

**Part Four, Chapter One:** *Wallid Walla Bint***Book Title:** *L is for Lion: an italian bronx butch freedom memoir***Author:** Annie Rachele Lanzillotto**Publisher:** SUNY Press, Excelsior Editions, SUNY series in Italian American Culture  
22 Corporate Woods Boulevard, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Albany, New York 12211-2504**Publication Date:** 2013, 2014 paperback**ISBN:** 978-1-4384-4526-7 (pbk)**ISBN:** 978-1-4384-4525-0 (hbk)**# of pages:** 331**URL:** <http://www.sunypress.edu/p-5639-l-is-for-lion.aspx>**Wallid Walla Bint****American University of Cairo, Egypt, Fall 1986**

I walked into a dress shop in Cairo and bought myself a traditional woman's Egyptian gown; floor-length emerald-green cotton with red beading in a pattern of tall feathers. I pulled it on over my head and hailed a cab, one of the many navy-blue Peugeot taxis constantly beeping around Cairo. The driver spoke a couple of words of English and introduced himself as Yusef. Then he said, 'Amerrreek?' and I said 'yes' and he said 'Joseph, Joseph' with his hand on his heart until I understood that Yusef was Arabic for Joseph. This made me happy. I felt that everywhere I went there would be a Joseph to guide me. I told him, '*mi Papa esta Joseph,*' and he understood and said, '*Babba, Joseph. Alhamdulillah.*' He asked me what I did, and I told him I was a student of schistosomiasis. He asked me what that was. I tried different words and combinations until he understood what I was struggling to communicate across language. I told Yusef I was trying to understand why people were getting re-infected throughout their lives with a disease that there was good medicine for. I talked about how babies were getting infected in canals where their mothers gave them baths.

"Ah *bilharzia*," he said, "*Bilharzia* like Abdel Halim." Then he clarified, "The Egyptian Elvis," and to make me understand, he played a cassette tape.

"You like?"

"*Aiwa*." Yes.

"*El Helwa Hayati*," The Beautiful is My Life, Abdel Halim, good."

"Abdel Halim," I repeated.

"Die. *Bilharzia*. Before eight years." Yusef showed me Abdel Halim's photo on the cassette box; striking brown eyes and the drawn-in cheekbones of a cigarette smoker. Then through a mix of radiant facial expression, verbal phrases and hand cues, Yusef communicated to me something that changed the course of my studies, "*Allah* has brought you to Islam through your fascination with *bilharzia*. I drive you to my shaykh." He refused money for the ride, as long as I let him take me where he wanted. When we drove up to a pale brick building, I saw the sign: First International Conference on Islam and Medicine. I knew I was right where I needed to be. I felt so lucky, and in place. Yusef walked me into the building, found his shaykh and registered me for the weekend conference. He said he'd drive me there the next morning.

The conference was attended by Muslim doctors from Egypt, The Sudan, North America, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Their common purpose was written in the program as: "We come to respond to the challenge of the Qu'ran to contemplate the universe and its marvels, for to examine scientifically and to appreciate aesthetically is to lead the human heart to Allah. If scientific inferences in the Qu'ran, transcribed fourteen

hundred years ago, appear compatible with modern fact, then the miracle of the Qu’ran is upheld, and science reconciled.”

I sat back and listened. The headphones had many languages to dial into. I set mine to English. One shaykh had an illuminated presence, Shaykh Abdul Majeed Ben Aziz al-Zindani. His gaze caught me from across the room. He had a white turban, a long beard, and a luminous smile. Shaykh al-Zindani quoted inferences about genetics in the Qu’ran and *Sunnah*, the words and acts of the prophet Muhammad as a prescription for life, and then said, “Since Muhammed, peace be upon him, was illiterate and since science in the seventh century knew nothing of genetics, therefore, this upholds the miracle of the Qu’ran.” I tried to follow his logic. The shaykh compared the word translated on headset as *clot* in English, into the scientific word for embryo, *zygote*. Shaykh al-Zindani founded the “Commission on Scientific Signs in the Qu’ran and Sunnah.” He encouraged modernization in Muslim society, by saying that technology was not in conflict with with *sharia*, Qu’ranic law. He helped ease Muslim communities into development. I spoke with one western doctor near me who explained that al-Zindani helped Saudi Arabia accept new technologies by convincing the people that technology was pre-ordained by the Qur’an. Al-Zindani advocated for technological advancement, where technology was thought to be in conflict with beliefs and traditions. This interested me. I knew he could help the fellahin, Nile floodplain farmers, get better medical care. I wanted to talk with him directly. The man had power, faith, conviction, political prowess and spiritual presence.

I walked up to Shaykh al-Zindani and extended my arm to shake his hand. This was a big mistake. He withdrew his palm to his chest and lowered his gaze. He wouldn’t

talk to me, or look at me when I stood in front of him, or acknowledge my presence in any way. Being a woman was in my way of interactions. I said "*Ma'salaama,*" peace, and retreated. I wasn't used to being so invisible. I hated having to remember that I was a woman. I bought a white headscarf, and wore it to the banquet that night. One of the western doctors, a Caucasian man named Dr. Allison (Pete) Palmer, embraced Islam, and declared the *Shahadah*: "*La illaha illa'allah, Muhammed Ur Rasulullah!*" There is no God but God and Muhammed is his prophet. The crowd burst into "*Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!*" God is great, three times.

Shaykh al-Zindani made an announcement that was translated as, "Dr. Palmer was already a Muslim unknowingly, for this follows the natural order of the universe and the Islamic concept of *ayah*, where every creation inherently honors its divine author."

One of the Western male scientists asked me to continue our talk over dinner the next night. I wanted to stay on topic, but he had other, more intimate ideas. Two things became clear. I had to get a sense of Islam if I were to understand how people interacted with medical systems, and being a woman would get in my way. Islam had to enter my cells as a man and as a woman. Yusef was right; *Bilharzia* was leading me to Allah.

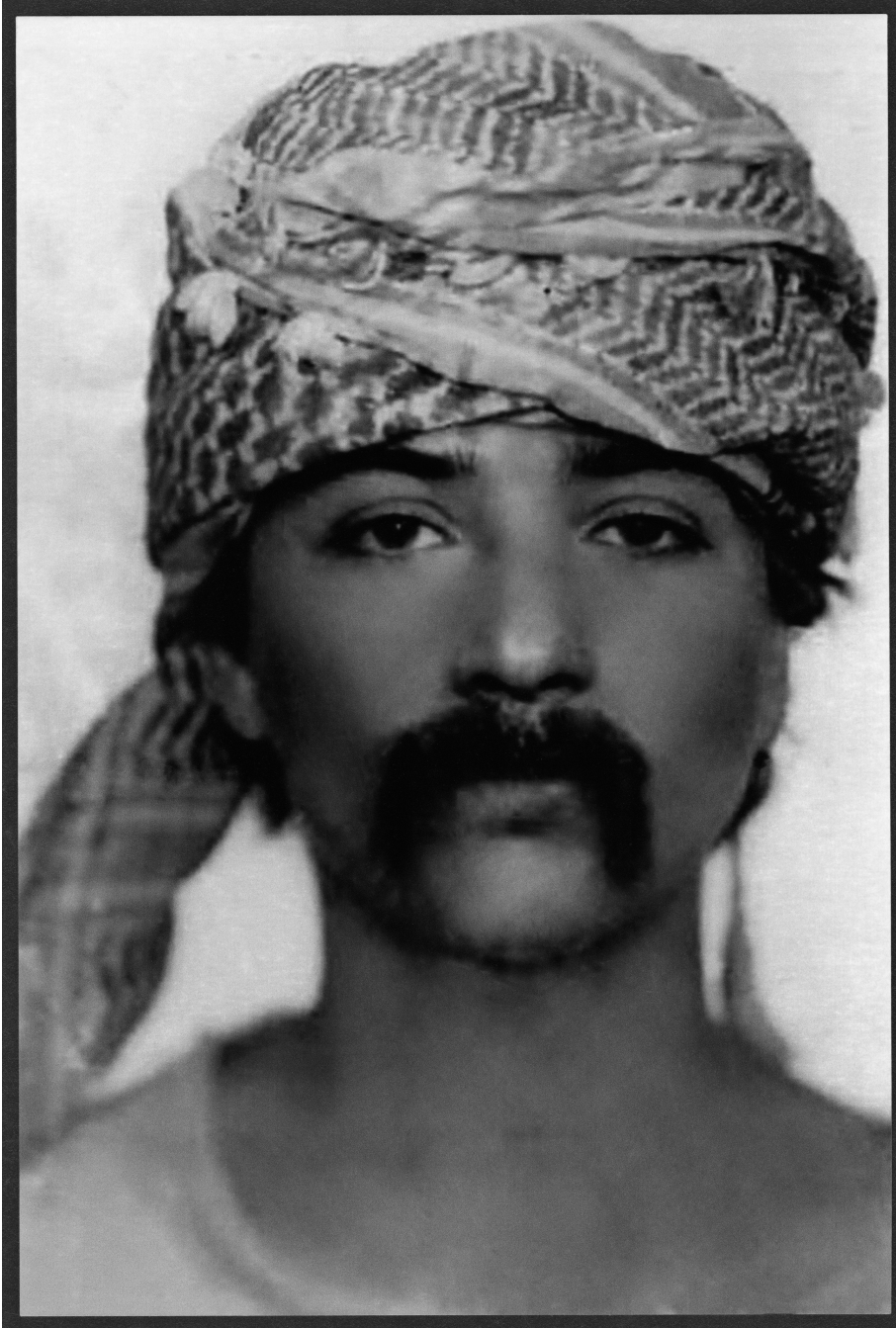
When I walked in the streets of Cairo as a woman, I had to ward off men. It was common for a man to hide behind two parked cars and ejaculate at me as I walked down the street. Some mornings, men leaned on the *Kasr El Aini* bridge as I crossed over the Nile on my way to school. One guy showed me his erect penis. I joined the *tae kwon do* team on campus. When I saw his hand display his penis for me, my natural reflex was to shove him, with the force of my two arms. He fell down the concrete flight of stairs



down to the riverbank. He got up and shook it off. I was sick of men. Some followed me for blocks as I walked to school, saying, “*Ishta*,” sweet cream. This was an everyday occurrence. Most of the foreign female students had similar stories. My father trained me from an early age in the Bronx to be aware of everything around me. I was hypervigilant, I could spot guys across the street who were even thinking about following me. Most of the ejaculators, wore *galabeya*, the traditional long loose dress for Arab men.

My first three days I walked in Cairo with friends and listened intently to the way men talked in Tahrir Square, and the souk the *Khan el Khalili*, a maze of alleyways packed with vendors of spices, bronze, alabaster and a myriad of goods. We sat in the oldest café in Cairo, *El Fishawy*, whose mirrors on the walls were so old they held their own visions. *El Fishawy* was a place a woman could get a coffee. Most cafés were filled with men only. I closed my eyes and listened. One thing was clear to me. Men grunt. I listened to the pitch and intonation of their grunts. I was surprised by how much a man can get away in public with just vowel sounds and moving his eyebrows to communicate. Women worked so hard at public interaction. Men could just recede into the background and grunt, relax. There was less pressure on them in public, it seemed to me. I was a quick study. Eyebrow movement meant the opposite in Cairo as it did in the United States, where lifting eyebrows meant “no.” I practiced the deep vocal guttural patterns men uttered and moved my head and eyebrows up to answer “yes,” and bleated the sound “*la-aa*” for no. Sounds and facial gestures for yes, “*aiwa*,” basic numbers and money, how to order coffee, tea, and a *shisha* pipe at a café, and the words: *Alhamdulillah*, and *Salaam Wa’ahleekum*. That was my arsenal. About twenty words. My register was a

natural alto. I was the kind of woman people said 'Sir' to over the phone or when I approached their cash register. I chalked it up to my energy, my directness, my vocal pattern, my spirit. I walked into a tailor and ordered two custom *galabeia*, "for my father" I said, "who is about my size." When the tailor gave me the *galabeia*, it fit comfortably, like pajamas but with a long open V-neck. I needed *sederi*, the button-up cotton and silk vests men wore on their chests. *Sederi* had pockets under each armpit, and some had a secret diagonal pocket under the balled cloth buttons in front of the chest. A great place to carry a wallet. I attained *sederi* in unorthodox ways. I couldn't find exactly what I was looking for in the souk, but I would see them on men passing in the street. So, twice, when I was with a friend, I stopped a man and traded or paid American cash for what they were wearing. American dollars made a man strip right in the street. A pair of men's sandals, and I was ready to go. I slipped the *galabeia* over my head and I was surprised to learn that it had a built-in false pocket, an open slit posing as a side pocket. I stuck my hand inside. I called it the masturbation pocket. I thought about the men who squatted by the roadside, one hand in this slit, masturbating under the tent of their *galabeia* as it fell open around their knees. I wrapped a *keffiyeh*, the traditional red and white headdress for men, around my head like I'd been doing it for lifetimes. Wrapping turbans felt natural to me. I wrapped in the style of young men, with the tail hanging from the side over the ear. Out came the moustache. After one look in the mirror, I took the name Abdul. I shoved my penis-doll in my underwear, walked down the marble staircase where I was living in *Mohandessin*, and walked out onto my street, *Sharia Abdel Moneim Riyad*. I walked right by Hamdi who sold gum and cigarettes on my street. I walked over the *Qasr El Nil Bridge*, into *Tahrir Square*.



The author, Annie Rachele Lanzillotto, as Abdul, Cairo, Egypt 1986.

Photo taken in a passport photo shop off Tahrir Square.

I was finally left alone to think, and to experience Cairo. Abdul walked in *galabeia* without interruption, sat in cafés where only men sat for fenugreek tea and *shisha* pipe, watched the people go by through hours of sweet honey tobacco and strong coffee sipped through a sugar cube held in my white front teeth. The caffeine and tobacco kept me slightly high all day. This is what men did. I felt happy. With the moustache, men left me alone, even if I didn't totally look masculine, it didn't matter. No man ejaculated at me again. What a relief. Women walked by me and averted eye contact. A couple of times over the months, in the market crowds of the *Khan el Khalili*, I would hear people around me look at me and say, "*Wallid walla bint?*" Since this happened more than once, I asked a teacher what that phrase meant and she told me, "Boy or girl?" I knew nothing about the kind of trouble I could get into if I was caught cross-dressing. I knew nothing of Egyptian law. I could rip Abdul off on a five-count and toss *galabeya*, *kaffiyeh*, moustache and penis-doll into the bushes, and on several occasions, I did. There was a policy in Cairo at the time to aimed to protect women tourists and students from harassment; Egyptian men had to have identification if they were walking with foreign women. This policy never helped me as a woman, but almost got me into trouble as a man. Once, as Abdul, I walked home with two friends from the university, David Basilico, my best friend in Egypt, an Italian Rhode Islander Brown student and his girlfriend Kate who was visiting. A cop car drove by the three of us once, then twice, then it circled to come back a third time. Suddenly I realized that I was the "Egyptian man" the cops were looking at, and coming after. I ripped off Abdul, tossed his getup into the bushes and walked ahead alone in the dungaree jacket and pants I had underneath, and turned the corner. The cops pulled a fast U-turn, drove straight up to

David and Kate and demanded to know, "Where'd the Egyptian man go?" My friends were smart, and played stupid. After that I was more cautious and walked the streets alone, or fifteen feet in front of my friends.

The call to prayer echoed in the alleys and my soul. Overlapping voices of *muezzin*, those who call the faithful to prayer, ricocheted from the minarets erect in the sky to my bones. Abdul followed the men into mosques for ablution and prayer. For Friday night *zhikr* at *Al Azhar*, the oldest mosque in Cairo, I entered through the revered green door, took off my sandals and panted the name of *Allah* hour after hour. I had prayed with a girl named Gheda from school who brought me home for dinner and prayer. What I didn't know is that men and women prayed with a different choreography. My movement was out of synch with the men. I was sunk. I didn't know how to pray like a man. Sheer naïveté saved me from panic. I moved into the thick part of the pack of men and mimicked their movement.

The *zhikr* began. We stood shoulder to shoulder, panting "*Allah*," and undulating. The crowd got larger. We squeezed in, chest to chest. *Zhikr* was easier than prayer, simpler choreography. We panted "Allah" for three hours. I felt my heart and whole soul vibrating with the "ah" sounds in "Allah," and for me "Allah" became short for "Alleluia," as I chanted in the *zhikr*. It was the most high I'd ever been in a religious ceremony. There was something quite animal about hundreds of men thrusting in synchronicity and a deep guttural prayer coming from the deepest part of ourselves. The mosque rang with our energy and collective sweat. Being Abdul, I felt freedom. I had confidence in the moustache Francesco made me, he was a pro, the thing didn't fall off or

tilt with all my sweat at *Al Azhar*. After a few hours, I let go of who I was and where I was and joined the mystical spirit of the prayer. Abdul got to experience things Annie never would. I was on a high.

With the spiritual encouragement of a shaykh on campus, in time, I declared the *Shahadah* and was given the name Rabia, after a Sufi saint and mystic poet. Like me, Rabia was the fourth child born in her family, and the name Rabia name means the fourth. The shaykh asked for my passport so it could be stamped: Muslim. My mother hit the roof when she heard this.

"That's ridiculous. Nobody's stamping your passport with anything let alone: Muslim. I never heard of such a thing."

"It's necessary," I said, "so I can go to Mecca for a Hadj."

"Mecca-shmecka. I thought you're going to Jerusalem for Christmas. You really want to cross the Israeli border with Muslim stamped on your passport? What a ya' crazy!"

I focused on my studies. Students evacuated Cairo after the ship, *Achille Lauro*, was hijacked in the Mediterranean by the Palestinian Liberation Front. All over Cairo, and even on campus, there were burnings of the U.S. flag. I listened to the P.L.O. youth on campus, talk of their views of history and politics. The Middle East, it seemed to me, is a seat of collision. If I waited for peace, I'd wait a lifetime. I stood at the crossroads of three continents, three religions, and two tectonic plates up the Red Sea. I felt I was in the center of the world. Everything collided.

To further my fieldwork, I went to the Egyptian Ministry of Health where Dr. Mustafa received me. We sat and were served *shei*, black tea, poured by a male tea servant who refilled our cups every so often. We spoke for hours. He mapped out rural health clinics in the Nile floodplain that I could visit to see the Ministry's fecal smear collection and analysis program. One thing he said to me I will never forget. He quoted a colleague as saying in an address to The International Conference on Schistosomiasis in Cairo in 1979:

"If you, Mr. Scientist, came to Sadat with the immunity pill for *bilharzia*, he'd cut off your head."

I drank the sweet glass of tea. I listened to this sour news. I had assumed all governments wanted the good robust health of their people. I learned otherwise. The Egyptian economy could not absorb the peasant-class majority to have energy, health, and desire, because that was a direct path to dreams, freedom, and revolution. Schistosomiasis kept peasants lethargic for decades with abdominal pain, bloody urine, and fatigue, keeping the peasant class down, for generations. Now I saw the shadow side to Egypt's legendary patience. Somebody had to get the peasant class out of its chokehold. Access to effective medical care would give millions of *fellahin* an increase in vitality, which would disrupt the status quo, and the Egyptian government couldn't handle the influx of productivity. My mind was blown. I thanked him for the conversation and set up our site visit.

Dr. Mustafa accompanied me to a rural medical clinic in Kunberra, and steadied a few microscopes for me to eye the signature razor-edge triangle on the tail of a *bilharzial* egg that up until then I'd seen only in books and slides back at Brown in Dr. Senft's lab and at the Sci Li. Here was the culprit that cut into the bladder wall, the infestation of which caused irritation and calcification turning into granulomas, rendering the organ useless, and led to cancer. We talked to villagers waiting to be seen, and two clinic workers who showed me education pamphlets and medicine vials that had instructions written in symbols of the sun and moon, for the illiterate. Crates of medical supplies stamped with the words "From your friends in the United States of America" were stacked inertly, unpacked. What good was I to anybody? As useless as medicine in an unopened crate. GranmaRose's words echoed in my head: 'What good a' you!' The next months I set out on my own up the Nile and down into the delta, visiting villages, rural clinics, city hospitals, and farms, frequenting the oasis town El Fayoum and venturing through Kafr El Sheik, Damietta, Beheira, Gharbiya, Daqahliya, Sharquiya, Minufita, and Qalubia. Sometimes I'd take an Egyptian friend with me from school to help translate. Most times I went alone and walked up to peasants in the fields and along the canals and handed them a pen and paper. Thanks to Yusuf, I knew the magic words to tell *fellahin*. "I am studying *bilharzia*, like Abdel Halim."

Women were affectionate in Egypt and unassuming. One Muslim friend Aziza took me home from school often, where she always insisted we immediately change out of our street clothes and into pajamas, she took off her *hijab* and we got into bed to read,



talk, and rest. Her mother taught me how to peel mangos and make grape leaves. Another girl on our *tae kwan do* team scrubbed my back in the showers after our practices, while the coach made us *sheii*. The team had a long warm-down, unlike any teams I'd been on back in the States. My sparring partner was a red belt, an Egyptian guy named Koolib. We got some *kushari* together in Tahrir Square, and he said to me, "Annie make luff to me efvery Tuesday night, under the Sphinx." It was the most unique proposition I'd ever gotten. But I didn't take him up on it. Instead I started seeing a Muslim woman on campus named Jamilla who looked me right in the eye. One afternoon she sat on a low cement wall and stared at me. As we talked, I got closer to her, and squared off my hips in front of her. She didn't turn away. Her irises opened. I brought my lips to hers and we kissed softly. There's levels to a woman. There's what you see, then there's this other place when she opens and lets you in, behind, what you see. We had to kiss indoors. This was the Muslim world. I visited her room, we made out and made each other wet. She was an Egyptology major, and I invited her to join me on a *felucca*, a sailboat into Upper Egypt. She said yes. Many years later, she would become an expert Egyptologist with a forte for being able to smell the dynasty of a mummy. Different dynasties used different embalming chemicals, and she developed sensitivity to smell the difference.

All along the Nile, our *felucca* stopped in ports, and I ran into fields of hibiscus and cotton, sugar cane, and palms. I talked with women cleaning their bowls, clothes, rugs, grain, and children in the canals. Women expressed that they did not have enough hours in their day to take for themselves to seek medical attention from the local clinics.

When they could not bear their symptoms any more, they'd give in, and go to the *mustashfa*, the city hospital, with progressed diseases.

Nadia wore a bright lime-green dress and stood knee deep in a canal in the Tropic of Cancer sun. She lifted her baby Ali out of the water. Woman, river, baby, an ancient trinity in the act of washing in the Nile. This canal was clearly contaminated with parasites. The water was thick and green and still. There were snails in the reeds along the banks. I understood from Nadia that her mother and grandmother and great grandmother and on and on, were all *fellahin*, whose destiny had been linked to the Nile. She was told to stay out of the water by, as she said, the "one-who-wears-shoes male doctor." I held out my notebook and gave Nadia a BIC pen. I prompted her to draw the life cycle of the schistosome as she knew it. "*Bilharzia. Bilharzia. Abdel Halim.*" Nadia smiled, raised her head and took in a deep quick breath in assent. Nadia quickly sketched two worms linked together in copulation, then a standing human stick figure cut off at the knees by a squiggly line indicating water. She drew the spiral shell of a snail and the worm coming from the snail toward the foot of the stick figure. Health education efforts had worked. Nadia understood transmission and the life cycle of the parasite, yet all the while, she stood calmly in still waters, Ali balanced on a shoulder—waters she had been warned to stay out of by health officials. I looked at the women washing clothes in the canal. They washed with their ancestors as well as their neighbors. I thought about the schistosome eggs I saw under the microscope in the clinics, and how they can cause infertility, complications with pregnancy, and lesions in the vulva, vagina, cervix, and uterus. Nadia said, "*Alhamdulillah,*" thanks be to Allah,

acceptance of life and fate, and above all else a belief in divine will over her knowledge of *bilharzial* transmission. Health information was nowhere as powerful as faith. She proudly took my arm and walked me to her home for dinner, quoting popular *hadith*, deeds and words of Mohammed, and *sura*, quotes from the Qur'an, which reinforced for her the belief that infection doesn't exist in and of itself, but only through the will of Allah. "For where did the first infection come from?" and "If Allah will thee with infliction, none can remove it but He." This is an old story I thought, as we walked through fields of sugarcane—the collision of belief and knowledge, religion and science. Like anywhere on earth, the control and regulation of water is power over life itself, and the understanding of women's lives key to creating collective healing. Nadia broke off a stalk of sugarcane, and we chewed the sweet raw power of the earth.

At her house, eleven of us ate *kushari*. We sat on mats around a cool mud-brick room. She lived in the west bank of Luxor. I thought of Nahkte, who I had learned about through Dr. Scala. At Brown, Dr. Scala had shown me images of Nahkte's CAT scans. Nahkte was a weaver who lived in roughly the same area as Nadia, only in 12 B.C., in the village Deir el Bahri. Nahkte's sarcophogus showed calcified schistosoma ova in the liver, kidney and intestinal mucosa, and red blood cells in his bladder epithelium, histologic proof that schistosomiasis existed in the times of the pharaohs. Nadia's mother placed a one-inch cube of meat on top of the bowl she handed me. I was given the meat the father would have been given. Women need the iron most, but in the gender rules of eating, this is not a consideration. I tried to pass the meat cube to the mother and got rebuked with her hand waving in the air at my face. After we ate, Nadia decided to teach me about *bilharzia*. Her brother Hadjaj who made money from tourists and spoke a little

of eleven languages, interjected translations. I recorded the syntax exactly as I heard it, and intentionally did not correct grammar with respect to Hadjaj's lingual facility. This is what Nadia said in Hadjaj's English:

"When I was young I going to school. On the way home from school it's hot. There was small canal. Brother would jumping in canal. In school they warned us, "Take care of the water. Don't jumping in canal. Don't drinking dangerous water!" I have seen *bilharzi* in the Nile and in the canal. There are people here bigger than us who know this is *bilharzi*. Also in school they show us a picture. They told us, "If you swim, if you drink, bilharzi come to you like Abdel Halim." But we young. We don't care. I washing things, bowls, things allways all girls. We laughing, washing in canal. If the water has current she's good. If the water stop, she's no good. When I was seventeen-years-old, all way I making blood. Pains all my body was tired like having baby. Inside my stomach. Bilharzi he take allway he eat my body. I was like this. [She pulls a cigarette from Hadjaj's ear and holds it straight up]. And one day when I be thirty or forty, *Halas!* My mother my father taking me to clinic. No doctors come here to village. Never. The doctors come from Cairo. If I walk with Baba in Cairo with his *galabeya* and stick they clear the street. They say this man has no mind, take care, he'll hit you with stick. No *fellahin* are doctors but there is one, but he's special. If you have much money you go. I going to clinic. I say I have *bilharzi*. I making blood. The doctor just looked to me like you. [She passed her eyes from down to up.] He said okay. He write pen and paper to going to buy medicine. Okay I buy medicine in pharmacy three pounds. *Filoos kitir*. [very expensive.] A lot of people cant afford this. I eat six or five or ten. I don't make me nice. I making blood blue red black very dirty rocky. Then finish. I sleep

in bed ten days. I drink *karkadee* [hibiscus]. I drink anise or sometimes *sheii* [tea] or chocolate. I eat not so much. Bread cheese or meat or something rice cabbage. I feel good. Each morning I drink one bottle mineral water. Once a year I making blood. Now it's clean. I don't go doctor. I just drink mineral water. I don't going back to doctor 'cause he's very bad doctor. He don't understand. Just allway wanting money. Shoe Guy! [Colloquial curse for one who wears shoes, a literate white-collar punk.] I don't have *bilharzi* now. Thanks to my God, Allah."

I joined a *felucca* leaving Luxor. I stared into the morning, gazing at the gas flame blue colored Nile. I contemplated my own blessed cure. Why had I accessed medical care? Why had medicines worked in my body and not the bodies of my friends? I looked out over the skin of the river. I reflected on how different my life seemed from my ancestors, but we shared some of the same diseases. I knew the *fellahin* would continue as they have for thousands of years washing in the Nile, and the canals. The Nile is the life of Egypt, without the Nile there is no Egypt. The floodplain runs on either side of the river, and the delta. The rest is desert, and oasis villages. The construction of the Aswan Dam made everything worse in terms of schistosomiasis, bringing the snails inland and spreading the parasite. The word had to get out through the mosques. Shaykh al-Zindani, or someone of that magnitude would have to reconcile medicine and doctors, with the *fellahin*'s faith in God and *la vita quotidiana* with the Nile.

I bent over the side of the *felucca*, breaking the skin of the river with my hand. I had a lot to think about. The river streamed coolly through my fingers. Easy now, you don't have a spleen, I reminded myself. The sailor told me, "Who drinks from the Nile

returns to the Nile." I had to return. Without a spleen, complications from parasites could be fatal, despite medicine. I had to return. I cupped my hand overcoming thoughts of schistosomes and lifted the water to my open mouth. As my hand passed the river to my lips, I thought *Alhamdulillah*. I swallowed. The *felucca* picked up speed with the wind. Women washed their children along the riverbanks. That is the image of the Nile that stayed with me, the river, the mother, the child, an eternal trinity. A sip of the Nile flowed down inside me. My pact with the river was sealed.