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Modes of Cosmopolitanism in Waguih Ghali's Egypt in *Beer in the Snooker Club*

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Abstract

This paper examines the different expressions of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in Waguih Ghali's semi-autobiographical *Beer in the Snooker Club* (1964). It defines two different forms of cosmopolitanism in the novel (colonial versus imperial) and their influence on the identity of the main characters. The paper also examines the obsession with defining 'Egyptianess' in the novel in the wake of Egyptian nationalism during Nasser's regime. The paper argues that cosmopolitanism and nationalism are two opposite ideologies that hold each other in balance but when the balance tips off in favour of one pole, an immoderate ideology raises its ugly head: racial or class-based nationalism, on the one hand, or colonial hegemony, on the other. Finally, the paper concludes that Ghali favours imperial cosmopolitanism which boasts of multiple communities that interact together and still preserve their uniqueness and specificities.

Keywords: Waguih Ghali; Egypt; Nationalism; Cosmopolitanism; Identity

Foreign culture is as necessary to the spirit of a nation as is foreign commerce to its industries.

—Ameer Rihani, *The Book of Khalid*¹

This paper examines the different expressions of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in Waguih Ghali's semi-autobiographical *Beer in the Snooker Club* (1964). It defines and discusses the repercussions of the two concepts on the characters of the text in light of the historical context of the novel that spans Egypt under British protection and immediately after the 1952 coup d'état. Waguih

¹ Ameen Rihani, *The Book of Khalid: A Critical Edition*, ed. Todd Fine (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2016), 183.

Ghali's only published novel is semi-autobiographical where Egypt becomes a throbbing image of hopes of national unity superseded by the reality of irredentist ideologies. Ghali's Egypt is everything and its opposite; he was born in 1929 or 1930 at a time of Egyptian prosperity but worldwide massive wars and misery. Egypt was both rich but colonial, colonial but fighting for self-rule, Arab but distinctly Egyptian, majorly Muslim but open to other religions as well as other nationalities. Egypt, like Ghali, was everything. This multicultural condition is understood in my research in terms of Egyptian cosmopolitanism where foreign and local interact and live tolerantly together. However, the fight for independence from British rule and from Israeli settlements in neighboring Palestine comes with soaring nationalist cries that ultimately destroy the cosmopolitan fabric of the Egyptian society where western (imperial) residents and proponents of cosmopolitanism are suddenly unwelcome.

Ram, the main character of the novel, represents the author's fashioned autobiographical self. Like Ram, Ghali's subjectivity is formed by a conglomerate of interlocked and opposite forces at play in the Egyptian scene which cannot be neatly distilled into a single category. In fact, categorization based on ethnicity, religion, or nationality fragments and fractures Ghali's, and consequently Ram's, sense of self. In parallel with Egypt's rich and interwoven but also contradictory social and political structure, Ghali was "born a Copt in predominantly Muslim Egypt and into a wealthy class at a time of socialist revolution, and educated at an English school at a time of national revival, [Ghali] was also the one penniless member of a very rich family."² This is how Ahdaf Soueif summarizes Ghali's state as a minority individual who is even pushed to the margins of his own minor space. Therefore, he is not only a rich anglicized Christian in a nationalist socialist predominantly Muslim Egypt, but his genteel poverty ostracizes him even within this rich but dwindling minority. Further, his non-orthodoxy alienates him from his Coptic circle.³

My paper focuses on Ghali's political depiction of Egypt that, due to international and national politics, fell into a swamp of irredentist ideologies during the "swinging sixties."⁴ These conflicting ideologies resulted in long, arduous, and claustrophobic processes of identifying who was Egyptian and who "deserved" to live in Egypt. The flourishing and the fall of Egyptian cosmopolitanism is portrayed in *Beer* in a literary web of interrelated politics. Nationalism—the antithesis of cosmopolitanism—is understood as a cause for the destruction of Egyptian cosmopolitanism. The paper argues that the two ideologies—cosmopolitanism and nationalism—are two opposite poles that hold each other in balance, but when the balance tips off in favor of one pole, an immoderate ideology at the opposite pole raises its ugly head: militant nationalism, on the

² Ahdaf Soueif, *Mezzaterra Fragments from the Common Ground* (England: Anchor Books, 2004), 194–5.

³ Fifty-four years later in 2018, Mina Ibrahim, who self-identifies as a "misfit" in the Coptic community, relates to Ghali and his unorthodoxy and sees how it alienated him from his immediate Coptic community. See "Christmas Misfits: Ethnographic Notes on the Coptic 'Waguihs.'"

⁴ "The Swinging Sixties" is the title May Hawas gives to the collected diaries of Waguih Ghali: *The Diaries of Waguih Ghali: An Egyptian Writer in the Swinging Sixties* (2017) referring to the cataclysmic political and social events that were taking place in Egypt during that time.

one hand, and colonial hegemony (where locals become replicas or, to use Homi Bhabha's term, "mimic men" with no grounding in either camp), on the other.

I. Ghali's work in context

First, it is important to start out by trying to place the work in its historical context. Egypt was a British protectorate from 1882 until 1922 when it was granted partial independence from Britain through the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. In 1952, the Free Officers Movement was able to effectively abolish the constitutional monarchy, and to end British occupation of Egypt, henceforward, it would be the Arab Republic of Egypt. Gamal Abd El-Nasser, a prominent officer in the movement, was seen as the savior of Egypt and the whole Arab world from colonial rule. With him, pan-Arabism came to the fore. Egypt's Arab culture was foregrounded and there was general hostility toward foreigners. In fact, imperial hegemony and the creation of Israel by force in 1948 signaled a slow but sure change that has ever since crept into the masses and the governments of the Arab peoples. Instead of the inclusive and welcoming cosmopolitan societies they were, Arab countries were now becoming increasingly sectarian, stringently nationalist, and claustrophobically exclusive. Ghali's novel is placed at this intersection between Royal Egypt and the Arab Republic of Egypt and that is why it portrays the rise and fall of Egyptian cosmopolitanism within its folds.

Second, it is equally significant to contextualize Ghali's work itself, however hard it is to place the text under any single category because, according to Hilary Kilpatrick, it has no immediate "literary affiliations."⁵ His work written in English comes in a period when the development of Anglo-Arab literature comes to a halt before it begins to revive later with the publication of Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) and the post 9/11 Anglo-Arab and Arab-American novels.⁶ Therefore, such works as Ghali's *Beer in the Snooker Club* and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *Hunters in a Narrow Street* (1960) and Isaak Diq's *A Bedouin Boyhood* (1967) were "scattered works which cannot even be organized into a minority tradition because there are so few of them."⁷

While traditionally Ghali is categorized as an Anglo-Arab writer as in Geoffrey Nash's *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, Kilpatrick discourages a unilateral categorization of Ghali's work under Anglophone Arab literature that constricts it to just one constitutive component: the language in which it is written. Rather, she encourages placing *Beer in the Snooker Club* within the more natural context of the Arabic/ Egyptian literary tradition and within its immediate geopolitical and local context. Likewise, Rasheed El-Enany does not confine the appreciation of Ghali's text to the language it is written in. Rather, he situates Ghali within his contemporary Egyptian writers who wrote *in Arabic* and engaged with Arab politics, even more than with writers interested in East–West relations. His focus

⁵ Hilary Kilpatrick, "Arab Fiction in English: A Case of Dual Nationality," *New Comparison* 13 (1992): 46.

⁶ See Kilpatrick 1992, Arab Fiction, 2.

⁷ See Kilpatrick 1992, Arab Fiction, 46.

on Ghali's work thus shifts from the author's identity as an Anglo-Arab writer to Ghali as an Egyptian writer who is preoccupied with Egyptian politics and whose work is "more of a condemnation of Nasser's Egypt, the persecution of communists under his regime, as well as an irreverent elegy of the demise of the aristocratic class and rise of the army officer class in the post-1952 Egypt, than a novel about issues of the encounter of East and West."⁸ This is the same conclusion that Kilpatrick reaches by placing the novel in its geopolitical context where it is found to "derive its strength from its contextual placement in the post-1952 Egypt."⁹

Ghali's choice of writing in English, the transnational language of the metropole, is really a choice. It does not in any way emerge from a (forced) divorce from his Arabic native language, as is the case with colonial and postcolonial Maghrebi Francophone writers. Rather, it is, as Geoffrey Nash explains, the "outcome of a privileged education and therefore represents a freely chosen adherence to a foreign language and to a lesser extent its culture" and not a result of having been "wrenched away from [his] native Arab identity."¹⁰ It points to the fact that Ghali belonged to a cosmopolitan Egypt that was falling apart. Worthy of consideration is the fact that only a "century ago Middle Eastern cities were multi-lingual" so much so that "[m]embers of the British Levant Consular Service were expected to be familiar with Latin, French, Greek, Turkish, Arabic and Persian. Italian, German and Spanish were optional."¹¹ Likewise, Sahar Hamouda's *Firing the Canon* (2002) illustrates how "[f]rom Alexandria in the north to Assiut in the South, middle- and upper-class Egyptians spoke Arabic and French at home, and if they had had an English education, English as well." It extended to street vendors too who "could communicate in forms of intelligible French, English, Italian and Greek."¹²

Undoubtedly however, writing in English shows a certain degree of influence from the English imperial culture, but it does not contest the Egyptianness or the Arabness of Ghali's character. As Peter Clark argues, Ghali's novel may suggest his "physical and psychological, but not emotional, detachment from the Arab subject matter."¹³ Ghali's work does not necessarily point to a denigration of the local tradition. In fact, Geoffrey Nash notices that unlike the "entirely anglicized ... Edward Attiyah," Waguih Ghali "demonstrates(s) a far closer connection with Arabic patterns" as shown in his depiction of the "contemporary alienation of Arab intellectuals from the politics of post-colonial Arab societies."¹⁴

⁸ Rasheed El-Enany, *Arab Representations of the Occident: East–West Encounters in Arab Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2006), 85.

⁹ See Kilpatrick, *Arab Fiction*, 10.

¹⁰ Geoffrey Nash, *The Arab Writer in English: Arab Themes in a Metropolitan Language, 1980–1958* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1998), 20, 25.

¹¹ Peter Clark, "Marginal Literatures of the Middle East," *Literature and Nation in the Middle East* (2006): 179–188, August 10, 2017: <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9780748620739.003.0010>.

¹² Sahar Hamouda, "Firing the New Canon: The Marginalized Anglophone Arab Writers," *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts* 7 (2002): 1–39.

¹³ Peter Clark, "Translations without Translators," *Banipal* 2 (1998): 74–75.

¹⁴ See Nash 1998, *The Arab Writer*, 38.

In fact, Ghali seems to be a pioneering writer of fiction to criticize the authoritarian regime of Gamal Abd El-Nasser. Placing the work within its natural milieu of Egyptian literature allows us to be aware of the fact that “writing in these years may have witnessed some of the most oppressive political constraints on the artist during the entire revolutionary period.”¹⁵ Yet, Ghali is one of the first, if not the first, to complete and publish an anti-authoritarian work before the June War of 1967 that has “clearly been a defining moment in the modern history of the Arab nations” and which ushered in a number of anti-establishment novels. The defeat was

in fact, a devastatingly terminal blow to the pretensions carefully nurtured by the political sector during the early years of independence and revolution; in the words of Fārūq ‘Abd al-qādir, an Egyptian critic of drama, it was “a total defeat of regimes, institutions, structures, ideas, and leaders.” The general disaffection and the attitude of intellectuals to the governmental structure in Egypt, and their sense of alienation, is portrayed with brilliant clarity in Naguib Mahfouz’s novel, *Thartharah fawq al-Nil* (*Chatter on the Nile*, 1966; *Adrift on the Nile*, 1993), a work which clearly antagonized the Egyptian authorities at the highest level and almost led to his incarceration.¹⁶

Thus, although the language Ghali uses is English and the book gets published in England, his concerns are specifically Egyptian. Egyptian politics, Egyptian nationalism, Egyptian cosmopolitanism, Egyptian–British relations, and their effect on Ghali’s own identity crisis that finally leaves him crushed, are all main themes in Ghali’s “English” novel.

2. Review of literature

Ghali has just started getting the attention he warrants, both locally and internationally, especially after the electronic publication of Ghali’s handwritten diaries, draft to a second novel, and letters to Diana Athill by Cornell University Digital Library in 2013. Ghali’s only autobiographical novel has also been made accessible to the Egyptian reader through its translation into Arabic in 2006 by Hanaa Noseir, and in 2013 by Iman Mersal and Reem Rayes. Most recently, May Hawas edited two volumes of his diaries (2016 and 2017). Critically, Ghali has been generally examined by Geoffery Nash, Kilpatrick, and Enaany to contextualize and categorize his work. Nadia Gindi’s (1991) “‘The Gift of Our Birth’: An Image of Egypt in the Work of Waguih Ghali” and Sahar Hamouda’s “Firing the Canon” (2002) read Ram’s narrative as a reaffirmation of Egypt’s Pharoanic identity.¹⁷ Peter Clark touches upon Ghali’s sympathies and his authentic Egyptian cosmopolitanism. Deborah Starr (2013) argues that “drinking, gambling,

¹⁵ Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 145.

¹⁶ See Allen, *The Arabic Novel*, 59.

¹⁷ Check Nadia Gindi’s “‘The Gift of Our Birth’: An Image of Egypt in the Work of Waguih Ghali.”

and making merry” are “Waguhi Ghali’s search for cosmopolitan agency”; they are his methods of fighting against the rising Islamization and localization of Egypt, an argument which I take issue with. Although there has been recognizable academic effort done, and although the novel is starting to be popular both academically and among the regular readership, still it is underexamined.¹⁸ My paper attempts to fill this gap. My study attempts to go one step further and deeper into the study of Ghali’s novel. Therefore, this study offers a very detailed critical analysis of the text itself and simultaneously relates it to the larger political and historical scene of Egypt, emphasizing its political and cultural significance. In order to relate the text to its context, the paper employs Paolo Giaccaria’s understanding of Alexandria as a port city that has experienced two types of cosmopolitanism that, I argue, are clearly portrayed in Ghali’s text and which point to the demise of a healthy type of cosmopolitanism and the consequent rise of exclusive and unaccommodating types of nationalism. The text also defines nationalism as a construct and examines the different types of national constructs in the text only to show how unnatural and limiting they are.

Although Giaccaria focuses on Alexandria, his theory on cosmopolitanism could also be applied to Cairo, which is the main setting in this novel. This is because Giaccaria uses Alexandria and other Mediterranean port cities as examples of older forms of cosmopolitanism that came into existence due to the formation of contesting empires. Port cities, as such, were the hub of the cosmopolitan experience. His theory is not exclusive and does not wrench port cities, like Alexandria, from their geopolitical context. In fact, it is their geopolitical space that signaled them out to be the best examples of Mediterranean imperial cosmopolitanism. His theory does not treat Alexandria as “*ad Aegyptum*”—that is, adjacent to Egypt—but as part of Egypt and of other empires as well. Alexandria *ad Aegyptum* is, in fact, a contested description of Hellenized Alexandria that attempts to cut it off from its immediate geopolitical context.¹⁹ By contrast, Giaccaria’s Alexandria as a port city is the entry point to Egypt through the Mediterranean Sea. In the same light, and not withstanding Sami Zubaida’s different interpretation of Alexandrian cosmopolitanism from Giaccaria’s, Zubaida emplaces Alexandrian cosmopolitanism within its immediate historico-political context of Mohamed Ali’s policies that helped establish the “legendary cosmopolitan enclaves in Cairo, but especially Alexandria.”²⁰ Historically, since the Muslim conquest in 642, the capital of Egypt moved from

¹⁸ M. Lynx Qualey writes that *Beer* has “appeared on bimonthly best-seller lists, off and on.” See “Beer in the Snooker Club: Egypt Then and Now,” *AGNI*, January 30, 2018 (<https://agnionline.bu.edu/blog/beer-in-the-snooker-club-egypt-then-and-now/>).

¹⁹ Hala Halim argues that any understanding of Alexandrian cosmopolitanism that attempts to wrench it away from the contemporary, immediate, and larger forces at play and to annex it exclusively to an older version of its Hellenistic past of cosmopolitanism is a “historiographical ‘invented tradition’ that, in casting the modern city as reviving Hellenistic Alexandria, construes it as a ‘golden age’ with recourse to a range of tropes.” She understands this as a “Hellenizing and colonial narrative through the bracketing of the Arabo-Islamic period.” See Hala Halim, *Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism: An Archive* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 20, 22.

²⁰ Sami Zubaida, “Cosmopolitanism and the Middle East,” in *Cosmopolitanism, Identity, and Authenticity in the Middle East*, ed. Roel Meijer (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999), 68.

Alexandria to Fustat in Cairo. When Mohamed Ali set out to modernize Egypt in 1805, he succeeded in placing Egypt on a par with the most sophisticated European nations. Cairo—as the capital city—and Alexandria—as Egypt's main port city—became the two most developed cities in Egypt. Consequently, Europeans as well as Syrian-Lebanese, Turkish, and North Africans flocked to the two cities in hopes of finding work opportunities that opened up because of the economic and cultural boom witnessed by the two cities in the wake of Mohamed Ali and his dynasty's reform measures.

To Ghali, too, the cosmopolitan experience of the two cities of Alexandria and Cairo was quite alike since as a child he lived in both cities. In fact, Ghali attended Victoria College in both its Cairo and Alexandria branches; he was in the Alexandria branch from 1944 to 1947.²¹ The conflation between the cosmopolitan nature of the two cities is also reiterated by one of the main characters of the novel—Edna—who thinks true Egyptians cannot be found in either city because the two cities have too many foreigners and thus the indigenous social, economic, and cultural fabric of society is affected there. Since Cairo and Alexandria were governed by the same geopolitical forces, their cosmopolitan nature did not widely vary in any significant degree. Therefore, this text stretches Giaccaria's understanding of the cosmopolitanism of Alexandria to include Cairo as well.

3. Mediterranean cosmopolitanism or the (colonial) effects of a cultural bomb?

Taking into account the cultural surroundings of Ghali's homeland helps us understand why he is so diverse and why he cannot be categorized as one thing or the other. Ghali and his semi-autobiographical Ram live in Cairo, which has for a long time been largely cosmopolitan even after the 1952 revolution took place. Paolo Giaccaria finds that Mediterranean cosmopolitanism of which Egypt was part has had its own specificity and its old and rich history that could not be reduced or tied to moments of western colonization and domination.²² What Giaccaria's Mediterranean cosmopolitan cities have in common is that their "cosmopolitanism cannot be interpreted as the outcome of the encounter with the West ..., consequently downplaying the role of previous cosmopolitan moments." Thus, he rightly marks a distinction between "at least two cosmopolitan moments in the Mediterranean ... : an imperial cosmopolitanism and a

²¹ Colin Clement, "From War to War," in *Victoria College: A History Revealed*, ed. S. Hamouda and C. Clement (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 185.

²² Likewise, Gayatri Spivak, who examines cosmopolitanism in the contemporary context of globalization, takes issue with "most accounts of globalization [that] see it as having emerged from imperial and colonial era forms of internationalism, expressing a binary and teleological historical narrative in which local cultures and societies are overwhelmed and incorporated into a Europe-centered world order." Therefore, she too gives examples from Africa and Asia of cosmopolitan experiences that were formed prior to European colonial intervention and that were the result of geographical ties and trade connections. "The topos of the crossroads is powerful" in such examples. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Foreword: Cosmopolitanisms and the Cosmopolitical," *Cultural Dynamics* 24, no. 2–3 (2012): 107–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0921374013482350>.

colonial cosmopolitanism,” which would help “make sense of this Mediterranean complexity and ambiguity.”²³

In fact, the

permanence of ... imperial powers within the Mediterranean space, most significantly the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire, but also, indirectly, the Spanish monarchy with the Bourbons' Kingdom of the Two Sicilies ... and their coexistence actually worked as “conditions of possibility” for cosmopolitanism in the Mediterranean, nurturing some degree of multiculturalism and multinationalism, which transcended the political and military clash between the two principle empires, Habsburg and Ottoman. (Giaccaria)

Thus, contesting empires fed, rather than undermined, multicultural existence within the one empire. In other words, they provided a “condition of possibility” for cosmopolitanism to thrive. Later, the French and the British Empires also joined the imperial contest. In fact, the

situation further changed in the early nineteenth century, when the French, British, and Russian imperial powers entered the Mediterranean game, multiplying the conflict and making the interior borders more and more complex: from Napoleon's military and scientific expedition to Egypt in 1798 to the fall of both the Habsburg and the Ottoman empires, in 1918 and 1922 respectively, five empires confronted each other in the Mediterranean. (Giaccaria)

It is this coexistence of rivaling imperial powers that allowed for *Mediterranean imperial cosmopolitanism* to thrive by paving the way for trade, commercial diaspora, and so forth. Giaccaria gives a very succinct definition of Mediterranean *imperial* cosmopolitanism as an attempt to sustain a field of tensions between cosmos and polis, between general and particular, that took place during the five-century period that has been largely ignored by both Eurocentric and postcolonial cosmopolitans.²⁴ Put differently, Mediterranean *imperial* cosmopolitanism is the site of tension between centrifugal and centripetal forces where, as Giaccaria puts it, it does not “privilege either the cosmos (the universal) or the polis (the particular), missing the oxymoronic link that connects them in a ‘field of tensions’ and falling into a sort of a dichotomic trap.”

Similarly, Peter Clark places “the Egyptian Waguih Ghali's *Beer in the Snooker Room*, published in the 1950s’ among the works written by writers who have all

²³ Paulo Giaccaria, “Cosmopolitanism: The Mediterranean Archives,” *Geographical Review* 102, no. 3 (2012): 293–315, January 10, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.19310846.2012.00153.x>.

²⁴ Eurocentric cosmopolitanism is the “Eurocentric tradition directly linking Greek and Latin Stoicism to contemporary liberal cosmopolitanism” (Giaccaria). However, postcolonial cosmopolitanism discusses the “complex relationship between cosmopolitanism and coloniality [and the] postcolonial critical readings of cosmopolitanism” (Giaccaria).

come from the older Ottoman and Mediterranean cultural worlds.”²⁵ Notwithstanding the typos in Ghali’s book title, it is interesting to see Clark categorize Ghali’s work as coming from an older Ottoman and Mediterranean cultural world as this paper does. This particular manifestation of imperial cosmopolitan style of life fits Sami Zubaida’s definition where cosmopolitanism is

not the fact of multi-cultural coexistence, but the development of ways of living and thinking, styles of life which are deracinated from communities and cultures of origin, from conventional living, from family and home-centredness, and have developed into a culturally promiscuous life, drawing on diverse ideas, traditions and innovations.²⁶

By contrast, Mediterranean *colonial* cosmopolitanism points to a hegemonic domination of the colonizing power over local culture. Giaccaria argues:

French and British colonial domination of vast areas enhanced a new age of trade and commercial diasporas in the region, mainly in the cities, reinforcing the making of an Orientalist cosmopolitan imagination about Mediterranean cities, which found its zenith in Lawrence Durrell’s *Alexandria Quartet*.

In other words, the more developed and hegemonic West started creating a discourse of cultural alterity where the Mediterranean served as this cultural other. Many of the communities in Alexandria, for instance, would then favor the colonial over the local language. They would choose to talk in the English or the French they learned than to speak the local Arabic of the country they lived in.

In the same line, the novel portrays those two types of cosmopolitanism. The paper will start with a discussion of Ghali’s depiction of the Mediterranean imperial cosmopolitan model that harks back to Egypt’s older version of cosmopolitanism where a balanced tension between the polis (the local) and the cosmos is maintained. This cosmopolitan “balanced tension” between the local and the metropolitan center is depicted through the unpolitical Ram we read about in flashbacks. In fact, the paper argues that there are two Rams. Edna, Ram’s love, sets in this divide in Ram and this split only gets worse with his visit to England. That is why the paper differentiates between a pre-Edna Ram and a post-Edna Ram.

The pre-Edna Ram is an uncritical avid reader who is body and soul enmeshed in the Egyptian war in Suez as much as he is intellectually engaged with the English cultural scene, world political theories, and events. He finds it unproblematic to hate England politically and to love it aesthetically and culturally. He can combine between patriotism, his love for Egypt, and his love for the English civilization. He has multiple and interwoven identities that together create who he is. Ram narrates how before meeting Edna, he fought with a group of “freedom

²⁵ See Clark 2006, *Marginal Literatures of the Middle East*, 183.

²⁶ Sami Zubaida, “Cosmopolitanism and the Middle East,” in *Cosmopolitanism, Identity, and Authenticity in the Middle East*, ed. Roel Meijer (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999), 15–33.

fighters, all students, harassing the English troops at Suez. Three of my friends had died, and Font was lying in hospital with a bullet in his thigh.”²⁷ Meanwhile, he is captivated by the “idea” of anything “English”: life, weather, customs, thinking, and knowledge. While in Egypt, he feels that “life” is in Europe. Egypt with its “mock” life where “family girls are expecting a platonic love affair and the young men boasting about imaginary affairs” is “empty ... no life.” By contrast, England, he feels, is the “world of intellectuals and underground metros and cobbled streets ... beckon[ing] to us.”²⁸ His love for western civilization never conflicts with his patriotism. In that sense, Ram is himself an expression of this tension between the polis and the cosmos, the parochial and the universal. He exemplifies this imperial Mediterranean cosmopolitanism where the global does not erode the local. Mediterranean imperial cosmopolitanism is what constitutes pre-Edna Ram, a Ram who is naturally Egyptian and only politically anti-English, who is a lover of metropolitan English literature, songs, and life and is also at home in cosmopolitan “local” Cairo.

After Edna comes into his life, she tries to proselytize Ram and Font—Ram’s bosom friend—into communism; Ram and Font start becoming more politically aware and mature. Their readings and discussions with Edna along with their disillusioning visit to England create an incurable split in Ram and makes Font an example of a rebel who cuts his nose to spite his face. When Ram goes to England, and after repeated disillusionments there and in Egypt, he develops a split character where he sees himself as an actor and judges himself from a distance.²⁹ Post-Edna Font who gets as disillusioned as Ram tells the latter: “[W]e’re so English it is nauseating. We have no culture of our own.”³⁰ Synthesis between passion for the local and the international, which we have glimpses of prior to the appearance of Edna in their lives and subsequent disillusionments, gives way to disjuncture and disunion. Font and Ram’s inability to contain the different forces that constitute the cosmo-polis creates these nauseous self-hating Fonts and Rams who are at war with their “selves.” Font becomes a dislocated Jimmy Porter who sells cucumber in Cairo once and sweeps the floor at his friend’s snooker club another time. Ram becomes a malfunctioning disillusioned gimmick. In order for Ram to survive the after-effects of living in un-cosmopolitan countries, he has to make compromises, he has to live with the gap between the local and the international and to prize one over the other. These compromises induce a split in Ram and create a splintered subjectivity.

Therefore, not only is imperial cosmopolitanism represented in Ram’s wholeness, “conviviality, hospitality, and multiple loyalties” (Giaccaria), but the devolution of cosmopolitanism in Egypt is also shown to the reader through the same character.³¹ There is a parallel devolution in Ram’s character where we have the

²⁷ Waguih Ghali, *Beer in the Snooker Club* (London: Serpant’s Tail, 2010), 48.

²⁸ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 55–6.

²⁹ Ghali’s disillusionment with England is similar to Albert Memi’s with France; it runs across postcolonial countries and writings.

³⁰ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 18.

³¹ In his essay “On Cosmopolitanism,” Jacques Derrida identifies “hospitality” as the basic ethic of cosmopolitanism, especially with regard to refugees and asylum-seekers, which is the same ethic

whole cosmopolitan subjectivity of Ram replaced by a split subjectivity; in the end, Ram turns into a malfunctioning character due to the changing un-cosmopolitan Egyptian setup. Unarguably, the new political situation of post-independent Nasserite Egypt grew very hostile to cosmopolitanism. On the political, economic, and cultural levels, austere measures were taken to rule out foreign presence/influence in Egypt especially after the Tripartite Aggression on Egypt in 1956. Likewise, racism and political foul play in England disallow Ram from becoming on a par with white English men. The world's growingly separatist and nationalist agenda destroys Ram's multicultural character. He is an amalgam of Egypt and Europe, of the Oriental and the Occidental, the Pharaonic and the Greek. Neither set could exclusively wrench him away from the other. If Ram chooses one side over the other, he loses his integrity and wholeness. The truly cosmopolitan Ram is incapable of prizing one component of himself over the other. For him, it is not a mere question of politics; it is a life-or-death issue about identity and home. Having to choose one thing over the other shakes Ram's identity; his subjectivity becomes at risk.

Nonetheless *Beer* presents another form of cosmopolitanism that somehow survived even during Nasser's regime. This model is Egyptian colonial cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan Egypt under the British protectorate still had different centers, but these centers started to have a direction, the colonial center. If in the novel imperial cosmopolitanism is presented in the figure of Ram, colonial cosmopolitanism is presented through the characters of Ram's aunt and her son, the despicable Mounir. Mounir, an Egyptian elite who has studied in America, gets so Americanized and becomes disdainful of local manners, language, and customs. At one point in the narrative, Mounir pretends to know no Arabic when the American Jack finds difficulty reading the Arabic name Abdelkerim; in an attempt to distance himself from the local and the Arab, the Americanized Mounir "pronounced it as though to him too, it was difficult to pronounce."³²

The denunciation of the local culture by elite Egyptians could be understood differently in light of the dependency thesis, which "views developing countries as beset with institutional, political, and economic rigidities, both national and international, and trapped in a dependence/dominance relationship with developed countries." The local elites along with "international special-interest power groups, including entities such as the multinationals, aid agencies, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund" serve and are rewarded by world powers and hegemonic capitalist nations. In fact, "controlling elites often engage in activities that run counter to the well-being of the wider population and, in some cases, may even lower levels of living and perpetuate underdevelopment."³³

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak can also see how the mechanics of modern global cosmopolitanism follow the old colonial-colonized paradigm. Cosmopolitanism has conditions of possibility for it to exist. Foremost among them, to Spivak, is

chosen by Giaccaria to define cosmopolitanism. See "On Cosmopolitanism," in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London: Routledge, 2001), 1–24.

³² See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 136.

³³ John C. Hawley, ed., *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies* (London: Greenwood Press, 2000), 140.

the “organization of global governance,” which should make “the flow” between countries mutual and all-encompassing. “*Cosmopolitheia*,” which foregrounds the politics governing the city over the cosmos part, “requires a borderless world. A borderless world already exists where capital roams free.” However, in modern globalized cities/world, there are economic and language barriers. In postcolonial countries, local languages are effaced/denigrated, while economic barriers are raised according to the same old European/colonial versus the colonized/peripheral paradigm. What our modern world has now is mega-cities with “electronic capitalism” where cosmopolitanism is virtual, lived on the screen, digitally.³⁴ Subsequently, local languages do not circulate and, in fact, could die out, and postcolonial countries would remain underdeveloped. Spivak argues that “languages do not globalize. Languages must come through to supplement the uniformism that is the condition and effect of globalization. Only capital and data globalize. Everything else is damage control.”³⁵ At the heart of cosmopolitanism is not global syncretism but *cosmo-politics*, that is, how the cosmopolitan city is ruled, the world constitution that guards it.

In the novel, Mounir, the Americanized cousin of Ram, is an example of a controlling capitalist elite of the postcolonial era who though has anti-nationalist and procolonial views and sentiments is not at all involved in politics. After the socialist revolution, Mounir, who is so disdainful of local manners, language, and customs, reaps the benefits of nationalism and the socialist revolution. By contrast, “all other students dying at Suez were from poor families and Mounir and Co. were going to lord it over the survivors.”³⁶ Paradoxically, he is not considered a national heretic and his Egyptianness is not questioned and his safety and well-being are never threatened because he now belongs to the modern global cosmopolitan world protected by newer forms of cosmopolitanism/capitalism. He says: “England must stay at Suez and protect us from the Red Menace,”³⁷ yet “he is becoming very influential.”³⁸ He resembles, in many respects, the man/husband drawn by Spivak in “Megacity” where for him the cosmopolitan is synonymous with “business and globalization, for the wife, childrearing and Americanization.”³⁹

In fact, this model of colonial cosmopolitanism is looked down upon in the narrative. It is seen as more of a colonial discourse. When Egypt/ians and their culture are looked down upon, even if by native elites and Eurocentric cosmopolitan Egyptians, then cosmopolitanism is in fact a camouflage for the effects of a cultural bomb Ngugi wa Thiong’o speaks of. Instead of cosmopolitan multiplicity and acceptance, we have Sosous, Mimis, and Lulus at the Gezira club⁴⁰ whose “belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their

³⁴ Spivak develops this idea in “Megacity,” *Grey Room* 1 (2000): 9–25 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1262548>).

³⁵ See Spivak 2012, Foreword: Cosmopolitanisms and the Cosmopolitical, 109.

³⁶ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 49.

³⁷ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 49.

³⁸ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 123.

³⁹ See Spivak 2000, *Megacity*, 11.

⁴⁰ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 129.

heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves [has been] annihilated” due to imperial hegemony.⁴¹ Instead of cosmopolitan inhabitants with overlapping identities, we have Egyptians who lose touch with their original selves and become false copies of the white western human model. Discontinuity, fragmentation, and conflicting loyalties take the place of conviviality, hospitality, and multiple loyalties, to use Giaccaria's description of Mediterranean cosmopolitanism.

Thus, both imperial and colonial Mediterranean cosmopolitanisms are presented in *Beer*. Mounir, who is hated and derided by Ram, is an extreme example of colonial cosmopolitanism that gravitates towards a colonial center and therefore irritates the patriotic and truly cosmopolitan Ram. By contrast, Ram stands for imperial cosmopolitanism where a healthy tension between the centrifugal and centripetal forces is at play. The breakdown of Ram's character reflects the downhill movement of imperial cosmopolitanism in post-1952 Egypt.

4. Cosmopolitanism paving the way to Egyptian nationalism

Paradoxically, cosmopolitanism is a driving force of nationalism. Giaccaria rightly argues that “cosmopolitan and irredentist ideologies were jointly forged and mutually reinforcing.” Similarly, Pheng Cheah argues that historically “cosmopolitanism ... precedes the popular nation-state in history and nationalism in the history of ideas.” For him, the antonym of cosmopolitanism is “not nationalism but statism.” In fact, it is “only with the birth of a genuinely national state” that the two become antithetical.⁴²

This understanding of the essentially non-discordant nature of cosmopolitanism and nationalism could be borne out by the following historical example. In his book *The Arab Awakening*, George Antonius who chronicles the origins and history of Arab nationalism argues that most proponents of Arab nationalism were educated abroad and were open to metropolitan forces. Likewise, most of the secret societies that had nationalist agendas were made up of western-educated intellectuals who rebelled against the confines of the local tradition and the injustices of Ottoman rule. These societies were both inclusive and exclusive: they were separatist movements that included different ethnicities and religions. In other words, its founders were both cosmopolitan and nationalist.⁴³

The paper argues that, in *Beer*, when the inclusive imperial cosmopolitanism is threatened by an underlying colonial discourse, not to mention the actual colonization of Egypt by Britain, it rebels, favors independence, and rallies for nationalism. In *Beer*, the characters who are the staunchest supporters of independence and nationalism are themselves cosmopolitan at heart: Ram, Edna,

⁴¹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1994), 3.

⁴² Pheng Cheah, “The Cosmopolitical: Today,” in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Chea and Bruce Robbins, vol. 14 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 22, 26.

⁴³ See George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (Beirut: Khayats, 1938), 79.

and Font. Cosmopolitan here signifies that the tension between the cosmos and the polis is balanced and weighed against each other. By contrast, colonial cosmopolitan characters like Mounir, Ram's aunt, and Ram's mother who experience no tensions of the sort are not nationalists and revile any local/national emblem. Ram recounts how they disdain Om Kalsoom on account of her localness, Arabness, and provinciality, although "from Turkey to North Africa, Om Kalsoom is the most beloved and revered person alive." She cuts across all sections of the people "but not so with those of the French pensionnat, the club and the 'travelled'" because to them she is a "sign of commonness."⁴⁴ Over and above, Mounir, the American mimic, argues that the British must remain in Suez.

Interestingly, not only are the cosmopolitan characters nationalists but the reverse is also true: most of the un-cosmopolitan characters depicted in the novel are not actively nationalist. The Egyptian masses are majorly politically indifferent. For example, Ram's uncle and all the other local characters have no will of their own and keep reiterating "what can we do? It's God's will"; "ask him whether he is happy Nasser rid us of Farouk, he answers: 'whatever God brings is good,' ask him how much he pays his waiter, he says: 'Allah knows, more than enough.'"⁴⁵ It is here that religion is used as an opium for the people. At the end of the day, it is only those who are cosmopolitan at heart that are attentive to national and human rights. In short, both the uncosmopolitan and the colonial cosmopolitan characters (being either too centrifugal or centripetal) tip the balance in favor of western hegemony.

In a parallel movement between the political and the personal, when cosmopolitanism dies out, cosmopolitan characters also experience a downfall. Ram's destiny parallels the demise of cosmopolitanism, which is superseded by a nationalist discourse that disables a multinational and heterogeneous existence of individuals. The personal and the political are indeed interrelated.

5. The inherent irony in nationalist discourses

Beer attempts to give many versions of the nationalist discourses prevalent at the time. Even individual characters are seen partaking in this game of defining Egyptianness. Ironically enough even Edna the Jewess, who is multicultural and is an example of an individual who cannot live in any country that is not truly cosmopolitan, draws her own limiting and restrictive picture of who the true Egyptian is. Edna defies categorizations—she is an individual comprised of different and opposing facets and identities: a rich communist, an unproud Israeli, an Egyptian nationalist Jew.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, she regards only the peasant as worthy of being a true Egyptian. She essentializes Egypt and thinks of it in romantic terms. Egypt to her is the peasant and his plight; rural and poor areas

⁴⁴ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 165.

⁴⁵ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 39, 40.

⁴⁶ When Ram knows of her marriage to an oxymoronic Egyptian nationalist and Israeli man and of her stays in Israel, he tells her, "Then you are an Israeli"; she replies, "I am Egyptian" (See Ghali 2018, *Beer*, 185).

are Egypt, whereas the rich and their districts are not Egyptian. In fact, she goes as far as saying that “Egyptians are not found in Cairo or in Alexandria. You have never really known Egyptians. I hate Egyptians of your class as much as I do my parents,” she declares to Ram.⁴⁷ In one sentence, she contradicts herself by denying Alexandrians and Cairenes their Egyptianess but finally ends her statement by describing them as hateful “Egyptians.” She, bizarrely, excludes Cairo and Alexandria from the scope of the Egyptian and makes her nationalist construct not only class based but also geographically limited to the rural parts of Egypt. Her Egyptianess is class and space oriented and as such is tenuous.

Another excerpt clarifies her standpoint; she “labels” Alexandria and Egypt cosmopolitan “not so much because they contain foreigners, but because the Egyptian born in them is himself a stranger to his land.” According to her, cosmopolitan Cairo and Alexandria rob Egyptians of their essential traits and conventions. That is why although an Egyptian himself, Ram is led by Edna into believing that he is not a “true” Egyptian and that it is owing to her that he got “introduced ... to Egyptian people.”⁴⁸ Here she is describing the Lulus and Tatas and all the other mimics of the imperial center. What she sees around her is a colonial cosmopolitanism that tends to uphold the cosmos and to simultaneously erode the local and the parochial.

However, her definition of Egyptian is limiting and unaccommodating and, in many ways, unnatural. That is because she distils a wide country that strikes deeper in history than most other countries in the world to one feature: peasantry.⁴⁹ In fact, her definition is personalized and romanticized since it is based on an old love story she had while still only a girl. Edna, whose first love had been for Adle—a rural Egyptian peasant, predicates her love for Egypt on her assimilation into and defense of the Egyptian common man and, more precisely, the *fellah*. The rich for her—although she is one of the richest—are disgusting and not genuine; she cannot stand them.

On a second reading, the reader feels that Edna is mistaken about her own nationalist sentiments. Although she defends the cause of the Egyptian peasant, what motivates her is more a sense of duty for *the* peasant whom she loved “with every fiber in [her] body”⁵⁰ and unwittingly caused harm.⁵¹ This particular tragic love incident in her life lays out for her the general course that she would follow.

Edna tries to “imagine” an Egyptian nation, to use Benedict Anderson’s terms, and to believe in an Egyptian community that is pure and essentialist. She also “invents” a tradition, to use Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s word, and

⁴⁷ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 106.

⁴⁸ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 53.

⁴⁹ Edna personifies the belief that “nationalism is an urban movement which identifies with the rural areas as a source of authenticity, finding in the ‘folk’ the attitudes, beliefs, customs and language to create a sense of national unity among people who have other loyalties. Nationalism aims at ... rejection of cosmopolitan upper classes, intellectuals and others likely to be influenced by foreign ideas” (Bruce King, *The New English Literatures* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 42).

⁵⁰ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 108.

⁵¹ Edna’s parents who knew about this love affair and that she gave herself to him “bribed the necessary people and brought an action against Adle for ‘inciting [her]’” (108).

carries it out ritualistically to connect to what she believes is the essence of Egypt, the unchanging peasant. For example, Edna takes Ram along “many trips, bare-foot and in peasant dress to the poor districts of Cairo.”⁵² Willfully disposing herself of urban clothes in favor of rural ones, Edna enacts Adle’s assertion of identity by remaining barefoot and in peasant clothes. Then, she and Ram sit Arab fashion; she asks him to comb her long hair for her and tie it into plaits,⁵³ which has become a kind of foreplay for them. As far as bare feet and peasant clothes are concerned, these symbolize Edna’s love for rural Egypt epitomized in Adle. These “rituals” “impl[y] continuity with the past” so crucial in the creation of the nation.⁵⁴ Undoubtedly, however, such excursions to rural Egypt are very artificial and constructed. Edna directs the scene, as it were, and re-enacts a lost romantic vision. For her this is Egypt that she believes in and loves.

It is worth noting that Edna, in spite of her communism, never gives up her money; she uses it to travel a lot and spends it on her friends Ram and Font. Edna seems to do on a personal level what nation-states do on a political level, which is to propagate cultural nationalism. Deniz Kandiyoti convincingly argues that nationalist discourse has an essentially “Janus-faced quality. It presents itself both as a modern project that melts and transforms traditional attachments in favor of new identities and as a reaffirmation of authentic cultural values culled from the depths of a presumed communal past.”⁵⁵ Similarly, Edna acts like a traditional fellaha in an attempt to re-enact the past and create her own personal conception of nationalism. Yet, she never really loses herself there in the past or gives up her money or entitlement to high-class society. She keeps her money to herself and she continues to be a rich well-educated person visiting all the expensive places in the West. In spite of her communist leanings, Edna dresses up as a rich western woman does and remains a well-off multilingual Jewess. In other words, Edna’s nationalism has a “Janus-faced quality” and is cultural construct, at best. She ultimately adapts the past to her present.

Ghali’s narrative attempts to deconstruct all essentialized concepts about Egypt. Interestingly, in parallel with Ram and Edna who are a bundle of contradictions, most other characters are subjects of heterogeneity, though in a milder and less upsetting manner. The westernized characters are not the only ones with conflicted and split identities. In fact, the most naïve and local of characters still smack of difference and oppositions.

Ram’s uncle is a case in point. He is the only member of his family who still keeps to the traditional ways: he “lives in upper Egypt looking after the land ... he is the only one amongst us not westernized.”⁵⁶ Yet, he too is a bundle of

⁵² See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 53.

⁵³ Plaits are the traditional rural way of tying the hair of a *fellaha*.

⁵⁴ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1–2.

⁵⁵ Dennis Kandiyoti, “Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation,” *Dossier* 26 (2004), February 10, 2017 (<https://www.atria.nl/ezines/web/WomenLivingUnderMuslimLawsDossier/2004/No26.pdf#page=55>).

⁵⁶ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 161.

contradictions: he is “illiterate,” yet a Pasha. He is a rich, kind, and gentle Pasha whom the *fellaheen* love because “he sits with them and cracks jokes. He even weeps at their misery, just like them, without searching for the cause of that misery.”⁵⁷ He is a parochial uncle but he yearns for the city and its mirth, the metropole and its attractions, the center and its learning and ways so much so that he pays “infuriating respect” to the “educated part of the family.”⁵⁸ When he comes to town once a year, he sips from its joys to the brim so much so that the urban people feel nauseated at his excesses. The few hours he spends in town act as a safety valve for him; he turns into a Dionysian subject—“horribly vulgar.” To be able to stay parochial and lead a sheltered conservative life in Upper Egypt, he has to spend some festive time in metropolitan Cairo. Finally, the ultimate irony is that he is the kind fellah who facilitates the exploitation of other fellahs: “my sweet *fellah* of an uncle ... if only you’d treat the *fellah* a little better.”⁵⁹ The wealthy *fellah* of an uncle is a bundle of things. Even the most parochial of characters does not boast of a whole complete subjectivity. He is as much of a split character as Ram is; it is only that he is unaware of it. He is, as Ram explains, not of the intellectual type; he does not ponder over things or look into their causes, like most of the Egyptians in the novel. Therefore, there is no such a thing as an Egyptian *fellah* who is the prototypical Egyptian since *fellaheen* do vary among themselves. In other words, Ghali’s text deconstructs Edna’s romantic conception of the rural person as the one and only true model of Egyptianness.

In a likewise manner, Ram’s simple distillation of Egyptian to one characteristic feature—“sense of humor”—is equally misleading, faulty, and exclusionary. After years of intimately befriending Edna and doubting his own Egyptianness for her sake, Ram tells Edna “you are not Egyptian ... do you remember you told me once that I am not Egyptian because I belong to the elite, etc? But I am Egyptian.” Obviously, the above-quoted passage shows an obsession with defining, classifying, and bestowing Egyptianness on like-minded people: the passage seems to say, “you are not Egyptian, it is me, my version of Egyptianness alone, that is truly Egyptian.” In fact, the novel seems to be testing and contesting the essence of what is traditionally thought to constitute the Egyptian character. For Ram, he is Egyptian while she is not because “I have our humour ... I have the Egyptian character. You haven’t ... You have no humour, Edna, we would all have died a long time ago if we didn’t have our humour.”⁶⁰ Ram equates the Egyptian character with “our” humor that is still flimsy and untrue. Ironically, we meet many Egyptians—like Mounir and his mother—who are so humorless. Ram cracks jokes with Arevian and Doromian, the two rich Armenians who, though not Egyptian, are “with a sense of humour.”⁶¹ Thus, a sense of humor is neither exclusively Egyptian, nor is it an essential Egyptian trait.

For Ram, humor is a means of communication that crosses boundaries of social standing, religious or political affiliations, and so forth. It is a moment when

⁵⁷ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 169.

⁵⁸ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 161.

⁵⁹ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 173–4.

⁶⁰ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 185.

⁶¹ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 19.

odds are set aside. It is a time for bonding that transcends even nationalities. A sense of humor is what Edna lacks since everything with her is political, consequential, causative, unlike the “Egyptian” uncle who has a live and let-live attitude. Whereas Ram’s uncle connects with fellow farmers through “humor,” Edna connects with the other lower classes of Egypt, as she is one of the richest, through other means—charity and communism. While the purely Egyptian Kharafallah, the coffee-house owner, who to me has no sense of humor, contents himself with accepting the situation of the homeless child as “God’s will,” Edna takes things into her own hands and decides to “make some arrangements for him.”⁶²

In short, neither Edna nor Ram’s definitions of Egyptianness are workable. And ultimately, this obsession with defining the “Egyptian” prototype wreaks havoc on so many, otherwise cosmopolitan, inhabitants of Egypt. This essentializing discourse discernible on the national and the individual level makes Deborah Starr believe that “Ram offers three hedonistic models of Egyptian identity construction: drinking (beer), gambling (snooker) and making merry (jokes).”⁶³ Then, she concludes that “this formulation of Egyptian identity as founded on drinking and gambling, two activities prohibited by Islam, flies in the face of predominant articulations of religiously inflected Egyptian ethno-nationalism as well.”⁶⁴ Even if Ram offers these three hedonistic acts as his Egyptian way of life, they are not presented as the only Egyptian acts, which would in fact deny Egypt its multivocal and multicultural existence. Making merry, in particular, could be read not as a mode of life but as a “light” and inconsequential method of opposition and sometimes hostility to predominant modes of acting and thinking.

6. Conclusion

This paper has made use of Paolo Giaccaria’s distinction between Mediterranean colonial cosmopolitanism and Mediterranean imperial cosmopolitanism. The latter boasts of multiple centers or communities that interact together and still preserve their uniqueness and specificities. The former, however, has different communities, but they all gravitate towards the hegemonic imperial center where there is “normalization and assimilation” of the different groups (Giaccaria). Paradoxically, imperial cosmopolitan characters are staunch nationalist. However, they have no place in a growingly separatist atmosphere. The paper also shows how colonial cosmopolitan characters, like Mounir, work in favor of the metropolitan hegemonic powers and therefore give legitimacy for the nationalists to question their loyalty for the nation and hence the nationalist attempts at exterminating all foreign elements for the sake of the purity of the nation. In light of Giaccaria’s theory, the paper argues that *Beer* prefers cosmopolitan imperial identities—that is, it prefers identities of groups, nations, and

⁶² See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 41.

⁶³ Deborah Starr, *Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt: Literature, Culture, and Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 111.

⁶⁴ See Ghali 2010, *Beer*, 112.

countries to remain fluid and not to be so rigidly categorical and definitive and mutually exclusive. Naming and labeling, essential acts of constructing identities, are depicted as an encroachment on personal freedom, personal choice, and private life.

This paper understands Ghali's novel as essentially non-binding and non-essentialist. If he attempts to oppose "predominant articulations" of identity, to use Starr's words, he does so by "performing" different cultural codes that exist side by side with other equally valid identities in an essentially polyphonic text and an equally rich Egypt.

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Cite this article: Ibrahim, Doaa Mohamed Abd El-Salam. 2024. "Modes of Cosmopolitanism in Waguih Ghali's *Egypt in Beer in the Snooker Club*." *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2024.11>