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Talking About a Revolution: Gender and the Politics of Marriage in Early Twentieth-Century Egypt

Parlant de révolution: Sexe et politique entourant le mariage en Égypte, au début du XXe siècle



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The 1919 Egyptian Revolution has been elevated to an iconic national moment in Egyptian history. In this paper, I use pre-revolutionary, elite discussions about marriage as a means for interrogating the ways in which concepts such as modernity, nationhood, and citizen were defined and understood. I place discourses of gender and marriage at the center of the processes through which the modern, nationalist experience was learned and practiced in modern Egypt. Debates about marriage not only demonstrate that the domestic roles of Egyptian women were in the process of being redefined, but that the marital habits of modernity had to be learned by men and women alike.

La révolution de 1919 en Égypte est élevée à un moment national iconique dans l'histoire de l'Égypte. Dans cette analyse, j'utilise des discussions de l'élite pré-révolutionnaire au sujet du mariage comme moyen de questionnement sur la manière des concepts tels que la modernité, la nationalité et le citoyen étaient définis et compris. Je pose les discours sur le sexe et le mariage au centre des procédés à travers lesquels l'expérience nationaliste moderne a été apprise et pratiquée dans l'Égypte moderne. Des débats à propos du mariage démontrent non seulement que les rôles domestiques des femmes égyptiennes étaient en processus de redéfinitions, mais aussi que les habitudes maritales de la modernité devaient être apprises autant par les hommes que par les femmes.



Perhaps no other moment in twentieth-century Egyptian history has been as consistently hailed as the largest nationalist uprising than the Egyptian revolution of 1919. The mass protests and street demonstrations that erupted in March 1919 against British colonial rule are frequently recounted in both nationalist collective memory and academic scholarship as a watershed moment in the development of modern Egyptian nationalism.¹ The existing historiography on Egyptian nationalism, for example, traditionally cites the 1919 revolution as the first time veiled and 'secluded' Egyptian women descended from their 'harems' onto the streets of Cairo in political protest against the British occupation. Indeed, a number of scholars have depicted Egyptian women as generally uninvolved in the struggle for national independence until the 1919 revolution (see, for example, Marsot, Philipp, Salim, al-Subqi). This mythologized and romanticized narrative unfortunately has downplayed various public debates, in which both women and men participated, that preceded the revolution. Because the 1919 revolution has been elevated to an iconic national moment in Egyptian history, it has overshadowed analysis of other institutions and debates that helped shape and define notions of nationalism in early twentieth-century Egyptian society.

In contrast, this paper argues for a different reading of the development of early twentieth-century Egyptian nationalism. It explores the ways in which Egyptian male and female writers conceptualized the Egyptian nation through metaphors of marriage between 1899 and 1919. This period is a significant one, as new ideas of marriage, law, nationalism, and gender were being shaped and redefined on an unprecedented level. I argue that press debates about the so-called "marriage crisis," which many elite Egyptians felt was undermining the family and social order, served as an arena in which men and women learned to be modern, progressive nationalists decades before the 1919 revolution. A systematic study of the "marriage crisis" – typically used in the singular by Egyptian writers to refer to perceived increases in either bachelorhood or female minor age of marriage – will reveal that marriage was a contested site of national identity formation that attracted the growing social and legal attention of Egyptian nationalist reformers and press writers throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century. By placing discourses of marriage at the center of the processes through which the modern, nationalist experi-

ence was learned and practiced in colonial Egypt, we can see how women (and men) were in fact political participants in the development of Egyptian nationalism long before they took to the streets in 1919.

Review and Departures from the Literature

Contemporary studies on Egyptian nationalism have begun to draw on recent theoretical developments by scholars such as Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm that have expanded the analytical framework of nationalism. Traditionally, historical scholarship on Egyptian nationalism overwhelmingly focused on political histories of ideologies, institutions, and elite personalities (see, for example, Ahmed, Ghurbal, Goldschmidt, al-Rafa'i, Ramadan, Safran, Vatikiotis, and Zayid). While the recent literature has effectively rewritten older works, what is missing from these studies is a careful analysis of the interactive roles between Egyptian men and women (see, for example, Beinun and Lockman, Coury, Gershoni and Jankowski). Such accounts tend to posit a somewhat rigid binary opposition between the "public" nationalist domain of men and the "private" cultural sphere of women and the family, echoing Partha Chatterjee's argument about the inner/outer domain of Bengali Hindu nationalism, which sought to situate the "women's question" in an inner domain of spirituality, localized within the home and embodied by the feminine. Even Beth Baron, who argues that women's participation in the 1919 revolution must be seen as a continuation of earlier actions undertaken in the women's press in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, claims that the male nationalist press had politics as its central preoccupation, while women wrote mainly about topics pertaining to the home. To be sure, women's scholars, like Leila Ahmed, Margot Badran, Beth Baron, and Selma Botman, have sought to rescue Egyptian feminists from historical obscurity by recognizing their important contributions to Egyptian nationalism, but the main focus of these works has been on the roles and lives of upper-class women and elite women's organizations such as the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), drawing a rigid bifurcation between Egyptian feminism and nationalism.

While the existing literature provides important insights on the development of twentieth-century Egyptian nationalism, I depart from it in two significant ways. First, I use marriage as a lens to study the formula-

tion and articulation of nationalism in colonial Egypt. Unfortunately, studies on Egyptian nationalism frequently ignore the fundamental ties that make and break the family, despite the acknowledgement among scholars of nationalism that "the nation has invariably been imagined via metaphors of family" (Eley and Suny 26). As Etienne Balibar points out, "the great theme of the recent history of the family is the emergence of the 'nuclear' or small family" which ignores "the most crucial question" for scholars of nationalism: the penetration of family relations by the intervention of the nation-state, that is, the "nationalization of the family" (101-102). Yet, we cannot begin to talk about the family or the nation without examining marriage: marriage is the fundamental institution of the imagined, heterosexual Egyptian family, and the nation by extension. Furthermore, studies by scholars such as Marilyn Booth and Clarissa Lee Pollard that emphasize the formation of a modern family as a basis for a secular, nationalist society portray this version of the family as an uncontested institution. It is only by examining the marital bonds that were perceived to be in "crisis" that we can begin to understand the multiple and competing articulations of the family and the Egyptian nation, as well as how Egyptians conceptualized their rights and duties as married national subjects. An analysis of the early twentieth-century "marriage crisis" will help elucidate competing strands in Egyptian nationalism and contestations to the hegemonic model of the 'modern' family.

Second, I depart from the existing literature on Egyptian nationalism because I use gender as both a primary tool and object of analysis. In using gender as a category of analysis, I am influenced by Mary H. Blewett who defines gender as the "appropriate masculine and feminine behaviors that are worked out in political controversy and become socially established as expressions of the fundamental 'natures' of men and women" (92). Building on Blewett's definition, I investigate the ways in which Egyptian men and women manipulated notions of manhood and womanhood to better suit their interests as husbands, wives, and emerging nationalists. I explore the multiple and contradictory ways in which notions of masculinity and femininity were conceptualized by elites in the press and how they embedded meanings of marriage and national identity in one other. Because women have been traditionally neglected in Egyptian historiography, past studies have focused almost exclusively on the roles and status of elite women. Few have effectively utilized gen-

dered analyses, although scholars in other fields have written a number of pioneering works since the publication of Joan Scott's influential *Gender and the Politics of History*. Scott, along with other scholars, has underscored the importance of studying gender along with other analytical categories such as class, race, or ethnicity. Even among the new generation of gender historians, however, gender studies have largely ignored constructions of masculinity. Yet notions of masculinity and femininity are constantly being redeployed and renegotiated in terms with one another. Scholars cannot begin to fully understand how one is being reworked without considering the other.

Marriage, in particular, serves as one of the most effective, yet largely ignored, ways of studying gender and nationalism in a normative, heterosexual context. As Nancy F. Cott notes, "the whole system of attribution and meaning that we call gender relies on and to a great extent derives from the structuring provided by marriage. Turning men and women into husbands and wives, marriage has designated the way both sexes act in the world" (3). I do not mean, however, to suggest that marriage played the only role in the construction of gender in colonial Egypt. Indeed, gender is constructed by a variety of institutions, discourses, and processes. Yet I argue that marriage reveals one of the pivotal processes through which gender was learned and practiced in colonial Egypt. Gender identities and marital identities were intertwined: gender was largely influenced by the constructed identities of men and women as husbands and wives, and manhood and womanhood were largely shaped by the marital identities of husbands and wives. As a result, the ways in which men are made into husbands and women into wives will provide critical insights into studying gender formation in the early twentieth century.

Likewise, gender is a useful tool for studying marriage and nationalism. As Eley and Suny emphasize: "We finally need to consider the gendered dimensions and meanings of nationalist discourse more seriously, for this remains an astonishing absence in most of the scholarly literature... the subtle, complex, and disguised dialectics of femininity and masculinity in the construction of national identity... require explicit recognition" (27). I am most interested in how national identity was constructed differently for men and for women, and how notions of femininity and masculinity were deployed in national identity formation. Because marital identity was



often constructed by Egyptian elites as an essential component of national identity, the conjugal ties and identities provide a useful way to examine not only how men and women are turned into husbands and wives, but also how both are made into modern national subjects.

Poor Bachelors, Ignorant Women, and Greedy Parents

Margot Badran, Laura Bier, and Bruce W. Dunne, the few scholars who have addressed Egypt's "marriage crisis," cite the growing concerns in the 1930s over bachelorhood: large numbers of urban middle-class men were choosing bachelorhood over marriage either because of the 1930-1932 economic depression, which made marriage financially unviable for single men, or because of the sexually accessible outlet of prostitution, which deterred men from seeking marriage. Focusing on bachelorhood in terms of the early 1930s economic crisis or prostitution, however, oversimplifies the multiple manifestations of the "marriage crisis." While the 1930s were characterized by campaigns to abolish legalized prostitution, there was nothing new about legal prostitution or calls for its abolishment in Egypt.² Similarly, the economic depression of the early 1930s was not the first the Egyptian colony experienced under the British occupation. Egypt also faced an economic crisis in 1907, which adversely affected the marriage market. Changes in the economy invariably had an impact on marital agreements: for the growing middle classes, the entry of the Anglo-Egyptian economy into the world market resulted in greater preoccupation with capital and consumption as the Egyptian colony became a market for European manufactured goods. According to Baron, several commentators in the early 1900s bemoaned this situation, where money had become the "all and all." Middle-class men, particularly those who earned low government salaries, complained that they could not afford to marry. Baron notes that the women's press portrayed these men as "fleeing from marriage" as early as the late 1890.

Indeed, one such reader, Muhammad al-Bardisi, was concerned enough about the rise in bachelorhood that he wrote a letter to al-Ahram, perhaps the most widely-read Egyptian nationalist daily newspaper at the time, that was published on the front page under the title, "Young Men and Their Aversion to Marriage."³ In this letter, al-Bardisi explains that the "marriage crisis" is a major concern to him because

"the institution of marriage has always been the fundamental cornerstone in the development of civilization... [and] is essential for the preservation of the human race and the tranquility of man's conscience" (1). His grave fear was that men would not marry and reproduce children for the future Egyptian nation. Although he cites a number of causes for male aversion to marriage, among them the lack of properly educated women and extravagant demands for dowers, he also blames economic stagnation. Al-Bardisi claims that "most young men earn no more than 5 pounds a month, and it takes an extremely long time for them to set aside from this paltry sum sufficient funds for a dowry and the costs of a wedding, let alone the expenses necessary for the upbringing of their children" (1).

The object of critique in al-Bardisi's letter was not so much single bachelors who were "fleeing from marriage," as Baron insists, but rather uneducated women, the economy, and materialistic parents who demanded expensive dowers from their daughters' suitors. The concerns over bachelorhood cannot be properly understood without an analysis of the internal blame accorded to Egyptian society's "lack of educated women" and "exorbitant" demands for dowries. Another reader, Ibrahim Ahmed Fathi, also lamented "the reluctance of young men to marry" as "a microbe that infects the learned and the peasant alike," yet he strongly disagreed with al-Bardisi's explanation for the "marriage crisis" (1-2). Fathi disputed al-Bardisi's claims that Egyptian society lacked women with educations and men with sufficient salaries. Rather, in a more explicit nationalist tone, he argues, "Egyptians could have enterprises and jobs... Yet when we look around us we find that the companies and commercial stores are in the hands of foreigners" (2). While Fathi directly links the British occupation to the "marriage crisis," he also blames Egyptian men:

If Egyptians applied themselves seriously and intensively, they could...establish their presence in commerce and accumulate vast wealth. The young men of today spend their time in coffee shops and in places of entertainment...having squandered whatever money they had with them, whereas if they economized, they could have saved great sums from the money they spent on coffee, water pipes, drink, and games (2).

While Fathi addresses the economic situation under the British occupation in anticolonial tones, the objects of his critiques are neither uneducated women nor materialistic parents, but rather the bachelors

themselves. Furthermore, he directly calls on them to become more productive national subjects in order to rectify the "marriage crisis."

Indeed, as early as the 1890s, press reporters and social reformers lamented the rise in bachelorhood and the decline in Egyptian marriage rates. For example, in his famous 1899 treatise on Egyptian women, *The Liberation of Women*, Qasim Amin, a Muslim judge and nationalist leader, addresses the problematic issue of the bachelor. This treatise, in which Amin uses Islamic arguments to justify his call for women's reform, is traditionally hailed as the founding feminist text in Egypt. Amin is often acclaimed as "the father of Arab feminism" because of his calls to end female veiling and seclusion, as well as male abuses of polygamy and divorce (Abdel Kader, Cole, Haddad, Tignor). A number of feminist historians have criticized the overemphasis on Amin's text, which has led to a misconception that Egyptian women were not actively engaged in debates on women's issues (Ahmed, Badran, Baron). Yet, they also seem to have reached a consensus that the "women's question," characterized as the debate that emerged among turn-of-the-twentieth-century Egyptian intellectuals, was first taken up by men, even if women quickly joined in (Badran, Kandiyoti, Shakry). According to Badran, "it was the search to explain their country's backwardness that first led men to articulate feminist formulations" (16). The male nationalist concern with women's rights, which centered on issues such as education, veiling, and polygamy, is portrayed as coinciding with a broader agenda about 'progress' and the compatibility between Islam and modernity (see Kandiyoti).

While other scholars have focused exclusively on Amin's construction of the 'backward' Egyptian woman, I am more interested in how he constructs the Egyptian man, specifically the bachelor, vis-à-vis the Egyptian woman within the context of creating future 'modern' national subjects. Indeed, it is difficult to understand the construction of Egyptian manhood without considering its simultaneous juxtaposition with Egyptian womanhood, from which it is invariably defined. As Amin notes:

Every man who assumes that marriage will provide him a companion... will be disappointed. It is impossible for him to achieve this companionship through marriage. This may explain the reluctance to marry that we are observing among the able young men around us. The increasing number of cultured men is a result of the value placed on boys' upbringing... The increasing number of cultured men will necessitate that we implement the proper

methods of upbringing for women, methods based on the principles of... education... It is not an exaggeration to claim that the new generation of men prefer bachelorhood to marriage because they do not believe that present-day marriage will fulfill any of their dreams. They refuse to be committed to a wife whom they have never seen. What they would like in a wife is a friend whom they can love and who can love them (81-82).

Amin offers two reasons for men's "preference" for bachelorhood over marriage: first, the lack of suitable, educated women who can provide fulfilling companionship and, second, the custom of arranged marriage which prevents engaged couples from meeting one another before their wedding day. His mobilization of a critical portrait of uneducated Egyptian women functions within a complex set of assumptions about the 'backwardness' of Egypt, especially as it relates to the education and advancement of its women. Yet, his critique is not so much directed toward women themselves, but rather to Egyptian society as a whole. By employing the royal "we," he is calling on his fellow Egyptians to properly raise and educate their daughters. Similarly, he calls for the abolishment of arranged marriage, which does not entail "blindly adopting European values," but rather "a return to the religious principles and traditions of the earlier Muslims" that will "support the young men and help them to achieve their aims" (83). As other scholars have noted, Amin was not necessarily a feminist who had the best interest of women in mind. In the passage above, his concern lay with male bachelorhood, not female spinsterhood. For this prominent nationalist, the "increasing number of cultured men" was a waste to the future nation if they could not find suitable wives (82). Amin's views need to be situated in a colonial setting where "untutored 'ignorant' mothers were problematized, and motherhood was posited as a symbol of national backwardness" (Shakry 135). As Timothy Mitchell and Omnia Shakry have demonstrated, motherhood in colonial Egypt was fundamental to the constitution of national identity and entailed the formation of a series of discursive practices that demarcated women as both a locus of Egyptian 'backwardness' and a sphere of transformation to be modernized.

In many respects, Amin exemplifies Chatterjee's argument of "the double bind" in which anticolonial nationalist thought found itself. To constitute itself as nationalist, Chatterjee contends, anticolonial thought must "demonstrate the falsity of the colonial



claim that the backward peoples were culturally incapable of ruling themselves in the conditions of the modern world. Nationalism denied the alleged inferiority of the colonized people; it also asserted that a backward nation could 'modernize' itself while retaining its cultural identity. It thus produced a discourse in which, even as it challenged the colonial claim to political domination, it also accepted the very intellectual premises of 'modernity'... on which colonial domination was based" (*Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* 30). Indeed, we see Amin's emphasis on Egypt retaining its cultural identity when he explicitly situates his calls for reform within a discursive Islamic tradition. As Shakry notes, "even Westernized modernizing reformers... situated their own projects as a defense of Islam and a critique of taqlid [blind imitation]. Their projects were often conceptualized as an illustration that 'true Islam' was entirely compatible with modernity" (148). While he may have appropriated colonial assumptions about the 'backwardness' of Egyptian society and women, Amin was quick to point out that practices such as arranged marriage were not Islamic. In his view, 'true Islam' was compatible with 'modern' marriage that would enable Egyptian men to marry and reproduce future citizens for the nation.

Marrying Minors, Mature Mothers

The "marriage crisis" was not only used to refer to men who did not marry at all. It was also used to refer to men who married minors. During the early twentieth century, a number of proposals and laws were passed that reorganized Islamic personal status laws regarding marriage and divorce.⁴ Major legislation was passed into law in 1920, 1923, 1929, and 1931.⁵ Although a number of scholars have discussed these legal reforms affecting marriage and divorce, their narratives remain largely descriptive of what these laws entailed (Anderson, Badran, Esposito, Hatem, Sonbol). Few, if any, interrogate how and why these laws were proposed, by whom they were proposed, how the larger public reacted to such laws, and where these laws fit into articulations of Egyptian nationalism. Furthermore, with the exception of Baron, scholars have neglected the press debates on marriage in the first two decades of the twentieth century, as well as the major marital legislation that was proposed in 1914. The marital legislation of this period cannot be understood without first considering the early twentieth-century public debates that set the stage for the passage of these laws.

Although the 1914 marital legislative proposal was not passed into law, it marks the first significant attempt by Egyptian nationalist reformers to pass legislation regulating marriage. The 1914 proposal is the focus here because it marks the beginning of Egyptian nationalists' attempts to construct a new vision of 'modern' marriage to create a national family. In March 1914, deputy member Zakariyya Bey Namiq, presented a bill on marital issues to the Legislative Assembly,⁶ among them a proposal to establish the legal age of female marriage at sixteen. The bill sparked widespread controversy and sparked several weeks of public debate in the press where reporters and readers alike debated the proper female age for marriage and the national duty, purposes, and meanings of marriage.⁷ The age of marriage, in particular, generated heated reaction, as readers discussed the appropriate age for marriage in front-page articles and letters to the editor, offering personal opinions as well as their own proposals. While the 1914 debates were largely initiated by male writers, discussions about the proper female age of marriage originated among women writers in the previous decade, who observed that many girls that married at a young age were prone to difficult (and often fatal) pregnancies and to diseases such as hysteria (see, for example, Nasif).

Namiq similarly believed that female minors risked their health when they married young and, thus, consulted several doctors to determine the "moderate" age of sixteen, although he realized that this proposed age would be highly unpopular among Muslims (Rizk). As Baron explains, Muslim authorities could find no basis in Islamic law to justify the establishment of minimum age limits because the Prophet Muhammad had married his youngest wife when she was six. Indeed, Muslim doctors attempted to refute medical findings that determined premature marriage was dangerous. One such doctor, Muhammad Tawfiq Sidqi, argued:

Pregnancy hastens the growth of the entire body which is why one finds that young women's bodies after giving birth develop at a far faster rate than women of a comparable age who do not marry. Young, healthy women have an abundance of robust blood that emits an invigorating stimulus which permeates the frail bodies of elderly men, heats their languid blood, and activates their feeble organs. Scientific lore cites instances of old men whose white hair regained its color and whose teeth grew back as a result of cohabiting with young women. There can be no doubt that a girl's health at the age of puberty is at its prime and,

therefore, will have the most powerful effect on men than at any other time. Thus, the husband benefits from the improvements of his health while the wife benefits from his money and status (1).

In spite of such 'convincing' medical reasoning, the editors of al-Ahram supported Namiq's bill, arguing:

Marriage is not simply for procreation, nor should offspring merely be brought into existence. Rather it is our responsibility to ensure that our offspring are strong, vigorous, and well raised. Can this goal be accomplished by marrying women who are too young? We say no, a thousand times no! We can only build a sturdy enduring edifice from sturdy materials. A strong nation can only be built from a large, well raised, educated offspring and such offspring can only be formed by mature mothers. The nation needs mature women, not girls. (1)

Once again, we see the mobilization of the mothers-of-the-nation discourse, underscoring Mitchell and Shakry's arguments that motherhood in colonial Egypt was fundamental to the constitution of national identity. In this passage, however, motherhood is not embedded within discursive practices that focus on the uneducated, ignorant Egyptian mother vis-à-vis her European counterpart, but rather in terms of her age and maturity. In order to convince Muslim Egyptians that the age of female marriage should be raised, the editors couch their arguments within a nationalist discourse of a "strong nation" in order to appeal to all Egyptians.

Despite the widespread support of Namiq's bill among nationalists, it was nevertheless subjected to such harsh criticism that he was ultimately forced to withdraw it (Rizk). The withdrawal of Namiq's bill, however, did not signal the end of marital reform, evidenced by the passage of the Egyptian Code of Organization and Procedure for Shari'a Courts (the Islamic religious courts) in 1923, which set the legal marriage age for women at sixteen (Anderson, Baron, Esposito). Feminist scholars argue that the ensuing marital reforms of the 1920s are, in the words of Amira Sonbol, the cause for the present subjugation of Egyptian women, and were intended to prop up a new state-sponsored patriarchal order. A similar point has been made by Mrinalini Sinha in the case of colonial India, where she argues that the passage of marital reforms was not necessarily concerned with improving the social position of women per se. Yet, Sinha points out that the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 was more concerned with a commit-

ment to modernity, marking a crucial turning point between the de-legitimization of colonialism as the agent of modernity and the advent of a new nationalist 'Indian' modernity. The case of the 1914 proposal and its debates demonstrates similar tensions and ambiguities of colonial modernity in the Egyptian context.

Indeed, when the debates over legislative proposals such as the 1914 bill are systematically interrogated, it becomes clear that Egyptian reformers sought to define and redefine marital laws in order to create a physically sound, 'modern' family. Their intention seems to have been to create married national subjects who would form national families that could serve as the foundation for a postcolonial nation free of social ills. However, the fact that the 1914 proposal did not pass seems to suggest that the nationalist model of mature marriage was highly contested, particularly in a society where minor marriage was religiously sanctioned. In contrast to scholars who believe that state-sponsored visions of marriage and the family were linear and hegemonic, the debates over the 1914 bill reveal that these dominant notions clearly did not go unchallenged.⁸

When early twentieth-century Egyptian writers were lamenting the "marriage crisis" and the need for reform, they often used marriage as a metaphor to discuss the larger socio-economic and political changes that were sweeping Egyptian society during this tumultuous period. Although the writers examined in this paper represent a small segment of Egyptian society, their arguments, tactics, and views were not cohesive. They employed a number of strategies embedded in a variety of multiple and often intertwined discourses: religious, secular, nationalist, anticolonial, and economic. Yet, the underlying assumption among all these writers was unified: reforming marriage would facilitate Egypt's path to modernity. By 'modernizing' marriage, Egyptian nationalists could put an end to British colonialism and attain national independence. Whether they used marriage to critique Egyptian society, parents, or the roles of men as bachelors and women as mothers, these writers were all articulating competing visions of the family as a site where the Egyptian colony could reform and prove itself to be 'modern' and, thus, worthy of political independence.

When Egyptian press writers and nationalist reformers bemoaned the causes of the "marriage crisis," they were not only referring to their concerns about the alleged increases in bachelorhood or minor marriage. They were



also using marriage as a means to envision a postcolonial Egyptian nation and to articulate their fears about its future. Not only could the corruption of this institution cause the theft of suitable Egyptian husbands and fathers for the nation, but it could also endanger the reproduction of future citizens. Although discussions of the "marriage crisis" frequently posited the Egyptian woman at the center of reform, both men and women ultimately were held responsible for this "crisis" and its harmful effects on the future Egyptian nation. As a 'modern' and loyal national subject, the Egyptian man was instructed to fulfill his political duty by marrying his female compatriot and educating his daughters, while the Egyptian woman was directed to improve her educational and domestic competence so that she could attract an Egyptian husband. The public debates surrounding the "marriage crisis" thus reveal the multiple and competing articulations of early twentieth-century Egyptian nationalism, and how elite Egyptians conceptualized the interconnectedness of their marital and national identities. Indeed, these debates reveal one of the pivotal ways through which the modern, nationalist experience was learned and practiced in colonial Egypt long before the 1919 revolution.

Endnotes

1. Egyptian nationalists initiated a three-year struggle for independence beginning with the 1919 revolution when Britain failed to remove the World War I protectorate status. Although Britain occupied the Ottoman Egyptian province militarily in 1882 and established a new colonial regime, the province was not placed under a military protectorate until the onset of World War I in 1914. In 1922, the British conferred nominal independence and a constitution was signed in 1923.
2. Recognition and regulation of prostitution existed in various forms since the nineteenth century, with British colonial authorities establishing a formalized system of control in 1905. The Egyptian government left colonial regulations in place after Egypt gained nominal independence from British rule in 1923 and until state-regulated prostitution was officially outlawed in 1953 (Badran, Tucker).
3. This quote and all subsequent excerpts from primary articles and speeches are my own translations, unless they are taken from secondary sources. For Arabic words and names transcribed into English, I follow the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) system of transliteration.
4. Egyptians proposed all of these bills and laws. Unlike in colonial India, British officials did not

attempt to reform, or "Anglicize," the Islamic legal system in Egypt, despite their frequent criticisms of the shari'a courts (Brown). The British ruler in Egypt from 1883 to 1907, Lord Cromer, explained that, "if they [the shari'a courts] are ever to be improved, the movement in favour of reform must come from within. It must be initiated from by the Egyptians themselves. Any serious attempt to impose reforms by pressure from without would be extremely impolitic, and more, over, would probably result in failure" (515).

5. The Law of 1931 was the last major piece of legislation affecting the family until 1979, when a presidential decree by Anwar Sadat offered women minor gains in divorce rights, only to be abolished a few years later (Hatem).

6. The Legislative Assembly was created in 1913 by the merger of the General Assembly and Legislative Council. It was comprised of nationalist reformers, lawyers, and landowners who sought internal reform as the path to Egyptian independence (Baron).

7. There are too many articles to cite here, but they ran in the daily newspaper, al-Ahram, among other newspapers, throughout the month of March 1914.

8. Botman, for example, argues, "secular politicians were reluctant to intervene in the private domain of the family" (49). Hatem claims that the nationalist alliance which formed against the British reinforced the patriarchal legal system: while the emerging patriarchal order enhanced women's integration in the "public" sphere, state commitment to a nationalist ideology worked against changes in the private sphere, and continued to maintain private control through personal status laws.

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