In his memoir *Out of Place* (2000), Edward Said writes of a walk that he took with his father when he was a young child:

I scampered along behind him, while he pressed on with his hands behind his back at a resolute pace. When I stumbled and fell forward, scratching my hands and knees badly, I instinctively called out to him ‘Daddy…please’, at which he stopped and turned around slowly toward me. He paused like that for a couple of seconds, then turned back, resuming his walk without a word. That was all. It was also how he died, turning his face to the wall, without a sound. Had he, I wonder, ever really wanted to say more than he actually did (Said, 2000, p79).

In Said’s account, his father was powerful, authoritarian, bullish, noisy in his demands and in his silence. My Egyptian father was also stubbornly quiet, proud, resolute in his determination to succeed, and silent. These two successful and powerful fathers were reserved, taciturn, mute almost about their political and historical formations. This essay is an exploration of this silence and of the necessary forgetting of what the meanings and consequences of having been formed as a colonised subject.

Egypt is a talking society, talking is a national pastime as all ‘sorts of topics are subject to detailed discussion, evaluation, comment’ (Danielson, 1997, p5). This talking society, which dissects politics endlessly and incessantly discusses everything that is happening or not, is guarded on a particular matter – the breakdown of the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. This revolution (led by a small group of Army
Officers – named the Free Officers), which began full of drive, commitment and idealism, has not led Egypt to a more coherent, democratic, or materially prosperous society. Nevertheless, the fiftieth year anniversary celebrations were full of the discourses of triumph, liberation and progression. While the media was full of this rhetoric, in private something else altogether was going on. My father was desolate over the failure of the revolution (in our home we had to call it a coup), and I discovered that many Egyptian men of a certain class, age and influence were profoundly depressed about how their dreams had crumbled and evaporated and were wretched over how corrosive corruption had won out as opposed to the social law of collective good. Egypt at this moment in time (2004) is in a desperate economic and political state and this essay is a partial exploration of how a dream turned to dust, of how a brief period of optimism and zeal turned into pessimism and passivity. It shares a concern with Galal Amin’s essays Whatever Happened to the Egyptians? (2000), but while his collection is a lively series of short takes on aspects of everyday life, this essay is concerned with the disintegration of a political dream and with how colonialism endures and lives on inexorably in the Egyptian present.

Colonialism haunts, it does not inhabit only the past but continues to be a serious presence in people’s lived experience, in psychic lives, in matters of globalisation and the local, and in material relations. The inscriptions of the past can be glimpsed, sensed, felt profoundly not only through the continuing matters of aid, fiscal treatment of third world countries, but also through emotions such as anxiety, uncertainty and diffidence. These marks are there whether known, understood or not. Like a palimpsest, successive layers of history co-exist within the present; despite attempts to erase the past, ‘all present experiences contain ineradicable traces of the past which remain part of the constitution of the present’ (Aschroft et al., 2003, p174).

Colonialism persists and rather like the repressed it will not disappear. As Elliott, argues a society’s present always risks ‘becoming haunted by what is excluded. And the more rigid the position, the greater the ghost, the more threatening it is in some way’ (Elliott, 2002, p153). In short, the past is inescapable and cannot be sloughed off – either by discovering and telling another narrative or by focusing on acts of resistance. This chapter is an exploration of how a colonised past inextricably lived in the present has hindered the development of a different political society. I concentrate on the political domain and on masculinity. It is important to say that in the social and cultural spheres, Egyptian life is not moribund but full of lively and creative