"May Her Likes Be Multiplied": "Famous Women" Biography and Gendered Prescription in Egypt, 1892–1935
Author(s): Marilyn Booth
Source: Signs, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Summer, 1997), pp. 827–890
Published by: The University of Chicago Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3175222
Accessed: 24/01/2015 14:36

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"May Her Likes Be Multiplied": "Famous Women"
Biography and Gendered Prescription in Egypt, 1892–1935

In August 1892 an obituary for Irish horse trainer and journalist Mary Morgan appeared in the Cairo monthly al-Muqtatat (Choice Pieces). "Mistresses of the pen," it began, "have lost a woman considered foremost among them, indeed among masters of the pen and men of business" ("Khasarat," 779).1 Narrating Morgan's path from childhood to death (a story not lacking in dramatic elements), the obituary-biography declared her obliged to earn her living because her society's religious law gave her father's wealth to his son. But according to Choice Pieces's criteria, this story had a happy ending: from her earnings Morgan built a manor, that emblem of Victorian respectability. The finale proclaimed a lasting legacy:

Research on which this article is based was funded by a Middle East Research Competition fellowship from the Ford Foundation, Cairo, and carried out in 1990 and 1995 in Cairo. I first located and began to think about this material while conducting related research with fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies (1988–89) and the Fulbright Islamic Civilizations Program (1989–90). I am grateful to these institutions and to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a research fellowship (1995–96) funding my ongoing work on Zaynab Fawwaz, pertinent to this essay. A much earlier version of this essay was delivered at conferences in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and Urbana, Illinois, in 1990–91, and later incarnations in Cairo, Atlanta, and New York in 1994–95. I thank these audiences for their comments. For their helpful critiques, I thank Lila Abu-Lughod, Margot Badran, Liz Bohls, Zaha Bustami, Alice Deck, Suad Joseph, Blair Kling, Zachary Lockman, Afsaneh Najmabadi, David Prochaska, Zohreh Sullivan, and two anonymous readers.

1 All biographical and other texts in Egyptian periodicals discussed in this article are listed in the appendix rather than the list of references. The appendix lists biographies with bylines by author. Biographies without bylines were by convention the editor(s)' products but were not necessarily authored by them; I list them by title in the appendix. When they are attributed to a previously published source, that information follows the title. Because I speak of column headings for biographical series, I give these too; "Shahirat al-nisa" ("Famous Women"), the most common, is abbreviated SN. When biography titles are identical and without byline I distinguish them in text by the periodical's abbreviated title (see appendix). I transliterate the titles according to the Arabic orthography (e.g., Jane Austen becomes Jan Awstin), but without marking long and short vowels; translations are given in the appendix. All translations in this article are my own.

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“With her pen she wrote on the brow of fate, ‘Women are no less than men’” (780).

This one-page biographical sketch appeared four months later in the first issue (November 1892) of the first women’s magazine to appear in Arabic, al-Fatat (The Young Woman).² By then it had also appeared in the first issue (September 1892) of al-Hilal (The Crescent), which quickly emerged as a rival to Choice Pieces among leading general-interest (and male-run) magazines. Two years later, when Zaynab Fawwaz (1850–1914) published an enormous biographical dictionary of famous women’s lives, precisely the same narrative appeared minus the opening sentence that marked it as an obituary (1894, 482–83).

Even as she reproduced this biography, Fawwaz prefaced her 1894 Scattered Pearls on the Classes of the Mistresses of Seclusion³ with a complaint: biographies of prominent men abounded, but no one had recorded, in Arabic, the lives of renowned women (5–6). In fact, Mary Morgan’s life history was one of hundreds of short biographies published under the heading “Famous Women” that appeared in the Egyptian press from the 1890s on. These thumbnail sketches drew on a venerable Arabic genre that had emerged only two hundred years after Islam’s founding and had given Fawwaz a literary structure within which to work. As Fawwaz and magazine editors echoed the evaluative entries of the medieval biographical dictionary, they also drew on European and American sources and subjects. They produced a practice of exemplary biography that was indigenous and modern, prescriptive and suggestive.

Of women’s autobiographies in twentieth-century France, Nancy K. Miller has written that “to justify an unorthodox life by writing about it . . . is to reinscribe the original violation, to reviolate masculine turf” (1988, 50; emphasis in the original). While autobiography—with its ascription, however elusive, of authorship—may assert a responsibility for this “revio-

³ Tabaqat (classes, literally “layers”) signaled Fawwaz’s intertextual link to the Arabic biographical tradition. This term had been used by early writers of biographical dictionaries to imply chronological, genealogical, and social groupings as the basis of their organization of individual subjects’ lives. Fawwaz did not follow this organizational principle, although her internal organization of biographies often did follow premodern practice. For example, in the Morgan biography, Fawwaz may have omitted the first sentence not only because she was not engaged in obituary writing but because to start with Morgan’s birth was more in line with traditional practice (as was a listing of individual attributes). On Fawwaz’s biographical practice, see Booth 1995b. Fawwaz’s biographical dictionary is the second extant one authored by a female in Egypt. The first, much of which was never published and has been lost, was penned by Maryam al-Nahhas, another Syrian (al-Nahhas 1879).
lation” in a particularly blatant and therefore contestational way, biography can trespass the same ground, while treading more lightly by posing an ostensible distance between the writing subject and the biographical subject. In biographical dictionaries and the women’s press, editors and writers in Egypt wrote women’s biography into the polemics around “the woman question.” They produced a body of texts at once defiant and ambivalent, argumentative and conciliatory. They instituted a discursive practice that sometimes converged with, sometimes challenged, other discursive productions of “woman.”

These texts were produced and first read in a period when social and political institutions were in upheaval: a newly consolidated colonial structure was built on (and accelerating) Egypt’s integration into the European capitalist system (and indebtedness to British and French interests); accelerating urbanization and class formation and differentiation were made visible in new patterns of home life and living space, dress and sociability for an elite of the wealthiest merchants and largest landowners, Egyptian and foreign (western Europeans, Greeks, Syrians, Jews from across the Ottoman Empire). A protofeminist consciousness that had emerged among a few female and male intellectuals of the nineteenth-century elite exploded into furious debate among a broader social stratum in the 1890s and on into the twentieth century, for the woman question brought together issues of regeneration and community identity, the place of European cultures, and questions of economic empowerment. As nationalist programs competed on terrains of class difference and communal loyalties, protofeminist positions were variously espoused or attacked by male nationalist commentators.

The British government had occupied Egypt in 1882 and installed Lord Cromer as consul general in the wake of popular unrest and an attempted revolt of army officers in alliance with notables against the nominally Ottoman local sovereign. The “awakening” (nahda) — an intensive movement of intellectual self-searching on behalf of a variously defined larger community that had begun early in the century — took on nationalist and anti-imperialist inflections. A popular press had emerged in the 1870s, encapsulating a range of intellectual and political agendas and working in tandem, in the first decade of the twentieth century, with the beginnings of organized party political activity. By this decade, earlier “stirrings of national self-consciousness . . . behind them . . . something older and stronger, the wish of long-established societies to continue their lives without interruption,” had become “an articulate idea animating political movements” (Hourani 1991, 309). Nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiment reached new activist heights in 1919, in popular resistance to the British refusal to
meet with an Egyptian nationalist delegation (the Wafd, which developed thereafter into a political party). Women of all classes were active and visible in this resistance, which a few upper-class women felt gave them a firm mandate to demand participation in Wafd policy making. In 1922, Egypt obtained a nominal independence from Great Britain, and the next year this group of women founded al-Ittihad al-nisa‘i al-misri, the Egyptian Feminist Union. Although its origin was aristocratic, the Egyptian Feminist Union developed a following among women of a new elite that formed the audience for women’s magazines.4

These were some of the events.5 Shaping them was an activist debate on the meanings, interrelations, and effects of modernity, nationalism, and internal ethnic (Egyptian vs. immigrant Levantine) and religious (Muslim vs. Christian) difference. There were overlaps within these categories. Most Egyptians were and are Muslims, but the sizable Coptic Christian population had vocal presences in the media and among the nationalist leadership. Although immigrants from the Ottoman Syrian provinces (and from Greece) were mostly Christian, there were Muslims among them, notable examples being Zaynab Fawwaz and Rashid Rida. A further division was that between (the few) Shi‘i Muslim immigrants (like Fawwaz) and Sunni Muslims, both immigrant (like Rida) and native to Egypt. Egyptian nationalism was split along several axes, too. There was the question of priorities—to rid Egypt of the occupiers before all else or to privilege a gradual strengthening of social and political structures from within first, looking to “the West” for guidance. There was the question of moral authority, too. In a society where religious affiliation was a primary marker of identity officially and legally (and where church hierarchies and an official Islamic establishment held sway over social practice and legal standing), “secularism” meant thinking in nation-based terms that would override religious identity as the basis of community but could not propose eradicating religion entirely from the public arena. Rather, what role should religion(s) play?

Muslim nationalists in Egypt were grouped loosely into two camps,

4 For a wonderfully delineated history of the Egyptian Feminist Union and the women who founded and participated in it, see Badran 1995.

5 The space of one essay precludes thorough discussion of the processes and particularities of one society’s history of imperialist economic and then political subjugation; the formulations of nationalisms and ideologies of gender in Egypt and throughout the Ottoman Empire, which of course were not isolated one from the other; or the ways ethnicity and class formation interrelated as Egypt’s new elite grew apace. For a succinct treatment of these processes, see Hourani 1991 and the further references he offers. On feminism’s intersections with these processes, see Cole 1981; Badran 1988a, 1995; and Ahmed 1992.
“modernist” and “organicist.” The division corresponded to divergent perspectives on the position of religion—overwhelmingly, of Islam—in the formation of the state and the construction of a unifying national identity. Islamic modernists, emerging late in the nineteenth century, declared their intent to separate the Prophet Muhammad’s received message and exemplary practice in the earliest Muslim community from later layers of doctrine and practice accumulated as Islam spread geographically and ramified in its political structures and intellectual elaborations. For the second group, the organicists, Islam was “an inherited, balanced system of faith and action” that depended both on the Qur’an and on “the verifying authority of community consensus” through time (Stowasser 1994, 6). Organicists were uncomfortable with the modernists’ willingness to abandon practices on the basis that they were both inessential to Islamic practice and unsuitable to the demands of modern life.

If organicists tended to demand the expulsion of Britain before all else, the correlation between political demands and ideologies was not always perfect; nor was Islam—in its many definitions—the sole factor in determining Egyptian nationalist agendas. This echoes through the biographical sketches that form the heart of my project, for religion—Islam, various kinds of Christianity, Judaism—invariably appears as one of many formative factors in the life histories of individuals and nations. Predominantly, it is the modernist stance that appears in biographies of Muslim women written and published by Muslims and Christians, Egyptians and Syrians, Sunnis and Shi‘is: Islam is flexible on social practice and gender and held from its beginnings the possibility for women to make their own lives.

6 Hourani’s 1962 classic analysis of the modernist vs. traditionalist debate has been elaborated by many, and I am indebted to it; here I follow Stowasser’s distinction among three approaches in the century-long “inner-Islamic debate” (1994, 4). The literature on Egyptian nationalism is too vast to cite; however, in thinking about intersections between nationalism, patriarchy, and feminisms in the Middle East, I am particularly indebted to the work of Deniz Kandiyoti and Margot Badran and, with respect to this article, to Suad Joseph’s and Afsaneh Najmabadi’s suggestions.

7 A third group, scriptural literalists, emerged in the 1930s. By then, a vision dominant earlier—that selective borrowing from the West would allow Egypt to emerge victorious in the anti-imperialist struggle and thence to build an autonomous nation—had given way to disillusionment wrought by continued British control and internal political chaos, the increasingly evident chasm between Western discourses of liberal democracy and the needs of international capital, and the parallel disintegration of support structures and livelihoods. Afshar rightly warns against equating scriptural literalists with conservativizing movements, for insisting on “literalism” as a basis for gender policy can work in many ways, as Islamic feminists today are showing (see Afshar 1995, 198). Yet I think Stowasser’s 1994 division makes sense for the period I am investigating.
Gender practices sanctioned by tradition were not immutable for the devout Muslim or Christian woman, suggested these texts.\(^8\) (Indeed, many of the customs and rituals that local reformists and the representatives of imperialism railed against were practiced by both Muslim and Christian families in Egypt, especially in rural areas, suggesting that they were not based in religion.) Egyptian Muslim modernists and Coptic Christian nationalists, as well as Muslim and Christian reformists from Ottoman Syria, had common concerns, if not identical ones, that surfaced in women’s biographies. And for all, the question of how to situate “the West” within a practice both reformist and nationalist was a difficult one. As Pierre Cachia has noted, “It is worth recalling that ‘Westernization’ was a direction taken by local elites even before they had to bend to lasting foreign rule; that the driving force behind it was never submission but the desire for emulation as the surest means of self-assertion; that ‘the West’ adopted as an example, viewed as monolithic and often idealized, was an abstraction tinged by Arab perceptions of their needs and aspirations” (1990, 30). “West” and “East” (\(al\)-\(gharb\) and \(al\)-\(shar\)) were both abstractions, frequently invoked ones; after Japan’s 1905 victory over Russia, and as Egyptian nationalisms became more sharply defined, the layers of meaning these terms contained multiplied. In these biographies, the varying meanings of these politically loaded abstractions surface to create a point of ambivalence: \(al\)-\(gharb\) as both the focal point of admiration and emulation and the source of social disintegration and decay; \(al\)-\(gharb\) as threat and as promise.

Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias have emphasized the “central dimensions of the roles of women [as] constituted around the relationships of collectivities to the state” (1989a, 1; see also Moghadam 1994, 2). Debates in Egypt, as in so many other emerging postcolonial states, over the appropriate boundaries for a national/ist collectivity constructed iconographies of the ideal woman as crucial to nationalist groupings’ contesting visions of the emerging nation-state.\(^9\) The postclassical sedimentations that Islamic modernists saw as skewing Islamic practice were symbolized cen-

\(^8\)This is not to be confused with the very different uses of women’s biography in different Muslim-majority societies then and now; nor is it to be taken as a statement relevant to the use of biography in Egypt today, as I will show in my forthcoming book *May Her Likes Be Multiplied*.

\(^9\)On this topic, with reference to majority-Arab and majority-Muslim societies, I have benefited especially from Kandiyoti’s searching work in *Women, Islam and the State* (1991) and “Identity and Its Discontents” (1994) and also from Jayawardena 1986; Baron 1991; Ahmed 1992, pt. 3; Moghadam 1994; and Badran’s works. I have also found most useful the essays in Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989b; Chatterjee 1990; the introduction in Sangari and Vaid 1990; and Radhakrishnan 1992.
trally in the positioning of women, as were the debates over secularism as a basis for nationhood and social practice. Modernists argued that the seclusion and veiling of women, and their control through polygyny and other practices, were institutions that kept Muslim societies “backward” (as some modernists, using “the West” as a yardstick, claimed). Their discourse furnished an ideological basis for a modernist nationalism that looked to Europe even as it formulated an anti-imperialist agenda. Yet Muslim modernist nationalists, as well as Coptic Christian nationalists, had to act within a symbolic field of cultural and political assertion that constructed a range of “authentic” pasts—Muslim, Arab, Egyptian. In this they competed with organicists such as Mustafa Kamil, who, attacking modernity as Western and therefore suspect, saw the legal, social, and biological inequality of women as part of “the stable structures of past tradition” that must underwrite any political formation (Stowasser 1994, 6; more generally, Kandiyoti 1994, 378–79).

Thus, if Islamic modernists and traditionalists each sought to control the shape of a twentieth-century Islam, the nationalist inflection on Islamic modernism demanded a program that would subsume or at least incorporate religious boundaries into a secular nationalist identity, thereby making possible on the practical level an alliance with Egypt’s Copts. Religion could shape the national heritage without governing the state, they believed. Emphasizing Islam’s malleability allowed it to become a shared heritage that need not define the nation, as both Christian and Muslim writers proposed. Yet the implications of this convenient slippage were ambiguous, particularly for women. And neither the Patriarchate nor al-Azhar contemplated relinquishing the control they had over the organization of family life among their adherents.

In these struggles an indigenous definition of “modernity” was at stake. Its contours took shape around the woman question. Deniz Kandiyoti (1991a, 1991b, 1994) and Walby (1990) have linked modernity to disturbances within preexisting modes of male dominance. I concur with Kandiyoti and Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989b), in the Mediterranean context (and many other scholars working in other regional and national contexts), in emphasizing the fluidity of public/private boundaries and regarding “the private” as subject to organization by the state. These warnings against conceptualizing Mediterranean societies as moving cleanly from private to public patriarchies at a time of social transformation, of an erosion in the classic patriarchy that had tended to structure nonnomadic,

10 Of course, there is a larger body of academic literature debating this, but in the interests of brevity I cite those who have analyzed it in Middle Eastern or Mediterranean contexts.
Muslim Middle Eastern and North African societies (Kandiyoti 1991b, 31). Yet I do find the concept of “public patriarchy” useful in articulating the ways in which gender was pivotal to nationalist definitions of modernity that sought to yoke women’s “awakening” instrumentally to the nation’s progress from “backwardness.” I theorize the mixed messages of the “Famous Women” biographies as linked to an emerging public patriarchy, defined by Kandiyoti (citing Walby) as women’s instrumental subordination within, rather than exclusion from, a public arena (1994, 377). Equally, though, I argue that women could read off biography some kinds of resistance to this modern patriarchy, for these constructions of lived experience implied a difficult but not impossible reimagining of the self. Yet these texts also suggest that women could not finally escape the dominant nationalist program for social organization: the nuclear family as the primary unit of the nation (attenuating more extended kin-based identities) and as that which would “produce a healthier nation” (Kandiyoti 1991a, 9).

Biography articulated the contradictory faces of modernist (liberal) nationalist—and feminist—discourses. Redefining the “National[ist] Family”\(^{11}\) as the productive unit of the nation and reorienting the loyalties of subnational collectivities were moves sufficiently radical to necessitate the assertion that the modernist project (and, in its nationalist formulation, its “secularist” leanings) was culturally authentic (asli) in its foundations and outcomes. Moreover, to claim the territory of nationalist hegemony from the organicist nationalists required this move, as Kandiyoti and others have observed. This left women in a double bind. The dominant textual move in many biographies is one of attempted reconciliation, a message that the exhortation to a specifically female modernity is in line with “authenticity” as represented in the constructed lives of premodern Arab and/or Islamic women and pre-Islamic Egyptian women (it also echoes the autobiographical unease Miller [1988] finds, when lives against the grain are put into print). Yet this, too, suggested flexibility by providing precedents for redefining a female arena.

If feminism in Egypt as elsewhere has been “bound to the signifying network of the national context which produces it” (Kandiyoti 1994, 380), and if in early twentieth-century Egypt that meant articulating feminist goals within the shifting framework provided by modernist/secularist and organicist nationalisms and emphasizing its adherence to local precedent, this did not mean that women’s articulations of feminist positions

\(^{11}\) Kandiyoti’s observation that the reformist Committee for Union and Progress in Turkey defined the monogamous nuclear family as the “National Family” illustrates this convergence (1991a, 11).
were completely within the fold of even profeminist nationalist men (nor, of course, were women's feminisms homogeneous). While biography upheld the outlines of the modernist/secularist program for women, management of the nuclear family as the site of nationalist strength (and indoctrination), and clearly defined public work in the service of the nation, it also tentatively escaped those boundaries by articulating women's needs and strategies for self-realization. Kandiyoti's notion of "patriarchal bargains," women's strategies of maneuver and resistance within systems of male dominance, is useful here (1991b). The "Famous Women" biographies can be seen as an elite strategy for pushing the boundaries, but only so far. That men also published "Famous Women" texts suggests shared cross-gender interests within this socioeconomic stratum while warning against quick distinctions between women's and men's nationalisms. If these biographies were "reviolat[ions] of masculine turf," they were not unequivocally so.

Students of feminisms and nationalisms in Muslim and/or Arab societies now have a solid empirical and theoretical literature on which to draw. To sort out the contradictory implications of nationalism for women requires (among other approaches) following closely the rhetorical leads of discrete groups of texts while setting them firmly within the histories of which they are a part. This methodology, as limited as it is in providing a broad scope, complicates present understandings of how gender, nationalist politics, and the search for indigenous identities intersected under the weight of imperialisms — cultural, economic, directly political. Inscriptions of women's lives now in Muslim societies constitute one battlefield on which feminists seeking "to formulate an indigenous feminist project," radical Islamist gender activists, and traditionalists seek to control the "'true' message of Islam . . . [as] the only legitimate ideological terrain on which issues pertaining to women can be debated" (Kandiyoti 1991b, 23). Early Muslim women are the only possible role models in the political context of Egypt today, as in other (Shi'i or Sunni) Muslim majority societies, such as Iran (Booth 1989). This is in striking contrast to the period I discuss here, when legitimacy could be conferred by images of Eastern and Western lives (as biographies classify them) in conjunction rather than in isolation. That I find a synchronic and diachronic biographical continuum in the earlier period more dominant than a cultural discontinuity on

12 Hourani (1962) 1983; Cole 1981; Jayawardena 1986; Ahmed 1992; and Kandiyoti 1994 (briefly) have focused on men who voiced profeminist outlooks at the turn of the century. Badran 1988a and 1995 have drawn out the clashes between women's feminist goals and the male-run and, by the 1920s, dominant liberal nationalist project. Ahmed 1992 has analyzed divergent feminist positions as "Western" and "indigenous."
biographical terrain is not at all to privilege or assume a Westernizing feminism but to offer one small response, on the basis of a large body of texts, to Judith Tucker’s question: “How do we weigh the role of Europe against the indigenous features of Arab society [at discrete historical points]?” (1990, 202).

Tucker’s big question, and modest responses like mine, cannot escape a continuing issue in work on nationalisms and feminisms in the Arab world. To what extent were nationalist and feminist formulations indebted to the assumptions of European liberal political philosophy and liberal nationalist practice, and how did these overlie—and suppress—other possible directions for gender politics? Contemporary feminisms in Arab and/or majority Muslim societies pose critiques of assumptions historically grounded in the European liberal legacy. New approaches to studying the interrelations of state, civil society, and patriarchy in the Middle East, like Suad Joseph’s (1994) important concept of “relational rights” as an explanatory framework for social politics in Lebanon, do the same. At the turn of the century, if nationalists and feminists debated the material and psychic impact of taking on Western cultural and political traditions, and if this debate questioned the fit between political philosophies of al-sharq (the East) and al-gharb (the West) set up as a binary opposition, the very assumption that the populace must be defined above all by the borders of a nation-state tended over time to subsume arguments to the contrary that drew upon the concept of the umma, the community of Muslims, as primary community.¹³ In fact, the umma came to imply the national community (with specific resonances in women’s biography, as I show in Booth 1995c), and the relationships of individuals to the state tended to be formulated in the terms of classical liberalism, modified to incorporate collectivities both sub- and supranational.

This appropriation is played out in women’s biography. The sovereign individual subject appears as the ideal; women’s outward (yet qualified) movement as autonomous actors into a public domain is implied as positive although slightly dangerous—for the national community and the structure of the family more than in terms of women’s subjectivities, in line with the “fraternal social contract” (Pateman 1989) of the modern liberal state. “Famous Women” biographies upheld and questioned a cross-cultural generic expectation for biography that has proven hard to shake even now, despite a recent outpouring of scholarship that explodes con-

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¹³ Hourani’s *Arabic Thought* ([1962] 1983) remains the core study on this, while more recent scholarship has focused usefully on individual thinkers and specific groups within Egyptian nationalism.
vventional expectations of auto/biographical writing. Telling a life as an individualized, linear narrative singled out from the lives of others, they also constructed shifting and seemingly contradictory senses of community. They invoked a supraethnic, suprageographical, supraclass community of women based on shared experience, which (uncomfortably for a late twentieth-century scholar) could echo the self-serving naïveté of imperial feminisms. Moreover, this was not a sense of community in which most women in Egypt could participate. “Women” as a collectivity, as a group across which exemplarity based on comparison is possible, tended to be invoked within an unspoken construct of bourgeois class identity. Yet, appearing in an era when liberal nationalist consciousness was becoming militant activism, biographies also implied the nation as primary community.

Prescriptive biography summons a second sense of individualness as well, for it presupposes the individual who must be disciplined into her or his place in the community. In Egypt, biography writing as disciplinary practice was one of many discursive practices that worked to shape the model gendered citizen of a nation-state envisioned by a growing number of nationalist reformers. Biographies of female subjects were overtly didactic in a way that biographies of male subjects published in the same period were not.14 Biography as a disciplinary practice targeted a certain kind of female subject, daughters of a new elite envisioned by and embodied in the liberal nationalist leadership. Including (if sometimes distancing) members of the Turkish-Egyptian aristocracy, large landowners, leading merchants, and the highest religious authorities, this elite drew in provincial notables, a few settled Beduin leaders, and the upper echelons of urban entrepreneurs. The newly minted professional, often but not exclusively the offspring of traditional elites, was part of this very loose grouping. Increasingly, the new elite could be characterized as “middle class,” speaking Arabic rather than French or Turkish. Here the ideal female citizen was supposed to emerge, in carefully controlled circumstances.

By accustoming the female reader to thinking about the lives of women as individual trajectories, as contests between autonomy and social constraint, a theme explicit in many of these texts, biography helped to construct the ideal (bourgeois) woman as the individualized subject of a national, putatively postimperialist state that was undergoing a difficult and prolonged birth as these biographies were appearing in print. At the same time, by constructing a community of women that suppressed national

14 This is an entirely different question from that of female vs. male authorship of biographies of female subjects, an issue upon which I touch here and discuss at greater length in “Jeanne d’Arc” (1995c) and May Her Likes Be Multiplied (in press).
boundaries and international power relationships, exemplary biography offered the encouragement of a collective history of heroines, that first-step feminist move.

Posing her big questions, Tucker calls for more work on the specificities of cultural production (1990, 209–11). My argument rests on specificities and depends on an analysis of rhetorical strategies. I begin by identifying the rhetorical patterns of “Famous Women” biography in this period and by situating it intertextually. Writers integrated patterns and niceties familiar from premodern biographical writing into a new language of hortatory journalism directly addressing the reader in a style more readable than the belles-lettres style that was gradually waning. The result was that these texts simultaneously fulfilled and subverted the generic expectations of biography readers. Exploiting the premodern biographical dictionary’s exemplary potential and deploying its terms, they shifted focus not only by selecting new biographical subjects along with the old but also by commending narratives of outward movement in women’s lives. They gave women writers and readers new although narrow models of selfhood to consider, while the very temper of the text warned against the outright rejection of more familiar paths.

In the second half of this article I take up the political work these texts could accomplish. I see these biographies as part of a growing industry of prescriptive text production. At the end of the nineteenth century, book circulation in Egypt expanded greatly. The spread of education, the marketing of ever cheaper books, pamphlets, and magazines, and the honing of more accessible Arabic prose styles both reflected and produced a wider reading and book-buying public. From the 1890s on, as the “Famous Women” biographies appeared, so did a flood of prescriptive and didactic literature aimed at women and at the family as a unit. At its center was a concern with gender relations and sexuality. Domestic manuals and conduct books, treatises on “women and Islam” and “women in society,” and new school texts all contributed to marking the boundaries of gendered social roles, delineating the sphere of the domestic, and instructing people in their duties as parents, children, spouses, homemakers, and breadwinners. They defined relations between religious faith, civic responsibility, and gendered divisions of labor (Booth 1989). The “Famous Women” biographies, concerned above all with women’s relationships to home and society, were part of this technology of prescription. Perhaps biography was peculiarly powerful, for it acted as conduct literature that worked “by appropriating positive prescriptions rather than immobilizing prohibitions” (Jones 1987, 68). This is clear in the biographies’ rhetoric on domesticity.

I organize the second half of the article around the construction of do-
mesticity because it is around the issue of women’s relations to the home that the texts are organized. Striking for the ways they push out the acceptable boundaries of selfhood for a female audience, the biographies also hedge this expansion, marking domestic duty as central to women’s lives. Like many other texts in the women’s magazines, they construct a domestic economy emphasizing efficient management, hygiene, and thrift. This appears to accord with nationalist thought that constructed women’s activities as expansions of and accompaniments to their domestic work, in the service of the national “family.” As Partha Chatterjee (1990) has suggested for nineteenth-century Indian nationalist thought on women’s place, the domestic sphere itself could expand out of the home, as long as this expansion was regulated and defined as part of that which remained “private.”

Yet I want to interrogate this tidy ideological move, for could it not escape its envisioned containment? Did it result in real tensions in the material lives of some girls and women? Could it have had the unforeseen consequence of encouraging women to transgress the neat boundaries nationalist thinkers were assiduously setting for them? Was it an innocent way of posing a challenge to emerging outlines of a public patriarchy? Scholarship on gender politics in Egypt has tended to deemphasize the multiple and possibly expansive inscriptions the domestic could generate (the possibility that articulating women’s work in domestic space might serve to push as much as to constrict women’s movement into other spaces) and, indeed, to blur boundaries between those spaces.

In this context it is useful to recall the concept of maternalism as developed by scholars of women’s activisms on state maternal and child health

15 Kandiyoiti 1994, in discussing traditional and public patriarchy, cautions against seeing state regulation of women’s public movement as an expansion of the private sphere (see also Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989a). Yet it seems to me that a notion of public patriarchy can coexist with a notion of an expanded private sphere if it is borne in mind that public patriarchy as it involves state regulation has a part in defining the “private.”

16 Baron 1994 and Badran 1995 view the textual construction of the domestic as a cult of domesticity that hampered women’s wider movements, although their analyses differ. Baron sees this literature as empowering for women within the home, and as not totally antithetical to feminism, but she does not see it as feminist in the sense of working to redefine and/or erase gender boundaries. She also says that the “adoption of a domestic ideology by female intellectuals in Egypt was in part a strategic decision” (1994, 167), with which my findings are in accord. Badran separates feminism from discourses of domesticity, although she agrees, citing my earlier work, that biography might have worked differently (1995, 64–65). While I concur that much of the literature on domestic roles in this period could have circumscribed women’s self-images and visions, I think it likely that they were capable of using domestic manuals without letting these wholly define their futures. Without evidence on reader response we cannot know.
policy. "Maternalism" designates the multiple meanings and effects that could accrue when women advanced a notion of the maternal as directly pertinent to work in the sphere of state policy. As Seth Koven and Sonya Michel have noted, under this banner women could work deliberately toward autonomy in their own lives (1993, 24). Yet the banner could be appropriated by paternalist forces working "on behalf of infants, the race, and the nation." The domestic could, and did, inscribe many things to many people.

The "Famous Women" biographies were available as the grounds for a Foucauldian reverse discourse, or a Bhabhian counternarrative, within the dominant, nationalist-inflected debate on gender in Egypt. That is, they could serve as an oppositional discourse from within a discursive formation already (if newly) in place. They could draw upon a dominant discourse on gender but use its features to work a subtle shift in emphasis that would pose a political if not a philosophical critique of the dominant discourse (Foucault 1990, 101; Soper 1993, 33–34; Bhabha 1994). For example, all sectors of the press addressed girls' formal education: Should it exist? and for whom? and of what should it consist? Even among those who supported girls' education, the prevailing (although contested) view was that a girl's schooling should prepare her for home management and child rearing. Yet, as evident as an ideal of the trained homemaker is among the biographies of "Famous Women," education opens other avenues in a life story, paths that lead away from home, paths whose implications for identity, community, and relationality go largely unexplored.

Emergence of a genre
By assigning biography its own column heading, The Young Woman's ninth issue (August 1893) recognized that biographical profiles had become integral to the journal. The "Biographies of Famous Women Section" ("Bab Tarajim mashahir al-nisa") announced a feature that was to become institutionalized in the many periodicals directed at women that appeared in Cairo and Alexandria (and Beirut and Damascus) from the turn of the century on. Half a page to eight pages in length, these sketches traced life histories from birth to death or to a living subject's most recent triumph.

17 Koven and Michel 1993, 18–19, also 4–6. Embracing activisms that might or might not be "feminist," as Koven and Michel note, "maternalism" defines a concept of active public service as opposed to motherhood as a private act grounding the nation from a "protected" (isolated) site. Thus, it is distinct from domestic ideals constructed in early and mid-Victorian England, which themselves shifted over time (among a vast literature, I have relied on Ryan 1985; Davidoff and Hall 1987; Poovey 1988).
Often, biographies of pre-nineteenth-century Arab women were telegraphic, chains of anecdotes and poems reproduced from medieval sources (but often selected and rearranged). Like entries in medieval Arabic biographical dictionaries, these texts often started with a genealogy and attributes that simultaneously characterized, situated, and praised the subject. European subjects were inserted into this mold (which was on the surface not so distant from premodern European hagiographic rhetoric). Thus, Christiana, Queen of Spain, was “beautiful of aspect, astute in her charms, noble in attributes, lofty in her manners” (“Karistiyana,” 57).

But unlike those medieval counterparts, these biographies of Arab, Turkish, European, American, and Indian women were punctuated by statements that generalized from a life story to the gendered structure of social life. Zaynab Fawwaz, whose *Scattered Pearls* (1894) was a major (often unacknowledged) source for “Shaharat al-nisa” (“Famous Women”) columns, had hinted at this, but she was more cautious than were some journal editors. The magazines situated women in the nation and/or state, hierarchizing their roles: Christiana was “exemplar of the true mother,” and when her son was young she ran the state (“Karistiyana,” 59).

This article emphasizes the collective focus and rhetoric of 450 biographies published in Egypt, 1892–1935. One overview cannot address all of the issues this mass of texts raises or adequately convey their complex articulation with other texts published in the same venues. I refer only in passing to issues of class identity—for example, the occlusion but also the idealization of the Egyptian peasantry in the formation of a “normative” nationalist female citizen, which I address elsewhere (1995c). I analyze synchronic and diachronic differences among and within magazines in my longer project; here I highlight similarity because my objective is to set out the terms of a biographical discourse and to emphasize its presence across a range of journals and over a period of time. Perhaps, at a time when feminist scholars are focused on markers of difference, this emphasis on similarity requires justification. I think it important to recognize that in a period of frank debate that might seem startling from the vantage point of

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18 These appear in sixteen journals for women or focused on the woman question published in Egypt. My analysis also takes into account thirty biographies in *al-Mughataf* and *al-Hilal* before 1930, as well as being informed by post-1935 biographical dictionaries and magazines. My conclusions are also borne out in the forty-three biographies appearing in the Beirut women’s magazine *al-Hanna* (1909–12) and the Damascus journal *al-Mar’a al-jadida* (1920–27). The women’s journals in which my sources appeared, and abbreviations used in citation, are listed at the start of the appendix. No biographies appeared in *al-‘A’ila*, *al-Sa‘ada*, *Tarqiyyat al-mar’a*, *al-Sufur*, and the second *Shajarat al-Durr*. Other women’s journals were unavailable.
Egypt today (where ethnicities, religious identities, and the terms of public, published debate on gender and most else have rigidified in a climate of political crisis), material differences along the lines of ethnic and geographic provenance, religious identity (as a matter of social belonging), and economic power engendered among a few a search for points of commonality that would forge a nation. Repeatability among these biographies also created a history that could sanction the demands of early feminists. At the same time, the theorization of commonality by nationalists and feminists performed the familiar ideological operation of masking their own class identity by making it into a norm for proper citizenship. The commonalities among these texts suggest a class-based agenda that could subsume other differences. To point out only the differences among these texts, as to point out only the moments where these texts distance the West rather than construct identifications with it, would be to tell only part of the story.  

Yet I do provide reminders of difference by citing instances of how a magazine’s orientation inflected its life stories. In fact, the consistency of emphasis across this genre highlights by contrast the differences that Arabic women’s magazines encompass. In Egypt alone, the more than twenty self-styled women’s magazines that appeared from 1892 to 1914 diverged in outlook even as they offered common features, addressed themselves primarily if not exclusively to girls and women, and focused on issues of women’s status and place. More diverse were the fourteen women’s journals founded between 1915 and 1935 in Cairo and Alexandria and often linked to organizations or societies and their agendas. For example, *Magazine of the Women’s Awakening* (1921–39), founded and edited by Labiba Ahmad, has been identified as linked with traditionalist positions, probably because Ahmad became centrally involved in the women’s wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in the early to mid-thirties. Yet until this time, its actual content shows a movement back and forth between traditionalist and modernist positions within an outlook shaped first and foremost by the majority faith. *The Egyptian Woman’s Magazine* (1920–39), founded and edited by Balsam ‘Abd al-Malik, a Copt, took a resolutely secularist stance and showed more interest in the doings of the Egyptian Feminist

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19 I want to emphasize that in this essay the thematics of East/West are implicit rather than directly analyzed; the careful reader will note the ambivalence that characterizes this relationship in the texts, a subject I do analyze in “Jeanne d’Arc” (1995c) and more broadly in *May Her Likes Be Multiplied* (in press).

20 On individual journals, see Khalifa 1966, 1970; Fenoglio-Abd el-Aal 1988; and Baron 1994. Baron’s work on the pre-1919 press highlights similarity, while Fenoglio-Abd el-Aal’s on three 1920s magazines stresses difference.
Union and its leaders’ contacts with international feminism. But these two editors’ choices of specific women to feature and their presentation of biography as a didactic form in the service of a “modern” womanhood often converged. Many subjects appeared in both journals: Zenobia of Palmyra, Malak Hifni Nasif, Sahiya Zaghlul, ‘A’isha bint Abi Bakr, Jeanne d’Arc, Khawla bint al-Azwar, and Catherine II of Russia. At the same time, the statistics on the two journals’ choice of biographical subjects implied different emphases and perhaps different audiences. Fifty-eight percent (nineteen out of thirty-three) of biographical subjects in Magazine of the Women’s Awakening through 1935 were Arab Muslims, and Ahmad included no Arab Christians. Twenty-seven percent were European or Euro-American Christians. Of The Egyptian Woman’s Magazine’s sixty-six individual biographies, 21 percent (fourteen) were of Muslims (Turkish and Arab), 3 percent (two) of Syrian Christians, 4.5 percent (three) of Copts, and 53 percent (thirty-five) of Europeans or Euro-Americans. Thus we find a fairly neat reversal in the numbers of Muslim and European or American Christian subjects. Moreover, the complete lack of Arab Christian models in Magazine of the Women’s Awakening contrasts with their presence in The Egyptian Woman’s Magazine.  

To complicate matters further, many of the early (pre-1920s) journals were founded by immigrants from Ottoman Syria, who had been leaving their homeland since the mid-nineteenth century because of economic circumstances and censorship. Fawwaz, Nawfal, and the editors of Choice Pieces and The Crescent were Syrian immigrants, as were the founder-editors of The Intimate Companion, Young Woman of the East, and Ladies’ and Girls’ Magazine. Relationships were complicated between Egyptians and immigrant Syrians (who were mostly Orthodox Christians or Protestant converts) in the context of nationalist politics. Many Egyptians saw Syrians as benefiting from, and often complicit in, British rule; through the legal system of the Capitulations, minorities had channels for preferential treatment. The Syrian-run press tended toward a pro-British (or, just as bad, “neutral”) stance, although this was not always the case; the closer
relationships of the Syrian middle class to Europe were evident in print. Yet some prominent Syrian intellectuals sympathized with the Egyptian nationalists, and among writers, ethnic and religious differences did not preclude social and intellectual exchange. To label the “Famous Women” genre as Syrian on the basis that almost all of the earliest women’s magazines, and the early general-interest magazines that included women’s biographies, were run by Syrians and then to consider this genre as therefore Western-oriented would be to oversimplify its genealogy and circulation and the nature of its didactic presence. For one thing, Zaynab Fawwaz, whose example in writing biography was manifest in the many borrowings from her volume that editors (Christian and Muslim, Syrian and Egyptian) allowed themselves, was from Jabal ‘Amil in Lebanon, a strong and culturally active Shi‘i Muslim region. Her subjectivity was not caught up in identifying with European (Christian) states, and she looked to an indigenous heritage of biography writing. In this she influenced Syrian Christian as well as Egyptian Sunni Muslim and Coptic Christian biographers. The premodern presence in Arabic letters of biographical sketches of women, and the featuring of early Muslim heroines, gave Syrians and Egyptians an indigenous authority and source of respectability for new writings of women’s lives. At the same time, Fawwaz inserted histories of women of the West among those of Muslims. If Syrian Christians’ closer ties to Europe motivated them to present European and American lives in generally (but not unequivocally) positive terms, they had been preceded by a Muslim writer in doing so.

If ethnic and religious differences did orient women’s magazines, then, and affected (but did not govern) the choice of subjects to profile, within this variety the biographies are striking for the more or less unified didactic mission they cumulatively construct and for the repeatability of the images they engender. And this repeatability also highlights by contrast what I think is the most significant kind of difference these texts offer: the simulta-

24 For instance, in the many salons of the time, which combined literary and political exchange, and which also, from the early 1920s, brought together women and men.
25 Although Zaynab Fawwaz’s biographical dictionary was published in 1894, she had completed it by November 1892, when al-Fatat’s first issue came out. In a letter (reprinted as “al-Risala al-thamina,” Fawwaz [1910]) published in the newspaper al-Nil in August 1892 (9 Muharram 1310 A.H.), Fawwaz tells Berthe Honore Palmer, president of the Women’s Section of the Chicago Exhibition, that she had composed this dictionary and wanted to send it as an exhibit from the women of Egypt.
26 On Syrian input in the women’s press, see Philipp 1978; Booth 1991; Baron 1994. On the background to Syrian immigration to Egypt, see Hourani 1969.
neous existence of potentially contradictory messages within a single biography.

My interest in the production of meaning—in how these texts were to be read by a defined audience of women—emphasizes texts’ insertion within publication venues over authorship, for “if texts are parts of complex cultural economies . . . then no individual can originate meaning nor can he or she contain or foresee the effects the text will produce. If even the unconscious and language . . . are cultural constructs . . . [then] it is more important to look at the structure and deployment of signifying practices than their ‘originality’” (Poovey 1988, 19–20). Moreover, these biographies defy questions of individual authorship. Even if editors held responsibility, according to convention, for unsigned writings in their magazines, the circulation of texts created a complicated genealogy. This could not even be defined as wholly matrilineal or patrilineal. When Choice Pieces welcomed The Young Woman as a forum solely for women’s pens, where did this place Mary Morgan’s life history, imported word for word from male-scripted Choice Pieces?27 The issue of male authorship is important in the women’s press overall and in biography, yet difficult to address in biography due to the sparse use of bylines. Men contributed biographical sketches regularly to some journals; two, Jurji Niqula Baz and Iskandar Ma’luf, had authored biographical dictionaries of women from which they excerpted magazine sketches.28 Identifiably “male” writing tended to uphold modernist nationalists’ conceptions of women’s duty to the nation as underlying their support for women’s “rights.” But so did many texts by women, and it is not clear whether women editors intervened in signed articles. I have found categorization of these biographies

27 In December 1892, al-Muqtataf noted al-Fatat’s appearance: while writers were founding periodic numbers in unprecedented numbers, this one was “an orphan . . . exclusively dedicated to subjects of interest to women and opening its pages to women writers only” (“al-Fatat,” 209). In al-Fatat and al-Hilal, the biography of Morgan was attributed to “al-Muqtataf.”

28 I have not located the books or ascertained whether they were published. Ma’luf’s Na’wabigh al-nisa’ was the source of several sketches in Fatat al-shargy, 1910–11, and of a biography of Warda al-Turk in Ma’luf’s own magazine, al-Atbar (1 [June 1912]: 362–64), where it is described as “a manuscript compiling most of the life histories of the Eastern and Western women in their various eras and divergent concerns.” Baz published biographical sketches in his Beirut journal, al-Hasna. Sketches were also taken from Ya’qub Sarruf’s A’tam al-Muqtataf. In Majallat al-sayyidat wa’l-banat, starred articles, which included the “Famous Women” profiles, were authored by Farah Antun, brother of the magazine’s founder, Ruza Antun. With respect to biographical and other texts in women’s magazines, Baron’s statement that “most of the material in the women’s press came from women” needs to be explored further (1994, 65). For my perspective on this important book, see my review in Booth 1995d.
by the writer’s or editor’s gender always open to question, more so than I expected initially. Can we speculate that in some cases the emphasis on duty was instrumental, and in others ideologically motivated? I suspect that for women and men both, it was a mixture of motivation and was not necessarily conscious: and the mixture differed from writer to writer more than from sex to sex. When men produced “Famous Women” biographies, the content and terms of prescription did not necessarily differ, but a male authorial/editorial presence perhaps created a differently didactic context, tending to emphasize national(ist) goals more directly and to address men as much as or more than women. If men and women had different starting points for their gender politics (Badran 1995, 16–20), the exemplary function seemed to submerge these distinctions in their constructions of “Famous Women.”

A rhetoric of exemplarity

_The Young Woman_ published life narratives (some as short as a paragraph) of seventeen women in its first, and only, twelve issues (1892–94). _Woman in Islam_, founded by Ibrahim Ramzi in 1901 as a forum for debate among a group of men on the woman question, featured nine biographies in fourteen issues.²⁰ _Ladies’ and Girls’ Magazine_, founded in April 1903, featured “The Most Famous Women” in its first four issues, after which the feature disappeared, to reappear in the early 1920s in the magazine’s sequel. With the 1906 appearance of Labiba Hashim’s long-running _Young Woman of the East_, the “Famous Women” were here to stay: almost every monthly issue until the last (1939) featured one, on page one (Booth 1995b, n. 86).

Was the apparent popularity of biography due to its entertainment value? If authors noted the enjoyment biography could generate (e.g., “Malikat Isbaniya,” 137), these texts’ rhetorical strategies suggest considerably more. A rhetoric of exemplarity pervades them, and indeed frames them, for often the exemplary note sounds at the beginning and the end of the biography. This rhetoric drew on familiar coinages: biographies in the earliest women’s periodicals frequently opened with statements of pur-

²⁰ The magazine took a middle-of-the-road position, cautiously praising some of Qasim Amin’s writings and defending him against detractors, while criticizing his second book. Yet it disagreed with the conservative stance of Tal‘at Harb. (For differing perspectives on the writings of these two men, see Cole 1981; on Amin, see Hourani (1962) 1983; ‘Imara 1989; Ahmed 1992, chap. 6). It featured detailed articles on the duties of family members and on bringing up children, putting in question Baron’s statement that its contents showed that male-edited magazines were more geared to the abstract than were those edited by women (1994, 76).
pose that yoked conventional vocabulary to the thematic hint of new agendas. Introducing a biography of nineteenth-century American feminist Lucy Stone, the inaugural issue (April 1903) of *Ladies' and Girls' Magazine* explained that “in this column are published the biographies of famous women of East and West; may they be appropriate models of virtue and goodness, refinement, highminded endeavor, and the performance of duties.”

If this diction was conventional, it framed a life history that was not. The conclusion explicitly invoked readers’ lives: the editor asked readers to write in their reactions to Stone’s activism. If biography could prescribe, it could also initiate dialogue on “appropriate models of virtue and goodness” ("Lusi Stun Balakwal,“ 4).

A declaration of intent also prefaced *Woman in Islam*’s second biography (1901), gesturing toward an intended didactic effect upon both sexes—females subsumed grammatically by the male. If using the “male universal” was conventional, magazines run by women often broke convention and constructed their audience grammatically as female. *Woman in Islam* did not, a sign of its primary intended audience of women’s guardians: “Our concern in the famous women’s biographies we choose to feature is to set out their life courses, examine [or put right] the truth, and point out whatever observations emerge to draw the [male] reader’s attention to the life of the Muslim woman in various phases of history—that this may yield a lesson and a sermon” ("‘A’isha umm al-mu’minin,” 26).

Most of *Woman in Islam*’s “Lives of Famous Women” ended with “The Lessons To Be Learned from This Life.” Could there be a more explicit signal of biography’s didactic power? The pointed reminder that this was not merely entertainment gave the feature (and the periodical) respectability, too, one which early fiction writers, even those writing historical novels with heroines at the center, could not yet achieve.

30 “Lusi Stun Balakwal,” 4. Although Stone kept her maiden name, this text adopts her husband’s name (while noting that she had not taken it!). Perhaps this had to do with Syrian (unlike Egyptian) women’s adopting the European practice of taking their spouse’s surname, as did *Ladies’ and Girls’ Magazine* editor, Ruza Antun Haddad.

31 A biography of traveler Isabella Bird published in the Beirut women’s journal al-Hasna‘ in 1911 also indicates that “Famous Women” biographies were constructed with gender-specific prescription and encouragement in mind. “Nothing propels woman onto the path of upward development and induces her to a life of erudition and greatness like reading biographies of outstanding women,” Tawfiq Zaybaq, author of this biography, began. “For through those lines she hears a voice calling to her: By the likes of these, countries derive pride and nations advance. And how can what is feasible for this woman not be feasible for you, when you are her partner in flesh and blood, equal to her in the powers of the mind and the female sentiments? Indeed, you have better circumstances and a more conducive spirit of
Declarations of exemplarity articulated “the shifts and reutilizations of identical formulas for contrary objectives” that mark discourse as discontinuous (Foucault 1990, 100). The role models they introduced were something new, if often clothed in familiar garb. Such generalized advertisements of exemplarity prepared the ground for the deployment of more specific formulae. From writer Madame de Sévigné to journalist ‘Afifa Karam and charity worker Rujina Khayyat, from Zenobia of Palmyra to Christiana of Spain to Elizabeth of Rumania, biographical subjects were said to be fitting examples for today’s women. Sometimes this mark of approbation stood on its own, leaving the reader to draw conclusions from the unfolding life narrative. Sometimes the compliment was spun out in a particular hue. “Elizabeth of Rumania” (Young Woman of the East) expanded this formula pointedly with a figure of speech that displaced female aspiration from appearance to intellect, a metaphor so common that it became a cliche: “How beautiful is woman when her ornament is literature, and how beautiful are queens when they are the likes of Carmen Silva, a fine model for the rest of womankind” (“Ilisibat,” 43).

Thus the biographical subject as role model was anything but implicit, and contemporary women fit the part, too. In 1908 Young Woman of the East profiled writer ‘Afifa Karam, a twenty-five-year-old immigrant to North America from Greater Syria. Her life story (thus far) concluded in a tone at once fulsomely complimentary and fiercely prescriptive: “We are hopeful that in future she will attain a high level [of achievement] and will be the best possible example for daughters of the East to follow: the most brilliantly shining lamp whose light will guide [them] to the paths of knowledge, so the daughters of the East will be freed from the shackles of empty fantasy and the abyss of decadence. Thus will they come to know that they were created for something better than serving the beauty of the face, and that their time is too precious to spend in front of the mirror” (“al-Sayyida ‘Afifa Karam,” 122).

Conventional diction also took on new semantic force when biographies closed with the hope that “the likes” of the subject “would be multiplied.” This formula of politesse most often closed biographies of contemporary Arab and/or Muslim women. Yet it carried new resonance in a context where competing role models were at stake and when it was Arab women
newly employed in public whose “likes,” it was urged, must increase. Likewise, the obligatory tone of praise and the retrospective evaluation of a life work demanded by obituary writing suited well a practice of exemplary biography dedicated to encouraging the living along certain paths. Recall the conventional opening of Morgan’s obituary: “Mistresses of the pen have lost one of their own.” As this declaration celebrated individual achievement, it suggested an ongoing community of women.

**Constructing community**

These biographies insist on notions of community, but the terms of inclusion shift by gender, geography and citizenship, religion, and (only implicitly) class. It is not quite the case that “biographical sketches . . . shifted from a focus on Western women to Arab, Muslim, and Egyptian women” (Baron 1994, 66), for all were present from the start and continued to be featured into the 1950s. The biographical sketches also temper Baron’s finding that journals edited by immigrant Syrian women in Egypt “tended to depict Western women in monolithic terms and dissociated themselves from Western women’s political demands” (105). Elsewhere I discuss at length the blend of approbation, sought solidarity, defensiveness, and criticism that these biographies exhibit toward European women (1995c). Here it is important to note that the balance between approval and criticism directed at a Western subject depended far less on her ethnic, national, or religious identity—or on her position within the matrix of imperialist power relations—than on how well she conformed to whatever model of woman as ideal citizen that a given periodical’s editorials and articles advanced. Not only might the portrait subvert an agenda; even when a journal did take a stance on which lives to feature, the parade of famous women in its pages did not always conform. *Woman in Islam* was not particularly interested in the West, and its biographical column’s purview was defined as “the lives of Muslim women.” What was Maria Agnesi doing there, in the September 1901 issue, following the greats of Islam’s founding years—“Khadija bint Khuwaylid wife of the Prophet,” “‘A’isha Mother of the Believers,” “the brilliant poet al-Khansa’”? Agnesi’s ethnicity and religion could be overlooked even in this periodical: she represented the dedication to scientific knowledge that *Woman in Islam* proposed as appropriate for women.

Perhaps this indicated the journals’ insatiable, sometimes indiscriminate, need for material month after month. Yet it seems just as attributable

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to unresolved questions that marked competing nationalist, and femi-
nist, landscapes of the future. How much of the West to admit? In general,
inscriptions of Western women's lives suppressed this question (raised in
other texts in these magazines) in favor of an instrumental emphasis on
what was perceived as a crucial linkage between national prosperity and
women's work. Badran suggests that this approach to the woman question
was favored by male modernists (1995, 16–17). Women certainly appro-
priated it, perhaps strategically as I have speculated. The Egyptian Woman's
Magazine's biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning insisted on the utility
of poetry-as-women's-work in constructing a communal (national and, im-
plied, imperial) identity: "Many of England's choice women have emerged
as outstanding; some of the finest have become famous. Their renown has
reached the entire civilized world. They are always mentioned with great
respect, for they have been a great benefit to their country and generally
for humanity. . . . No wonder the magazine takes interest in a famous poet
involved in promoting and elevating English arts and letters and propagat-
ing the spirit of progress and nationhood" ("Misiz Barawnin," 260).

Discussing Egyptian, Levantine-Egyptian, and European women's writ-
ten images of each other in the years 1862–1920, Mervat Hatem states
that "because they viewed each other as alien, they were not able to relate
to each other's experiences, learn from them, or to integrate them into an
understanding of the dilemmas that were also their own" (1992, 35).
These biographies suggest otherwise because they use a complex rhetoric
of community and othering in the service of exemplarity. That they mostly
repress issues of class difference, social fragmentation, and the power rela-
tions wrought by imperialism suggests that the priority here was the mold-
ing of the emerging middle-class Egyptian woman into an identity that
lauded more than it rejected the paths that privileged women of the West
were said to be tracing. Discussing material culture, Judith Tucker asks:
"Did the enthusiasm for Western culture among the rising European-
oriented middle classes [of the Arab world] disrupt their communication
with other classes to the point where old social alliances came to be threat-
ened?" (1990, 211). How did discursively instituted cultural practices like
biographical writing define the ideal female citizen as a member of a certain
class and as a nonmember of certain population groups? If the prepon-
derant class identification implicit in these texts was in tension with the
nationalist need to define an inclusive national community, only in a tiny
minority of texts was "the peasant" the icon of nationalist womanhood.
(Hence the popularity of Jeanne d'Arc as biographical subject: What more
respectable peasant could one find? [Booth 1995c].)

Life narratives employed this cautiously favorable position on European
and Euro-American practices to make points about their own audience's environment. Prevailing attitudes in Egypt (or "among the Arabs" or "in the East" or "among our men") to women's nondomestic work were juxtaposed critically with an approving description of "Western" outlooks. American astronomer Maria Mitchell took her Vassar students on field trips; "and this, girl students going hundreds of miles to observe a solar eclipse, is something men in the east do not conceive of even in their dreams." Or the comparison was implicit, presenting an Arab subject's atypical circumstances as that which should become the norm. A biography of the Egyptian feminist writer Bahithat al-Badiya (pen name of Malak Hifni Nasif, 1886–1918) noted approvingly her husband's supportive attitude, for this "freedom of opinion allowing her to publish" was "infrequent among Egyptian men." Comparisons across continents that largely ignored contemporary politics worked with other strategies of comparison (women to men, present to past) to emphasize what was shared and positive. These had the effect of setting up a critical mass of women exemplars across time and space, presented within complex social environments of constraint and possibility, for readers to contemplate and emulate.

**Reading one's own life**

The rhetorical construction of exemplarity and community suggests to me that the "Famous Women" biographies were a kind of collective autobiog-

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34 "Mariya Mitshil al-falakiyya" (MM), 9. That this biography had appeared in *al-Muqata‘* in 1898 is one indication of the complexity of the issue of circulation and "origins." It does suggest that women's magazines that insisted on their indigenous character, such as *Majallat al-mar‘a al-miriyiyat*, founded and edited by a Copt, Balsam 'Abd al-Malik, did not find it troublesome to borrow from periodicals identified closely with Western viewpoints, such as *al-Muqata‘*. Of course, there may have been an earlier, or an interim, publication of this biography in a different venue that was the "origin" of its publication in *Majallat al-mar‘a al-miriyiyat*.

35 "Bahithat al-Badiya," 466–67 (most likely by Balsam 'Abd al-Malik). Another biography of Nasif asks, "I wonder how much more she would have written if her husband [a prominent nationalist Beduin leader] had not cast her into the desert far from the sessions of the men of literature?" (Ibrahim, "‘Azimat al-nisa‘ 4," 136–37). This biography was authored by a man, and juxtaposing these two excerpts gestures toward a not infrequent phenomenon of discourse on gender at the time, women's more cautious, even conciliatory, rhetoric on the woman question vs. men's more direct attacks on practices they regarded as retrograde. Badran has explored this divergence in her work. But both passages make women's intellectual output, or at least its production in print, dependent on men's setting or relaxing of boundaries. The two excerpts, read together, also remind us not to make quick distinctions between "conservative Muslim" or "organicist nationalist" and "reformist/modernist" publications, for the more directly trenchant comment comes from what is usually taken as an example of the former, Labiba Ahmad's *Majallat al-nahda al-nisa‘iyyat*.
raphy, writings of both precedents and potential lives for editors and readers, echoes of their own mostly unwritten autobiographies. They exemplify the inherently autobiographical cast of biography that recent feminist theoretical work has taken up.\textsuperscript{36} It is not that Arabic-language autobiography was an unwritten genre. Pre-nineteenth-century men had tackled the writing of the self, and possibly at least one medieval woman had, too, for others reproduced fragments of an as yet unlocated autobiography by medieval scholar ‘A’isha al-Ba’uniyya, a biographical subject in \textit{Woman in Islam} (1901) and \textit{Young Woman of the East} (1908). Zaynab Fawwaz and poet ‘A’isha Taymur (1840–1902) had written autobiographically (if briefly) to explain their immersion in biographical and fictional writing. At the end of the period this essay covers, two feminist activists would write their autobiographies, as would entertainers. But writing the self openly for publication, like signing one’s name to a printed work, went against the training of most elite women in turn-of-the-century Egypt.\textsuperscript{37} “Famous Women” biographies provided an indirect and fluid narrative of self that was more respectable for women, more veiled (if often quite transparent). Those who published biography in the service of women’s futures could construct shared yesterdays, enact today’s constraints, and propose collective hopes for women’s tomorrows — boldly but under cover.\textsuperscript{38}

Situating these biographies in magazines addressed to women and ed-

\textsuperscript{36} Liz Stanley calls on feminist biographers to “recognize that biography as a genre is by no means separate from the autobiography of those who produce it” (1990, 59). See also Ascher, deSalvo, and Rudderich 1984; Farran, Scott, and Stanley 1986; Brodski and Schenck 1988; Bell and Yalom 1990; Epstein 1991; Stanley 1992; and the essays in \textit{a/b: Auto/Biography Studies} (1993).

\textsuperscript{37} See the essays on pre-nineteenth-century Arabic autobiography in \textit{Edebiyat} (Fall 1996), by members of the study group Radical Redefinitions of Arabic Literature and Language. For the information on al-Ba’uniyya, I thank Dwight Reynolds (personal communication, March 1996). On Fawwaz’s autobiographical allusions, see Booth 1995b, 127–29. On autobiographies of early feminist leaders, see Badran 1986, 1992. On early entertainers’ autobiographies, see Danielson 1991. On women writers signing their names, see Baron 1994, 43–50.

\textsuperscript{38} My theorizing of this particular auto/biographical crux parallels the work of social historians. Baron 1989 shows that in this period veiling itself was becoming lighter, more transparent. Badran emphasizes the gradualist approach to institutional change as a hallmark of early feminists in Egypt. The veil, retained, could allow women to lead public lives without radically challenging established practices of seclusion, and Egyptian feminists called for its abolition only when women and men might be “ready” (Badran 1995, 23–24). This appears to me not only as a conscious strategy but also as an element in Kandiyoti’s “patriarchal bargain.” Of course, “veiling” (like women’s modes of self-expression) was itself not a static practice either diachronically or across Egyptian society. On autobiography and Muslim women’s expectations and strategies, see also Milani’s 1990 and Najmabadi’s 1990a wonderful discussions of early women’s biographies in Iran.
ited by women, indeed invoking female interlocutors who might benefit from imagining these lives, created a sort of women's space and constructed an active and communicative female reader (paralleling the ideal of active womanhood that biographical subjects embodied). One audience that all the magazines targeted, especially in the 1920s, was the growing schoolgirl population. The daughters of families who profited from a socioeconomic transition into a class structure that gave an emerging bourgeoisie dominance, these girls were the beneficiaries of nationalist leaders' keen interest in expanding and subverting a school system that had been constricted by the British administration (Tucker 1985, 122–30; Baron 1994, chap. 6; Badran 1995, 143–48). Editors of women's magazines vied for their attention and for education ministry money. “One reason we are ushering in our new year so cheerfully and with redoubled endeavor,” explained the editor of The Egyptian Woman's Magazine in 1921 (the journal's second year), “is that our honorable Education Ministry and some of the provincial governments' administrative councils have decided to subscribe to our magazine for the girls' schools under their aegis.” Both The Egyptian Woman's Magazine and the Magazine of the Women's Awakening made formal agreements with the ministry to distribute their publications to government girls' schools. Two decades before, members of the Egyptian royal family had shown support for some new women's magazines by buying subscriptions for girls' schools.39 This kind of patronage, and the later government support, suggests the converging interests of magazine publishers and school funders in getting the magazines to schoolgirls and teachers. That articles directly address them on occasion suggests a specific consciousness of these audiences (and the financial support they could bring). In fact, there is textual evidence that women's magazines, girls' schools, and biography were directly linked: “The Sun of History”—a biography series featuring Jeanne d'Arc, Zenobia of Palmyra, and Khawla bint al-Azwar—was first written for a history course at one of Cairo's first government secondary girls' schools (“Shams al-tarikh”). And Zakiyya 'Abd

39 'Abd al-Malik, “Muqaddimat al-sana al-thaniyya,” 1–2. See also Labiba Ahmad in NN 3 (October 1923): 109. On earlier magazines, see Baron 1994, 68, 91, 92. On the agreement with the education ministry, see Fenoglio-Abd el-Aal 1988, 31. Similarly, in MM's first year, the editor noted that the recently published Dhikra Babithat al-Badiya, a commemorative volume for Malak Hifni Nasif, had been bought in bulk by wealthy individuals for distribution in girls' schools in Egypt and the Sudan (MM 1 [November 1920]: 320). The importance of these subscriptions and forms of patronage is suggested in an open letter from Balsam 'Abd al-Malik to the minister of education in 1933, complaining that subscriptions taken by the ministry and provincial councils had decreased by more than half (MM 14 [May–June 1933]: 156).
al-Hamid Sulayman exemplified girls’ nationalist consciousness when she reacted defiantly to the life of Jeanne d’Arc that her English teacher narrated in class (“al-Nabigha”; Booth 1995c).

Biography appeared in the same journal issues that exhorted parents to consider new channels for their unmarried daughters’ energies. Writers could urge readers to consider new narratives for their own lives in an unthreatening manner, for biography displaced personal destinations onto the maps of others’ lives. Speaking of Western women’s autobiographies, Carolyn Heilbrun has noted that “well into the twentieth century, it continued to be impossible for women to admit into their autobiographical narratives the claim of achievement, [or] the admission of ambition” (1988, 70). Writing and reading others’ lives were means to inscribe, to imagine, “unacceptable” futures.

With its pointed introductions, exploitation of familiar formulae, generally positive tenor, and truth claims, biography could do this remodeling work in the most concrete fashion possible, by constructing a linear narrative of individual “progress,” constructed both as movement out of the home and learned activity within. It might be argued that to focus on individual “notable” figures privileged exceptionality rather than exemplarity, even as it also tended to support the idea of a national community based on individualistic enterprise over relational outlooks. Many “Famous Women” do appear as exceptional, one of a kind, alone of their sex. Yet this rhetoric of exceptionality was put in the service of the rhetoric of exemplarity and repeatability. This advanced rather than impeded the normalization of the prescribed role models. It paralleled the construction over centuries of the unique position of the “Mothers of the Believers” — the Prophet Muhammad’s wives — as exemplary, repeatable paragons of the good Muslim woman, most recently in collections of women’s biography published by Islamist presses in the 1990s (Spellberg 1990; Stowasser 1994; Booth 1995a). “Presented as repeatable women,” in Afsaneh Najmabadi’s (1995) words, the subjects of biography were offered as reassuring precedents and guides for those Arab women whose lives were beginning to look markedly unlike their mothers.

If Arab and European women both were popular subjects from the start, and if ancient Egyptian pharoahs vied for space with modern European monarchs, contemporary Egyptian women as biographical subjects did become more numerous in the magazines of the 1920s and 1930s, especially and not surprisingly those edited by Egyptians, both Muslims and Coptic Christians, as opposed to immigrant Syrian women. The trajectories these life histories proposed spelled out the agendas that “Famous Women” biographies had been implying since the 1890s while giving their
audiences models closer to home and simultaneously celebrating shifts in middle-class Egyptians’ material lives. Perhaps Zakiyya ‘Abd-al-Hamid Sula-

layman, profiled in *Magazine of the Women’s Awakening* (1926), was the sort of reader editors envisioned. Daughter of a settled, landowning Bed-

uin, she blazed through the school system, for her father “even though he exemplified the age into which he was born, absorbed into his very self the

noblest inclinations of this age, for he saw girls’ education as a religious
duty exactly like boys’ education” (“al-Nabigha,” 412). Zakiyya was among

the first Egyptian women sent on scholarship to England. Specializing in

preschool education, she returned to a career in the ministry of education,

setting up nurseries, training teachers, and giving public lectures. “No mu-

sic brought the happy news of her birth, yet her birth itself was the glad
tidings of reform” (412).

The qualities and pursuits of a good woman

If biography was to encourage girls and women to look beyond the home,

and parents and husbands to look on approvingly, writers had to proceed
circumspectly. If it could echo not only the exemplarity of the Prophet’s

wives but also a venerable tradition in Arabic letters, so much the better.

When Zaynab Fawwaz compiled her *Scattered Pearls* in the early 1890s she

might have drawn on American and European compendia of women’s bi-

ography, but the Arabic tradition provided a more familiar, and unim-

peachable, discursive and social model.40

Medieval (male) compilers of biographical dictionaries had profiled

women. An exemplary potential marked the earliest ones, compiled in

part to evaluate the lives of those who had surrounded Muhammad

and reported on his doings and sayings. Who were the sound sources for

social behavior in the Muslim community? the medieval biographers

asked (Roded 1994; Booth 1995b). Praiseful attributes and telling anec-

dotes structured these premodern literary models. Fawwaz and magazine

writers followed precedent: they accented certain qualities, acts, and goals

40 In her preface, Fawwaz lists her many classical Arabic sources and alludes to but does

not name European-language sources. I have found no textual evidence yet that European-

language collections of women’s biography were available in Egypt in this period, but it is

not unlikely. (Magazines certainly were available.) The earliest translation of such a volume I

have located thus far is Tamadir Tawfiq’s 1959 rendering of Sarah K. Bolton’s classic, *Lives of

Girls Who Became Famous* (1923) (Sakakini and Tawfiq 1959). There was no lack of English-

language volumes of women’s biography at the time; Hanaford 1882 and Phelps et al. 1885

make explicit the role-modeling potential of their material. Peabody’s very title (1923) yokes

exemplarity, biography, and pedagogy; from 1915 to 1926, it went through two editions and
eleven printings.
as positive and ordered attributes and epithets in hierarchies. Through nearly half a century of sketches the most mentioned qualities were intelligence, wisdom, courage, determination, good judgment, eloquence, and loyalty. Although premodern dictionaries had ascribed these to eminent women, for twentieth-century compilers they had different resonances and were to produce results firmly within Egypt’s twentieth-century economic and political trajectory. Yet new and old mingled, for if these qualities were to be inculcated and exercised in new contexts, they were not to diminish old familiar virtues, however unstable the correspondences between virtue and action might be.

Emphasizing the expansive, encouraging women onto new paths, magazine biographies foregrounded “Famous Women” as fully and thoughtfully using their own resources, physical, mental, material, and situational, to push changing role patterns in certain directions. Whether Sitt al-Mulk (a de facto ruler of Fatimid Egypt) or Lucy Stone, Aspasia of Miletos or “Atiyyat the Copt,” women act to shape their own destinies in these individual dramas. To act is to struggle with the given contours of one’s social environment, these narratives reminded readers. They applauded women’s persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles put in their paths by social expectations, while they also praised those who took advantage of auspicious circumstances.

Girls’ education was one of the hottest topics of the time, and biography weighed in, labeling social circumstance obstructive more often than not. A 1923 sketch of charity worker Rujina Khayyat called her “one of the first Egyptian women to be educated, at a time when that was considered a defect in a female” (“Rujina Khayyat,” 369). Two decades earlier, *Ladies*’ and *Girls’ Magazine* had accentuated the unwillingness of Lucy Stone’s father to educate her and her own determined (and successful) efforts to acquire an education (“Lusi Stun Balakwal,” 4). Over and over, biographies of scholars and writers pointedly described the process of gaining knowledge as a struggle, not only for Arab but also for other Mediterranean, and European, women—from Hypatia to Maria Agnesi to Marie Curie. Workers in and contributors to girls’ education were among the most popular subjects of “Famous Women” columns; and, of all the doings of Catherine II of Russia, it was her establishment of girls’ schools that received the most attention in a 1911 sketch. *Magazine of the Women’s Awakening* even featured a series, “Life Histories of Famous Women Educators.”

Writers elicited unchallengeable precedents for educating girls from

41 “Katrina al-thaniyya” (FS); Salim. See also “Bahithat al-Badiya” (MM); “Mariya Mitshil” (MM); “Mary [sic] Mitshil” (FS); “Misiz Firank Lisly”; “al-Anisa Firjini Basil”; “al-
Islam’s history, as in a 1901 profile of Sayyida Nafisa, descendant of the Prophet, transmitter of religious knowledge, devout ascetic: “A woman who reached this pinnacle of piety and was so learned that Imam Shaf‘i came to her to hear hadith deserves to have her name inscribed in history. She is a lesson to those who heed lessons, an example that proves to those Egyptians who remain naive that seeking knowledge is everyone’s duty, in which it is possible for women and men to be equal” (“al-Sayyida Nafisa,” 76). If knowledge was duty, surely it must be pursued.42 Of course, such a biography lent support to the Islamic modernist position that Islam in itself did not preclude “modern” pursuits such as the education of girls. Nafisa could sanctify nationalists’ insistence that the nation would need knowledgeable women. At the same time, she represented the modest Muslim woman whose knowledge was transmitted from home.

Girls’ and women’s own efforts to get educated constituted a major motif in a wider thematics of social constraint. Received patterns of female upbringing, parental disapproval of higher education, one’s own resistance to the idea of “career,” all were presented as deterrents that “Famous Women” had to overcome.43 Stories of women suffering for atypical careers drove the point home, as exceptionality was put in the service of a changing concept of what gender norms should be. Jeanne d’Arc was “scorned” by the male establishment, but this was “in conformity to the women’s awakening [of her time] . . . she committed no crime . . . except doing men’s work” (Yunus, “Jan Dark,” 272–73).

The thematics of social constraint also point to an underlying assumption in many of these biographies that individual action and women’s

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42 This text offers another reminder of Woman in Islam’s primary audience. The male plural standing for all in “those Egyptians who remain naive” may imply male guardians first and foremost. Note that the text carefully delineates where “it is possible for women and men to be equal.” Biography intervened not only in the debate on whether girls should get educations but also in the question of how: it posed a critique of existing schooling. A sketch of Arab poet al-Khansa’ (ca. 646 C.E.) contrasted the erudition of Arab women in history with contemporary experience: “Today they enter the girl in school and spend several years educating her until she is able to read . . . or write three words, two of which are wrong” (Antun, “al-Khansa’,” 76). Describing Egyptian feminist writer Malak Hifni Nasif as a serious schoolteacher—“above the practices of girls these days, which are open to criticism”—a sketch criticizes “English education” as leading to al-ta‘aruf (acting like the farisj), the superficial imitation of European lifeways for which Egyptian youth of both sexes were scolded in the press (“Bahthar al-Badiya,” 466).

emergence into public space, into "men's work," are necessarily good and positive moves. The possible costs to women were not debated through biography, although sometimes the costs to families were.

This emphasis on movement outward was in line with the liberal nationalist ethos of individualist effort on behalf of the community, in line with the goals of public patriarchy. Yet it was both tempered and given a certain inflection by the thematics of domesticity, which tended to posit a more relational ethos, albeit one defined by a traditionalist image of women as nurturers. In connection with the individualist emphasis, social constraint as a theme also intimated an ideal that relied on a bourgeois economic and social positioning. In biography, both poverty and aristocratic ease represent barriers to individual achievement that women must overcome as they work to fulfill personal goals and serve society. Austrian labor activist Adelheid Popp is described as overcoming a childhood marked by extreme poverty, child labor, an alcoholic father, and a home for poor girls where she "devoured the library" (al-Hakim). She went on to struggle for women's rights as workers. As this text lauds activism on behalf of a female proletariat, it narrates Popp's entry into the middle class approvingly and defines this positioning as crucial to the success of her work. English prison reformer Elizabeth Fry, in contrast, had to "overcome" the aristocratic ease of her childhood: inherited wealth is a burden, a seduction threatening both women's self-realization and their ability to work for the nation (if it is not harnessed to philanthropy).44

It is not surprising, given this emphasis on individual(ist) effort, to find that biographies highlight independent thinking as crucial to women's formations of self and to the endeavors that made them famous. Biographies of Elizabeth Fry, Jeanne d'Arc, and others praise fearlessness in speech and action, and "freedom of thought.45 Yet in this context also, the formation of a female self depends on an implicit ethos of relational action, for women's independent thinking is to serve community needs. Thinking for oneself, and against the social grain, produces judicious and bold action inscribed in collective memory (and with political overtones that resonated loudly in the climate of Cairo in the 1910s and 1920s). 'Ufayrā bint 'Abbad, a third-century C.E. poet of the Arabian peninsula who stirred her people to revolt against a tyrannous overlord, could easily become a con-

44 "Suwar min risālat al-mar'a." On philanthropy as upper-class women's activism, see Marsot 1978; on philanthropy as one progenitor of the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), see Badran 1995. Biographies of philanthropists are popular in the women's magazines throughout the period this essay covers. Significantly, they tend to emphasize hands-on charity work, as did the EFU.

45 "Ilisasāt Firay, Il"; Yunus, "Jan Dark"; also "Khawla"; Yunus, "Bint al-Azwār", "al-Khansa" (MM, 1).
temporary heroine: “Were it not for the strength of character of a fine woman, [her] tribe would not have liberated itself. . . . May God increase her likes in every region” (“Ufayra,” 85; also Yunus, “Zaynab”; “Umm al-Banin”; “Sahifat al-adab”).

Strength of mind and boldness of action resound through biographies that feature women’s public political work; yet, again, a thematics of social constraint shapes the narrative. Biographies of women rulers—from the Pharaoh Nitocris to Zenobia to Shajarat al-Durr, Catherine the Great, and the Begum of Bhopal—stress strength and political ability. But some dwell on difficulties women face in maintaining authority. 46

Subjects receive praise for publicizing women’s conditions and needs and for working in the public sphere to improve women’s lot. 47 A few sketches narrate women’s struggles for political rights, even as editors insist that the space of politics does not overlap with their own sphere of commentary. Such emphases tend to privilege a notion of community over competition between women of different backgrounds, especially given the cumulative insistence on cross-cultural precedent and women’s “common” goals vis-à-vis men. Thus, we are told, American colonist Margaret Brent demanded access to all meetings of the Maryland assembly but was refused. Had she succeeded, women would have had equal political rights with men two centuries ago. “Hardly do we try to do anything new but it has been done before,” sighs the writer. The biography’s title claims a sense of community among women of East and West by intimating a shared descent, a single forebear, for it calls this Euro-American woman “A Noble Grandmother, The First to Demand Women’s Rights.” Eschewing the publicly political in editorials, women’s magazines reinserted it through the kitchen door of women’s biography. 48


47 “Al-Anisa Jisy Akirman,” “Jullanar Hanim,” “Maryam Harri”—all were praised for taking an interest in women of societies other than their own and writing about these women’s lives. For women writing about conditions of women’s lives in their own societies, see al-Hakim; “al-Sayyida Zaynab Fawwaz”; Baz, “Hanna Kasbani Kawrani”; and, more indirectly, “Fatima ‘Aliyya.” On working to improve women’s and girls’ lives, see Baz, “Luiza Biruktur”; “al-Anisa Firdisi Basili”; “al-Anisa Nasra Baridi”; “al-Barinsis Fatima Haydar Fadih”; Ibrahim, “Azimut al-nisa’ 5”; “Bahithat al-Badiya”; “Mariya Mitshi al-falakiyya” (MUQ, MM); “Misir Fark Lisly.”

48 “Jadda karima,” 245. Typically, this text is silent on how class shapes demands for public political rights. “[Brent] is represented as an early feminist because of her demand for two votes in the assembly, one for her freehold, another for her position as executor” (Uglov 1989, 87.) The text articulates cross-gender exemplarity and exceptionality: when Brent and
Impeccable precedent

As they drew on—and away from—premodern biographical inscription, magazine editors celebrated the subjects medieval compilers had selected. Western lives might be useful to interrogate shifting possibilities, but precedents closer to home made it harder to argue against “new” lives. As in the sketch of Sayyida Nafisa quoted above, texts construct these irrefutable sources as not denying extradomestic endeavor to Muslim women.

These constructions of Muslim women’s lives (Arab or not) are said repeatedly to disprove popular but erroneous notions of Islamic doctrinal deterrents to women’s expanded lives, echoing the arguments of the Muslim modernists that I outlined at the start of this article.⁴⁹ To make sure the message comes across, these images are framed by the modernist claim that many practices labeled Islamic were traditionalist accretions not dictated by Islamic law. Khawla rode into battle to save her brother. If this could be glossed as a feminine aim, the text claimed that her life story “shows that Islamic civilization is not against women’s advancement, nor does it bar her from sharing worldly affairs with men” (Yunus, “Bint al-Azwar,” 299).

Even when a text portrays a Muslim woman as aberrant, outside of norms defining most women’s lived experience, the very denial that her life enacted a redefinition of limits could open those limits to question. Profiling the Begum of Bhopal in 1916, during her rule, The Fair Sex noted that “Bhopal is the world’s only state to be ruled solely by women even though it is a Muslim state, holding to the religious law that—according to what is said—does not in any circumstance entrust rule to a woman. . . . The talents of this woman [made her able to] triumph over the beliefs of her subjects in this regard.” Yet the biography ends: “Her Majesty, like all other Muslim women, avoids sitting with [unrelated] men, and so prefers to remain apart, in her palace” (“al-Mar’a al-wahida,” 83). As they probe, the biographies reassure.

Thus, lives of eminent women as inscribed by Zaynab Fawwaz and by editors of the early women’s press followed medieval biographical dictionaries in emphasizing received notions of women’s “proper” attributes and

her sister reached America, they were so good at setting up and running their farm that they were “a model to the men” (“Jadda karima,” 243). For other narrations of women’s political activisms, see “Wafat Misie Bankhurst”; “A’isha bint Abi bakr”; “A’isha umm al-mu’minin”; “al-Sayyida Fatima bint al-Amir As’ad”; Jamati; Zahra; “Sarujini Nayidi”; “Lusi Stun Balakwal”; “Umm Sharif.” Profiles of women rulers tend to stress their political acumen and activism. On journals eschewing politics, see Nawfal, “Iyadah.” See also Baron 1994, 168–69; Booth 1995c.

⁴⁹ See Hourani (1962) 1983 for an overview of these arguments; see also Stowasser 1994.
activities. Yet it was easy to find in the traditional sources attributes that could strengthen women's sense of self and lead them on to new paths. To repeat endlessly, and therefore to attempt to normalize, such attributes as courage and eloquence in new discursive contexts were to work toward legitimizing new subjectivities by taking up the terms of the old—a reverse discourse that could be both productive and constricting.

**Life at home: Biography and domesticity**

Even as they historicized, celebrated, and shaped women's movement out of the home, biographies incessantly articulated both continuity and change in the relationships between women and domestic duty. Although linking women and the domestic was nothing new, defining women's relationships to the domestic discursively *was* new. In fact, the domestic as a space that claimed attention was new. The need to define how "woman" and "home" overlapped was crucial to (and necessitated by) the shift from a traditional patriarchy to a new public patriarchy inflected by nationalism, for the equation of women and the domestic could no longer be taken for granted in a milieu where women's duties were defined in terms of the nation's needs, which could not be fulfilled wholly in the home.

Biography performed a practically oriented ideological task as it helped to demarcate the domestic as a serious professional sphere. In this, it was in the company of other prescriptive texts: how-to articles and books stressing proper arrangement and orderly management, good nutrition, the management of domestic help, and above all the careful training (rather than rearing) of children, a transformation accompanied and shaped by an emerging terminology of discipline (Mitchell 1988, 88–89; Baron 1994, chap. 7). Biography, with its message that "real women had done it all (but not easily)," perhaps answered to a psychological need in a way that how-to manuals could not. That it was concerned with helping middle-class women work out new pressures in their working lives is suggested by the different positionings of the domestic in general versus in women's magazines, my first concern in this section. I then discuss the construction through biography of housework and home management, bringing in marriage and motherhood briefly.

Even as traditional epithets buttressed women's inscription in the domestic, the "Famous Women" biographies provide one more warning that the role of the domestic in discourses on women, especially in emerging feminist discourses, is open to question. When a notion of the domestic as a privileged site is constructed as giving women special powers, foregrounding and then conscripting a moral precedence linked to
motherhood, is this a question of enhancing women’s place in the home or of displacing the notion of home? Does it confine women’s authority or construct a basis for new ways of thinking and acting? For Egypt, Baron has argued that the early women’s press was at the center of a “new ideology of domesticity [that] gave women greater responsibility in the home without challenging its boundaries” (1994, 166). Margot Badran emphasizes a clear break between “the cult of domesticity” and emerging feminisms.50

The women’s press biographies complicate the picture. Even as a domestic ideal structures one life history after another, biography opens up a space of other possibilities. More discreetly yet forthrightly than other forms of prescriptive and polemical literature on “woman’s place” available at the time, these biographies question the linking of women and the domestic by highlighting it as a fluid and changeable space. As I show the equivocal positioning of “the domestic,” I want to make the point that as biography might stabilize feminine identity around the domestic, equally it might push the boundaries of what home and family meant, what the domestic ruled out and what it could allow. To go further, emphasizing the domestic as women’s sphere could give credibility and even familiarity to the idea of extradomestic activity for women, already articulated in the mainstream press by Fawwaz. Indeed, framing public lives within domestic concerns made the expansive work of biography possible by downplaying any perceived threat to the accustomed social order.51 But that order was changing. I end by showing how domesticity is articulated with concepts of national duty as inflected by gender.

I have already suggested that much of this biographical writing shows a conscious practice of cautiously providing models for change, a practice I have no difficulty in labeling as feminist, for this forthrightly pedagogical act is built discursively on the recognition that those defined as “women” confront immediate barriers to their own attempts at self-definition. In its own small way biography helped to prepare the ground for, and then to

50 Although Baron (1991b) emphasizes the constraining force of domestic ideology, she points to its legitimating function in women’s nationalist activism. On “rationalizing” housework, I want to cite especially Davidoff’s pioneering 1976 article, which highlighted issues many scholars have since taken up, first with regard to European societies and then with regard to intersections of ideologies of domesticity and imperialist practices; both pertain to the imperializing metropole and to post/colonized societies (see, e.g., Hansen 1992). During this essay’s long history I have been helped by the appearance of historical work on domestic ideologies that parallels, and has refined, my thinking. In the interest of brevity I would especially mention Newton’s (1994) analysis of two 1839 English domestic manuals as paralleling my argument in emphasizing the dual movement of discourse on the domestic.

51 I am grateful to Afshaneh Najmabadi and Zachary Lockman for helping me to clarify my argument here.
support, an organized feminist movement in Egypt and the accelerating entry of women into an ever wider range of professions. Yet the shifting rhetoric within individual biographies also suggests ambivalence toward these changes. The biographies exemplify not only the deliberate construction of agendas but also the implied conflicts and anxieties that social transition visits on individuals. Focusing on material lives, biography could express with a kind of intimate ruefulness the unresolved questions for everyday living that evolving gender ideologies raised.

**Women and the domestic in the dominant press**

That Mary Morgan's life history circulated from general audience magazines to a journal targeted at females suggests that "Famous Women" articles attracted more than one audience. But behind an apparent similarity in biographical practice stood a set of differences that highlights the domestic more as an area of debate in the women's press and more as a taken-for-granted category of gendered experience in general magazines.

Mary Morgan's life history, first published in *Choice Pieces*, celebrated an individual whose fame rested on her visibility, her public persona, indeed her showmanship as both equestrian and journalist. Morgan's family life goes unmentioned but for the fact that she and her sister traveled and worked together: they were public people together. This is the portrait of a businesswoman, a skilled professional in more than one sphere, a woman compelled to earn her living who makes such a success out of it that at her death she is building a large home, a woman for whom marriage and children are not part of the picture. Morgan as biographical subject does not simply repress the image of the domestic woman; she over-turns it.

Like Morgan, most women featured in *Choice Pieces* between 1890 and 1914 were highly visible career women (often unmarried and childless),

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52 This is one reason biographies of women were rarer in later magazines (Booth 1995a). Only in the early 1920s was the attributive adjective *nisat*i (feminine, pertaining to women) glossed by Egyptian feminists as equivalent to the French *féminist*e; see Booth 1995b, n. 4. *L'Égyptienne*, the French-language organ of the EFU, was founded in 1925 and labeled (on the cover) "féministe." But this magazine, not joined by a sister publication in Arabic until 1937, would have been read by a very small elite. Badran has noted that the ambiguity of meaning in the term *nisat*i was possibly advantageous to those advancing its "feminist" implications (1988b, 11).

53 Described first as one in a company of educated women ("mistresses of the pen"), Morgan is also marked out as puncturing gendered boundaries, someone who "ought to be counted with men of the pen and businessmen" ("Khasarat," 179). The lack of parallelism (no "women of business" surround Morgan, although her sister is called a successful professional photographer) might suggest the greater acceptability (as well as familiarity) of writing as a female career.
or ruling monarchs. But it seems to be not the life itself that is of interest to the editors, or even the life history’s implications for reimagining gendered divisions of labor, but the life insofar as it intersects with the journal’s overarching pedagogical agenda. Annie Besant’s biography is merely a prelude to a long and negative explication of theosophy, as is a biography of Madame Blavatsky, while that of Clemance Royer serves to introduce her commentary on and translation of Darwin’s works (“Hanna Bizant,” “Madam Blafatsky,” “Madam Clemanse” [in Latin characters]). Yet, as a magazine devoted to propagating a vision of secularist, European-oriented national development according to teleological notions of scientific progress and the tenets of social Darwinism, Choice Pieces featured articles and letters on the need to educate women to take conscious part in national regeneration. The periodical’s biographies of women were in line with this goal even as they underwrote other preoccupations.

Mostly silent on where the domestic fit in, a majority of the twenty-four biographies of women in Choice Pieces in this period were placed at the back (just as the women’s section came last in some early Arabic biographical dictionaries). Set off from the magazine’s featured articles, they appeared in a regular column called “Tadbir al-manziil,” “Home Management.” Perhaps this was the substance of Zaynab Fawwaz’s complaint that no one was writing women’s lives, for these women’s biographies were not part of the life-and-times sweep of history inscribed in biographies of men, almost invariably lodged in the front of the general magazine among leading articles. Celebrated for their work outside the home, women subjects were set firmly within it by the magazine’s positioning of their life stories, representing the silent assumption that women’s lives could be collapsed into “Home Management.” What sort of message did it convey that Mary Morgan’s life history was followed by short pieces on the benefits of drinking lemon juice, the virtues of proper hospitality, and new means of banishing insects from the home? Perhaps these companion entries made it possible to eschew mention of Morgan’s domestic life: they reminded readers that “Home Management,” after all, was both women’s priority and an arena for knowledge, professionalism, and control.

Toward the end of 1892, Choice Pieces was challenged by an upstart, Jurji Zaydan’s al-Hilal (The Crescent). From its first issue, The Crescent offered a

54 Sarruf and his colleagues were largely uncritical of Britain’s imperial hand in Egypt. On this journal, see Farag 1969.
55 Where biography introduces a “more general” topic (Besant, Blavatsky, Royer), or profiles a ruling monarch (Victoria, Catherine II, the empress of China), the biography merits inclusion up front, with the men. The queen of Rumania, writer and charity patron, to the contrary, is positioned in “Home Management.”
page-one series called “The Most Important Events and the Greatest Men.” History and the individual life story were coupled here, and the (male) individual as history maker almost always got the spotlight. Aiming for a more popular audience than *Choice Pieces, The Crescent* had found a concrete formula that apparently worked. As its editors dictated changes in magazine content and format over the next twenty years, this feature remained. It must have generated immediate interest, for *Choice Pieces* followed suit, starting in December 1893 with a biography of educator and reformer ‘Ali Mubarak. Yet in *The Crescent’s* first issue, Mary Morgan was relegated to page twenty-eight.

It is hard not to see the steady stream of “Famous Women” in the early women’s magazines as a riposte to the dominant, general-interest magazines’ concept of history as a parade of male actors, especially since the women’s magazine subjects were just as prominently positioned as the men of *The Crescent*, directly under the masthead. Their headings echoed *The Crescent*’s rubric, too, yet it seems significant that women’s magazines after *The Young Woman* chose the feminine plural adjectival form *shabirat* over the masculine (“inclusive”) *mashabir* that had been used in nineteenth-century biographical dictionaries of women. In positioning and heading, biographies in women’s magazines announced a response to “male-stream” history.

No longer relegated to the back pages, no longer encompassed by the “Home Management” section, women’s biography in the women’s press gave domesticity a sustained centrality, and interrogation, that it did not have in general interest magazines. Morgan’s biography (reappearing in

56 The first volume’s “Ashhar al-hawadith wa-a’zam al-rijal” featured Napoleon Bonaparte, various Ottoman sultans, Confucius, Peter the Great, George Washington, the Emir ‘Abd al-Qadir, Victor Hugo, Muhammad ‘Ali, and Ramses II. The series featured Eastern and Western subjects from the start, except when it came to women.

57 On Zaydan’s and his son’s editorial directions, see Tarrazi (1913–14, 3:86–89), who emphasizes their grasp of what readers across classes and ages wanted, the magazine’s popularity, and the editorial concern with educating youth. See also Egger 1986, 13–17, 69–70, 169–70. Zaydan’s exclusion of women from *The Crescent*’s biographical subjects, and from his biographical dictionary, is intriguing because female heroines were prominent in many of his historical novels.

58 Should a link be made between the single exception and its male authorship, editorial control, and primary implied audience? In Ibrahim Ramzi’s *al-Mar’a f’ll-Islam*, biographies of women were the last feature. Yet this had a framing effect too, if it did not give so much prominence to life narratives.

59 A few did center on the domestic. A sketch of Lady Isabella Burton (1893) focused almost entirely on her marital relationship, stressing the great influence she had over Richard Burton because she made wifehood a profession. This biography is preceded in the “Home Management” section of vol. 18 (October 1893) by a notice on writer Josephine Butler, who,
The Young Woman) was among the minority of biographies that gave domesticity very short shrift. Published in the earliest women’s journal, it was part of a tentative move toward utilizing women’s life histories, signaled in Hind Nawfal’s prefatory editorial when she invoked historical precedents for women standing proud. Nawfal’s biographies tended to be short and buried inside. However, The Young Woman’s longest biography, “Her Majesty the Empress of Russia” (“Jalalat imbiraturiyat Rusiya”) gave domesticity pride of place. What else could a women’s magazine do? As the Personal Narratives Group has written, “Women’s personal narratives are, among other things, stories of how women negotiate their ‘exceptional’ gender status both in their daily lives and over the course of a lifetime. They assume that one can understand the life only if one takes into account gender roles and gender expectations. Whether she has accepted the norms or defied them, a woman’s life can never be written taking gender for granted” (1989, 5). Responding to the realities of its women readers’ (and editors’) lives as positioned in the domestic, the women’s press could highlight the gendered nature of experience by foregrounding the domestic as a domain—but not the domain—of women’s lived experience, creating a slippage both productive and confining.60

Tending the household
Before readers of The Fair Sex learned of Jane Austen’s novels in a 1910 sketch, they learned that she was skilled at many kinds of handiwork (“Jan Awstun,” 33). Repeatedly, and until at least the mid-1930s, the great majority of texts presented home and family as the central and indivisible concern of “Famous Women.” Biographers hierarchized subjects’ occupations: the domestic first, other careers or pursuits second. Woman in Islam’s biography of Maria Agnesi began not by noting her scholarly work but by stressing her love and loyalty to her family and her domestic abilities. “She performed her household duties to perfection,” the reader learns, before reading of her renown in the sciences (“Mariya Anaysi” [MI], 176). And this Maria Agnesi is exemplary: approving of her “simplicity,” the writer calls her a “great model.” Fawwaz, writing the life of American astronomer

having written a much-praised biography of her husband, is quoted as saying that girls need to know their worth and to grow up able to depend on themselves financially as well as psychologically. Butler goes on to assure the reader that she considers her roles as wife and mother preferable to all else she has done.

60 It also contributed to the emphasis on commonality and community as aspects of women’s lives and as markers of an ongoing community of women. Interrogating the place of the domestic in women’s lives could emphasize the common lot of women, downplaying differences, e.g., between women of the East and the West.
Maria Mitchell, reversed the order but inserted the domestic centrally into the subject's educational pursuits: "She had a strong inclination toward the mathematical sciences and she excelled in them even as she undertook the housework, washing the dishes and so forth. But her father did not try to turn her away from her natural inclinations." In her essays Fawwaz stressed that women must have the option to train for work outside the home. Her own working background diverged utterly from that of the early editors of the women's press who could depend on the income of male family members. Although Fawwaz was quick to note that Mitchell's studies did not keep her from the kitchen, by opposing "housework" and "natural inclinations" she subtly undermined the notion that women's work and the domestic were essentially linked. But strategically women had to balance the two: "[Mitchell] used to say that woman can learn seven languages as she works with her hands in sewing and embroidery . . . [as director of the local public library] she would often make socks by hand while the book lay open before her" (1894, 482).

Young Woman of the East's biography of Mitchell (1910) put the domestic squarely first. Mitchell "used to prepare the food, wash the pots and pans, do her sewing and embroidery, and after that dedicate herself to studying scientific and astronomical writings" ("Mary [sic] Mitshil" [FS], 5). Typically, Choice Pieces was silent on Mitchell's double burden as it narrated her scientific victories. At least readers had to look for her in "Home Management" ("Mariya Mitshil al-falakiyya" [MUQ]).

These exemplary portraits as prescriptive texts stressed the positive, but a prescriptive note sometimes crept in around domesticity. Negative assessments of individual middle-class women's assays into public life, rare as they are in these texts (but sprinkled evenly throughout the time period), suggested that new pursuits could go only so far and hinted an ambivalence about redefining gendered divisions of labor. If the Ladies' and Girls' Magazine declared Lucy Stone its first biographical subject because she was "first to call for restitution of women's rights in America," and if it went on to narrate Stone's defiance of her family and her public activism, still it concluded that her work had had an effect on the thinking of American women. The results show clearly in the way [American women] have burst forth. But we find such unrestrained movement forward not free of great harms even if it carries great benefits . . . that is, that society can draw on the activity, seriousness, and strengths of half of humanity . . . and women have talents men do not have. The harms are the disturbance this causes in the system of the family as the woman leaves her house
for the crowded [world] of business, where she will not find herself honored and respected as she is in the home—not to mention her neglect of children and household. ("Lusi Stun Balakwal," 5–6)

It is this "tough call"—public activism versus "children and household"—that the magazine asks its readers to debate in letters to the editor, in its mission to define models of "virtue and goodness . . . and the performance of duty" (5).

Giving approving priority to women's domestic work suited more than one agenda. Furnishing reassurance that women were not deserting the home, it helped construct the emerging model of the trained housewife as essential to an ideal nuclear family (separated from the extended kin group, harmonious through companionate marriage, bringing up well-trained, obedient, nationalist children). Articulating new ways to organize home life, the focus on housework could discreetly defuse conservative opposition to new career paths. For "many women's personal narratives unfold within the framework of an apparent acceptance of social norms and expectations but nevertheless describe strategies and activities that challenge those same norms" (Personal Narratives Group 1989, 7).

Because biographies put the domestic first, they declared that "Famous Women" did not allow public careers to impinge upon "womanly" duties to home management, husband, and children.61 Being queen did not affect the concern that "Alexandra, Late Queen of the English" showed for domestic matters. Nor did it keep her from reproducing this system, from "training her daughters in the occupations of the home" ("Alikandra," 362). (The sketch does not address how Alexandra as maternal icon suited imperial interests.) The centrality of hands-on domesticity structures biographies of women rulers from Nefertari to Victoria—an insistence, perhaps, that the link between women and domestic duty could not be shattered by class or by the most overt kinds of status and power.

Equally, though, these biographical deployments of the domestic conveyed a message that women's domestic work could not be used to constrain their public lives. One profile after another stresses optimistically that domestic duty does not deter women from intellectual and professional pursuits. Adelheid Popp's activism was not slowed by home and family, her biographer marvels (Hakim). Lucy Stone's "duties to her son and family did not keep her from maintaining her agenda of research and speechmaking" ("Lusi Stun Balakwal," 5). Nor did the confrontational

61 "Al-Lady Bartun"; "Mary [sic] Mitshil" (JL); "Madam di Safinayh" (MM); "Sarah Birnar"; "Madam Rulan."
work of the divorced and childless Zaynab Fawwaz mean that she ignored the dust balls.

One of this fine woman's unique qualities is her love for those of her kind [i.e., gender] and ready defense of them at every turn. Often she has faced the men writers and litterateurs on this, out of her wish to better the eastern woman's condition and prepare the way for her progress. Over and above this, she is attractive, sweet of speech, enjoyable in her presence, far removed from pretension and arrogance. She avoids affectedness and flattery in conversation and is one of the finest homemakers in her knowledge, training, and consummate [skills]. Yet her performance of these womanly duties has not kept her from working in the literary arts . . . her hard toil is evident, the valuable time this work of hers has taken over and above her household duties . . . May God increase her likes. ("Al-Sayyida Zaynab Fawwaz," 228)

Explicit mention of household work marks biographies of contemporary Arab women, like Fawwaz, and women of the West. It does not structure the many biographies of Arab and Muslim women of the past, although their inscription within family is paramount. That many biographies of early Muslim women were reproduced verbatim or nearly so from premodern sources illustrates the novelty of this discourse of domesticity. It had not marked the discursive production of premodern Arab or Muslim elite women's lives (and of course their own lived experiences of domesticity were both widely varied and very different from those of most female turn-of-the-century magazine readers). This was a new concept of domestic duty pertinent to contemporary lives. If it was associated with the West, it was no less a part of young urban middle-class Arab women's new educations, and its appropriation could be cast in local cultural terms.

Domestic duty as a defined space, separated from yet yoked to daily pursuits not included in the domestic, was a modern idea. It was a sign of modernity for these women engaged in rewriting their own lives. It was central to the formation of a modern public patriarchy, for its explication in print, the endless circulation of domestic details and the debate over how the domestic should define girls' education, gave the domestic a public presence and put women's domestic work in the spotlight as a public act for the nation. The space this sphere occupied in the women's press suggests that working out its relationship to extradomestic work was not easy: the editors themselves, Baron notes, "experienced a tension between their literary and domestic lives" (1994, 120). No wonder it was a subject that engaged the compilers of biography. That it was to be a part of the
definition of the new woman is signaled in a silence that differentiates the “Famous Women” biographies from both the lives of those editors and the how-to articles and books they wrote. The servants these women had (and assumed their audience had), and the ink they spilled discussing servant management in their magazines, do not appear in the biographies. It is the “Famous Woman” herself who does the housework there.

**Mothering**

Raising children also took up many pages in women’s magazines and in the prescriptive book industry. Neither there nor in the biographies did servants rear the children.62 The active and educated mother was an increasingly visible protagonist. Two sketches of George Sand published sixteen years apart begin to suggest how the image of the perfect mother grew increasingly explicit over time. After her divorce, said Fawwaz in *Scattered Pearls* (1894), “[Sand] concerned herself with her children’s upbringing” (133). In 1910, *Young Woman of the East* added a qualifying phrase to the same sentence: “[Sand] concerned herself with her children’s upbringing as is fitting for a wise and rational mother” (“Jurj Sand” [FS], 203).

Like housework, motherhood emerges through biography both as a sole occupation that commands respect and demands knowledge and as one privileged duty among several pursuits. The stern emphasis on individual agency is key here: the worst mother is a passive one. A woman’s attention to the educated upbringing of her children is paramount: a proper mother is reflected in the *tarbiya* (training, upbringing) of her children, “the Queen of Spain” (Christiana) declares (“Malikat Isbaniya,” 139). In the world of the “Famous Women” columns, queens are as good at hands-on mothering as they are at housework.

Women who are presented first and foremost as mothers are portrayed as active contributors to their children's successes; and occasionally mothers of biographical subjects are approvingly said to have been influential for their daughters’ careers.63 This was especially so in girls’ education. If

62 An exception is Ḥifat Sultan’s sketch of Alice Ayres, nanny in an English household who is celebrated for saving the family’s children (and sacrificing herself) during an 1885 fire. This illustrates a common tendency in the “Famous Women” biographies: when working-class or peasant women are subjects, it is because their acts benefit the nation at large as defined by a middle-class elite. The best example is Jeanne d’Arc (Booth 1995c).

63 *Jullanar Hanim*, Baz, “Hanna Kasbani Kawrani”; “Amra ibnat al-Khansa’.” Here, even in the title, the poet ‘Amra is daughter of her mother, one of Arabic literature’s most famous poets, but her paternal lineage is mentioned immediately in the biography. A biographer may make a point of mentioning the subject’s mother as well as her father: see “‘A’isha umm al-mu’minin,” 26. Firmly in line with premodern practice (Rodet 1994, 12), this was a received practice being put to a new use. For example, a biography of Miriam Makarius (by
seeking knowledge was “everyone’s duty”—as Woman in Islam’s sketch of Sayyida Nafisa declared—this was not only an invitation to action directed at girls, but also a matter of parental responsibility. And if women were in charge of children’s training, then Miriam Makarius’s mother’s financial and social struggle to get schooling for her daughters and sons was especially laudable (Sarruf). In line with liberal nationalist rhetoric, though, it is often that familiar figure, the supportive liberal father, who is pointedly invoked as central to a daughter’s educational and career successes.64 This centrality probably reflected the lived experience of women writers, for fathers—more likely to be educated themselves, and circulating outside the home—were in more of a position to advocate for their daughters’ formal educations. And if they were educated, they had no excuse for laxity, biographies harshly critical of unsupportive fathers imply.65 Yet this motif also underlined male modernist nationalists’ interests; one reason they pushed girls’ education was to increase the chances that rising liberal professionals like themselves could find an educated wife who would reportedly be a good companion, a good home manager, and increasingly a respectable articulate appendage in public.66

The order of importance of a woman’s different roles, mother and career woman, parallels the precedence given to home management. Young Woman of the East’s biography of Queen Victoria concludes, “and thus was this queen a skilled and knowledgeable person, a virtuous wife, an excellent mother, a skilled mistress of the home—just as she was an august ruler,” a finale not found in the otherwise similar biography in Scattered Pearls sixteen years before (Fawwaz 1894, 442–46; “Fikuriya,” 327). Nefartari exemplifies “the good, proper mother and the striving spouse”; only then is she also “the noble queen and wise administrator” (“Ahmas Nifirtari,” 245). At the same time, this ordering of roles concludes a text that

Yaqt Sarruf, reprinted with some modifications by Fawwaz, and by FS) quotes from a speech on al-Khans’a that Makarius had delivered, a passage in which Makarius criticizes biographers’ lack of attention to their subjects’ mothers. As Sarruf’s text was circulated this criticism was repeated (e.g., in Fawwaz 1894, 497–510; “Maryam Nimr Makariyus”).


65 “Sharlut Barunteh”; “Misiz Barawnin,” Baz makes a more general criticism of families unsupportive of daughters’ educational aspirations (“Maryam Jahashan”). That unsupportive mothers are not mentioned supports the attitude that fathers were more in a position to act, but it may also be due to a lack of information on mothers.

66 The representation of marriage in these biographies privileges the notion of the companionate union, which in turn helps to construct the image of the nuclear family as the building block of the nation, an emphasis that had emerged discursively by the end of the nineteenth century. I discuss these representations in Booth, in press.
describes Nefertari as the first Egyptian queen to rule actually despite the presence of a legal heir, and “this is one of the proofs of the strong influence of women at that time” (245). Similarly, both biographies of Christiana of Spain, one published in 1898 and the other in 1934, mention that she ruled the nation after her husband’s death as regent for her son, but especially in the later sketch it is her mothering that is central (“Karisti-yana”, “Malikat Isbaniya”).

Marie de Sévigné’s life history begins by foregrounding the social contingency that shapes women’s pursuits: “It is a great thing for a woman to be proud of her brilliant abilities—not because such brilliance is rare, but because circumstances make brilliance in women a rare happenstance” (“Madam di Sayfinay” [JL], 41). But if the reader expects a discussion of that “brilliance” she must wait, for the biographer declares that “one can write of de Sévigné’s life as a wife, mother, and famous writer” and does so in that order. Thus, de Sévigné’s life after her husband’s death was a “good example which should be followed: for she put all her concern into the upbringing of her children, and that is no small thing for a young woman of twenty-three in an era which was the epitome of moral decadence” (44). Only after this will the reader discover that de Sévigné is considered to be among the greatest women writers of history, maybe even surpassing the men of her time. The section on her intellectual, writing life is not only last but shortest (45–46).

Angel in the house?

Images of domestic work, motherhood, and marriage as women’s defining work are buttressed in biography by rhetoric that takes for granted certain characteristics as “feminine virtues”: modesty, compassion, self-sacrifice, sensitivity, and those few subjects said to be lacking in these areas may be labeled disapprovingly as “unfeminine.” Such conservative markers of image saturated many of the biographies of premodern Arab women and not a few of contemporary women. Yet, as I have suggested, such epithets and judgments had a shifting significance. That even “conservative” biography might serve an emergent image of the new woman is illustrated by one of the earliest biographies in the women’s press. The life history of Maria Theodorovna, empress of Russia, consort of Alexander III, appeared in The Young Woman in 1893 (“Jalalat imbirurat Rusiya”).

Maria Theodorovna makes her first appearance within the family: as wife, daughter, sister, and then mother. Her activity outside the domestic realm is set firmly within this family context as her primary work arena. The biography offers a typical list of positive attributes that echoes those of medieval biography. The subject “is possessed of great amiability and
delicateness, gentle-heartedness, sociability, a mild temper, a supple disposition, purity and chasteness. Even more does she possess abundant good sense and a sharp mind” (242–43).

But these praiseworthy attributes are not simply hagiographic labels or mere descriptive terms. They are guides for behavior. Maria may be an empress, but her virtues and pursuits construct an ideal that would have looked as familiar in mid-Victorian England as it perhaps did to readers of the Arabic women’s press. The biography portrays domesticity as an occupation requiring training and organized work. It intimates an ideology of conduct marked by hard work, thrift, modesty, and above all concern with home and family, regardless of one’s social position, for the empress “sews most of her daughters’ clothes with her own hands, so that truly great women will follow her lead. They will realize that work is incumbent on women, that woman was not created (as some princesses think) to spend morning and evening on the cushion of opulence” (243). Women must be active contributors to their society, but their acts must be carried out modestly and out of the limelight, the text urges. Women must work to fulfill other women’s needs but only in certain ways; they must not lose sight of domestic responsibilities when taking on other work. Note the order in which Maria Theodorovna’s activities are enumerated. “To prove that virtue is according to good works she divided the hours of her day among the upbringing and education of her children; close contact and intimate sociability with her husband; sewing what her daughters needed; perusing books of knowledge and religion, and political and literary newspapers; and studying languages . . . not to mention stimulating knowledge and refinement among her sex, as she loved to do, and visiting hospitals and girls’ schools instead of nightclubs and recreation grounds” (243).

Maria, the biographer says, is “a warning-by-example . . . for women of the world in general and princesses of the East in particular.” In the constellation of attributes this sketch articulates, the noun jalala (Her Majesty) comes to echo a female adjective from the same root, jalila (honorable, important, splendid). Yet, if Maria is a “warning-by-example,” the biographer praises qualities implied to be unusual for women and most men: “God entrusted to her gentle frame [the sort of] strength and courage rarely found except in the strongest of men” (242). What did it mean to yoke the exemplary woman’s qualities to “male” attributes that have more commonly served to justify men’s monopoly over domains of public action? Concluding a biography that positioned women as workers in society even as it celebrated a carefully refined presence in the home hinted that gendered boundaries constructed on the foundations of “the natural”
might not be so impermeable or natural after all. This was a quiet hint: narratives like this one, even as they defined a new domestic profession, acted to displace fears of women negotiating boundaries that once had seemed firm by emphasizing the primacy of domesticity. Yet even Maria Theodorova, that “angel in the house,” did not stay at home. By and large, if the subjects of biography in Egyptian women’s magazines stood on a pedestal of exemplarity, it was not that of the Victorian angel.

As Maria Theodorova’s life history intimates, the boundaries around accepted gendered comportment were caught up with specific notions of community. The sign of domesticity was inscribed at the center of ideologies of nation emerging before the turn of the century. The centrality of the domestic realm, inscribed at the center of hundreds of biographical sketches, derived not only from its relation to women’s lived experience but also from the urgency of defining the relationship between gender and space in a developing ideology of the nation.

Home and nation
If domesticity delineated a space of both regulation and self-affirmation for women, it also represented a source and microcosm of nationalist effort. The instrumentality of the idea of home, with “woman” written at the center, to the concept of nation has engaged much recent scholarship across many histories. In Egypt as in other sites of nationalist struggle, the inscription of the maternal body onto the map of nationalist aspirations (both modernist and organicist) has been identified as constitutive of nationalist ideologies. This nationalist maternal body figures centrally in discourses on gender in Egypt through this period. In biography, mother and wife are cast as the perfect female citizens. But so, under certain conditions, is the public worker.

While the companionate wife and the educated and educating mother as icons of nationalism were anticipated in the earliest magazines’ biographies, texts of the early 1920s etched them more starkly; the “Famous Women” rubric yielded on occasion to headlines such as “Mothers of Great Men” (The Egyptian Woman’s Magazine) and “Wives of Famous Men” (The Fair Sex). It was usually in relation to a male leader’s national(ist) work that the woman-behind-the-man was lauded as honorable and unrecognized, her status emphasized sometimes by the occlusion of her own first

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67 See Poovey 1988; Chatterjee 1990; Radhakrishnan 1992; Ray 1994; and many of the essays in Kandiyoti 1991a. Benedict Anderson’s 1991 now classic work on nationalism has been widely criticized for not attending to this nexus.

68 On Egypt, see Mitchell 1988, 111–13; Baron 1991; Ahmed 1992, chap. 8; Badran 1995, 63.
name: Lady Asquith, Mme. Joffre (wife of a French general), and Safiyya Zaghlul (wife of nationalist leader and then prime minister Sa’d Zaghlul) epitomize the perfect partner.69 ‘Abbas Hafiz takes up a useful borrowed chestnut—“Any great man’s achievements are due partly to women” (286)—as he praises Safiyya Zaghlul for staying at home dry-eyed as the British exiled her husband. No less celebrated is the mother-behind-the-son, willing to sacrifice her son for a cause, usually presented as a nationalist one, often anachronistically.70 The “enlightened motherhood” motif echoes through profiles stressing the crucial impact of mothers on famous sons, such as St. Augustine and George Washington (what better icon of nationalist success?) (“Ummahat”). Christiana of Spain is commended loudly for training her son; her two daughters are ignored (“Malikat Isbaniya”).

When the maternal figure is inscribed metaphorically, it is in a context of service to the community, most often implied to be a national community (imperialism occluded). Florence Nightingale, it is written in a 1909 biography, cared for the soldiers in the Crimea “just like a mother.”71 Nasra Baridi was like a mother to the girls in her school in Syria. The Begum of Bhopal was like a mother to her subjects. Perhaps displacing the woman ruler into mother made her public role less objectionable. In the context of emerging nationalism, the queen as female model to the nation (or empire, ironically) converged usefully with that ubiquitous image, “Mother of the Nation.” Safiyya Zaghlul’s iconic status as “Mother of the Nation” was repeatedly articulated in profiles from the 1920s, competing for attention with another icon, “Mother of the Beneficent Ones,” the Turco-Egyptian Queen Mother.72

Thus, privileging the maternal role and extending it to the nurturance of society built a narrative of useful domesticity that fed perfectly into nationalist narratives. The linking of the maternal and the national fueled the

69 “Al-Lady Rubirtsun” (spouse of a British commander in India) and “al-Jiniral Jufra waqarinatu” name women’s domestic and supportive roles as directly responsible for “national” (imperial) success. See also Ibrahim, “Safiyya Zaghlul”; “al-Lady Askwith”; Zahra, “Missiz Darwin.” Women portrayed as sharing or carrying on their husbands’ work are praised: “Aspasiya zawjat Birikilis”; “al-Lady Mary Muntagu”; “Missiz Firank Lisy”; “Madam Kuri.”

70 “Asma”; “Ummahat.” On motherhood as patriotism, see also a profile of Mary Longford (“Bunulat imra’a’”). Compare Lionnet 1988, 270, on the textuality of soldiers’ mothers as good nationalists in Algeria, and Afshar 1992 on Iran.

71 Zuraqq, 202. This echoes Nightingale’s own studied inscription of image within public discourse (Poovey 1988, chap. 6).

widespread concern about girls’ education, for if girls were to fulfill their proper roles as citizen-mothers, they had to have a carefully defined education. As already noted, the education of girls was lauded and defined in biography, giving experiential weight to the magazines’ more abstract discussions on the subject. But when biographies followed the modernist nationalist line, pushing girls’ education as crucial to national construction rather than primarily out of a concern for women’s own individual futures, the messages that a schoolgirl might receive were decidedly mixed.73 Was education the prelude to a distinguished academic or professional career? If so, was it merely to be conceived as an outgrowth of the maternal role, as suggested in the biographies of schoolteacher Nasra Baridi and others? Must education be channeled only into the upbringing of one’s own children? What did it mean to earn a living? For biography articulates this most often as economic necessity rather than self-fulfillment, echoing an attitude toward women working for pay that sounded throughout the press.74 The fraught question of education was marked by ambivalence, by unresolved tension. The demands of a modern patriarchy could not maintain the liberal tenet of individual freedom (itself contradictory for women, as feminist scholarship has solidly demonstrated).

Yet, just as situating the domestic as women’s privileged site made it respectable to imagine other lives, yoking the domestic to national duty offered a language in which women’s direct public participation in the construction of the nation could be articulated, as it gave women more authority at home (Baron 1991b). From the metaphoric extension of mothering and the emphasis on selflessness, it was a short jump to highlighting as a woman’s main contribution her patriotic acts. As patriotism and active participation in a nationalist struggle defined the domestic (if publicized) acts of Safiyya Zaghlul and Mary Washington, they marked the public work of Egyptian merchant Haylana ‘Abd al-Malik, English feminist Emmeline Pankhurst, and Turkish activist and writer Khalide Edib.75 In light of nearly a decade of organized, named feminist activism in Egypt, a 1929 obituary-biography of Pankhurst is intriguing. It notes approvingly that during World War I, Pankhurst de-emphasized feminist activism to work

73 Fenoglio-Abd el-Aal observes that education to further “reproduction of the feminine role” was a common motif in MM and NN (1988, 76, and 64, 64n., 79, 113).
74 On women working outside the home in other than educational pursuits, and out of economic necessity, see, e.g., Baz, “Hanna Kasbani Kawrani”; “Khasarat rabbat al-aqlam”; “Jan Awstin”; “Sharlut Barontehe”; “Khadija bint Khuwaylad”; “Haylana ‘Abd al-Malik”; “Misia Firank Lisy”; “Mary Liﬁ al-qitila”; “Kristin di Bizan.”
for the war effort. Had there been no world war, the biographer states, perhaps there would have been civil war in England over women’s suffrage ("Wafat Misiz Bankhurst"). This echoed a widely expressed misogynist attitude in England toward feminism, encapsulated in the biography’s description of Pankhurst’s methods as *takhrīb*, a word heavy with negative connotations ("laying waste,” “demolishing”). Yet here the message is an ambivalent one, for “if men have used such methods, women must, too” (53)—at least, if their feminist activism is shaped by service to the nation.

In 1919, in the thick of nationwide and cross-gender public activism against British control of Egypt, when *The Fair Sex* wanted to announce a shift in its own biographical practice, it began by inscribing national duty centrally and linking exemplarity and national progress: “If a nation wants renewal and progress its individual members take as examples those great people who preceded them, who succeeded and took great steps along the road of genius” (“Shahirat al-nisa’,” 81). The Western women this magazine had featured were active in ways “useful to their countries,” and this was integral to their fame. Announcing a shift from Western to Eastern women as biographical subjects, surely a significant political choice for the times, the magazine declared that it would provide local exemplars for “today’s female youth,” a rising generation “who spare no effort in Egypt’s emergence and success. . . . God grant us success in what holds the good of our community and our country” (81–82). Active women’s exemplarity and national progress were inseparable.

Five years before, *The Fair Sex* had featured French balloonist Sophie Blanchard (d. 1819). Her life story provides a useful conclusion to this essay, for it brings together strands I have followed. And although the woman at its center contrasts mightily with Maria Theodorovna, the emphases in the two biographies are not so dissimilar.

The biography opens with a declaration that could (and may) have come out of a mid-Victorian English domestic manual: “Life is beauty. And woman is the beauty in life, a flower that buds in earthly life’s garden to adorn the lifetime of man. She is multiple meanings, all pure and marvellous; in her smiles resides a light that dissipates the darkness of trials and strengthens the faltering step” (“Madam Blanshat,” 4). This preface echoes the issue’s (and the year’s) opening editorial, two pages before, which heralded the magazine as “a ripening flower which strives and works for what holds the good of the nation” (“Ifitītah,” 2). The metaphor constructed a link between women’s presence and the nation, between domestic and national duty. Yet this “flower” was not all sweetness and light. “Yes, she is sweetest when she knows her duty and understands her life’s aim, when she exemplifies boldness and courage. It pleases us to acquaint
our women readers with a lady who was an example of determination and courage. We mean Madame Blanchard — this lady who became famous with her husband Blanchard for flying” (4—5). The image of marriage constructed in this biography questions even as it celebrates the ideal of companionate marriage. Blanchard is shown to be supportive of her balloonist and inventor husband’s aims, even as a widow poverty-stricken by the late Jean-Pierre François Blanchard’s (1753–1809) consuming passion for aviation.\(^7\) “She was determined to follow in the path he had trod and so she began to ascend in the air” (5). For it was after his death that she became a famous aviator in her own right, whom the crowds flocked to see. Moreover, according to this biography she earned back the money he had lost, with her narrow escapes and daring fireworks displays in midflight. Widowed, Blanchard displaces the male wage earner without upsetting the structure of differential gendered roles. Yet her own rise to fame subverts the ideal of informed domesticity spelled out in the opening lines.

But it is the domestic that provides a parting word of advice. The narrative that ends with Sophie Blanchard’s dramatic death moves smoothly into a finale that recapitulates the opening, framing the didactic message of this life history within the four walls of domesticity. “Then the ropes that bound the balloon chamber where she sat burned and it plummeted, and so Madame Blanchard fell onto a city roof and thence to the ground, and died instantly. Thus ended that life so replete with persistence and occupation. We hope our women will learn an exemplary lesson (umthula) of perseverance and endurance from Madame Blanchard in the occupations for which they were created, and the duties assigned them as daughters, mothers, and wives” (6). Women are to elicit an example, but only of “perseverance,” and to turn it to good use in their domestically defined roles, dictated by God and nature. But the double resonance of umthula — as “example” and as “warning” — and the conjunction separating “occupations” and “duties” hint at the potential “multiple meanings” of this life for readers.

Thus, to read the narrative of domesticity in early twentieth-century Egypt as enhancing women’s authority in the home, and no more, is to ignore the multiplicity of messages these biographies held. They opened a space in which to interrogate boundaries even as they reiterated them.

They gave (some) women new models of selfhood to consider as they reaffirmed the old. Readers might be encouraged by the actual narrative of a woman's initiative in pursuing a chosen public career even as the narrative frame prescribed her primary role to be domestic.

To judge by the reactions of audiences to whom I have presented this material, the fact that Arab women and men at the turn of the twentieth century were writing the lives of women from four continents is striking in itself and worth pointing out. But these biographies, as I hope I have shown, were more than a demonstration of cosmopolitan existences. Institutionalized in one segment of the popular press, biography was a socializing instrument for middle-class girlhood. In a context where the social positioning of women was contested, biography helped to do the work of shaping a new generation of the politically and economically dominant social strata. That these journals were part of an emerging public school curriculum gave this production of meaning a very specific didactic focus. Biography purveyed a set of messages about gendered social roles that girls making the transition to adulthood could have perceived as contradictory. Strains in the discursive production of gender, and in women's lives, surfaced in the production of exemplary life histories. Managing an image of womanhood that was unstable, biographies intervened in discourses on gender that operated simultaneously to expand and to constrict women's lives. Reading perseverance in Sophie Blanchard's life, might schoolgirls not also read into their own lives an ascent into the air?

Program in Comparative Literature, Center for African Studies, and Center for Middle East and South Asian Studies
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Appendix

Biographical and other texts in Egyptian periodicals
The periodicals in which these texts appeared, their founding and closing dates (bracketed dates are the last volumes available to me), and abbreviations used in citation are al-Muatataf (Choice Pieces, 1876–1951 [moved to Cairo from Beirut, 1884], MUQ); al-Fatat (The Young Woman, 1892–94, F); al-Hilal (The Crescent, 1892–, HIL); Anis al-Jalis (The Intimate Companion, 1898–1908, AJ); al-Mar'a fi'l-Islam (Woman in Islam, 1901, MI); Majallat al-Sayyidat wa'l-bunat (Ladies' and Girls' Magazine, 1903–4, SB); Fatat al-barg (Young Woman of the East, 1906–39, FS); al-fins al-latuf (The Fair Sex, 1908–21, JL); Fatat al-nil (Young Woman of the Nile, 1913–15, FN); Majallat al-sayyidat wa'l-rijal (Ladies'
and Men’s Magazine [a sequel to SB, resumed in 1921 (vol. 3) as *Majallat al-sayyidat* and then as the Ladies’ and Men’s Magazine (vol. 4) in 1925, SR]; *Majallat al-mar’a al-misriyya* (The Egyptian Woman’s Magazine, 1920–39, MM); *Majallat al-nabda al-nisa’iyya* (Magazine of the Women’s Awakening, 1921–39, NN); *Fatat Misr al-Fatat* (Young Woman of Misr al-Fatat [a political organization], 1921–24?, FMF); *al-Raja’* (Hope, 1922, R); *al-Hisan* (Belles, 1924–59 [I covered 1924–30], H); *Adab al-fatat* (Letters/Morals of the Young Woman, 1926, AF); *Fatat Misr* (Young Woman of Egypt, 1930, FMI); *al-‘Arusa* (The Bride, 1925–39, A). The abbreviation SN stands for “Shahirat al-nisa’” (“Famous Women”), the most common feature headline for these sketches. I examined all issues in the Egyptian National Library, supplemented by my own holdings. The list below consists only of texts cited; it is by no means my entire sample.


“Al-Anisa Jisy Akirman” (Miss Jessie Ackerman). 1916. JL 9 (October): 121.


“Bilqis malikat al-Yaman” (Bilqis queen of the Yemen [the queen of Sheba]). 1929. MM 10 (December 15): 413–14.


“Faransis Darbalay” (Frances D’Arbalay [Fanny Burney]). 1935. SN. FS 29 (May): 393–95.


“Jadda karima awwal man talabat bi-huqq al-mar’â” (A noble grandmother, first to demand women’s rights [Margaret Brent]). 1898. AJ 1 (July): 242–45.

“Jalalat imbiraturat Rusiya al-mu’azzama” (Her exalted majesty the empress of Russia [Maria Theodorovna]). 1893. F 1 (May 1): 242–44.


“Jurr Sand” (George Sand). 1914. JL 7 (September): 84–89.


“Katirina al-thaniyya imbiraturat Alamaniyah [sic]” (Catherine II empress of Germany [sic]). 1932. SN. NN 10 (May): 159–60.

“Katirina al-ula” (Catherine I [of Russia]). 1908. SN. FS 3 (November): 41–43.

“Khadija bint Khuwaylid zawjat al-nabi ‘alayh al-salat wa’l-salami” (Khadija daughter of Khuwaylad, wife of the prophet prayers and peace be upon him). 1901.

Sirat SN. MI 1 (March 25): 14–16.


“Khasarat rabbit al-aqlam” (Loss of mistresses of the pen [Mary Morgan]). 1892.


“Al-Lady Rubirtsun” (Lady Robertson). 1915. (“Arabized with some changes from the writer on social affairs Beryl Adam.”) Nisa’ mashahir al-rijal. JL 7 (April): 345–49.
“Layla bint Tarif” 1912. FS 6 (March): 201–2.
“Madam Balafatsky wa’il-diyana al-sirriyya” (Madame Blavatsky and theosophy). 1893. (Attributed to Max Müller.) MUQ 17 (June): 668–70.
“Malikat al-duruz” (Queen of the Druze [Hester Stanhope]). 1926. (Attributed to a German newspaper.) MM 7 (April 1): 220–21.
“Malikat Isbaniya” (The queen of Spain [Christian]). 1898. AJ 1 (May): 137–41.
“Mariya Anaysi” (Maria Agnesi). 1901. Sirat SN. MI 1 (September 1): 175–76.


“Al-Sayyida Nafisa al-‘Alawiiyya.” 1901. MI 1 (June): 75–76.


“Umm al-Muhsinin sahibat al-sumuww al-amira al-jalila al-walida al-mu’azzama” (Umm al-Muhsinin, her majesty the exalted princess, the superb mother). 1923. SN. MM 4 (November 23): 475.

References


