

7 Liberal Thought and the “Problem” of Women Cairo, 1890s

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Tracing the impact of the genesis, migration and circulation of ideas on the societies of the Middle East in the late nineteenth to mid twentieth centuries, Albert Hourani focused on incisive and far-reaching voices in his now-classic *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*. He elicited the activism and intellectual production of those who appeared to have most ably and signally shaped socially responsive discourses that engendered – and sometimes challenged – liberal outlooks holding sway among many Arab intellectuals and politicians before World War II. Zeroing in on the (decidedly male) heroes of Arab liberal thought, Hourani preferred to attend intensively to the writings of a few rather than surveying the ranks of female and male thinkers and writers – lesser known now, and often then as well – who filled the columns of the new nationalist daily press in the 1890s and later, and founded newspapers and magazines of their own, producing reams of commentary on issues of the day.

This essay ponders what the results might be of creeping into the thick underbrush of unsung intellectual ferment to which liberalism’s most recognized interlocutors responded, and among which they moved. I concentrate on the discursive management of gender and sexuality, by now recognized as having strongly mediated Egyptian intellectuals’ responses to imperialism and colonial modernity.¹ I do so *not* by considering the writings of the celebrated and controversial Qasim Amin (1863–1908) or other well-known men of the time, but by studying contributions by writers on the topic *before* and coeval with the publication of Amin’s famously provocative 1899 tract *Tahrir al-mar’a* (*The Emancipation of Women*).

Albert Hourani was sensitive to the limitations of his chosen approach: to analyze in depth the written views of a select number of thinkers grappling with the question of how Arab societies should negotiate

¹ On recent scholarship see my review essay, Booth (2013). I am grateful for suggestions and comments from participants in the conference that gave rise to this volume, from the editors, and from Ken Cuno, Andrew Marsham, and Nacim Pak-Shiraz.

forces, ideas and material artefacts associated with European lifeways and philosophies. It is helpful to reread his “Preface to the 1983 Reissue” of *Arabic Thought*, where he reassesses his project twenty years on, affirming his belief in its importance but suggesting ways it could have been broadened, deepened and nuanced. I consider what Hourani calls his “second generation, stretching roughly from 1870 to 1900” for whom the burning question, he argued, was not whether to accept change but rather primarily the need “to convince those formed in a new mould that they could still hold on to something from their own past.” He also notes the continuing importance of a project he did *not* take on, elaborating the ideas of “those who still lived in their inherited world of thought, whose main aim was to preserve the continuity of its tradition.”² In this chapter I consider two texts that aimed explicitly to hail a broader audience for these burning issues, even to construct a new audience through direct address and explicit didacticism – in a sense, to operationalize for a (slightly) broader set of readers the more abstract formulations of the thinkers whom Hourani assessed. Hourani also recognized and cared about, but did not investigate, the question of how such ideas circulated among audiences and what their implications might have been for daily existence; for they “raise[d] questions about how men and women identified themselves and what they could believe about human life.”³

The two books I take up here are dissimilar in form and theme. One is a hybrid text emerging from new and secular educational trajectories and social-scientific discourses, in an adopted and adapted literary form. The other is embedded in what would have been a more familiar discursive framework, for 1890s readers, of the duties of the (Muslim) believer. ‘Abd al-Qadir Murad’s and ‘Abd al-Halim Mahfuz’s *al-Ghada al-misriyya* (*The Egyptian Lovely*, 1899)⁴ is a didactic novel that mounts a rhetoric of intervention in contemporary gendered practices. Husayn Fawzi’s *al-Siraj al-wahhaj ‘an dhikr al-‘awa’id wa-huquq al-zawaj* (*The Lamp Incandescent on Customs and Rights in Marriage Acquiescent*, AH 1314 [1896])⁵ is a treatise on getting and staying married,

² Hourani (1983: vi, ix). ³ Ibid., iv. ⁴ Murad and Mahfuz (1899).

⁵ Fawzi (1896). My copy lacks the title page; publication information comes from Nusayr (1990: 105). Fawzi (1896: 109) notes he completed writing it in AH 1310; thus, it may have come out before AH 1314. The title in *Fursat al-awqat* substitutes *al-‘awayid* for the more classical form. The first installment must have appeared in 1892 because the same issue carries a notice of the first issue of *al-Fatat*. The *taqriz* poem appearing a few pages after the first installment is dated 1310. There are minor editing differences between the serial version and the book; I follow the book, footnoting the earlier variants when significant. Nusayr lists two books by Husayn Ahmad Fawzi as well; this may be the same individual, as his father’s name was Ahmad (Nusayr: 5). I have not been able to ascertain birth and death dates for any of these writers.

simultaneously a work of polemics and a conduct manual. As different as they are, both participate in a worldly discussion about the contours of home, the meaning of “companionate marriage” and the perils of parenting adolescents in a rapidly changing world. In these works, the presence of European thought, more explicit (though telegraphic) in one book than in the other, emerges in particular social artefacts and terms, rather than as a set of ideas to be engaged. In different ways these works are poised between the “inherited world of thought” and the “liberal idea,” struggling to maintain aspects of the former with regards to gender arrangements but recognizing that the latter remained highly salient to Egyptians’ everyday lives. As has been demonstrated for so many times and places, “the liberal idea” at its ideological roots, and in the social outlooks of its makers, incorporated – and indeed was built on – patriarchal assumptions and institutions that have shaped liberal (and usually not very liberating) discourses on gender regimes. Expansive or flexible articulations of gendered functions, spaces and allowed sociabilities have served to further fix “woman” and “man” (and, more messily, women and men) into hierarchically organized and naturalized social positions along gender and class lines, and to impose heteronormative sexuality as a national and modern duty.⁶

Qasim Amin’s *Emancipation of Women* did not spring from a discursive vacuum, even if as early as the 1920s he was branded “the father of Egyptian feminism.” As myself and some other scholars have been observing for some time, female intellectuals like ‘A’isha Taymur, Zaynab Fawwaz, and Maryam Makariyus were already writing on these topics, as were women in Turkey, while leading male intellectuals and bureaucrats such as Butrus al-Bustani in Ottoman Syria, Namık Kemal in the Ottoman capital, and Rifa‘a al-Tahtawi and ‘Ali Mubarak in Egypt had been publicly encouraging the formal, institutional schooling of female children since the 1840s. But recognition has come more slowly for the fact that debates on gender pervaded the newly boisterous public sphere of the 1890s, comprised of a rapidly burgeoning non-official periodical press and an emerging private book-publishing sector. Lesser-known writers, especially those writing in periodicals other than the oft-tapped *al-Muqtataf* and *al-Hilal*, are but rare appearances in the scholarly literature. Yet in myriad forms – newspaper editorials and essays, news reporting on everyday events and crime, published poetry (in “classical” and vernacular Arabic), novels (translated and “Arabized” as well as first written in Arabic), biography, translation, textual

⁶ There are many analyses of this. For a later moment in Egypt, see Booth (2013b).

commentary or historical analysis – attention to gender as an organizational foundation of society was everywhere.

Amin's book joined – rather than initiated – a fervent debate. Elsewhere, I have analyzed historical treatises, historical fiction and biography for their uses of history as contemporary interventions in the politics of gender in Egypt's second decade as a British colonial possession, as I have considered back-page local news reporting in the national daily *al-Mu'ayyad* with the same concerns in view.⁷ By attending to a didactic novel and a wide-ranging treatise on practices and duties in marriage, can we reconsider the controversy that Amin's *Emancipation of Women* aroused in light of its immediate prehistory?

Novelizing Conduct

'Abd al-Qadir Murad and 'Abd al-Halim Mahfuz were a pair of medical students (*min talabat al-tibb*, as they call themselves on the title page). Like many novels of the time, *The Egyptian Lovely* placed a young female figure at the center of the action, signaling this pivotal position by making the novel her (anonymized) namesake.⁸ Contemporaneous works that evoked various histories to excavate a genealogy of gender politics, such as 'Ali Jalal's AH 1308 (1890–91) *Mahasin athar al-awwaliyyin, fima li-l-nisa' wa ma 'alayhinna fi qawanin qudama' al-misriyyin* (*Merits of the Ancestors' Traces, on Women's Duties and Legal Places, in the Ancient Egyptians' Laws and Graces*); Habib Efendi al-Zayyat al-Dimashqi's *al-Mar'a fi al-jahiliyya* (*Women in the Pre-Islamic Era*, 1899); and Shaykh Hamza Fathallah's *Bakurat al-kalam 'ala huquq al-nisa' fi'l-Islam* (*First Lights on Islam and Women's Rights*), also appearing in 1308/1890, were clearly aimed at a male and highly literate audience and, to some extent, an international one.⁹

The Egyptian Lovely, to the contrary, is aimed at a local and cross-gender audience, though with a specific hierarchy of addressees. But like the amateur historians, Murad and Mahfuz wrote *The Egyptian Lovely* as a pedagogic intervention with a clear politics of address. It features overt intrusions by an external narrating (overtly authorial) voice. This aligns it with other *riwaya*t (novels, narratives) of the time. Fictional narrative modeled on European works, sometimes translated or adapted from

⁷ Booth (2006, 2015).

⁸ On fiction titles' salience to the theme of gender politics in the early Arabic novel see Booth (2015).

⁹ Jalal (1890–91); al-Zayyat al-Dimashqi (1899). Fathallah (1890–91). On these see Booth (2015).

them (with or without attribution), was an emerging expressive form in the second half of the 19th century, in Ottoman Syria as well as Egypt. Many of these works incorporated overt editorializing and didacticism, and were explicitly written to instruct as well as entertain (as their authors often explained in rather defensive prefaces, given that the novel remained a suspect genre). Murad and Mahfuz's novel falls on the more overtly didactic side of the varying practices subsumed under the label of *riwaya* with its implied invitation to imaginative narrative (the term was also used for texts written as plays).

Their story is set in the recent past, a convenient choice for those seeking to criticize current practices while maintaining a fiction of temporal distance. Choice of setting as a strategy linked to a critique of gender arrangements does not signal a desire to launch an historical investigation, though, or to evaluate Egyptians' or Arabs' or Muslims' histories as such. Like the authors of the other works mentioned earlier in this chapter, Murad and Mahfuz use history for purposes of the present – but in this case vaguely, just to set the scene. Though labeled as a “[fictional] narrative,” their text is a hybrid: part story, part persuasive tract and part how-to manual on raising children, from prenatal care to choosing a daughter's spouse and beyond. It narrativizes concerns – indeed, anxieties – about women and girls, the family and marriage, and popular medical practices that were articulated repeatedly in the press, from podiums, and in parlours.

The Egyptian Lovely does not exhibit the specifically male terms of address that characterize the historians' sense of readership. In fact, as a quasi-fictional work, it suggests a desire to reach as broad an audience as possible, while deploying the structure common at the time and later of male characters in the text acting as “masterly” instructors of female characters – much as the authors saw themselves as doing extratextually, by asserting the authority of (male) physicians over (female) midwives and expectant mothers, a theme that runs through the story. Medical discourse offers a mode of argumentation, a claim of professional authority, and an invitation to readers to consume the novel as a self-help manual and guide to parenting girls. In parallel, the hierarchical structure of discourse in the text models a ‘modern’ patriarchal marriage.

The pair's preface exhibits a common combination of affective identifications and aspirations: pride and hopeful belief in the homeland, defensiveness over local popular practices, reformist zeal to bring Egyptians into (the authors') line, and confidence in the didactic power of words, particularly fiction. As noted, the novel was quite a new and somewhat ambivalently regarded genre at the time. It materialized partly out of familiarity with similar modes of writing in Europe – not

necessarily the novel's best recommendation, at a time when both Britain's 1882 occupation of Egypt and the alleged Europeanization of Egyptian elite urban youth were coming under increasingly vociferous attack. The juxtaposition of the authors' sober aims and a "frivolous" genre suggests, though, that fiction's potential didactic power – through its creation of identification between authors, audience and characters, and what writers vaunted as its ability to painlessly instruct and change readers – was recognized by writers and readers in 1890s Egypt.

Every person who loves his homeland [*watan*] and hopes it will enjoy ascent and advancement must defend it to the extent of his ability from all that mars it or causes others to scorn, mock and criticize it. It is well known that vanities and idle talk, humbug and hoaxes, know a fine market among us: how lucky their adherents, how sincere their talk, how correct their views! Among these widespread silly topics of conversation is that of how to treat and cure hysteria – or *al-aryah* – with night-time amulets, incense and *zars* [exorcism ceremonies]. It is uncommon to find a head of an urban Egyptian family who does not complain of the deeds that *kudiyat* [female *zar*-leaders] do with his women. But they [the men] must give in to them [i.e., to "their" women] either because the men know nothing about illness and its proper treatment, or because they believe the lies of those scoundrelly females [the *zar*-leaders].

Since the spread of such foolishness among us is one cause of derision leading others to laugh at us, and since it wastes much precious time, we believe the best way to erase these tall tales and stupidities and root them out from our homes is to explain this illness in a simple manner easy to understand ... so all will learn that hysteria is an illness like all others, and its cure is in the hands of doctors. For the sake of awakening in the masses a desire to read what we write, we have put it in the form of a novel. Here it is: we offer it to readers.¹⁰

Murad and Mahfuz's interest is clearly not in novel-writing per se (and the text itself suggests that fiction was not their forte), but in locating a form that will appeal to "the masses" – likely, to female as well as male readers or listeners. In this lies a gesture to a double audience, those "masses" in need of teaching, and the enlightened and implicitly male peers to whom the authors can explain themselves, with "the masses" kept firmly in the third-person distance. The structure of the preface and of the tale itself give us to understand that the novel operates on two levels, interactively: as an entertaining warning to "the masses" but also as a manual of instruction aimed at men who "know nothing about illness" but are ready to listen to (male) physicians and then to instruct the rest, or perhaps to read the novel out loud to wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters. A further layer of address, which links the authors to better-known reformist intellectuals of their time, comprises the

¹⁰ Murad and Mahfuz (1899), unpaginated.

“others who laugh at us,” European onlookers including colonial officials. Qasim Amin and others were highly conscious of this meta-audience.¹¹

This male mediator is singled out from the start as a primary target of the authors’ rhetoric of persuasion. Reiterating their exhortatory preface, the authors call their first chapter “Men’s Felicity lies in Women’s Soundness.”¹² It is in men’s interest to attend to women’s needs – and men’s felicity is primarily at stake here, as is the very notion of what makes the proper man. *Sa’ada* (“felicity”) connotes both emotional contentment and material ease; *salah* (“soundness, rightness”) signifies a sound and healthy physical state *and* an outlook of moral probity and publicly demonstrable social uprightness. In this tale physical, mental and moral states are inseparable; the two medical-student authors invoke sound bodies and sound minds as together making a sound nation – with careful oversight from the emerging masculine medical profession. The pair as a narrative persona imbue the emerging efendi figure with a sense of national duty in convenient accord with their profession, and firmly gendered and classed in their sense of how and where to discipline Egyptian subjects. They model what Lucie Ryzova and Wilson Jacob have elaborated as “efendi masculinity” in its early form.¹³ Through a politics of proper gender location, they exhibit a scientific discourse of modernity, draw on a script of romantic love, uphold the liberal notion of girls’ formal education and deploy the ideal-in-formation of the emerging heteronormative nuclear family unit to fix masculine patriarchal authority and feminine domestic labor as the blueprint for a sound and healthy nation.

As noted, and like many novels of the time, the story begins in a very recent past and deploys traditional rhetorical patterns, such as inserted poems that elaborate on moments of description in the prose, and *saj’* (rhymed, and ideally rhythmic, prose). The setting is quite typical,¹⁴ a garden-ringed stately urban home (*qasr*, palace) that alerts us to the characters’ status, while allusion to Egypt’s late ruler suggests a perspective defined by the upper echelons of society and the state:

In the era of the late Tawfiq Pasha, the former khedive, there sat in Shari’ . . . [sic] Number 18 a beautiful, consummately built mansion of dazzling splendor and glory, encircled by a high garden of low-hanging fruits. [Here a poem describes the mansion and garden, *qasr* and *janna*]. In this edifice lived one of Egypt’s best men, those known for good conduct and name: for sound mind and good heart

¹¹ On this in the history works I mentioned above, see Booth (2013a).

¹² This could also be read as “the salvation or improvement of women.”

¹³ See Ryzova (2013), and Jacob (2011). ¹⁴ Booth (2006).

he knew fame. Honest and upright, he was of fine moral might; a lover of the homeland, his self-esteem most grand. No more than 40 years, his strong build and fine appearance indicated his sharp intelligence. At the age of 28 he married a woman from the most noble of Egyptian families, venerable of descent, great of lineage.

This lady was pious, chaste and tender, and loved her husband sincerely. She lacked none of the finest qualities and accomplishments except knowledge of reading and writing. Yet this did not diminish her worth, for she surpassed other women in decorum and manners, grace and good company, and dedication to her husband's contentment. She strove with fullest ability to ward away all that might trouble him.¹⁵

He is the perfect masculine exemplar, and she is the perfect companionate caring wife, already a well-established proto-nationalist paragon. Significantly, she does not read or write (and whether girls should learn these skills, and to what extent, was a topic of furious debate at the time). This will affect her daughter's upbringing adversely. But they seem to have the perfect modern marriage as envisioned by male intellectuals of the era, one of mutual help and respect, but where the woman is ever aware that her well-being depends entirely on her husband. If they are partners, their interests harmonious, there is no doubt about where authority lies, who determines those interests, and who must please whom the most.

She watched over his preferences and liked what he liked. With such exalted attributes, pleasing character and honorable tendencies, her husband inclined fully to her, gave her his heart and stood ready to serve her and to fulfill her every desire.

They continued on in this state of mutual affection and felicity For there is no felicity superior to a daily life based on accord such that each member of the married couple works for the good of the other. No one would disagree that a man's felicity lies in having a sound and suitable wife, an intelligent one who knows that her moral and physical soundness derives from his, her well-being comes from his, and her ease and contentment lie in his. A person's interior cannot be well ordered, she knows, cannot proceed on the basis of uprightness and perfection, unless the woman considers her husband as her partner in life and knows their best interest is a shared one.

Regrettably, though, we see many of our Egyptian women considering their husbands but temporary companions, and believing a single word coming from [a husband's] mouth in a moment of anger becomes a reason for separation. Thus we see women concerning themselves only with themselves, squandering the interests of their husbands heedlessly, becoming expert in buying all kinds of adornment and trinkets, not caring whether the husband is able to bear those vast expenditures or not. It is all the same whether he is happy or miserable, as long as she has abundant cause for contentment.¹⁶

¹⁵ Murad and Mahfuz (1899: 1–2). ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

Note how quickly this novel veers into didactic exposition focused on women's behavior and generalizes from the fictional situation to the category of women at large. The passage is in company with many writings of the time that targeted women critically for wasteful consumption as a burden on men and the nation. The immediate scene sketched here is situationally ironic: it was perhaps not intended, but can be read, as evocative of men's prerogative to divorce their wives with a few properly-chosen words. (What woman would *not* spend as much as possible of her husband's money before the fatal words could emerge?) The authors do admit next that men exist who regard divorce as an easy exit strategy should they find the slightest of faults in their wives, but they are confident that if a man finds his wife loving, concerned to safeguard his property and dutiful, then he will without a doubt "incline toward her."¹⁷ To ensure that readers understand properly, an inserted poem instructs readers that it is divinely ordained that a woman must do her best to please her man.¹⁸

As this couple live their felicitous life, time passes but with no pregnancy to show for it. Weeping in her room, the wife resorts to a tried and true tactic.

She brought in midwives secretly without her husband's knowledge, to give vent to her grieving in their company and explain the causes of her pain. . . . They told her of a remedy they had inherited from the ignorant Egyptian *shaykhs* and their old women. As every exacting scholar or thorough investigator knows, these experiments were used anciently on people here and there, back when ignorance was widespread. On some people, these worked, for whatever reason . . . so women transmitted them generation after generation, making some modifications and altering certain details. Later people inheriting them used them for every illness that had even a slight resemblance to the ones they had been used for anciently.

It has been proven that the uneducated midwife, no matter how vast her experience, cannot diagnose the problem precisely and thus cannot prescribe its correct remedy; moreover, she does not know the effect of medicines she uses nor the dangers accruing if she errs in their usage.

This poor woman was so crazed about getting pregnant that she tried everything even when it caused intense pain. Her husband made it obvious that he was not concerned about [pregnancy], out of sympathy for her, wanting not to give her unease. She knew this, but she knew also that he awaited a pregnancy like a sick man awaits cure.¹⁹

The narrating voice interrupts the story with a mini-history of these remedies, clearly if rather defensively ascribing their longevity to women's oral transmission. It is but a step to the "uneducated midwife"

¹⁷ Ibid., 3–4. ¹⁸ Ibid., 4. ¹⁹ Ibid., 5–6.

whose experience is no match for expert diagnosis. The husband tells his spouse that she should see a female doctor [*hakima*]. *Hakimas* were trained in government schools, licensed to practice in clinics, to carry out forensic tasks and to fulfill other needed duties at police stations.²⁰ They were to be male doctors' assistants (and men and women in the government-run medical establishment were encouraged to marry each other). From the perspective of a male medical student, *hakimas* were officially endorsed yet safely subservient.

But she brought in *midwives*, she explains. Midwives were a more familiar presence for women, and there is evidence for some competition in the late nineteenth century between midwives and government-trained *hakimas*, for the latter both needed the locally-based midwives (*dayas*) for the access to women they could offer, and yet spurned them as rivals.²¹ In the novel, the husband instructs the wife on the dangers of midwives and why she should prefer someone trained in the medical profession (the novel's authors, for instance, or their *hakima* helpers).²² The husband's words become a direct address to the female reader or listener: "You were wrong to call them, and had I known, I would not have let you do it, for a person who gives himself up to those ignorant folk regards his own life as valueless."²³ The wife is quickly convinced: "Praise the Lord for my safe delivery from their hands." The husband summons "the most famous female doctor in Egypt" who is there within the hour and examines her as he – good efendi that he is – reads a newspaper to dispel "the torment of waiting." The next month, "the signs of pregnancy appeared . . . and from this time intimations of joy spread through this great house."²⁴

"Any passerby would be astonished at the abundance of carriages lined up against the garden walls, and would think he was in 'Abdin Square on the morning of 'Id al-Fitr."²⁵ But our concern (we the audience) is not the ritual niceties once the good news is out, nor the sociability of joy surrounding the formation of a new nuclear family. For we are inside the house, listening in on the *hakima*'s monologue as she addresses the mother and offers detailed advice on prenatal care, woman to woman: what to eat and wear, when to take baths, how to maintain a regular schedule and (crucially) how to avoid excessive emotions. Through male interlocutors (authors, and possibly readers), an envisioned female audience "hears" that advice as well.

Perhaps all of this good medical counsel is why our mistress is only in labor for half an hour before giving birth to a healthy girl, welcomed by

²⁰ Kozma (2011: ch. 2). ²¹ Ibid. ²² Murad and Mahfuz (1899: 6). ²³ Ibid., 7.
²⁴ Ibid., 7, 8. ²⁵ Ibid., 10.

the father: "The *sayyid* arrived on that evening's express train, finding many friends at the station to congratulate him. At home, he kissed his wife on the brow and after reassuring himself of her health, he took his daughter in his arms and began to kiss and hug her, tears of joy streaming from his eyes. He requested his wife to name her Latifa ('Lovely' or 'Gentle')." ²⁶

Latifa's history between the ages of one day and sixteen years is hidden behind a series of narratives about proper upbringing, including an emphasis on "paternal love that is not given its due importance." ²⁷ An embedded story ensues, narrated by the father, who has brought five-year-old Amina into their home. She is the daughter of a neighbor, Mahmud the "famous" merchant, brought low by a female broker (*simsara*) who invited prostitutes to his home and lured him into gambling until he went bankrupt and killed himself in shame. Abu Latifa has taken in the little daughter as a pious act (we never learn what happens to her mother), and thus are we instructed in the difference between good and bad masculinity, with a lesson on the dangers of impious behavior, a topic much rehearsed in the contemporaneous press. ²⁸

In chapter 4, "Educating women," we learn too of the father's desire that his daughter learn to read and write, as well as studying *usul al-din* (fundamentals of the faith) and basic maths. He expresses this in a monologue to his wife, for – as a good modern husband – he wants her opinion (though he rarely pauses to listen to it). An exchange between husband and wife spells out (in his voice) the vital importance of education: "Among life's imperatives now, as every intelligent person knows, is that a daughter be educated in a way that does not exceed or betray necessity." He thus articulates a signal element in an emergent nationalist agenda voiced by Qasim Amin and many others. This cautious discourse on the value of (some) reading for girls responds to what was an intense debate carried out in books and periodicals, on the sensitive issue of how girls ought to be trained. For what purposes and aspirations, how much and for how long, in what subjects, by whom, and where? Books such as *The Egyptian Lovely* enacted this debate in its particulars and arguments, and also manifested how girls were seen as objects rather than subjects of such training. It suggests how an educational project that might appear to open up areas of knowledge to new constituents actually served to solidify class and gender boundaries by establishing clearly gendered

²⁶ Ibid., 15. ²⁷ Ibid., 17.

²⁸ That the late gambler is a merchant, and the savior-father seems to be a cross between an upper-class landowner and a professional-bureaucratic type, or *efendi*, is worth pondering further, but is beyond the scope of this chapter.

educational trajectories and consolidating elite family units that could maintain the hold of certain social groups over the national-state-to-be.

But Umm Latifa wonders, “What is the use of educating our daughter when she has vast wealth, splendid beauty and fine morals? . . . An education might slow her growth.”²⁹ The husband hastens to note that he does not intend “turning her into an eloquent writer” or having her “delve deeply into the sciences” but only that she learn the Quran and enough writing and arithmetic to supply “knowledge useful to her sex in this earthly life, to broaden her understanding and know her duty toward her husband, her children, relatives and all with whom she deals. I will make it my business to select the books that come into her hands.” Closely echoing contemporaneous debates in the press over the extent and content of appropriate reading for the adolescent girl, such a declaration shows how, far from allowing girls an expanded fund of knowledge, education was deployed in the efendi class to enhance gendered distinctions in social roles and duties. It could restrict the domain of the feminine, while manufacturing presentable wives for the elites.

Responding to another emerging motif in public discourse, Abu Latifa pledges, “Just as I will take care of educating her soul and mind, I will be assiduous in training the body (*tarbiyat al-jasad*), for I know that a sound mind must inhabit a sound body.”³⁰ The conversation is detailed in its adumbration of familiar themes, incorporating virtues and vices of novel reading, lessons to be learned from the exemplary practices of women of the prophet’s family who “knew how to read and write,” and the advantages an educated woman has in raising healthy children.

Umm Latifa (who, we remember, was not formally educated) is a loving parent, but she is too lenient; the authors juxtapose description of her ways with a homily on proper mothering. As a result, young Latifa’s home tutoring (from a male teacher selected by her father) does not yield good results: “The mother was a stumbling block to her husband’s honorable aims because she thought his course of action would spoil her daughter’s morals and character.” Indeed, she is the spoiler, sending a servant to spy on the teacher and undermining his disciplinary efforts. Therefore, at the age of sixteen, Latifa “had no concern but amusement, adorning herself, and being dazzled by fine clothes and her own beauty”³¹ – an embodiment of behavior often criticized and lampooned in the press, and a distress to her father. That she grows up to favor *al-khula’a wa-l-malahi* – dissolute behavior and

²⁹ Ibid., 24. ³⁰ Ibid., 25. ³¹ Ibid., 30, 44.

amusements or places of entertainment – as well as expensive finery and spending hours before the mirror, is shown to be the result of a *lack* of education and proper upbringing, not – as was sometimes claimed by opponents of girls' education – an outcome of schooling.

Gradually the teenager shows symptoms of anorexia, irregular menses and mood changes. A male doctor summoned to the home informs her father that it is "an illness very widespread among women."³² Again the reader is treated to detailed medical counsel (explanation of the importance of regular menses, and so forth), and the father models good behavior by showing deference to the (male) medical profession. With Latifa's nervous disposition, the doctor says (echoing the authors' preface), "she is susceptible to the illness common among girls of [good] family, hysteria, known among the masses as *al-rih*, and which they treat by visiting *shaykhs* and mounting *zars*."³³ The doctor prescribes exercise "in secluded places, fields and gardens."³⁴

The two medical students' emphasis – and gloss for readers – on hysteria insinuates their induction into European-provenant concerns of the time, the fin-de-siècle fascination with mental conditions and their alleged responsibility for "degeneration" of the species, linked in turn to understandings of (and fears about) imperial reach.³⁵ In Europe in the same decade, women and girls were marked out as particularly (and sometimes exclusively) vulnerable to conditions labelled as "hysteria" or "neurasthenia" and explained as nervous deterioration due to a myriad of causes (not including the possible effects of gendered expectations for, and pressures on, their present and future lives in society). The transferral of this notion with its gendered regulatory consequences to colonized societies such as Egypt through medical training and popular scientific writings is evident in texts such as *The Egyptian Lovely*, where it is intended for further dissemination to an expanding market of novel readers, among them young women.

But perhaps it is time to marry! From many suitors, papa selects a Pasha's son, known to a friend of the father's because "he was with me in Europe studying the law and is now on the court."³⁶ Will this be another perfect modern companionate marriage? It seems so: after Latifa gets a lecture from her father on proper wifedom, she turns miraculously into the perfectly behaved young matron and dutiful wife. But the good times

³² Ibid., 48. ³³ Ibid., 51. ³⁴ Ibid., 51.

³⁵ See, e.g., Bourne Taylor (2007: 13–30). For a contemporaneous discussion, see H.B. Donkin, "Hysteria," in *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine* (1892), excerpted in Ledger and Luckhurst (2000: 245–50).

³⁶ Murad and Mahfuz (1899: 54).

last only until Muhammad Bek, the young husband, meets Mademoiselle Thérèse at a bachelor friend's home.³⁷

Eventually, having recognized her mostly absent husband's lack of interest, Latifa and her mother engage the services of a *kudiyya*, or *zar* leader, behind Abu Latifa's back. This offers an opportunity to describe the *zar* in detail, from the women who run it and their modes of persuasion, to the expenses incurred – another way in which women were said to waste husbands' and fathers' resources. The description indicts women's networks, women's oral knowledge and women's alleged gullibility. The theme of education as a disciplining force is somewhat undermined by a homily on women's responsibility for (illicit) love relationships, which the authors appear to suggest can only be avoided through seclusion. If the husband went astray, it is the fault of European women, and Muhammad Bek's final words to his inconstant lover become an accusation directed at all women, with an echo of the Quran and orally told stories of old: "Woe to women and their craftiness, for their craftiness is great." But Muhammad Bek is yet more explicit in his misogyny, aimed at a female persona who stands in equally for Europe's allegedly corruptive and destructive potential, and for that of the category of women *tout court*: "Women are devils who were created for us, and we seek refuge in God from the cunning of devils."³⁸ Europa undermines marital harmony and social stability, even as Europe provides the language of this novel's medical expertise. The young husband is the target of criticism here, but in the context of the authors' overall indictment of women's culture, he is implicitly the creation of his absent (and presumably uneducated) mother, and at a greater remove, of the Egyptian aristocracy, as the son of a Pasha. While the authors display no sympathy for classes below their station, their critique of Egypt's upper class was enough to leave space for the upward mobility they sought.

Ultimately, the daughter's eyes are opened to the *zar* as a swindle. Her father, now called "the professor" (*al-ustadh*), perhaps a gesture to a social positioning as educated efendi from a landowning family, sufficiently well-off to live in a *qasr*, explains that if "Egypt's boys and girls were educated there would be no doubt that after enlightenment their minds would not accept these foolish matters . . . and we could appear before the civilized world looking proud and honorable."³⁹ The point,

³⁷ This intimates a criticism of bachelorhood as detrimental to the nation's family plan. On critiques of bachelors as not fulfilling national duty (which became more pointed in later decades), see Kholoussy (2010).

³⁸ Murad and Mahfuz (1899: 123). In the first sentence, the word *makr* rather than the more usual *kayd* is used.

³⁹ Ibid., 136.

then, is not just the bodily and mental health of Egyptians, or even the notion of education as a vaccine against ready acceptance of either inherited practices or European ways, but the very reputation of Egypt in the modern world, its *national* health threatened equally by received local practices and foreign (and female) corrupt presences.

Latifa embraces the wisdom of her father's ways and summons a male doctor. (It must be obvious by now to the reader that the entire novel is an extended advertisement for its authors' profession.) We never learn whether the straying husband returns – one hopes he does not, although we do learn of his repentance – but Latifa and her parents are saved from the clutches of old women and dubious shaykhs, while en route the reader is treated to pronouncements on childrearing and girls' education, the importance of letting fiancés get to know each other, and the causes and treatment of "hysteria."

Thus, *The Egyptian Lovely* sketches a contemporary history of competing notions about how the social body is to be ordered and kept sound, via the bodies and minds of economically and socially privileged young women (and the men who regulate them), all from the perspectives of a self-fashioned modern masculine establishment. Two sources of knowledge and social-physical regeneration are at stake: folk knowledge embodied in elder women, "ignorant shaykhs," "uneducated midwives" and women's communal lives and networks, versus the medical profession (*tabibs/hakims* and to a lesser extent *hakimas*) and the state welfare institution. These are supported by the professional male bourgeoisie and the more established, older but enlightened landowning class. Abu Latifa himself is presented as a member of both. Recall, he is off inspecting his agricultural lands as his wife is in labor, even as he also represents *efendi/ustadh* identity.

The Egyptian Lovely joined a debate begun in the late 1880s as voices rose critiquing the *zar* and associated practices. This is one thematic-critical node around which the problematic of gender relations and the gendered order of society clustered in the 1890s. The *zar* was a convenient, elaborated signifier of unmodern, unacceptable consumption practices (with women as active consumers and men as passive funders), and of women as uncontrollable sexually and financially (and dangerous in groups). It was the undisciplined opposite of all that modernity was supposed to stand for and offer. It was also a signifier of racialized and class hierarchies, as many *zar* leaders were Sudanese; it has been suggested that the *zar* was brought to Egypt with the trade in African slaves.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Kozma (2011: 26). See also Troutt-Powell (2003).

With slavery's abolition (however incompletely realized) in 1869, and the consequent presence in Egypt of former slaves who had no means of support or networks, the availability of *zar* practitioners may have skyrocketed. Perhaps this is why it is such a topic of concern in the 1890s Egyptian press. It is one of the material and discursive presences against which, though usually implicitly, leading thinkers formulated their models for a rational, liberal, but orthodox, Islamic system. By its nature, it injected gender difference into the heart of both all that was "wrong" with Egypt and the disciplines that were needed to make it right.

The novel thus enacts (and preaches) a message of disciplined and sober urban Egyptian family life, modeling the ideal nuclear family and warning against the pitfalls of relying on practices associated with women. Its authors operate on an entirely different plane of discourse than did the leading reformist thinkers of the time, such as Muhammad 'Abduh or even Qasim Amin, but they raise similar issues of how to be modern as individuals and as a society. It grapples concretely with issues that Hourani's interlocutors treated more abstractly, although Amin's 1899 work – less than his 1901 follow-up – focused intermittently on issues of behavior and daily practice as well.

Policing Marriage

A few years before *The Egyptian Lovely* appeared, Husayn Fawzi, a clerk in the Customs Administration, had produced *The Lamp Incandescent on Customs and Rights in Marriage Acquiescent*. Published serially in the periodical *Fursat al-awqat*, this came out in book form as late as 1314/1896.⁴¹ Dedicating it to his father ("I ask only that he read it from first to last"), Fawzi claims to treat "a mighty subject that no one has preceded me in doing, nor has anyone knocked on the door of this noble method," the foundation of which he defines as specifically Islamic legal-behavioral issues (*al-masa'il al-shar'iyya*), "adorned with the ornamental belt of *adab* [belles-lettres, refinement] and crowned with learning's coronet."⁴² A rather similar work, alluded to earlier in this chapter, Hamza Fathallah's *First Lights on Islam and Women's Rights* had appeared in 1891, also claiming to be the first of its kind (an interesting claim in itself). Like Murad and Mahfuz, though in a differently shaped text, Fawzi seeks to intervene by instruction in the fraught issue of modern marriage. Also like them, his work produces an anxious figuration of young elite

⁴¹ Fawzi (1896). The title in *Fursat al-awqat* substitutes *al-awwayid* for the more classical form.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3.

masculinity in peril as well as a portrayal of modern marriage that fixes women in the home and yokes their training to a domestic future.⁴³

Immediately Fawzi mobilizes gender, through the conventional invocation of praise for the divine, elaborated thematically to evoke his chosen topic. I quote this opening passage at length, because I find its progression significant:

Praise God who created all beings with His power and after His will, and made women an adornment to men and a firm and upstanding support in every situation. Praise be to He who arranged matters around the crucial pivot on which they depend, in the sphere of women's work. Women were created that all conditions be good and right [*li-salah al-ahwal*],⁴⁴ and were made to exist [to ensure] abundant offspring from which communities [or nations: *umam*] derive pride in the face of other communities. From those chaste well-protected⁴⁵ females are produced men who praise God and seek His forgiveness from every [untoward] leaning . . . And I say, as one who acknowledges my shortfalls and my inability, Husayn son of Ahmad son of Muhammad Fawzi: As it is part of completing one's religion to marry and immunize oneself from every devilish incitement to evil, one must follow the path that came in the Noble Verses and honorable Hadiths concerning marriage. A man must be on his guard and confront the matter carefully before patterns are set, to have a strong grasp of his situation and to order well his domestic well-being. Thus can he join the way and company of men, prepared for the perfections that complete him, not overlooking anything in which resides proper and sound attributes and corrective measures for himself and his family, whether his offspring or other kin, and not spending wastefully or extravagantly from the income God has provided him, but only on what necessity requires, proceeding according to his ability without incurring unbearable costs, for God is forgiving, and commands him repeatedly in His Precious Book not to be spendthrift. . . . How many a rich man squanders his fortune, his property vanishing like the wind in his rebellious disobedience to the Creator . . . how many a property owner has found his building razed to the ground because he obeyed Zayd and placated 'Amr and stayed up night after night with Bakr until he had not a coin to his name. . . . How many a fellow has claimed wealth, garbed himself in the dress of rich folk, imitated a thing or two, and compared himself to them . . . and then was turned aside . . . honor defiled and guise revealed. When there appeared openly what had been veiled beneath the train of his finery and trappings, he gnashed the teeth of regret . . . How many a youth has resorted to his father, depending on him for daily needs, relying on his wealth and ease . . . taking to meandering between bar and brothel [*hanat khamr wa-khanat fasq*], relying for his expenditures on this inexhaustible treasure and not acquiring for himself that which would benefit him in time of need. But then his father passed away, he inherited many

⁴³ On the construction of the virtuous wife in Palestinian economic thought of the 1930s, see Seikaly's chapter.

⁴⁴ In *Fursat al-awqat*, this appears as the rather different *li salah al-akhlaq*.

⁴⁵ "*muhsinat*," pl., epithet for Muslim women: "well-protected," i.e., chaste.

possessions – homes, land and other things – and followed his mates’ manner in spending, not turning away from his earlier habit acquired from his brethren but rather becoming more dissolute until soon he demolished the name of his father and family which had placed its hopes for a robust future existence on a youth on whose education and refinement it spent large sums. If I wished to count the likes of these, it would be never-ending: there are so many, God preserve us! They have not derived anything useful from the legacies their forebears exhausted their lives to create. . . . Indeed, those family possessions and traces are either pawned, sold to Mr So-and-So the foreigner, or [disposed of] elsewhere. . . the upshot is that most of those whom we have mentioned end up begging . . . after easy circumstances, [economic] vigor and good name. To God alone all matters belong.⁴⁶

What interests me is that Fawzi’s unequivocal declaration of women’s purpose and role in Egyptian life grounds a discourse of anxiety about male behavior, and produces an urgent warning that men must overcome what appears as a wayward passivity in their handling of marriage, family and public comportment, if they are not to be lost altogether. Men are portrayed as teetering on the edge of chaos and ruin, constantly threatened by desire, whether for women, trappings of wealth imagined or parasitically acquired, or seductions of bars and brothels, seen to ultimately put Egyptian capital into European hands. If the perfect wife is she who helps and guides – and produces “men who pray to God” – the husband is seen to need care, protection and guidance; and as an adult, he seems to have undone this potential prayerful masculine self engendered by mothers. There is an interesting harmonics here as well that indirectly connects this text to *The Egyptian Lovely*’s focus on “hysteria,” and evident in other texts of the decade, on the effects of “ease” on young men. I suspect this is linked to fin-de-siècle European theories of “degeneration,” popularized by Max Nordau’s tirade on the subject (published in English translation in 1895), which linked “degeneration” and “hysteria.”⁴⁷ Texts such as Edwin Ray Lankester’s 1880 *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* explained degeneration as occurring when “[a]ny new set of conditions occurring to an animal . . . render its food and safety very easily attained . . . just as an active healthy man sometimes degenerates when he suddenly becomes possessed of a fortune; or as Rome degenerated when possessed of the riches of the ancient world.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Fawzi (1896: 5–7).

⁴⁷ See Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (1895), excerpted in Ledger and Luckhurst (2000: 13–17, quote on 15).

⁴⁸ Edwin Ray Lankester, *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (1880), excerpted in Ledger and Luckhurst (2000: 3–5, quote on 3). Arab intellectuals could have grounded a like idea (more as a collective rather than individual phenomenon) in the theories of Ibn Khaldun, revived by Egyptian social scientists (but perhaps only decades later). See O. El Shakry (2007: 7, 71, 84).

The linkage of young men's corruption and degeneration with that of "Rome"/the nation would not have been lost on thinkers in Egypt.

Indeed, the woman as wife appears as the most active and least "degenerate" member of the household, to judge by Fawzi's next chapter, couched in second-person address to fathers (perhaps the less disciplined peers of Abu Latifa?). He warns them against being the cause of loss of their God-given revenues and status:

To you, rational men, I wrote and propounded that introduction, so take for yourself an example from these aural scenes and make them your song . . . God gave you a mind: with it, distinguish the wicked and injurious from the good . . . Know that these things arise only from three causes: letting the boy behave as he wishes without being severe on him; giving him extra money; and failing to marry him off when he reaches adulthood. You will find that most of those [negative examples] we mentioned lacked pious and good wives who arrange their men's affairs and give advice, for the structures of existence depend on the women, and they are the cause of every felicity, earthly and otherworldly. Concerning the earthly (if she is one of the above-mentioned goodly women), she preserves the property and wealth of her husband, and firmly counters every difficulty that weighs him down, making what is difficult easy and guiding him to what is most beneficial for her household, and for him and herself both. Likely she quietly puts away a portion of his earnings and then brings it out [when needed], for the husband's benefit or so that he can then build something good for the future . . . In sum women are the cause of wealth and instrument of felicity, the source of saving and economy. We might well see the unmarried man spending more than the married man. As for the otherworldly, she is the greatest deterrent to committing grave offenses and prohibited acts [*mubiqat, muharramat*] which are at the seat of all ruin and perdition. . . . The benefit of marriage is great, too great for this simple treatise to encompass. And so a person [*insan*] must choose for himself a pious, good wife in possession of the aforementioned provisions, of good family origin, who will stand with him to carry this great burden. After all, she is the cause of procreation, and [their] blood is likely to mingle [in the progeny]. Indeed, she and he are like one member, one self. Do you not see that a person flees from his mother and father to seek comfort and joy in her, that he espouses her like a sister or mother, never finalizing anything without her knowledge and guidance? Since this is how things are and he knows she will be an important part of him, a strong helper, he must not be negligent or lazy about making a thorough investigation and pursuing inquiries on all matters large and small in the matter of marriage. He must not rush, for haste makes the foot slip; even if this means waiting years until the appropriate situation is within reach, so that he doesn't fall into a disconcerting situation or a terrifying divorce, which – by God! – is a thing rejected by the soul of the educated and enlightened man [*nafs al-adib al-hurr*].⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Fawzi (1896: 8–9).

In assessing men's and women's comparative superiority, Fawzi reminds the reader that God made men "*qawwamun 'ala*" ("in charge of") women, as said in Qur'an 4:34. This term, still hotly debated in the twenty-first century, was a focus of discussion for writers in the 1890s, though I cannot digress here to follow Fawzi's somewhat tortured if rather alluring logic. For each gender he finds superiority in its own differentiated sphere of action, but they are not equally placed. He sketches an unequivocal social gender hierarchy; his repeated assertions of it suggest his firm belief in its necessity and logic, but equally his anxious sense of fragility about its continued existence. At the same time, the text's explicit direct address might solidify a sense of homosocial (and heteronormativized) community, the company of male married or to-be-married addressees, warned against masculine fragility and simultaneously reminded of their Qur'an-sanctioned hierarchical privilege (as it is interpreted here) over "their" women.

Here and elsewhere in the treatise, "good wives" are clearly seen as prerequisites for keeping men off the streets and taming their behavior.⁵⁰ At the same time, these wives are apparently produced by the very men whom they discipline. When Fawzi's addressee switches from father to husband (as he starts speaking of how spouses should treat each other), he suggests that women are infinitely pliable (as men are apparently not), and responsibility for the end product lies with the husband. With difficult-to-ignore phallic imagery, he says:

A woman is like a branch or a plant. If you want her to be straight she will be straight; it is up to you, what you do and how you treat her. If you want her to show *i'tidal* [straightness, uprightness, harmoniousness, moderateness], then create for her a straight/moderate/harmonious way, like the rod for plants: the plant will grow and develop along it, and the longer it grows, the straighter it is, like the rod [*'ud*]. If you want her to be crooked, then give her a crooked path; if you try later to straighten her, she will break . . . The smart man must make his way moderately with his wife, treating her with all respect, esteem, dignity and calm, for upon her rests nothing less than the flourishing life of the home: for women, as the *hadith* says, are the lamps of houses. She has the right to seek counsel and be consulted [*al-istishara*], so that her knowledge includes what her husband does. If he wants to go out anywhere, he must tell her, not to obtain her order [i.e., permission], but to give her to understand that he is not doing anything secretive . . . it must not be thought that women are devoid of intelligence such that one would reject the idea of seeking their counsel.⁵¹

Fawzi upholds some practices that (to judge by his overt defensiveness) he knows are facing opposition from his peers. The importance he

⁵⁰ Ibid., 17. ⁵¹ Ibid., 22–23.

ascribes to making the right marriage and his sense of what that requires, for instance, lead him to support the *shari'a*-compliant allowability of those contracting marriage to see each other (only, in the female's case, face, hair and hands).⁵²

We say this knowing that the reader [father] will not be pleased by this and will not act accordingly, out of haughtiness or ignorance and shame, maybe even fancying that the viewer [prospective bridegroom] may talk about the viewed [prospective bride] after seeing her – saying he saw the daughter of So-and-so, or that she was offered to him and he refused, or the like, and could take [seeing her] as a reason not to marry, if for instance she has a marred face. . . . But the sensible one will respond to this false claim [by saying] that the father of the bride naturally would only allow one with all the conditions of piety, goodness and uprightness, not to mention whose person and family he knows well, to see her.⁵³

Fawzi criticizes a tendency “in this era” to run after wealthy spouses and not consider other factors, such as probity and God-fearingness. Yet his apparently forward-thinking ideas (like those of Murad and Mahfuz) about what is due to women before and in marriage entail masculine control that serves to reinforce hierarchical and rigidly gender-differentiating relations and practices within the natal family and the conjugal home.⁵⁴

The serial publication of this work is evident in its episodic nature and perhaps in its movement among primary targeted audiences: most chapters are phrased as a direct address to men (mostly as fathers but sometimes as husbands), including instructions on childcare, aimed at fathers as those ultimately in charge. But he addresses his words directly to wives at one point and then again to women in the section on raising daughters (but not in the section on raising sons, addressed to fathers).⁵⁵ Notwithstanding his support for allowing fiancés to see each other, taking daughters' views on prospective spouses into account, eschewing high dowries, and allowing girls to learn reading and writing, the author circumscribes gendered behavior within rigid boundaries. For example, he supports allowing girls to be trained in potential remunerative work, drawing on a *hadith nabawi*, “a craft [*san'a*] in the hand is security

⁵² Ibid., 18. ⁵³ Ibid., 18. ⁵⁴ I was helped to think through this by Chandra (2012).

⁵⁵ Interestingly, this is a modification occurring between serial publication and book. In *Fursat al-awqat* women are in the third person but in the book, in describing how women should deal with their husbands' bad moods (somewhat differently than how men should deal with their wives' bad moods), he says: “How can you not find this perception correct, when he is the man charged with spending on you and your children?” Fawzi (1896: 27). He switches back immediately to third person: “As for the wife, she is *sayyida* in her home and commands its flourishing and prohibits what is wrong” (echoing *shari'a* diction usually addressed to men).

from poverty.” For family circumstances might change and (some) girls must be prepared to support themselves or others. But what does this mean in reality?

With this, the girl possesses, after reliance on God, a guarantee for the future. It is well-known that such is a crutch in the privation that can befall a person or family suddenly, a fate they cannot repel but with whatever remains in their hands. The *ahadith nabawiyya* came to corroborate our words: *San'atun fi'l-yad amanun min al-faqr*. These are indispensable crafts – weaving, sewing, hand-work. Rather than a husband having to find a foreign [or unrelated] woman [*ajnabiyya*] to put his wardrobe to rights, the lady of the house [*rabbat al-bayt*] is more suited to that task; she makes him shirts, drawers, handkerchiefs, *jallabas* and other garments, and does likewise for her children, not to mention embroidery, darning and lace-making. She can work while secluded at home, making a tablecloth, curtains or the like, which the husband is delighted to see, even if this amounts to nothing really as long as money is present. Yet when he learns that in his home it is possible to do this sort of work, naturally he will take pride in it, especially in that it is more skilled work and more perfect, than that available from outside. This is additional to her knowledge of ironing clothes and the rest, so that the house needs nothing more. The benefits are abundant: in a situation of ease as we said, the lady can adorn the home with the work of her own hands, and if afflicted by a deterioration in their living circumstances and the man's inability to gain a livelihood, there is nothing wrong with selling her work, even if temporarily, until God brings ease again.⁵⁶

Thus, remunerative work for women is set firmly in the home and explicitly within seclusion, and is solely for purposes of benefiting the family and replacing potential gaps in family income. As Hourani noted, Qasim Amin supported women's work cautiously in *The Emancipation of Women*,⁵⁷ not the first to do so, he was less wedded to the idea that women's work must take place in the home. For Fawzi (unlike Amin), siting women's income-generating work in the home is justified also through a contrast arising from his occasional, pointedly acerbic comments on European women and European feminism, an interlaced theme too complexly developed to discuss here.

Furthermore, while Fawzi emphasizes the strength and power of the “good woman,” he subscribes to received notions about the essential natures of masculine and feminine. Though men are criticized and women are lauded throughout the text (again manifesting his primary audience as masculine), when he gives examples of sexual transgression by married individuals, these always concern so-called wayward women. More quietly, men's sexual desires are always to be accounted for as understandable. The harm to women in divorce, for instance, is material

⁵⁶ Fawzi (1896: 45–46). ⁵⁷ Hourani (1962: 165).

and perhaps emotional but does not concern sexual deprivation, while for men, it is to be expected that they will seek sexual satisfaction one way or another, and that this is only normal and thus excusable. Yet this is one of the many works of the time which characterize females as always more impressionable, more liable to succumb to temptation; hence the dangers of gender mixing in public or private, of women smoking, drinking, or reading French novels.

In sum, *The Lamp Incandescent*, like *The Egyptian Lovely*, is a work meant to intervene in targeted readers’ behaviors, through direct address, exposition and exemplary story or anecdote (which Fawzi sprinkles throughout). Both take on the question of gendered discipline as a necessary societal axle that has broken down. Both sustain a tone of instruction and urgency. They pose themselves as agential presences badly needed in Egyptian society as perceived by these authors in the 1890s.

Writing for Readers

Agential presences need audiences. As noted earlier, this is a topic to which Hourani alluded but did not develop, yet it is a crucial element in assessing the purchase of reformist texts, whether the more elevated discourse that Hourani examined or the “underbrush,” as I have called it. In addition to textual strategies such as direct address (which clearly seek – and construct – an envisioned audience though of course the text cannot tell us whether that audience responded or who comprised it), there are intriguing intimations of readerships in a few books from this era, and they form part of the picture I am trying to sketch. One such example comes in *‘Afrit al-niswan* (*The Women’s Demon*) (1886), by Najib Mikha’il Gharghur, founder-editor of the journal *al-‘Afrit*.⁵⁸ This work is said to be a translation, though typically, neither original title nor first author is mentioned. A novel set in France, it concerns bad behavior by a young man and his negotiations with his guardian (his maternal uncle) over his coming to adulthood and seeking a spouse. I have only Part II, and in the preface Gharghur refers to a controversy stirred up by his “bold” title, presumably following publication of Part I. It was “the gentle sex” who responded, saying to their male compatriots:

Was it not enough that your forefathers were not enamoured of freedom? Is this why now you would strive to extinguish its fires, criticizing its supporters and badmouthing its partisans, confining us and ruling that we be deprived of

⁵⁸ Gharghur (1886). I have not located Part I. Gharghur also authored *Hadiqat al-adab* (Alexandria: n.p., 1888), 5 vols., and *Ghara’ib al-tadwin* (Alexandria: Matba’at Jaridat al-Mahrusa, 1882).

contemplating the wonders of what [freedom] comprises? ... Perhaps the experiential lesson consists in knowing the outcomes of [freedom's] stories [*akhbar*]. Indeed, you are trying to prohibit us from knowledge of how its firmly placed pillars have come to support us and provision our rights which have for a very long time undergone trial. How hard-hearted you are! Your judgment is truly remote from justice and counter to the obligation of compassion. It is no wonder if the excessive and greedy concern for [retaining] your command has served as an invitation to those commanded to rebel, and [you will see] there is no blame to cast there, if you are among the wise and rational.⁵⁹

We do not know who these women were or whether they even existed, for this may be a hypothetical response: earlier, Gharghur makes an allusion to seeing “the angels of the story in a dream.”⁶⁰ He contrasts those who attacked this book (presumably in Egypt) with “editors of newspapers in Europe,” who are not slow to read and criticize every new book but then do not “close the doors of their publications in the face of the writer. . . people ponder the truths [arising] from discussion and they know the sound from the corrupt.”⁶¹ At the least, it seems there was a critical response to what he had written, and intriguingly, he at least dreams of a female audience on his side as he exploits the potentials of translated fiction to pose a homily on the wayward behaviors of young men.

What can we learn, or hear, from the existence, assumptions, content and modes of address of these works? To put it another way, what do we miss when we consider only the better-known works of leading intellectuals, or those who were most controversial and thus have remained in the public eye? As noted earlier, the 1890s saw an enormous increase in the availability of print media. For the first time, local newspapers appeared, including a few based outside the major metropolises of Cairo and Alexandria, while those in Cairo included news from their correspondents in the provinces. New venues, whether in the periodical press or created by start-up publishing ventures, may have encouraged the proliferation of genres in which key debates of the time circulated. Issues of women's education, sexuality, proper manhood and womanhood, and the raising of the young were treated not only in editorials and expository books such as Qasim Amin's, but also in religiously framed treatises, published orations, works of travel literature, histories, vernacular poetry and dialogues, didactic novels and historical novels, medical manuals, conduct books, and even works of biography.

Clearly, these were aimed at various if overlapping audiences, just as these works – so diverse in genre and approach – overlap substantially in

⁵⁹ Gharghur (1886: 4–5).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

their earnest disciplinary approach to boundaries of gender and sexuality, and in the occasional aporias that they reveal. Though the issue of readership can never be addressed truly adequately, since the sources do not exist, we can read these texts for their modes of address and style: clearly, the texts I consider above were produced with an audience broader than that of the intellectual elite in mind and with announced aspirations to attract as broad an audience as possible. The 1890s may well be the first decade in which we find overt gestures toward constructing a popular audience for reformist texts, though in the early 1880s, ‘Abdallah Nadim’s short-lived *al-Tankit wa-l-tabkit* was a harbinger. In sum, the plethora of genres and venues, and the textual clues to sought readerships, along with expressed anxieties about providing proper reading to the nation’s young (especially its female young, always constructed as more impressionable and more vulnerable than their brothers), suggest at least an aspirational broadening of interlocutors. Most were probably unlikely to peruse one of Muhammad ‘Abduh’s treatises.

Conclusion

In their modes of address, language and perspectives, such works contextualize the better-known and often-discussed works of the era. To read Amin’s *Tahrir al-mar’a* (1899) against discourses already circulating may generate diverse and different nuances than those we read into it from our twenty-first century, elitist-text-led and postcolonial perspectives. While its focus on women’s practices, behaviors and modes of dress and sociability have been critiqued as masculinist, patriarchal and imperialist,⁶² in fact Amin shifted the focus somewhat, not decrying men’s public behavior as Fawzi and others did, yet putting ultimate blame for domestic disarray and dismay on men and opening up spaces for negotiation that are not broached by works such as Fawzi’s treatise or the medical students’ manual-cum-novel. In both works, to some extent men are portrayed as passive or hapless victims of women’s sexual and material desires and their consumption habits (including resort to the *zar*). A tone of urgency and anxiety hovers, the sense that all is lost for men if they do not assert their financial, sexual and domestic dominance and their role of master instructor in the interests of family and national reform – if they are not *qawwamun ‘alayhinna*. The tone of Amin’s book is quite different, and perhaps here, as much as in the prescriptions he

⁶² L. Ahmed (1992: ch. 8). Her view has become the “orthodoxy” on Qasim Amin. For a different view, see Booth (1993).

proposed, and his title, which in itself reverberated at the time, are the grounds for his book's controversial reception. In short, his *Emancipation of Women* looks a bit different when read against works such as those I have discussed, which were by no means unique at the time, even if authors echoed each other in claiming they were walking on "virgin territory."⁶³

We must think of the discursive field of the Nahda as a space of negotiation and transition, from a (continuing) oral realm of debate that incorporated reading out loud with all of the opportunities for discussion this afforded, into a field more (though not fully) defined by print and silent reading. But levels of literacy even among the elite meant that older forms of intellectual conversation remained highly salient – as of course they always do. And we must also recognize that Nahda writers of all stripes cannot be easily characterized as "modernist" or "conservative," "West-leaning" or "steeped in tradition." Whether taking up the new form of the novel or writing in the familiar form of the religious-legal treatise, authors brought together, sometimes in paradoxical parallel, their own "inherited tradition" and the world beyond Egypt. Furthermore, while one of these two works might appear more modernist and Europe-friendly than the other, both work to stabilize and indeed to freeze gendered categories in the interests of national and communal vitality. Both address themselves to men as the enlightened but fragile leaders of society, who are to instruct "their" women in the byways of modern patriarchy.

This brings me in conclusion to an offhand comment made by an intellectual from the Fayyum, Ibrahim Ramzi, in the newspaper he founded in response to Amin's book. In *al-Mar'a fi al-Islam's* first issue (1901), speaking of the range of local reactions to *The Emancipation of Women*, Ramzi remarked matter-of-factly that "husbands and wives talked about it in their bedrooms."⁶⁴ Rereading *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, I mulled over how wives and sisters and sisters-in-law and mothers are absent from our work on these turn-of-the-century male intellectuals, just as they are absent in those intellectuals' books, but not in fiction or in the treatises I study. Yet, how might they have been co-authors? What information, what analyses, what conversations, what insights, did they supply for the male authorial names on the title pages? We have no access to these intimate conversations. If only we knew what the partners, sisters or daughters of Muhammad 'Abduh, Qasim Amin

⁶³ For more on the rhetoric of "firstness" in this regard, see Booth (2015).

⁶⁴ Booth (2001: 171–201).

and the writers discussed in this chapter had to say to them! Did they read or were they read to? Did they copy out manuscripts for their men? What did women’s conversations yield? If these must remain unanswered questions, we ought to try to imagine the fullness of the contexts in which such texts were produced, as Albert Hourani well knew, and as he fostered in those of us who were so fortunate to be his students.