SHADES OF SILENCE IN YASMINE EL RASHIDI'S *CHRONICLE OF A LAST SUMMER*: SOCIO-CULTURAL DYNAMICS, SILENCING AND TRAUMA[1]

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The article analyses multiple meanings of silence in the novel *Chronicle of a Last Summer* written by the contemporary Egyptian writer Yasmine El Rashidi. The paper moves beyond the understanding of silence as a mere absence of speech and considers its semantic ambiguity whose interpretation is circumstantially dependent. The silences depicted in the novel are not uniform; instead, they originate from various contexts. The article aims to identify these silences, explore their origins, and analyse their potential meanings and functions; some serve as a form of communication, others result from intentional silencing or even collective trauma. The paper focuses mostly on silences produced by people around the protagonist, either intentional or imposed, which have shaped her personality and her own take on silence, specifically her lack of coverage of the revolutionary period. Even though the protagonist's silence with regard to the 25 January Revolution can be interpreted in multiple ways – including but not restricted to her profound disappointment and reluctance to revisit painful memories – the article argues that it can also be viewed as an expression of dissent and resistance against the official revolutionary narrative.

Key words: contemporary Egyptian literature, Yasmine El Rashidi, silence, eloquent silence, silencing, trauma, 25 January Revolution

In the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution which led to the ousting of President Ḥusnī Mubārak in early 2011, the Egyptian book market was flooded with a surge of literary accounts depicting the moment of upheaval. Among the first to emerge

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were memoirs, diaries of the revolution and testimonial writings, which H. Kamal aptly labelled as "autobiographical hybrid texts" (Heshmat, 2015, p. 69). Later on, a diverse array of literary re-imaginings of the revolutionary events emerged, including works with a realistic focus, narratives incorporating elements of dystopia and post-apocalyptic scenarios, or writings employing irony and satire. Despite their fictional nature, many of these works were set against the backdrop of the turbulent revolutionary period, incorporating fragmented accounts of the protests drawn from the firsthand experiences of their authors, often providing readers with a detailed account of the protests, usually presented from the personal perspective of a protagonist. Despite her publishers' suggestion to follow a similar path (Politics and Prose, 2016), Yasmine El Rashidi turned to fiction and her novel *Chronicle of a Last Summer* was published in 2016.[2] Rather than conforming to expectations, the novel breaks away from the narrative currents and explores the nuanced complexities of political and personal silences in the Egyptian social and cultural environment.

Yasmine El Rashidi (Arab. Yāsmīn al-Rashīdī, 1977) is an Egyptian writer and cultural commentator who publishes in English. She is a frequent contributor to the *New York Review of Books*, the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* and is a contributing editor of the quarterly magazine *Bidoun*. She is the author of two non-fiction books, a collection of essays *The Battle for Egypt: Dispatches from the Revolution* (2011) and a study of contemporary Egyptian music in socio-political context, *Laughter in the Dark: Egypt to the Tune of Change* (2023). Her debut novel *Chronicle of a Last Summer* (2016), which was longlisted for PEN Open Book Award in 2017, portrays life in Cairo through the perspective of an unnamed protagonist/narrator at different stages of her life. We meet her for the first time at the age of six, right after the sudden disappearance of her father. She is a keenly observant and curious child who keeps asking a lot of questions, most of which go unanswered. Her mother, grappling with a difficult situation, refuses to address most issues, including the mysterious absence of the father. Frequently, she leaves her daughter without any explanation and withdraws into silence. As a result, the little girl is left to navigate the bewildering and tumultuous socio-political and cultural environment alone, relying on subtle cues, her imagination and intuition. The scorching hot summer in Cairo, combined with unrelenting silence, only occasionally punctuated by the muffled sound of a TV, together create a suffocating atmosphere that bears down on the characters of the novel, serving as a metaphor for the oppressive climate produced by the authoritarian regime. The novel chronicles the protagonist's everyday life, portraying her

[2] According to the author, her publisher wanted her to write a testimonial non-fiction book. However she decided to go against this suggestion, because she felt that "depicting reality is not always the truest truth" (Politics and Prose, 2016, 38:20, 52:05).

interactions, which encompass dialogues (or silences) with her emotionally absent mother, a family friend she refers to as Uncle, her leftist-minded cousin Dido, her best friend Habiba, and her estranged father. Despite encountering silences in conversations with various individuals, it is her mother's silence that remains the most pressing and influential. Through the protagonist's perspective, the narrative sheds light on the changes over time in both the environment and society and captures the first sparks of political dissent.

Even though silence has frequently been construed as being in opposition to speech and regarded as an absence – a void lacking communicative meaning – silence within human interaction can indeed be seen as integral to human discourse (Saville-Troike, 1985; Jaworski, 1997a; Bonacchi, 2021; Schmitz, 1994; Ephratt, 2008). In its very essence, silence is ambiguous and its function can be ambivalent. While it can be perceived as a result of communicative failure and hinder verbal exchange between a speaker and a listener (Tannen, 1985; Bonacchi, 2021; Jaworski, 1997b), silence also has communicative potential (Jaworski, 1997a). It is capable of conveying multiple meanings, whose interpretation is context-specific (Pérez, 1984; Schmitz, 1994) and culture-dependent (Tannen, 1985). Ephratt (2008) distinguishes between eloquent, i.e., communicative silence, and pauses in speech and silencing, which he views as non-communicative since they are not the means of a speaker's expression (pp. 1101-1103). The concept of silence is diverse and wide-ranging; scholars across a broad range of disciplines have provided varying definitions of silence, often categorizing it in relation to its multiple functions within linguistic, literary, social, cultural, political, psychological, artistic, religious, memorial and other contexts. To interpret various nuances of silence that permeate the work, this article distinguishes between silence which occurs in a domestic and in public settings, even though these spheres often overlap and influence each other. The article also considers two crucial factors; whether the silence emanates from the protagonist or other characters, i.e., whether the main character assumes the role of speaker or listener, and whether it is voluntary. In other words, it will examine whether it is related to eloquent silence or silencing.

Silence in the Domestic Environment

During the first part of the novel, the narrator is mostly preoccupied with the silences in her private life. Since the nameless protagonist is still a child, most of her verbal interactions take place in the domestic environment, with the members of her family. She resides in a large, multi-generational house, albeit now only with her mother, following the passing of her grandmother and aunt Nesma. After her father's disappearance, the only remaining person for her to communicate

with within the household is her mother. With her time at school limited during the summer, her mother becomes the central figure, not just in caregiving but also as a conversational partner.

The pervasive silence in the novel, though perceived as suffocating and oppressive, is actually not monolithic; rather it is rooted in different contexts. Some of them are related to a high intensity of emotions which are difficult to verbalise, like emotional pain, grief, or anger (Ephratt, 2008; Bonacchi, 2021; Bruneau, 1973). Pérez (1984) calls them "communicable states", as opposed to the ineffable and the inexpressible (p. 111). In the novel, these emotional and/or attitudinal states are mostly communicated through silence. For instance, when Nesma, the neurodivergent sister of the main protagonist's mother, died, the mother stoppped talking about her, as she did when her mother passed away or after her husband left. Sometimes, when the protagonist's mother is angry, "she's just quiet" which the protagonist experiences as "much worse" than shouting; at other times her silence "felt like disapproval" (El Rashidi, 2016, pp. 23-25, 129). While this type of silence can be identified as eloquent, since it expresses emotion, the protagonist, being a small child, has trouble deciphering them. Nevertheless, as she grows up, she learns to read her mother's non-verbal language, recognizing subtle cues of disapproval and irritation such as a stiffened neck, raised eyebrows and reproachful statements presented in the form of questions.

On the other hand, there are many deliberate silences on the mother's part, whose aim is to obstruct communication, steering away from discussions deemed taboo, inappropriate for a child or difficult for her to talk about. The shroud of secrecy surrounding her father's disappearance is palpable, amplified by her mother's telephone conversations in French, a language the daughter doesn't understand. Throughout her childhood, the narrator regularly faces dismissals such as "[you are] too young to understand" and "it's better not to know too much" (El Rashidi, 2016, pp. 11, 67-68). She is acutely aware of the fact that "Mama doesn't like (...) [her] asking too many questions" and is therefore increasingly reluctant to broach sensitive topics out of fear of making her mother angry (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 18). According to Kurzon (2007), these may be considered as intentional silences, either conversational, when no response is given, or thematic, related to specific topics. Even though these silences are produced mostly by other characters, they also have a silencing effect on the protagonist as they discourage further discussion and at the same time teach her to refrain from asking again.

In case the silences are too long, they could affect interpersonal relationships in a negative way (Bruneau, 1973). The somewhat distant relationship between

the protagonist and her mother[3] leads to strained communication, placing the heroine mostly in the role of a "listener to" silence. While the mother's dismissive reactions may be partially explained by prevailing cultural attitudes toward children, as the heroine grows into adulthood, their communication not only fails to improve but also fractures. The protagonist later observes: "She doesn't speak much about what is on her mind. I don't ask, she doesn't ask. The unasked questions feel heavy between us" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 98). Towards the end of the novel, when the mother informs her daughter of the father's return after almost three decades, the protagonist is taken aback and wants to discuss this news. However, the mother abruptly ends the conversation. Paradoxically, silence here is established by means of acoustic noise – she unmutes the TV, halting any further verbal exchange.

> Your Baba is back. He is staying at your aunts'. He would like to see you. As you can imagine, he has been through a rough time. I stared at Mama, then the TV. I stood in silence for a moment. She sat in silence for a moment. My body felt transfixed. My mind blank before it began to spin. I wanted to ask where he had come back from, how long he was staying. Had she spoken to him, had he come to the house? *What kind of rough time?* Mama pressed the mute button to bring back the sound. (El Rashidi, 2016, pp. 143-144)

The mother's unwillingness to engage in verbal exchange with her daughter is rooted in diverse contexts and embodies multiple aspects of silence: some of them are influenced by her personality, her experiences of personal loss, social and psychological alienation and a possible mood disorder,[4] others are shaped by deep-seated socio-cultural norms, her upbringing and fear connected to political silencing. According to Younas (2023), the narrator's domestic environment can be viewed as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm of Cairo (p. 104). Therefore, the silences she experiences at home mirror those witnessed on a larger scale – not only in the streets and public places but also in the media and official narratives, illustrating how the personal, the social and the political are intertwined.

[3] The relationships between mothers and daughters in the Middle East seem to be particularly complicated. For example Čižmíková (2022a) considers it a result of patriarchal elements, power struggles, child-rearing practices and the process of subjectivation (pp. 33-34).

[4] She shows signs of depression, such as sleeping till noon, social withdrawal and lack of interest in the outside world. The narrator describes it as "melancholy so steeped in who she is" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 84).

Silence in the Socio-Cultural Context

While the mother's approach might be motivated by the parent's protectiveness over her child, it is also shaped by the cultural values which, according to Saville-Troike (1985), may either reward submisiveness (e.g., silence) or promote initiative (e.g., verbal expression) in children. Silence can serve as a tool for social control, as cultural norms dictate the balance between speech and silence, tied to social distinctions like hierarchy, roles, and age (Saville-Troike, 1985). These notions intersect with the culturally and socially accepted forms of behaviour expected from children. Concepts of authority among parents are often reflected in their use of silencing strategies towards their children (Bruneau, 1973). In this regard, child-rearing practices connected to silence can be seen as examples of socio-cultural silence, which Bruneau (1973) defined as the one "related to the characteristic manner in which entire social and cultural orders refrain from speech" (p. 36). According to Gregg (2005), referencing Shakri, Egyptian parents, especially those from traditional milieus, generally curb their children's curiosity and expect them to demonstrate submission, compliance and politeness towards adults, which involves obedience without asking too many questions (p. 2014). When we first encounter the heroine, she has just entered the phase that Gregg calls late childhood – a crucial period during which a child learns to respect authority figures and internalizes prevailing socio-cultural values, gender norms, good manners and moral obligations. To teach young children to remain quiet in specific social settings can be seen as "a part of the transmission of world-view" (Saville-Troike, 1985, p. 12). As El Rashidi herself noted, learned behaviour often becomes integral to one's personality and eventually contribute to "who a person becomes" (Politics and Prose, 2016).

Silences in the social sphere in the novel are rooted in, among other factors, cultural notions of honour, shame and modesty (Gregg, 2005) which have played essential roles in (not only) Mediterranean societies, dating back to ancient times (Peristiany, 1965; Crook, 2009). These notions have carried significant weight in Egypt — a part of both the Mediterranean area (Zeid, 1965; Abu-Lughod, 1986, pp. 32, 86) and the Middle East (Gregg, 2005, p. 106) — and have been influenced by Bedouin values as well as the ethical and moral values of the Islamic faith (Yakin et al., 2024). It must be noted that while individual interpretations and practices of these cultural concepts differ across various historical eras, cultural contexts, and geographical regions, they do possess certain common traits. Specifically, these cultural notions often assign significant, occasionally pivotal, importance to both individual and kin-group (family) reputation. The group's reputation is shaped by the conduct and behaviour of its members, while the members, in turn, gain advantages through their association with the group. From their late childhood, children are taught

that an individual's actions can affect the family's reputation in the eyes of the public, whether in a positive or negative way. The emphasis on maintaining a "good reputation" often leads to avoiding certain topics out of fear that discussing them might expose vulnerabilities or bring shame. In El Rashidi's novel, subjects such as (mental) illness, sexuality, and even private emotions like love are avoided in conversation. The protagonist reflects on her interactions with her uncle, noting, "we had never spoken about his own emotions" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 125). When her cousin undergoes a breakup, he refuses to discuss it, leading to a silent exchange. Dido argues that people find it difficult to identify their feelings, since they "weren't taught to be in touch with (…) [themselves]" (El Rashidi, 2016, pp. 84-85).

In the novel, silence is learned both through upbringing and socialization, and transmitted intergenerationally. Already an adult, the protagonist asks her mother about the four vacant spaces among her grandmother's collection of miniature oil paintings, which the grandmother traditionally painted on the same date each year. Why are they missing? Were they lost, destroyed or gifted to someone? Or were they simply not painted at all? If so, what prevented the grandmother from doing the painting? The mother has no answer; she does not know. The gaps on the wall are visual representations of unspoken matters, suggesting a pattern that's been transmitted from one generation to the next.[5] The empty places can be understood in terms of visual silence, a concept Kwiatkowska (1997) defined as analogous to acoustic silence, occurring when "we do not see what we expect to see, and register this absence as a figure against the less important ground" (p. 334). In the novel, visual silences occur not only in the domestic sphere but also in the public environment, when the protagonist notices changes along the street on her daily commute to school. She plays a game in which she earns points for items that remain in their place the following day, occasionally noticing absences of cars, buildings and even people. While some things are always present, such as the billboard with the picture of the president, others disappear: they are either demolished or removed by the police, such as kiosks, carts, and cars. The visual silences encountered by the protagonist serve multiple purposes. They function not only as markers of Cairo's urban changes on a micro-level but also, as highlighted by Younas (2023), they act as poignant reminders of "government maladministration, violence, and bad economic policies," which involve "adding fences to guarantee security to some people, unequal distribution

[5] The cultural concepts of both honour and shame are considered gendered, ascribing different roles to men and women. Even though the gender aspect is not the focal point in El Rashidi's novel, the fact that the silence occurs among the female members of the family possibly reveals gendered cultural norms that expect women to remain quiet and invisible.

of resources in different areas, the abolition of monuments and historical buildings, the removal of street vendors and the installation of commercial buildings" (p. 125). As will be discussed later, under an authoritarian regime, these failures are beyond criticism and consequently are shrouded in silence. Therefore, visual silence in the novel always functions as a visual manifestation of verbal silence, spanning both private and public spheres.

While silence in the novel often unfolds in private settings, it is closely intertwined with cultural and political aspects. These gradually seep into the protagonist's daily life from her childhood onward. For instance, she learns not to discuss witnessing her female cousin kissing another girl or the presence of an exhibitionist near their school. She discovers that writing a school assignment story called Disappearing People about forced disappearances won't earn her a good grade, and it also annoys both, the teacher and her mother. As might have been expected, even the father's absence is later revealed to be politically motivated: he was charged with fabricated corruption charges for refusing to award a significant contract he had put out for tender to the president's son.

Public Silence and Silencing

As time passes, the protagonist's narrative voice re-emerges during her university years. Readers catch a glimpse of the first signs of her political awakening, her presence at the first sit-ins on campus and her quest to find the means of self-expression, oscillating between documentary film-making and literary pursuits. While in the first part of the novel, El Rashidi focuses on silences produced within the protagonist's family, the second part sees her more absorbed by the social and political aspects of silence encountered in public spaces — within the university and on the streets. However, her conversational role remains that of a listener, primarily eliciting silence from others rather than contributing with silence of her own. She listens to these silences in the social sphere, trying to identify reasons why people refrain from speaking their minds openly. She is haunted by questions concerning the passivity of the people and her own feelings of incapacity and a sense of loss, whose source she is not quite able to identify.

In the novel, silences observed and experienced in public usually have a political dimension. Topics that are not discussed in the open concern the political status quo and subjects connected to it either directly, such as forced disappearances and torture, or implicitely, like the rising price of vegetables.[6] As

[6] The narrator points to rising prices of okra and tomatoes, staple ingredients for Egyptians, which have been influenced by the worsening economic situation in the country and have contributed to the discontent and rising anger among the population. As

is evident from the narrator's reflection, fear prevents people from making any comments that might be perceived as criticism of the current regime, express dissatisfaction with its policies or show even the smallest signs of resistance. Most of the novel takes place during the presidency of Ḥusnī Mubārak (1981–2011), whose authoritarian regime was known for continuous violation of human rights, repression, and the stifling of political dissent.[7]

The narrator in El Rashidi's novel does not mention these circumstances explicitly, nor are they the subject of conversations. Instead, she sketches out the atmosphere of latent fear that lurks beneath the surface of ordinary, quotidian life. When working on a writing assignment, the protagonist approaches people in the street, asking them what improvements they would like to see in their city. But people are distrustful and wary, afraid to respond: "People get scared when you ask them on the street. (...) They asked who was asking. They asked who was really asking. They said they couldn't answer such questions. (…) They said they couldn't speak about the city. They couldn't speak about the country. Sorry. You know how it is. I don't want to get in trouble" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 88).

On another occasion, when the first sit-in is organized at the university, people kept quiet about it. Despite it being a low-key event with very limited attendance, the media fabricated a version about protesters being devil-worshippers who engage in illicit sexual behaviour and believe in anarchy – a similar strategy to that employed during the 2011 revolution when the state media ran a smear campaign against the protesting youth. The protagonist recalls a similar incident that happened a few years earlier, when about a hundred young men were seized at night by the police, on the pretext that they were atheists. When they returned, nobody talked about what happened, but the scars that "peered from necklines

a cart owner in the novel comments, "we all know that tomatoes are politics" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 122).

[7] According to a Freedom House Survey (1999) and The Economist Intelligence Unit (2010), the system in Egypt under Mubārak can be characterized as authoritarian and unfree, marked by the frequent occurrence of arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, and summary justice. Despite the official abolition of censorship in the 1970s, freedom of expression remained significantly constrained by the Penal Code (*Qānūn al-ʿuqūbāt raqm 58 li-sana 1937*) and defamation regulations. These laws prohibited citizens from making critical statements that could be deemed libelous against religion or detrimental to public morality. Penalties for the so-called spreading of false news, smearing the country's reputation or defaming its political authorities included fines and imprisonment. The regime exercised control over practically all media channels, including the press and television. Moreover, the Emergency Law (*Qānūn raqm 162 li-sana 1958 bi-shaʾn ḥālat al-ṭawāriʾ*), enacted after al-Sādāt's assassination and only lifted for a short period after the January Revolution in 2011 further curtailed civil rights and liberties (Freedom House Survey Team, 1999).

and sleeves" suggest they were tortured (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 93). Likewise, several of those present at the sit-in are arrested, some of them never to be seen again. Just as before, "[n]obody speaks of it aloud, only whispers, rumors" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 94). In his analysis of the novel, Alenezi (2019) calls this avoidance of uncomfortable truth "pretended ignorance", viewing it as a survival strategy adopted by citizens (p. 177). All these arbitrary arrests and forced disappearances are covered by what Zerubavel (2006) termed a "conspiracy of silence". He defines this as a social phenomenon revolving around "open secrets" — common knowledge rarely discussed in public, characterized by "undiscussables" and "unmentionables", often stemming from fear and/or embarrassment (p. 3). In the novel, the silences that are in one way or another related to the regime, are primarily motivated by fear for personal safety.[8]

These silences do not stem from an individual's choice and so they cannot be considered eloquent (Ephratt, 2008). Instead, they can be seen as a consequence of deliberate suppression and silencing. According to Bonacchi (2021), silencing "is an act designed to 'shut up' subjects when they raise issues that are not accepted or claim interactional roles that are denied them" (p. 53). Ephratt (2022) distinguishes between externally imposed and indirect silencing: the former including censorship, while the latter involves the restriction or denial of access to information. Silencing involves more than just halting verbal expression; it also moulds and regulates it (Houston & Kramarae, 1991). Therefore, the politics of intimidation, various laws limiting freedom of expression, along with the regime's grip on media — incorporating diverse forms of propaganda and the dissemination of misinformation — can truly be viewed as a means of silencing the populace.

Silence between Submission and Trauma

There is a dimension to this public silence that goes beyond the apparent fear of the repressive state apparatus. In the second part of the novel, the protagonist tries to grasp the source of the torpor that has taken over the people, including herself. She confesses: "I felt deceived too, cheated out of live, but I wasn't sure why, or by what. I wondered. Was that also inherited, our listlessness, our sense of resignation?" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 81). Arguably, Ephratt (2022) suggests that while internalization of externally imposed silence could be viewed as an implicit

[8] However, as discussed before, the role of shame is also significant in this context, particularly in a predominantly Muslim society that places great importance on chastity and modesty, where the label of being an atheist or a morally depraved person carries substantial social stigma.

form of silencing, submissiveness stands as the primary reason here. To trace the root of submissiveness of the populace, one has to consider both the repressive character of Egyptian regimes and the country's experience under British colonialism. British colonial rule in Egypt, which was itself of authoritarian character, led to the widespread marginalization of the native population. This system stripped them of their voice and agency, significantly contributing to the development of the so-called colonial mentality. As Memmi (2003) pointed out, the negative stereotypes about the colonized people, created and perpetuated by the colonizing powers, profoundly influenced the self-perception of the subjugated population. The internalization of these stereotypes, coupled with the colonizer's economic, cultural and linguistic hegemony and the resulting limited options of the colonized to assimilate, fostered passivity and enforced subordination within the colonized community. Moreover, the combination of dependence, inferiority complex and silencing create identity issues within the afflicted communities. As Dido, the protagonist's cousin noted, "Nobody has a voice, (...) nor a real sense of who they are" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 80).

In this regard, Freire (2011) coined the expression "a culture of silence" to describe the plight of the dispossessed, especially in highly stratified societies, where decision-making and access to resources are the exclusive privileges of the powerful elite. Such circumstances often induce passivity, lethargy, and submission among the marginalized, whose voices are neither raised nor heard. While these "cultures of silence" trace their origins to the colonial period, Freire suggests that "they are predisposed to be 'reactivated' in (…) [their] manifestations under more favorable circumstances" (pp. 46-47). In other words, in cultures of silence, vestiges of the colonial past persist within oppressive and authoritarian regimes.

In El Rashidi's novel, the main character and her cousin both acknowledge a sense of being "muted", as though their lived experience in the world is actually inexpressible. In an attempt to describe his feeling of emptiness, Dido invents the term "poranheyar", a compound word merging the Russian "porazheniye", signifying a defeat, with the Arabic "inhiyār" denoting a collapse or breakdown. He describes the result as a form of devastation, concluding: "There isn't a language for what we are living (...) The way we live our lives is no better than death" (El Rashidi, 2016, pp. 80, 85). According to Younas (2023), the motif of silence reveals the limits of language and "give[s] expression to the ineffable," but it is also symptomatic of the "violence that words cannot express" (pp. 6, 8, 102).

Failure to articulate one's experiences, particularly those involving excessive violence and distress, has often been associated with trauma, with muteness being regarded as one of its symptoms (Felman & Laub, 1992). While trauma has long been viewed first and foremost as a psychological issue of an individual, often

connected to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and understood as the result of some shocking, traumatizing experience of imminent death, group-afflicting traumas have also been acknowledged and studied from historical, sociological and cultural perspectives. Alexander (2012) defined the concept of cultural trauma as the feeling of members of a certain group that "they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (p. 6), naming wars, genocides, massacres and different kinds of armed conflict as the most usual and obvious sources. However, even less conspicuous incidents or other kinds of long-term suffering can become the source of both individual and collective trauma. For example, Root (1992) introduced the concept of insidious trauma that takes into account the lasting impact of structural violence and everyday oppression, which may not always be manifest as direct physical violence, on the psychological well-being of individuals, whose manifestations fall beyond the criteria for PTSD. Moreover, recent scholarship has recognized the significance of colonialism, racism, and even authoritarianism as potential trauma-inflicting phenomena whose effects can be transmitted intergenerationally, though their manifestations might differ across cultures (Craps, 2013; Yusin, 2018; Danieli 1998b).[9] As Danieli (1998a; 1998b), Gagné (1998), Craps and Bond (2020) and others pointed out, by changing the system of interpersonal relations, trauma affects future generations, with family being the "vehicle of intergenerational transmission" (Danieli, 1998a, p. 9).

The Defeat of '67 and Intergenerational Trauma

The feelings of despondency and incapacity may well arise from the daily realities of living under an oppressive authoritarian regime along with being inherited from the preceding generation. Dido identifies feelings of dejection and apathy as "something passed on by the generation before". Despite belonging to a different cohort, Uncle shares this attitude. The protagonist recalls his words as he addressed her, lamenting the situation of Egyptian youth: "It was the legacy my generation would inherit, one of destruction and loss. Tadmeer, tadmeer. It meant devastation. He worried it was who we had become" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 77). The use of first-person plural pronouns like "we", "us", "our generation", indicates that the psychological malaise they have been afflicted with is regarded here as a collective issue, a shared aspect within a group. The protagonist

[9] For more information on colonial trauma in the Middle Eastern setting see for example Lazali (2019).

wonders: "Have we inherited defeat, the very spirit of it? Is it seeped into who we are? Do we have to reconcile with our parents's losses to build again?" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 111).

Besides the long-term effects of state oppression, authoritarianism, and the lasting effects of colonialism, the protagonist's use of terms such as "defeat" and "the parents' losses" appears to allude to a distinct type of traumatic event inflicted upon the generation of her parents. The word defeat (in Arabic *hazīma*) has been frequently used to refer to the Six-Day War (*Ḥarb al-Ayyāam al-Sitta*). Also called the June War (*Ḥarb Ḥuzayrān*) or *al-Naksa* (the Setback),[10] it has been identified as an event that had a profound and lasting impact on the psychological state of Egyptians. On 5th June 1967, Egypt, together with Syria and Jordan, got involved in a war against Israel which has come to be known as one of the shortest armed conflicts in history. In a mere six days, the Israeli military vanquished the Arab forces, gaining control of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights. The Arab World was profoundly shaken by this devastating defeat, but it hit Egypt particularly hard. The swift and unexpected defeat not only demonstrated Israel's military superiority and revealed the Arab states' lack of preparedness for war and deficiencies in political skills but many understood it in terms of a "moral judgement" (Hourani, 2013, pp. 442). Arabs, and particularly Egyptians, perceived the result of the Six-Day War as truly catastrophic and utterly humiliating. The extent of people's disillusionment and sense of deception was amplified by the long-term dissemination of propagandist narratives through official Egyptian media. For years, broadcasting channels like *Cairo Radio* (*Rādiyū al-Qāhira*) and *Voice of the Arabs* (*Ṣawt al-ʿArab*), as well as newspapers had been spreading pro-regime ideology, often resorting to the misinterpretation of facts and even outright fabrication (Alahmed, 2011).[11] Needless to say, the Arab populace had no reason to anticipate such a debacle. This "moment of deep rupture", as Halabi (2017) called it, not only initiated a period of great disenchantment and scepticism, but also sparked a crisis in ideological direction, contributing, among other factors, to the rise of political Islam (Pflitsch, 2010; Neuwirth, 2010).

[10] It is also known as the war of 1967 (*Ḥarb 1967*), the June Defeat (*Hazīmat Ḥuzayrān*).

[11] For example, on 2 June, the newspaper *al-Ahrām* published a commentary by the prominent journalist Muḥammad Ḥasanayn Haykal (1967), claiming that "[n]o matter what happens, and without trying to foresee the events, Israel is on the verge of a near-certain breakdown, whether from the outside or from the inside" (p. 9). In a similar vein, on the first day of the war, *Cairo Radio* broadcast the news about significant triumphs for the Egyptian Army against the Israelis, despite the reality being completely different (James, 2006).

While ʿAbd al-Nāṣir tried to tone down the immense impact of the defeat, calling it a mere "setback" (*naksa*), for Arabs, particularly Egyptians, it has remained a source of trauma (Kassab, 2010, p. 65). To cite Suleiman (2011), it was "an uncontested case of pan-Arab trauma whose aftereffects are still with the Arabs to this day" (p. 132). Gana (2023) also describes the defeat as traumatic and considers it, alongside injustices, colonialism, and authoritarianism, as one of factors contributing to the collective Arab predisposition towards melancholy. Al-Ṭarābīshī (1991) explains why 1967 can indeed be considered as a trauma (*raḍḍa*).[12] First and foremost, it was abrupt and completely unexpected because it was "preceded by strong feelings of self-confidence and exaggerated estimation of one's power" (p. 22).[13] Moreover, it wasn't perceived as a mere military debacle but as the defeat of the whole society, since it "laid bare not only military underdevelopment, but backwardness in political, economic, technical and cultural spheres" (p. 22). Since it happened so suddenly and was not anticipated, the defeat created an open wound that could not be healed. As Gana (2023) put it succintly, "[w]hat is traumatic is not so much the defeat in itself, but the aftereffect in which it was and continues to be experienced and relived as an irreversible destiny — as a continually retraumatizing re-memory and reenactment of the foreclosure of a possible future, or worse, the foreclosure of the very possibility of a future" (p. 120). Last but not least, al-Ṭarābīshī views the Six-Day War as a personal defeat for ʿAbd al-Nāṣir, who was revered as "a beloved father" of the Arab nation. Al-Ṭarābīshī particularly emphasizes ʿAbd al-Nāṣir's powerful voice which had an almost mesmerizing effect on his listeners, as well as his remarkable ability to articulate the inner yearnings of the entire nation. After the 1967 debacle, with ʿAbd al-Nāṣir losing much of his international standing and the authority of a pan-Arab leader, his once-influential voice seemed absent, leaving the people feeling as if they too had been bereaved of their voice.

The defeat affected a whole generation but its aftereffects have been felt during subsequent decades; the sense of defeat being transmitted to their offspring. According to Liem (2007), to keep silent about a historical trauma is "often creating impediments to healing and recovery and serving as a medium through which the intergenerational effects of catastrophic experiences are

[12] While al-Ṭarābīshī refers to trauma as *raḍḍa*, it has also been referred to as *ṣadma nafsīya* or *jaraḥ nafsī*.

[13] Many Arab writers and thinkers have described the feelings of optimism and the shock that followed the defeat, such as Syrian thinker Ṣādiq al-ʿAẓm (2007, p. 13) or the playwright Saʿd Allāh Wannūs (Dawwāra &Wannūs, 1977, p. 192).

transmitted" (p. 153).[14] As Ginio (2016) noted, military defeats may indeed be traumatic for the whole society, with people often turning their hopes to their children, expecting them to mitigate the losses suffered. But if followed by a period of honest self-reflection and necessary transformation, defeat has potential to start the process of revitalization leading to recovery from the traumatic moment. However, no such development happened in Egypt. Instead of a critical re-evaluation of political, socio-cultural and educational factors, the authoritarian regime, represented by ʿAbd al-Nāṣir and later his successors, continued to adhere to the propagandist, conspiratorial narratives, blaming the defeat on external forces and foreign betrayals. To quote Gana (2023), ʿAbd al-Nāṣir's choice of the euphemism "setback" (*naksa*) rather than the more appropriate and poignant "defeat" (*hazīma*) "speaks volumes about the ways in which its devastating effects had partly been euphemized, displaced, and disavowed rather than fully admitted, reckoned with, and apprehended" (p. 8). In his influential book *Self-Criticism after the Defeat*, (*al-Naqd al-ḏātī baʿda al-Hazīma*), Syrian academic Ṣādiq al-ʿAẓm (2007) offers a scathing critique of both the Arab societies and the Arab regimes, which continued to live in denial, "rationalizing the defeat, evading their responsibility and shifting it onto the other" (p. 52). By avoiding the confrontation with the reality of the defeat, they also missed the opportunity to process it, thus losing their chance for recovery and progress. Hence, the Egyptian "culture of defeat" (Schivelbusch, 2003; Ginio, 2016) has survived to this day, the traumatic repercussion of the June war still present and alive among the members of subsequent generations. König and Reiman (2018) recognize "mind-sets of fatalism, powerlessness and apathy", which are so often pointed out during the novel, as consequences of collective trauma, whereas the use of an "exclusive political narrative" often emphasizes the status of victimhood, reinforces biases and promotes a fixation on the past, leading to "disempowering coping mechanisms" (pp. 10-13). As the Egyptian historian Khalid Fahmy put it, 1967 sparked "a crisis of confidence that is still present today. (...) [W]e suffered a loss of world-view, a philosophy and an understanding of this part of the world and our place in it. And these questions still preoccupy us" (Zekri & Fahmy, 2017).

The protagonist of El Rashidi's novel is well aware of these implications, when she contends: "People of the older generation, Aunty and Uncle and all the others, would always somehow revert in conversation, even when talking about

[14] E. Ginio (2016) borrowed the concept of "cultures of defeat", from W. Schivelbusch's (2003) and applied it to the Ottoman Empire following the defeat in the Balkan Wars (1912–1913). He observes how this military "catastrophe" caused psychological, social and cultural issues, shattering the nation's self-assurance, creating identity problems and even triggering fear of erasure.

the price of food, to ’67. Defeat, we are a defeated nation” (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 81). El Rashidi’s narrator and her cohorts all feel the weight of this “legacy of destruction and loss”, contributing to their sense of incapacity, passivity and incapability to raise their voice to articulate the living reality of their generation. König and Reiman (2018) identified silence as one of the coping mechanisms with collective traumatization, even among the members of subsequent generations. Ephratt (2022) considers trauma-caused silence as part of the so-called “unsaid”.

Silences in the Post-Revolutionary Period

The last section of the novel moves between the summer of 2010, a few months before the breakout of the protests in 2011, and the summer of 2014, following the restoration of military rule under the leadership of the new president ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī. The chapter is marked by two key events in the protagonist’s private life: the death of Uncle in 2010 and the return of the protagonist’ s long absent father. During the period shortly before the revolution, the protagonist notices subtle shifts in her surroundings that signal the approaching moment of rupture: the rising price of vegetables, the soaring cost of living, changing patterns of traffic noise, deteriorating surroundings as well as the growing frustration of citizens and an increase in political activism. In 2014, the protagonist reflects on the changes in her life after the period of political and social upheaval. Her personality seems different now; even though she is still highly perceptive of her environment, she has curbed her habit of posing numerous questions and has adopted many of her mother’s silent mannerisms, such as raised eyebrows or the expression of disagreement in the form of questions.[15] While the silences in the previous chapters were mostly generated by the people around the protagonist, she now produces them herself. Some of them can be attributed to her upbringing and socio-cultural influences, stemming from being silenced since her early childhood across various spheres and contexts, others are probably caused by the violence and traumatic experiences she encountered between 2011 and 2013. Even though silence is semantically ambiguous, the text provides subtle cues that the protagonist’s refusal to cover the revolutionary period can also be interpreted as an expression of political dissent and resistance against the official socially polarizing narrative.

Whereas in the previous chapters, the protagonist wrestled with silences within her family and the socio-cultural setting, now she seems to have

[15] For example, during her conversation with a Muslim Brotherhood sympathiser (pp. 156-158).

internalized some of the diverse forms of silence she absorbed from her surroundings. Her upbringing and socio-cultural influences translate into the way she operates in various situations in her everyday life. For instance, when talking to her recently returned father, she tries to avoid the topic of his experiences during the years he spent away from his family. Though she has a vague idea of the events that unfolded after he had been charged with false allegations fuelled by political vengeance, she confesses: "We have never really spoken about his years of absence. (...) Where he went, what his life was like during those years, I (...) never ask questions, never raise the conversation (...). Sometimes Baba will make mention of what life has taught him. After all I have been through, he will say. I nod, then try to change the subject, to steer the conversation to something else" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 149). It is interesting to note that she never discloses the truth about what happened to her father, even though she appears to finally have learnt it during the conversation he had with Dido in prison, after the latter was imprisoned for his political activism. Whatever her father's fate was during those decades is left to the reader's imagination.

Her recently found propensity for silence is also evident during her visit to the doctor. She keeps silent about the reason for her visit, the character of her health problem is left unspecified. When the doctor prescribes her a cream and instructs her to return in a month, she inquires, "[w]hat is it for? What caused it? Is it curable? Will it go away? (...) How long will it take?" However, her questions are met with no response other than "It will take time" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 160). The silence of the doctor, though ambivalent, is symptomatic of the prevailing yet slowly changing approach among the medical authorities who tend to withhold detailed information from their patients. Nevertheless, the protagonist's choice to conceal details of her condition from the reader highlights the degree to which she has embraced socio-cultural norms of silence. Her silence regarding her ailment is probably tied to her sense of privacy, as well as her internalization of concepts like modesty and shame (Dolezal & Lyons, 2017). A similar rationale can be applied to her reluctance to divulge details about her father's persecution by the Egyptian authorities, leading to his inability to support the family – corruption charges, though fabricated, potential imprisonment, and other harsh conditions he had to endure would indoubtedly cast a shadow over the family's sense of honour.

The Loop of Setbacks

Not only does the protagonist's personality feel slightly different in the last chapter of the novel, but her narrative voice too has undergone subtle but palpable changes: events now seem to be narrated as if with a lump in the throat. The

noteworthy aspect of the novel's concluding section is the fact that the revolutionary period and its aftermath in 2011–2013 is not covered; it is only alluded to through hints and a few scattered fragments of memory. The absence of the historical moment of rupture is even more surprising not only considering the large number of of testimonial writings from the period concerned (Heshmat, 2015), but also because it feels as if everything in the novel has been leading up to that moment. All the signs, including the return of the protagonist's father, point in that direction, gradually building up the tension. As Alenezi (2019) noted, the importance of El Rashidi's novel lies in the fact that she was able to show "how citizens become silent and why silence is broken unexpectedly" (p. 175). Nevertheless, the pivotal moment that would constitute a release, a catharsis, is absent from the novel. The revolution broke the silence and provided a platform for people to raise their voices, channeling various forms of expression, creativity, and opinion, and yet in 2014 things seem to have reverted to their previous state, perhaps even getting "darker", as the protagonist ponders, gazing at the billboard with the newly elected president (El-Rashidi, p. 152).

Although the novel does not specify whether the protagonist personally experienced any traumatic events during those three years that might have caused psychological trauma, she does recount the ordeals faced by some of her friends including torture, rape, a knife attack, and several deaths. However, as Felman and Laub (1992) pointed out, one can experience secondary traumatization simply by bearing witness to traumatic experience of others. The protagonist's persistent use of plural pronouns when reflecting on the revolutionary period suggests she might also perceive it as a kind of collective trauma. The narrator considers the revolution "[t]he second defeat, our second Naksa" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 161) and wishes she had been able to "shake off the shadow of disappointment" and dispose of the painful memories. In the end, she comes to the conclusion that "it takes either a larger trauma or fleeting euphoria to erase what was" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 151), suggesting, that she views the revolution and its aftermath as traumatic.

In fact, contemporary sources often draw parallels between the impact of the 25 January Revolution and the Six-Day War Defeat on the Egyptian population. In her article, Naeff (2023) examines how young people in Egypt draw on the cultural memory of 1967 to "navigat[e] the oppressive reality of post-2013" (p. 54). One of the participants in the workshop dedicated to the memory of '67 admitted to feeling "defeated" after the revolution, "because we feel that something that we really hoped would change the society we live in had failed" (Naeff, p. 59). Even the contemporary Egyptian writer, Nāʾil al-Ṭūkhī (2017) points out analogies between the two events, mentioning that many of those who participated in the revolution referred to it not as *Ṯawrat 25 Yanāyir* (the

Revolution of 25 January) but sarcastically as *Naksat 25 khasāyir* – the Setback of 25 Losses.

As Bardawil (2020), Naeff (2023), and others commented, the generations growing up in the shadow of the defeat inherited a "dual legacy" of "revolutionary exhilaration and political despair" (Bardawil, p. 7) of the 1960s that "continued to haunt the struggle for decolonization and social justice and its recurrent setbacks in Egypt and the Arab region" (Naeff, p. 66). The protagonist recalls how Uncle used to say to her time and again: "This was what my generation was inheriting. It was up to us to mitigate the losses, the mistakes" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 124). The popular uprising in 2011 was an opportunity to break with the legacy of defeat, as it was a crucial turning point that inspired belief in people's power as self-governing citizens and the possibility of achieving democracy and justice and redress the losses suffered by previous generations. The euphoria following Mubārak's removal from office — after 18 days of street protests against his 30-year presidency — mirrored the condition of unwavering optimism, fervent enthusiasm and triumphalist exhilaration that preceded the Six-Day War. However, this moment of hopefulness and joy was followed by a period marked by a deep sense of disenchantment and betrayal, characterized by the political rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, a people-supported coup culminating in the restoration of military rule in 2013, and, most importantly, widespread civilian and state violence which peaked during the Nahḍa and Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawīya massacres.[16] The society became extremely polarized and alienated, with many interpersonal relationships, even within families, breaking down, sometimes beyond repair (see, for example, Matthies-Boon, 2022). To Nāʾil al-Ṭūkhī (2017), the January Revolution was in a way, a re-enactment of "the blow of '67", suggesting that many view the outcome of the revolution as similarly traumatic to what the Naksa was for the previous generation. The silence of El Rashidi's narrator might therefore be unintentional, symptomatic of the unresolved (collective) trauma and its consequences for the present time that are difficult to articulate, even more so under a military regime that suppresses freedom of speech and expression and stifles dissent.

Silence as Resistance

As silence resists straightforward analysis, it can signify both consent and disapproval, compliance as well as resistance (MacLure et al., 2010). Whereas the narrator's refraining from evaluation of the (post-)revolutionary period might

[16] The question of the character of the revolutionary events of the early 2010s and whether and for what reasons they failed to achieve their goals is beyond the scope of this paper.

be seen as a sign of objectivity — intending to remain an observer without letting her subjective experiences or opinions influence the narrative — I argue that it also carries subtle signs of resistance.

Since her university years, the narrator of the novel has been searching for the most suitable means to express her voice in a stifling environment filled with overbearing silences,[17] weighing up whether to choose a documentary film, a screenplay, or a novel. In the last part of the novel, the narrator refers to writing a book, with the implicit understanding that the novel itself is intended to be that very book. Clearly, she has finally succeeded in finding her voice and breaking the silence to which her family, society, and the repressive regime had conditioned her. It is therefore rather surprising for the protagonist to suddenly withhold her voice, especially after having searched for a suitable means of expression for years. Communicative silence that is unexpected and out of place carries meaning and illocutionary force, and can thus be interpreted as marked and eloquent (Schmitz, 1994; Bonacchi, 2021). In her exploration of silence within a literary framework, Pérez (1984) identified a narrative strategy in which the author omits a crucial component of the story, thereby creating "deliberate, perceptible, conspicuous silence" that "elicits a specific reaction (...) in the

[17] In this respect, the novel shares certain similarities with autobiographical novels as well as the genre of the *Bildungsroman*, depicting the "spiritual and intellectual maturation of the protagonist" (Paniconi, 2023, p. 4), in which finding one's voice and telling stories are often seen as integral to the self-birth process (see e.g., 2022b, pp. 360-361). Nevertheless, while Egyptian coming-of-age novels often focus on "themes such as a quest for love, a struggle for personal fulfillment, and a desire to achieve a cultural modernity often felt as 'other than the self'" (Paniconi, 2023, p. 207), these topics are not the primary focus of the protagonist in El Rashidi's novel. Moreover, female versions of such novels tend to focus specifically on the female experience, including marriage, emancipation, and professional aspirations, within a patriarchal, male-dominated environment (Paniconi, 2023; Fraiman, 1993; Abel et al., 1983). Even though gender norms and conventions play a certain implicit role in the protagonist's upbringing and personality, El Rashidi's narrative is neither specifically feminine nor preoccupied with these issues. In fact, as Younas (2023) observed, the narrator does not even seem to have written herself into the story at all; she functions solely as an observer, trying to record the life and changes happening around her from her personal perspective. Therefore, I suggest that El Rashidi's novel can rather be read as a chronicle, as its title implies. According to Jörgensen (2011), a chronicle is "a hybrid genre that moves among a variety of discourses and seamlessly blends fact with fiction, and the urgency of on-location reporting with a more literary attention to style and aesthetics" (pp. 140-141). It depicts a society in flux, changes in the environment or times of crisis, and portrays the social ills of the marginalized and dispossessed, creating a counternarrative to the official version of events (Jörgensen, 2011, p. 141).

reader" (p. 120). Intentional use of silence in narratives as literary silence, viewing it as a powerful rhetorical tool for dissent (Pérez, 1984). Muteness in literature has been recognized as a form of subjective expression of resistance, especially when dealing with power structures, particularly in cases where the consequences would be too grave or all other alternatives are unavailable (Reeds, 2016; Schmitz, 1994). Besides the struggle to find a voice that resists silence, often depicted in autobiographical and fictional writings, Al-Nowaihi (2001) emphasizes that "silence is [also] a form of resistance" (p. 477). As Maclure et al. (2010) put it, "choosing not to speak is a form of agency that works the gap between 'what goes without saying' and 'what cannot be said'" (p. 498).

In this regard, the protagonist's silence can be comprehended as deliberate and conscious – trying to communicate something without using words. It might be read as a way of addressing the disastrous end of the revolutionary endeavours and restoration of authoritarian regimes, that, in Younas's (2023) words, "act like a doppelgänger of Mubarak replicating the same government apparatus" (p. 124). She considers one of the novel's objectives to be the creation of a counternarrative to challenge the state's version of reality, especially during the pre-revolutionary period (pp. 103-104). I argue that the same holds true for the portrayal of the (post-)revolutionary period, though the opposition to the regime's narratives is expressed through silence. As the protagonist is either unable or unwilling to articulate her stance in this highly polarized society,[18] with the regime cracking down on dissent, she retreats into conspicuous, meaningful silence. By withholding her voice, she is able to express her rejection of the regime's narrative of the revolution which has become infused with conspiratorial elements and the incitement of fear, spreading the view that democracy is impossible and that military leadership is the only solution to avoid chaos and violence – the essence of which the reader obtains through the portrayal of one of the state's video montages broadcasted on TV: "If it weren't Sisi, it would be terror. ... *Don't forget, these people are the ones who murdered Sadat. Don't forget what they did*

[18] There is no room to examine in depth the roots and the process of the polarization of Egyptian society, but one of the main polarizing issues was the rise of political Islam and the policies of President Mursī, a Muslim Brotherhood candidate. Protesters continued their demonstrations even after Mubārak stepped down because they felt that the constitutional changes were minimal and the adopted measures insufficient. They felt betrayed by the sudden withdrawal of the Muslim Brotherhood from the streets, widely believed to be part of a power-sharing deal with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. The counter-revolutionary forces targeted the revolutionary youth and disseminated conspirational narratives that slandered their reputation to turn the general public against them. The rift widened further following the mass-supported coup in 2013 that ousted Mursī from power and escalated during the massacres of Muslim Brotherhood supporters. (For more details see, for example, Selim, 2015).

to Nasser. Don't forget Luxor. Don't forget Kosheh. Don't forget. *Don't forget*. *Don't forget*. *Don't forget*. *Don't forget*. Images of the Luxor massacre. Clips inciting violence. Terrorized Christians. Bearded men butchering, pushing youths off buildings, armed. Figures flash across screens. Killed by terrorist. Massacred. Persecuted. Dead. Images of Sisi" (El Rashidi, 2016, p. 177). The repetition of the phrase "Don't forget" serves as an appeal to readers to take time and remember the events as they truly happened, beyond the images and videos imprinted on the populace to impose hatred and fear, and not let their memories be overwritten by propaganda.

The episode in which the protagonist talks about the 2014 presidential elections might corroborate the concept of her silence as a form of resistance. When the topic of elections arises, the protagonist notes that while everyone she knows voted for al-Sīsī, she herself slept through election day and only woke up after the polling stations had closed.[19] By opting not to engage in the elections, she refuses to give legitimacy to both the election process and the candidate who emerged victorious. Through abstaining from voting, she symbolically withholds her voice, expressing dissent through silence. This act of passive resistance is underscored by the fact that she remained asleep throughout the entire time. Thus, it can be read as an attempt to completely disengage from the undesirable reality and, perhaps, even to envision a better one, albeit only in her dreams. Another sign that reveals her attitude, despite her silence on the topic, occurs when she stares at the "building-size flyer" of President al-Sīsī, hanging in the street. At that moment, she recalls the words her mother told her when she painted the walls in her room: despite her efforts, the colour turned out darker than she expected and her mother remarked, "it was a fact of life, things get darker" (El Rashidi, 2016, pp. 46). These words appear to echo in her mind, seem to refer to the poster, as well as the current political situation even though she does not express it explicitly: "Time changes perspectives, she used to say. Things become darker, like paint." (El Rashidi, 2016, pp. 151-152). Therefore, whereas the absence of coverage of the revolutionary period may suggest her reluctance to revisit painful memories, her silence regarding more recent events and the current situation could be seen as a subtle expression of disapproval and resistance against the polarizing state's narratives – the ones already present and those yet to come.

[19] The Egyptian presidential elections in 2014 took three days, the last one added only after the turn-out during the first two days was low. Perhaps the narrator is writing about the third day. The only other candidate besides al-Sīsī was Ḥamdīn al-Ṣabāḥī. According to the Democracy Index report, the election was labelled as a "wholly one-sided contest" (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015, p. 27).

Conclusion

In her novel, El Rashidi skilfully covers a diverse spectrum of silences, their sources and meanings varying with each situation and context. Some arise within the domestic sphere, while others result from cultural conventions, such as cultural concepts of honour and modesty. These silences range from eloquent expressions to outcomes of silencing and submission caused by the combination of the colonial legacy and authoritarian oppression. Silences depicted in the novel often transcend generations and are passed down as part of socio-cultural conditioning and a lingering collective trauma. Over the years, these silences have shaped the protagonist's personality and while she has internalized many of the cultural norms connected to silence, she has been able to use them in a subversive way. She has employed silence as a means of expressing disapproval, much as her mother did in the past, though she consciously appropriates it and utilizes it in a socio-political context, possibly as a tool of resistance. El Rashidi's novel also succeeds in breaking the meta-silence, as Zerubavel (2006) called it, that often enshrouds conspiracies of silence, where members of a collectivity abstain from acknowledging the very existence of silence, and so it brings the topic of silence to the forefront of literary and inter-personal discourse.[20] The novel invites readers to actively explore the significance of those silences, acknowledging the irreplaceable role of silence in human communication, as well as its capacity to convey numerous meanings, including resignation, trauma, dissent, and resistance.

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[20] The author herself acknowledged that the publication of her novel initiated discussions about silence among
her family members, enabling them to broach previously avoided topics (Politics and Prose, 2016, 47:15).

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