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Mnemonic Border Crossing on Egyptian Grounds: Novelists Reimagining the Past, Readers Reshaping Cultural Identity

Over the past two decades, Egyptian novelists have been crossing temporal borders and topographical terrains in what critics have marked as a burgeoning fascination with historical narratives. Works by established authors or debut novelists whose combined literary prowess, linguistic mastery, and epistemological ability to redeem the past and embrace alternative perspectives have taken the market by surprise setting the bar quite high. The fascination, gaining momentum, became steady creative interest in representing history, producing historical meaning, and generating historical thinking; all metamorphosing into narrative projects (e.g., trilogies) or individual works. Unfazed by the postmodern “ironic distance” and the negativity of a “nostalgia revival”, authors set out to “challenge and critique official historiographies and other dominant images of the past” (often prefabricated and prepackaged) which have long compromised Egyptian identity. They reimagine what history has forgotten, what other historical fiction has missed, turning the imaginary and fictional into inventive and enjoyable acts of memory, “an activity” Mieke Bal argues, “occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future”. An equal fascination with those “memory texts”, combined with an enthusiastic reception from readers, has met the momentum, which coincided with an expanding Egyptian readership very much connected to the spread of highly modernized and stylized bookshops, e – book clubs over social media, and marketing strategies that brought readers back to the reading shelf, and catered for the retro stance. The present study explores Egyptian mnemonic narratives, like the acclaimed trilogies of novelist Reem Bassiony, *The Mamluk Trilogy* (الناس اولاد) 2017 (and *Ibn Tulun Trilogy*) 2021 (أورنق (2021) Jewish Exodus novel *The Papers of Shamoun Al – Masry* (2021) *ون لو ط ن ثلاثية: قطعة ع ن* 2021) and *صمة ن عون شمة* by debut novelist Osama El – Shazly, and their contribution to the new Egyptian historical novel as identity projects.