to influence Ottoman-Egyptian institutions long after the Napoleonic occupation—from the reign of Mehmed Ali Pasha (1805–48) through that of Khedive Ismā‘īl (1863–79), with a brief anti-Westernization interlude (more anti-French than anti-British) during the reign of Khedive ‘Abbās I (1848–54). Further, during the reign of Khedive Ismā‘īl, European creditors siphoned nearly three quarters of Egypt’s treasury to support both European development schemes (among these, the Suez Canal) and Ismā‘īl’s strongly Westernizing cultural tastes (institutions like the Cairo Opera House and efforts to transform Cairo into Paris on the Nile). Bankrupted, Egypt was seized as collateral for its debts; in 1876, France and Britain assumed joint economic control over the Ottoman province, citing the need to bring its wayward finances in line. This structure of governance—termed the Dual Control—was paternalistic, indeed

colonial; it both resurrected the French invasion of 1798 and predicted the British invasion of 1882.

Still more unusual is the fact that Ottoman Egypt became a regional imperial power even as it battled the specter of European domination: between 1811 and the 1840s, Mehmed Ali's armies invaded the Arabian peninsula (1811–18), the Morea (1824–27), Syria (1831–40), and the Sudan (1820 onward).⁸² Most of these territories were lost quickly to foreign intervention, but the Sudan remained under direct Egyptian control from 1821 to 1884, then under joint Egyptian-British dominion until 1952. As Eve Troutt Powell has argued in her study of Anglo-Egyptian imperialism in the Sudan, from the 1820s through the early 1950s, Egypt was a “colonized colonizer,” intent on subjecting others to imperial power even as it remained subject to various forms of imperial domination itself.⁸³ I would suggest that Egypt's domination of the Sudan is the tragic geopolitical outcome of the translational seduction I describe in this book: a territorial enactment of the ontological fantasy of liberating the self from the colonizer by usurping and reoccupying the colonizer's *I*.

If Egypt's status as an imperial power was peculiar, so too was its postcoloniality. Three moments of equivocal “postcoloniality” would precede Egypt's final independence: one in the early nineteenth century, with the end of French occupation, and two more in the early twentieth, with the end of Khedival rule (1914) and the demise of the British protectorate (1922). Even Egypt's fourth and final postcoloniality—which arrived in the mid-twentieth century with the ultimate end of both Turco-Egyptian monarchy and British dominion—is equivocal, not least because legacies of empire continue to haunt Egyptian self-understanding.

This book, then, is a reply to overheard questions: the two mirror questions that Kiliṭū puts in al-Manfalūṭi's mouth (“Aren't I an Azharite?” and “How do I become European?”), which so oddly predicate the self-assurance of the Egyptian Muslim *I* on its translation into the European's “likeness,” and the self-incriminating question that lingers—like an embarrassed half-smile—at the corners of Said's discourse: Might cultural imperialism achieve its deepest effects by appealing to its targets' deepest affects, rule more by seduction than by fiat, depend more heavily on captivating its subjects than on capturing them? To that end, chapter 1 studies Napoleon's first proclamation to the Egyptian people of 2 July 1798 as a historical and rhetorical “pre-text” that would figure the translational terms on which Egyptians would relate to

the imperial West for the next 150 years. Drawing on Vicente Rafael's understanding of translation as an attractive technology of "telecommunication," I counterpoise my reading of translational seduction, as it plays out in Napoleon's proclamation, to Althusserian interpellation (invoked by Niranjana in her theory of autocolonization) and its presumed opposite (invoked by Natalie Melas in her theory of dissimulation). Chapter 2 reads Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār's "Maqāmat al-Faransīs" (1799) as a literary translation of Napoleon's pre-text. Engaging the theories of Fanon, Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, Bhabha, Baudrillard, G. W. F. Hegel, and Slavoj Žižek, I argue that al-ʿAṭṭār's fiction writes an antihistory of the French occupation: a narrative that abandons the dominant force plot of colonial historiography to probe its subterranean love plot.

In chapter 3, I turn to the impact of Egypt's experience of French rule on its first "post"-colonial cultural moment. I focus on the earliest translations and translation theories of Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, who studied in Paris from 1826 to 1831 and became a leading intellectual "reformer" of the Egyptian nineteenth century, spearheading the drive to translate French texts into Arabic. Reading his *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīṣ Bārīz* (1834)—the first modern Arabic account of European life—with his translation (1827) of Joseph Agoub's poem *La Lyre brisée* (1825), I show how his engagements with Orientalists like Agoub and de Sacy led him to theorize the inherent "exchangeability" of Arabic with French, thereby debunking the presumed incomparability of Arabic and subordinating Arab-Islamic epistemes to a Eurocentric literary-historical genealogy. I compare al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's theory of translation to that of Walter Benjamin and interrogate the Eurocentrism that haunts current understandings of world literature and the origins of literary comparison, engaging the work of Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, and Kiliṭū.

Chapter 4 traces the Egyptian turn to English after the British occupation of 1882. I contend that ʿAlī Mubārak's *ʿAlam al-Dīn* (1882), arguably the first Egyptian novel, shifts Egyptian "love" for Europe from France to England on the grounds of British Orientalist Islamophilia, to which Mubārak contrasts (unfavorably) the desacralizing tendencies of secular French Orientalism. This valorization of English thought as a new and more "proper" love object for Egypt prefigures Muḥammad al-Sibāʿī's 1911 translation of Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841). I argue that Carlyle's praise for the Prophet Muḥammad in *On Heroes* moved al-Sibāʿī to ignore Carlyle's ultimate subordination of the Prophet to Shakespeare and to

insist—against the evidence of Carlyle’s full text—on the radical translatability of the native Islamic “religious” and the British colonial “secular.” Rethinking the articulation of religion to secularism in the work of Talal Asad, Muhsin Al-Musawi, and Gauri Viswanathan, I show how Islam in al-Sibā’ī’s translation becomes a conduit for the secular, fulfilling Cromer’s colonial wish that “de-moslemised Moslems” undergo a literal reformation by de-Christianized Christianity.⁸⁴

Focusing on the period just after the anticolonial revolution of 1919, chapter 5 argues that the historical dependence of empire in Egypt on translation led nationalist intellectuals of the 1920s and the early 1930s like Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Māzinī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt, and Salāma Mūsā to define Egyptian claims to nationhood, national culture, and national literature in equally translational terms: to wonder whether, how, and to what extent Egypt could or should “translate” into Europe if it wished to be a nation. If modern Egypt’s equality with Britain hinges on a homology between the words and bones of ancient Egyptians and Britons, as Mūsā argues, or its nationhood on the translation of its “Babel” of ideological idioms into a single hegemonic language in tune with European colonial modernity, as Haykal suggests, did becoming nationally Egyptian mean remaining colonially “European”? Reading post-1919 Egyptian writings through and against the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Derrida, Partha Chatterjee, Liu, Mitchell, Rafael, Naoki Sakai, and Venuti on national ideology, translation, and sovereignty, I contend that the drive to institute Egyptian nationality surrendered Egypt to imperial translationality, pushing Egypt to eradicate all local incommensurability with a European “universal.”

Engaging the thought of Benveniste and Derrida on language, sovereignty, and violence, chapter 6 examines two novels that represent Egypt’s intimacies with England during the late imperial, almost postcolonial 1940s. In Najīb Maḥfūz’s *Zuqāq al-Midaqq* (1947; *Midaq Alley*) and Lawrence Durrell’s *Mountolive* (1958), Egyptian women—seduced and translated—both incarnate the triumph of British empire and project its imminent demise. It is as consummations of the seductive enterprise of colonial translation, as bodies prostituting or “adulterating” themselves into full “copulation” to English and Englishness, that the late-empire “Egypt” these women embody begin to exceed and escape colonial control. While I focus on Maḥfūz’s *Zuqāq*, I argue that both novels stage decolonization as a question of

re-recognition: how can colonized Egypt separate itself from its colonizer when it has become its colonizer—seduced and translated beyond recognition? Only by betraying itself can Egypt become “itself” again in the (post)colonial.

Against the backdrop of recent attempts by Western thinkers such as Derrida and Jessica Benjamin to theorize the relationships of love to friendship, domination, and enmity, my conclusion examines a 1929 exchange between the Egyptian literati Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād that centers on two interrelated questions. First, between conquerors and the conquered, who translates whom more, and why? Second, is cross-cultural translation motivated by love or by war? I argue that these writers’ interrogation of the psychopolitical motivations of translation within a decade of the 1919 revolution reflects a nascent awareness of the uneasy nexus of translation, empire, and the emerging nation in Egypt. Their early (post)colonial meditations on translation remain relevant to our present. Only by reoriginating literary-cultural comparison in a hermeneutics of intimate enmity, as al-‘Aqqād suggests, can we transact new and perhaps genuinely postcolonial forms of cross-cultural “love.”

Sounding postcolonial theory’s silences on the affective power of colonialism, then, I have tried in this book to uncover what makes colonial “enemies” and their postcolonial descendants intimate. I have tried to ask not what makes them “hate” each other so but what makes them “love” each other so. Thus I address the historical amnesia that confounds relations between the West and the Arab-Islamic world in the post-9/11 moment. Within one month of 11 September 2001, the Italian novelist Umberto Eco argued the need to counter the assaults of Islamic “fundamentalism” on the West by bringing Arab and Muslim students to the West to “study [its] customs and practices.”⁸⁵ The *Arab Human Development Report 2003*, an “auto-critique” by Arab analysts for the United Nations Development Programme, ascribed the “failure” of the Arab world to modernize and democratize to its presumed “failure” to adequately translate Western thought. We occupy a world, then, in which Westerners and Easterners who deny thick histories of intercultural traffic can pretend that modern Arab and Muslim travels to and translations of the West have not in fact informed and transformed Arab-Islamic consciousness for over 150 years. Never has it been so important to remind both the Western and the Arab-Islamic worlds that they are no strangers to one another, that what so-called Is-

lamic fundamentalists strive to undo is the thoroughgoing Westernness of most Arab-Islamic societies today: a Westernness that traces its roots as much to the translational intimacies that modern European colonialism engendered in the Arab world as it does to the violences that such colonialism has sometimes created, sometimes only exacerbated, but in any case always left seething in its wake.