

SOCIAL AND
Chapter 7 INTELLECTUAL
CHANGE

IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY THE SOCIETIES of the Middle East began to undergo a fundamental social transformation. Economic encroachment by the West and entrammelment in the global economy, the emergence of “modern” states in the region, and the domination, formal or informal, of much of the area by European colonial powers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries formed the overarching economic and political parameters of the transformation.

As early as the first decades of the nineteenth century some women, particularly rural workers and lower-class women in countries, such as Egypt and Syria, where European-made goods had made inroads, undoubtedly suffered as a consequence of the shifting economic and political patterns. For women in general the effects of European political and cultural encroachment were complicated and, in certain respects, decidedly negative. Nonetheless, in crucial ways the outcome of the process of change the encroachments set in motion was broadly positive, because the social institutions and mechanisms for the control and seclusion of women and for their exclusion from the major domains of activity in their society were grad-

ually dismantled. The social system had combined the worst features of a Mediterranean and Middle Eastern misogyny with an Islam interpreted in the most negative way possible for women, and Middle Eastern women have no cause to regret its passing.

The changes ensuing from economic change and from state policies, whether promulgated by an indigenous or a colonial bureaucracy, and the cultural and ideological developments that followed, had an impact on the lives of both men and women. One development was of peculiar significance to women, however: the emergence of women themselves as a central subject for national debate. For the first time since the establishment of Islam, the treatment of women in Islamic custom and law—the license of polygamy, easy male access to divorce, and segregation—were openly discussed in Middle Eastern societies. The subject of women first surfaced as a topic of consequence in the writings of Muslim male intellectuals in Egypt and Turkey. From the start the treatment and status of women were intertwined with other issues that these intellectuals considered critically important to society, including nationalism and the need for national advancement and for political, social, and cultural reform. From the start the discussion of women and reform was embedded in considerations of the relative advancement of European societies and the need for Muslim societies to catch up. A new discourse on women emerged, overlaying rather than displacing the old classical and religious formulations on gender and often linking issues concerning women, nationalism and national advancement, and cultural change. In the new and, by the end of the century, dominant discourse on women these issues were inextricably connected.

There is no intrinsic or necessary connection between the issue of women and the issue of culture, as the history of Western feminism shows. The Western legacy of androcentrism and misogyny, though differing in its specificities, is nevertheless, generally speaking, no better than that of other cultures, including the Islamic. Indeed, in view of such occurrences as the extermination of thousands of women in the course of the European witch-hunts, Fatima Mernissi's formula describing how the Muslim order conceived of its enemies, "the infidel without and the woman within," seems at least as aptly to describe the European past.¹ Nevertheless, Western feminists do not therefore call for the abandonment of the entire Western heritage and the wholesale adoption of some other culture as the only recourse for Western women; rather, they engage critically and constructively with that heritage in its own terms. Adopting another culture as a general remedy for a heritage of misogyny within a particular culture is not only ab-

surd, it is impossible. The complexity of enculturation and the depth of its encoding in the human psyche are such that even individuals deliberately fleeing to another culture, mentally or physically, carry forward and re-create in their lives a considerable part of their previous enculturation. In any case, how could the substitution of one culture for another be brought about for the peoples of an entire society or several societies?

Yet in the debate about women in the Islamic world, as in other parts of the non-Western world, those proposing an improvement in the status of women from early on couched their advocacy in terms of the need to abandon the (implicitly) "innately" and "irreparably" misogynist practices of the native culture in favor of the customs and beliefs of another culture—the European. (As I will discuss in the following chapter, it was no accident that the abandonment of native culture was posed as the solution for women's oppression only in colonized or dominated societies and not in Western ones.) This rhetoric became insistent and pronounced with colonial domination, and it was in this context that the links between the issue of women and the issues of nationalism and culture were permanently forged. They were fused initially in the context of Western economic and cultural encroachment and finally and most forcefully in the context of its political and discursive domination—a domination that was to precipitate new kinds of class and cultural conflict. The debate over women became a dominant mode through which these other profoundly divisive matters were contested. It was at this point that the veil emerged as a potent signifier, connoting not merely the social meaning of gender but also matters of far broader political and cultural import. It has ever since retained that cargo of signification. The fusion of the issue of women with issues of class, culture, and politics and the encoding of the issue of women and the veil with these further issues have been critical for women. Progress or regress in the position and rights of women has often directly depended on which side of the debates over nationalism and culture the men holding or gaining political power espoused. In this chapter I explore the developments that took place over the course of the nineteenth century and that set the stage for the emergence, in the late nineteenth century, of the discourse encoding gender with the conflicts of class and culture. The specific sources and evolution of that discourse form the subject of the next chapter.

Western economic encroachment and domination in the nineteenth century, the responses within Middle Eastern societies, and the economic and social changes that occurred were multileveled and intricate, as were the circumstances of the emergence and evolution of the debate on women. The direction of change was similar for the Middle East as a whole, though the

pace of change differed from country to country. Egypt and Turkey and to a lesser extent Syria, where European products first entered the market, were in the vanguard, whereas the Arabian Peninsula was less directly affected until well into the twentieth century. Local factors accented developments differently as the various regions—with their various urban and rural, nomadic and tribal communities—were caught up in the global economy. Also shaping the specific social and political outcome in each country was the evolving political relation with European states—whether the Middle Eastern country remained independent or became submerged in colonialism or protocolonialism.

Rather than attempt to follow out developments in the region in all their local variations, a project hardly feasible except in the most superficial terms, I shall focus on their effects on women and on the new discourses on women in Egypt. Egypt was at the forefront of the changes overtaking the Arab world over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and in many ways it was, and continues to be, a mirror of developments in the Middle East. The debate over the veil that erupted there at the turn of the nineteenth century, igniting a controversy within Egyptian society and touching off debate in other Muslim Middle Eastern capitals, marked the emergence of a new discourse. As formulated in Egypt at that time, when colonial ascendancy and class division were crucial issues, it proved to be a founding and paradigmatic discourse. Repeatedly throughout the twentieth century the issue of women and the veil, albeit occasionally in slightly different guise, has flared up in one or another Middle Eastern society—and indeed in Muslim societies further afield—and always the debate is charged with other issues—culture and nationalism, “Western” versus “indigenous” or “authentic” values—first drawn into the discourse on women at a past critical moment, a moment occurring in Egypt in the late nineteenth century. That is, it is a discourse on women and the veil in which another history is also inscribed, the history of colonial domination and the struggle against it and the class divisions around that struggle—a history affecting all Middle Eastern societies in one way or another and a discourse in which that history, those struggles, still live.

European economic encroachment was distinctly under way in Egypt by the late eighteenth century. By the 1770s local crafts, in particular textile production, were being adversely affected by imported European goods.² This trend steadily continued over the first decades of the nineteenth century, and by the 1840s a major shift was established, characterized by the import of finished goods and the export of raw materials and by an increase

in trade with Western Europe at the expense of trade within the Ottoman empire. Egypt, which had traded chiefly with the Ottoman empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was trading predominantly with Europe by midcentury.

This imbalance was occurring for reasons external and internal to the Middle East. During the first half of the eighteenth century Europe underwent a technological revolution that culminated in the industrial revolution. Techniques improved, particularly in textile production, outstripping in efficiency and economy the techniques of the Middle East. At the same time, production in the Middle East was disrupted by a devastating series of plagues and by political unrest. In Egypt almost continuous warfare within the Mamluk ruling class, plus extortionist taxation, further contributed to a decline in production.³

Developments in Egypt played a key role in accelerating social change. Particularly important were the policies pursued by Muhammad 'Ali, who became ruler of Egypt, nominally under Turkish suzerainty, in 1805 and who stayed in power for forty-three years. Intent upon making Egypt independent, Muhammad 'Ali set about modernizing his army and increasing revenues. He introduced agricultural, administrative, and educational reforms and attempted to establish industries, his initiatives in these areas giving impetus to economic, intellectual, cultural, and educational developments important to women.

In their immediate impact, both Western economic advances and Muhammad 'Ali's policies adversely affected some women, particularly lower-class urban and rural women. In the first place European imports caused a decline in the local textile industry, competition from Western products putting pressure on those involved in textile work—one of the few areas of remunerative labor open to women.⁴ This decline was exacerbated in the first decades of the nineteenth century by state trade agreements and later by state measures introduced to establish a state-run textile industry.⁵ Bringing textile workers under state control and instituting state-run textile factories disrupted the local textile industry, previously dependent on autonomous workers. Even when most of the state-run factories had failed, by about midcentury, traditional textile crafts could not regain their former vitality, although some local production continued. The failure of the state venture into textile production accelerated the pace at which Egypt became essentially a supplier of raw materials—chiefly and increasingly cotton after 1840—and an importer of finished European goods.⁶

Some of the state factories had employed some women, in particular factories in provincial centers, such as the tarboosh factory at Fuwwa. There

are no reliable figures on the number of women thus employed, but it is generally thought to be small. Women received about two-thirds of the wages received by men. Women, probably again only in small numbers, were also employed in other factories established by Muhammad 'Ali, sugar and tobacco factories, for example, and cotton-processing plants, some of which continued production into the twentieth century.⁷

Egypt's growing entrammelment in the global economy, however, initially decreased the opportunities for women to earn a livelihood or a supplemental income from textile production, whether by spinning, carding, or bleaching, as Judith Tucker has argued in her work on nineteenth-century Egyptian women. Tucker speculates, too, that the influx of European goods had a negative impact on other areas of local trade in ways that, again, harmed women and men. Thus she notes that while petty traders of foodstuffs, for instance, were probably unaffected, local merchants were pushed aside in favor of European companies and their agents. Consequently, women who invested in local trade would also have suffered.

The changes in land tenure laws that Muhammad 'Ali introduced in his pursuit of agricultural reform also adversely affected the peasantry, including women. The laws concentrated land in the hands of a few large landowners and led to peasant dispossession, which was exacerbated by other agricultural projects that Muhammad 'Ali vigorously pursued, such as digging and restoring dikes and canals. Although these measures significantly increased the area of cultivable land, they were carried out with forced male peasant labor, depriving the peasant household of essential agricultural labor and leading to further dispossession. Women and children, if they had no other means of support, sometimes worked alongside their men at the work sites. The pay was poor and often in arrears, and the conditions of work often appalling. Male peasants were also subject to forcible recruitment into the army, with once more the same consequences for their families; again, women and children with no other means of subsistence followed their men. They encamped in shantytowns and split the rations allotted to their men, and here, too, the conditions were often appalling.⁸

If not compelled by poverty to follow men fulfilling their corvée or military duties, women suffered in their men's absence, having to take on their agricultural tasks in addition to their own already onerous ones. Observers report seeing whole villages where cultivation was carried out by women.⁹ Land left behind with no family to cultivate it might be taken over by someone else; at the very least the crop suffered.

Other measures, including state monopolies on agricultural produce,

bore heavily on the peasantry, resulting in debt, loss of the right to work the land, or flight. All contributed to peasant dispossession and abandonment of the land, a trend that continued into this century. Peasant families fled to other villages or to the major towns, where they eked out a living as casual laborers and domestics—the outlawing of slavery in the later nineteenth century created a demand for domestics among the wealthier families.¹⁰

Broadly, then, according to Tucker, some of the changes ushered in by European imports and state reform measures worsened the lot of women, particularly women of the popular classes and rural women. However, other developments in the nineteenth century had enormous and more enduring consequences for women, in particular developments following from the state's aggressive pursuit of educational modernization and technological and social reform. Women were affected by such initiatives directly in the latter part of the century in that the state promulgated women's education and indirectly when men who were educated in the "modern" schools or who traveled to Europe to study called for reforms in the social arrangements regarding women. The questioning and rethinking of the role of women prepared the ground for the gradual expansion of educational opportunities for women and, eventually, professional opportunities as well. The initial beneficiaries of these intellectual and social changes were primarily upper- and middle-class women, but in the long term women of all classes had new opportunities.

Muhammad 'Ali's eagerness to acquire the technologies of Europe was an important catalyst. With the objective of strengthening and modernizing the country militarily and technologically and catching up with Europe, he sent student missions to Europe to learn military and engineering sciences and technologies such as shipbuilding and printing.¹¹ Schools and colleges for men were opened in Egypt, employing European teaching methods and presenting European subject matter, medical and military training in particular. Student missions were sent to Europe as early as 1809; a military school was established in 1816, and a medical school in 1827.

As part of the general enterprise of acquiring European knowledge, a school to train translators was established in Cairo in 1835. Its director, Rifa'ah Rafi' al-Tahtawi (1801–73), was a graduate of al-Azhar and a former member of an educational mission to Paris. In a descriptive work on French society, he recommended that girls be given the same education as boys, saying that this was the practice in the strongest nations, that is, in European ones. His was the first work to appear in Arabic associating reforms in social mores affecting women with the social and technological

reforms for national renewal. Muhammad 'Ali much admired al-Tahtawi's book and recommended its general use with students. Shortly thereafter the state, at least rhetorically, adopted the view that educating women was desirable: in the late thirties the Educational Council of Egypt, of which al-Tahtawi was a member, issued a statement declaring itself "impressed by women's important contribution to the progress of civilisation in modern societies" and recommended public education for women.¹²

Aside from establishing a school to train women doctors in 1832, the state took no steps to institute education for girls until the 1870s. The impetus to found the School for Hakimas (women doctors) was a practical consideration: training medical practitioners who would have access to women. A shortage of labor power and the prevalence of epidemic and endemic diseases led Muhammad 'Ali to see the importance of organizing sanitary services and training doctors. The school was established under the directorship of Antoine Clot-Bey, a French physician; its first female principal was Susan Voilquin (see chap. 6).¹³ Training at the school, generally called the Midwifery School because it emphasized obstetrics, took six years—the same length of time as the training at the School of Medicine, which was for men. At first the school had difficulty in recruiting students—it had places for sixty—but by 1846 it achieved enrollment to capacity and apparently maintained it at that level for the remainder of the century. Graduates, awarded a license to administer vaccinations, perform deliveries, and treat women and children free of charge, were appointed government employees with the rank of second lieutenant. The government also arranged marriages for the hakimas from among the graduates of the School of Medicine, for initially no marriage offers were forthcoming. One year, 1844, the director of the School of Medicine was ordered to submit the names of appropriate spouses among the medical officers for prospective graduates of the School for Hakimas. Once married, the couple were appointed to the same district and received a small house furnished at government expense.¹⁴

Hakimas treated indigent women at the Civil Hospital in Cairo, in an outpatient clinic as well as in the hospital, and they vaccinated children both at the hospital and in private homes, including those of the upper classes. About six hundred children were vaccinated at the Civil Hospital each month and over all about fifteen thousand per year. When the government established quarantine stations at ports in the 1830s and 1840s, the hakimas took over the physical examination of women; they also verified the cause of death, which was essential in planning preventive programs. The effectiveness of these women, even if the vaccination program

they carried out is the sole measure of that effectiveness, was enormous. Furthermore, as Yacoub Artin, minister of public instruction in Egypt later in the century, noted, their active presence in society helped spread notions of the value of education for women and women's ability to be competent and earning professionals along with notions of basic hygiene. In addition to serving as medical practitioners, some of the women became instructors in the school from which they had graduated. One former student, Jalila Tamrahan (d. 1890), became the principal of the school and published a work on her experiences in obstetrics as a guide to students in 1871.¹⁵

Although the School for Hakimas remained the only state-sponsored venture in women's education until the 1870s, the openness toward women's studying European subjects was reflected in the practices of the upper classes. Muhammad 'Ali's daughters and their retinues received instruction from European tutors as well as the traditional instruction in Arabic and religion.¹⁶ Upper-class families followed suit, though employing teachers for daughters was evidently a sporadic rather than a routine practice. 'Aisha Taymour (1840–1902), a distinguished poet and a member of the Turkish-Egyptian upper class, received an education, despite her mother's opposition, because of her own persistence and her father's support.¹⁷ Nazli Fadl (d. early 1900s), eldest daughter of a prince, who hosted the first salon in Egypt frequented by leading intellectuals and members of the ruling class later in the century, was presumably tutored in childhood by European teachers as well as Egyptian or Arab instructors.

Among the middle and lower classes, a small percentage of girls continued to attend the kuttabs, or traditional schools, which taught reading and the recitation of the Quran. But European-type education began among these classes as well, initially by way of missionary schools, first established in the 1830s and 1840s. By 1875 an estimated 5,570 girls were attending missionary schools, among them 3,000 Egyptians; and by 1887 about 4,000 of 6,160 were Egyptian.¹⁸ The majority of Egyptian girls attending missionary schools were Copts, but a small number of Muslims also attended, though most Muslim parents were reluctant to entrust their daughters to missionary schools, which were established for the purpose of winning pupils to Christianity. Occasionally when missionary-run schools set out to recruit from the poorest classes, among whom they felt able to resort to aggressive recruiting measures, Muslims could predominate. This was the case with Miss Whately's school. Mary Louisa Whately (daughter of the bishop of Dublin) recruited pupils by accosting poor people, parents and children, that she met in the street and persuading the children to attend. With the aid of Syrian Christian women teachers, she taught Chris-

tianity, Arabic reading, and needlework. The free instruction she offered in needlework earned her the animosity of Egyptian needlework teachers, who lost pupils to her; they came to the school to attempt to forcibly take them back.¹⁹

The zeal with which missionary schools pursued their proselytization, which they directed at local communities of Christians and Jews, as well as Muslims, spurred these communities to establish schools themselves. Two Coptic girls' schools opened in Cairo in the 1850s, constituting the first native European-style schools opened for Egyptian girls. Next came Jewish girls' schools, which opened in Alexandria and Cairo; and in the 1850s other communities, like the Greek, opened their own girls' schools in Cairo and Alexandria.²⁰

Khedive Ismael (r. 1863–79), who declared schools to be the “base of every progress,” instituted an Educational Committee soon after his accession. It recommended the establishment of schools throughout Egypt, including schools for girls, to be made available to all according to their means, and it proposed the modernization of kuttab schools and their incorporation into the state system. ‘Ali Mubarak (1824–93), a member of this committee who had studied in France, was particularly supportive of women’s education, stating that women had a right to pursue knowledge to its limits and a right to work, although their first task, he believed, was raising children and counseling spouses.²¹

The committee commissioned al-Tahtawi to write a textbook suitable for schoolchildren of both sexes. His *Al-murshid al-amin lil-banat wa-l-banin* (A guide for girls and boys), published in the 1870s, announced in its title that education was for both sexes. The text was a collection of pieces on a variety of subjects, including the education of women. Educating girls as well as boys, it stated, would make for harmonious marriages and would enable women, when necessary, “to take up occupations that men take up, to the limit of their strength and ability.” Women and men differed only in those features of their bodies “pertaining to femininity and masculinity,” women’s intelligence being in no way limited to matters of the heart but on the contrary extending to the most abstract ideas. On the marital relationship al-Tahtawi wrote that spouses should endeavor to love each other completely: “Neither should raise their voice to the other, and each should give in to the other’s will, men out of love, women out of obedience. . . . Neither should reproach the other with a past error. . . . Neither should part from the other even for a day without a parting word of love to be a reminder during the absence . . . and [a spouse should] never let the

sun go down on anger.”²² It is worth noting here that al-Tahtawi, an elderly man by now, had contractually bound himself to live up to the ideal of reciprocity that his text preached: he had given his wife a document in which he undertook not to exercise his rights in law to take further wives or concubines or to divorce her as long as she remained with him “in affection and loyalty, looking after his children, servants and slaves.”²³

In 1873 the government established the first girls’ school, a primary school, and in 1874 it established a secondary school. By 1875, out of 5,362 pupils attending government-run primary schools, some 890 were girls.²⁴ Ismael planned more girls’ schools, but they did not materialize owing to the financial difficulties of the state and Ismael’s subsequent abdication, in 1879.

With the British occupation, which began in 1882, the thrust toward educational expansion generally, including girls’ education, slowed down. The finances of the country improved, and the British administration expended some of the increased revenue on irrigation and other projects, deliberately keeping down expenditure on education for both financial and political reasons, even though the demand for education was steadily intensifying. Nationalist intellectuals like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839–97) and Muhammad ‘Abdu (1849?–1905) were urging the importance of education, and men of all sorts eagerly sought an education as a means of upward mobility and as a route to positions in government administration and teaching. The British did little to meet this growing demand; rather, they introduced measures to curb it. Immediately after occupying Egypt, they had continued the policy of the previous administration—providing education for both sexes at government expense—but as demand grew, they instituted tuition charges. In 1881, just before they took over, 70 percent of the students at government schools received government assistance for tuition, clothes, and books; by 1892, barely ten years later, 73 percent paid all their own expenses. Similarly, when it was pointed out to Evelyn Baring, British consul general (later Lord Cromer), in 1901 that many male primary-school graduates were unable to go on to secondary school and consequently could obtain employment in government service only with difficulty, he responded not by expanding the number of secondary schools but by raising the tuition fees at primary schools to cut enrollment.²⁵ The same policy was implemented at girls’ schools. Increased demand led to even higher tuition fees. For men and women alike, education could lead to gainful employment, and public demand for more girls’ as well as boys’ schools had been voiced, but government-sponsored secondary-school ed-

ucation for girls was not expanded until the end of the century. When a teacher-training college for women finally opened at the turn of the century, there were 138 applicants for thirteen places.²⁶

In response to the pressing demand for education and to the British curbs on attaining it, such figures as Muhammad 'Abdu founded Muslim benevolent societies and private committees for the purpose of establishing schools. These institutions catered to more students of both sexes than did government schools, though the places available for males vastly outnumbered those for females. In 1897 government schools provided for 11,000 male students, and the benevolent societies for 181,000; government schools for 863 female students, and the societies for 1,164. The societies had established more schools for girls in provinces throughout the country by 1909, while the government opened its first primary school for girls in Alexandria in 1917. In 1914 the number of girls at state schools had actually dropped under the figure for the 1890s, to 786. Private schools and missionary schools were growing, however. In 1912 there were 5,517 girls attending American Mission schools alone. Also meeting the growing demand were the numerous foreign schools of all sorts that sprang up.²⁷

State rhetoric and eventually state action in the matter of women's education paralleled the ideas being expressed in the discussions and writings of male intellectuals, such as those of al-Tahtawi and Mubarak. Similar ideas were being expressed elsewhere in the Middle East, notably in Turkey, which in matters of social and educational reform followed a course that closely paralleled Egypt's.²⁸ The intellectuals in the two societies shared and exchanged ideas. During the decades when al-Tahtawi, Mubarak, and Muhammad 'Abdu were putting forward their ideas on women, education, and reform, in Turkey the writer Namik Kemal (1840–88) championed women's education, and the encyclopedist Semseddin Sami (1850–1904) published a book entitled *Kadlinar* (Women) in 1880 similarly emphasizing the importance of education for women and also advocating reform in the matter of polygamy, which, he argued, though permitted by the Quran, was not recommended, and he quoted verses to substantiate his view.²⁹

Among the most influential thinkers on reforms with respect to women was the Egyptian Muhammad 'Abdu, an intellectual of considerable stature and with an extensive following (not only in Egypt) who began to make his mark as an editor of a newspaper, *Al-waka'i al-misriyya*, in the early 1880s. 'Abdu was a student of al-Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, a figure of enormous intellectual influence in both Egypt and Turkey, as well as in Iran and in other parts of the Islamic world. Al-Afghani was concerned in

his teachings and writings to reform and revive Islam from the condition of "ignorance and helplessness" into which it had lapsed and which had resulted in Islamic lands becoming prey to Western aggression. Reform from within, the acquisition of modern sciences, adaptation to the demands of the modern world, and unity among Muslims were all essential, he thought, if Islamic countries were to beat off Western aggression and exploitation. Freed of the incubus of "foreign domination," they would "work out a new and glorious order of affairs without dependence on or imitation of European nations."³⁰

Like his teacher, 'Abdu was an ardent and committed religious thinker. He argued for the acquisition of "modern" sciences and for "modernisation," for the promotion of widespread education, for reforms in the intellectual and social fields, and for the elevation of women's status and changes in marriage practices, and he emphasized the importance of the need to throw off the ignorance and misinterpretations of Islam that had accrued over the centuries. 'Abdu addressed the need for reforms with respect to women at various points in his life, principally in articles published in *Al-waka'i al-misriyya* in the 1880s and in *Al-manar*, a weekly publication, in the 1890s and early 1900s. He was probably the first to make the argument, still made by Muslim feminists today, that it was Islam and not, as Europeans claimed, the West, that first recognized the full and equal humanity of women. 'Abdu argued that the Quranic verse on the equal rewards of labor showed that "men and women are equal before God in the matter of reward, when they are equal in their works. . . . There is therefore no difference between them in regard to humanity, and no superiority of one over the other in works." Furthermore, he argued:

Anyone who knows how all nations before Islam gave preference to the man, and made the woman a mere chattel and plaything of the man, and how some religions give precedence to the man simply because he is a man and she a woman, and how some people consider the woman as incapable of religious responsibility and as possessing no immortal soul—any one who knows all this, can appreciate at its true value this Islamic reform in the belief of the nations and their treatment of woman. Moreover, it will be clear to him that the claim of Europeans to have been the first to honor woman and grant her equality, is false. For Islam was before them in this matter; and even yet their laws and religious traditions continue to place the man above the woman. . . . To be sure, the Muslims have been at fault in the education and training of women, and acquainting them with their

rights; and we acknowledge that we have failed to follow the guidance of our religion, so that we have become an argument against it.³¹

Abdu argued that the regulations affecting women, such as those concerning polygamy and divorce, like other “backward” and “degraded” customs that had led the Islamic nations into a deplorable state of ignorance, had their source not in Islam but in the corruptions and misinterpretations that had beset Islam over the centuries. The regeneration of the Islamic nation as a whole lay in a return to the essentials of Islam. Such a return would make evident that “such matters as divorce, polygamy, and slavery do not belong to the essentials of Islam.”³² Polygamy, for example, was only permitted, Abdu argued, because of the conditions of the day, although monogamy was clearly the Quranic ideal. The original intent of the Quran had been ignored, however, and it was necessary to pursue reforms, including legal reforms, to correct the harmful practices that had developed.

Abdu, unlike most of the other mainly secular intellectuals and reformers of his age, had a thorough grounding in religious thought and could knowledgeably argue the case for reform and modernization in terms that represented such reform as in harmony rather than in conflict with a “true” Islam. His formulations therefore authoritatively articulated the case for Islam and modernization for other intellectuals. And indeed Abdu associated with and was counted among the group of leading modernizing politicians and reformers, though he was perhaps more cautious and conservative than others. He advocated the discriminating acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and intellectual and other developments of the modern Western world in the cause of a national and Islamic renaissance. He deplored, however, the facile, unthinking imitation of Western ways—in dress, furniture, architecture, and the consumption of expensive luxuries—instead of the pursuit of a genuine transfer of knowledge and real social reform.³³

By the 1890s the call for more education for women and for reforms affecting their status was clearly audible. Women began to present their own case in the newspapers and magazines for women that appeared in the 1890s—and indeed some appeals had appeared in print earlier in the century. The poet Aisha Taymour, for example, published a work, *Mirrat al-ta'amul*, critical of upper-class men’s conduct toward their wives, in 1874.

In 1892 the first magazine for women, edited by a woman, was published, and in 1898, a second, also edited by a woman, began publication.

The founder of the first, *Al-fatat* (The young woman) was Hind Nufal, a Syrian Christian woman from a family of journalists also working in Egypt. In its first editorial the journal declared its dedication to advancing the women of Egypt along the path that European women were taking, and it urged women to regard the journal as their defender, to write to it and not consider it shameful for women to be published. Journalism, the editorial declared, was a noble profession practiced by many distinguished European women. Invoking the names of Joan of Arc, Hypatia, and al-Khansa³⁴ (the Arab woman poet), it declared its concerns to be not politics and religion but whatever was of interest to women—science, literature, manners, morals, education, clothes, fashions, sewing, drawing, household management, and the raising of children. In its first year of publication the magazine printed an article titled “Knowledge Is Light” by the Lebanese Christian writer Zeinab Fawwaz in which the author stressed the importance of education for both men and women; an article by Labiba Habiqa, a medical practitioner at Kasr al-Aini Hospital, calling on women to look upon journalism and writing as a responsibility owed to their sisters; and a piece by Mohga Boulos of Tanta saying women had a right to be educated. Among the first articles in the second women’s journal to begin publication, *Anis al-jalis*, was one, published in 1898, that cited statistics for literacy in Egypt—0.5 percent for women and 3.6 percent for men—and that urged the British administration to remedy this situation.³⁵

By the 1890s women were also being published in magazines edited and published by men, and they were publishing their own works as well. Zeinab Fawwaz published articles on education in *Al-Nil* in 1892, in which she called on the British to give all Egyptians the opportunity to study, and to provide jobs for school graduates.³⁶ In 1888, Miriam Makarius, wife of the editor of *Al-lata’if*, published an article in her husband’s journal on raising children in which she stressed the importance of educating women that they might acquire the skills and knowledge (hygiene, nutrition, and so forth) vital to this important task. Three years later Salma Qusatli, also of Syrian background, published an article in the same journal advocating women’s education in more militant terms. She declared that women had been attending schools and were deciding to leave behind “their role of insignificance . . . and to give up the necessity of directing their thoughts and all their efforts to household tasks only.” In 1891 the same journal reported the examination results at the American College for Girls in Cairo and the speeches made by the graduating schoolgirls. Adma Shuqra, graduating at the top of her class, gave a speech entitled “What Women of the East Have Gained in the Last Fifty Years,” and Mariya Tuma, one entitled

"The Role of Women in Society." In 1896 another journal, *Al-muqtataf*, published an essay on women's rights by Princess Nazli Hanem.³⁶ Arab women's voices, even schoolgirls' voices, were raised with questions on redefining the role of women, the need for education for all, and a whole range of matters also preoccupying their male contemporaries; by the 1890s their opinions and ideas were part of the world of print and part of the fabric of intellectual life.

Not just talk about the need for change but actual change toward acceptance of Western styles and ways was in progress. As early as 1843, the British Orientalist Edward William Lane, resident in Cairo, noted to a friend that regarding furniture, architecture, manners, dress, "Cairo is rapidly becoming more and more unlike what it was." Only three years later he commented again on how the city was changing and how some viewed with alarm its increasing westernization and the adopting of Western fashions. "I told you of some instances of the 'march' of European innovation here," he wrote, "[and] the 'march' has now become a gallop. The officers of the Government . . . following the example of Constantinople, have begun to put themselves into the complete Frank dress; frock-coat, waistcoat, and trousers, the last as narrow as any of ours." The 'ulama were "very angry" at all this, "which they justly regard as indicating important changes."³⁷

Egyptian contemporaries expressed anxiety over such visible changes in society. Like 'Abdu, 'Abdullah Nadim, another student of al-Afghani's, decried the facile imitation of Western ways everywhere in evidence in 1891. He noted in particular the consumption of alcoholic beverages, the adoption of European dress and foreign words, and the changes in women's manners and their greater freedom: women were increasingly to be seen on the streets "displaying their ornaments."³⁸ Qassim Amin, writing in the last years of the century, commented that "in recent years" men's domination of women had lightened with the advancement of their [men's] thought and that now one saw women going out to attend to their affairs and frequenting public gardens to enjoy the fresh air. Many women, he noted, now traveled abroad with their husbands.³⁹ Rashid Ridda, a disciple of Muhammad 'Abdu's, also commented in the same year on changes that had taken place in women's lives. The imitation of European ways could be observed everywhere among the upper classes and "those that followed them from the people"; even the veil, he asserted, was being removed by degrees. This Europeanization had spread even to the houses of the sheikhs and the men of religion, where it appeared in the dress of their women. "Who knows," he concluded, "where it will lead?"⁴⁰

References to changes in women's dress are plentiful for the first years of the new century, and some of these changes were evidently already in progress in the 1890s. Comments made early in the new century indicate that upper-class women traveling in Europe became accustomed to being unveiled, for they mostly veiled only when at home in Egypt. Among this class the veil became lighter and more transparent, apparently in imitation of the fashions of Istanbul.⁴¹

Other changes afoot for women would have been as obvious to contemporaries as changes in dress, though perhaps less easily pointed to or summed up as markers of change. Women, now more visible in public places, were not merely promenading to enjoy the fresh air but, as Amin observed, "going out to attend to their affairs." From the time the School for Hakimas opened in the 1830s, women had been medical practitioners and recipients of government salaries, treating women and children in homes and hospitals and quarantine stations. From the time missionary schools were founded in midcentury and increasingly over the last decades of the century as more schools of all sorts opened, women were active professionals—foreign teachers, governesses, and nuns at first, then Syrian Arab women, Coptic women, Jewish women, and eventually Muslim Egyptian women. By the end of the nineteenth century women in a variety of dress, veiled and unveiled, openly pursuing a range of professional activities, had begun to be features of this society. Schoolgirls were a feature of turn-of-the-century society, too. The number of literate women in Egypt in 1897 was estimated to be 31,200, including Europeans.⁴² True, their number in proportion to the population of the country as a whole—an estimated ten million—was not large. But in the cities, and particularly in Cairo, they constituted elements in the society that most people, and certainly the male intellectuals of the era, could not have failed to notice.