

**Dangerous Sexualities: The Construction of Sexual Knowledge in Egypt, 1827-1928**

**Submitted by Sherry Sayed Gad Elrab ElSayed to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, November 2011**

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## **Transliteration**

For the convenience of the non-specialist, I have omitted Arabic diacritical marks, except for the 'ayn (‘) and the hamza (’). I have transliterated Arabic according to convention and in line with the system used by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

## **Constructing Sexual Knowledge in Egypt, 1827-1928**

### **Dissertation Aims and Scope**

The main aim of this interdisciplinary project is to examine attempts to codify sexual knowledge in Egypt between 1830 and 1928. Through surveying medical, religious, legal and moral writings on sexuality, this study aims to examine the underlying politics of sexual knowledge and the structures of permissions and prohibitions within which sexual knowledge was articulated in the period under study. The research recognizes that there are several sources that informed people about sexual behaviour in the period under study. However, the study is concerned only with a number of writings that imparted teachings about sex directly or indirectly to the growing literate middle class, and proceeds to discuss their authors and contexts.

The study's main focus is the influence of medical and scientific conceptualization of sex differences on the understandings of gender and sexuality. In nineteenth-century Egypt, the study argues, professional medical authorities promoted medical theories that suggested men's innate active sexuality and inability to control their sexual urges. At the same time, professional Egyptian doctors increasingly projected women as mentally and physically fragile because of their reproductive cycle. Women were increasingly viewed as incapable of being sexually spontaneous. To remain healthy, women were advised to suppress their sexual desires to be satisfied only through marital sex.

Through examining the interconnections between medical, legal, religious and moral discursive literature on sexual behaviour, this study brings into light the associations between sex, sexuality and the creation and

recreation of gender. The study demonstrates that medical perceptions of male and female sexualities were at the core of moral and intellectual discourses on gender equality as well as religious opinions on sex-related issues. Since there was a multiplicity of ideological and activist stands on questions about sexuality and gender in the period under study, the study explores the variety of ways in which nationalists, feminists and religious scholars adopted, borrowed or negotiated with scientific and medical ideas on female sexuality to support their different views on contemporary controversial issues such as gender equality, polygamy etc. Medical and scientific ideas of male and female sexuality had a complex impact on discursive literature on gender and sexuality. On the one hand, they were employed to justify the continuity of patriarchy and the increasing male regulation of female sexuality. On the other hand, they strengthened arguments in support of the participation of women in public life.

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## Introduction

### Conceptualizing the history of Sexual Knowledge in Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century Egypt

"A woman is less prone to carnal desires than man is. Love for a man is a sensual inclination to the gratification of his physical pleasure. Love for a woman is an emotional affection that is directed at blending of two spirits. Evidence of these two different perspectives is reflected in the types of trickery and deceit men use to win women, in spite of which many women are able to defend their honour and overcome men's desire. If the situation were reserved, and women pursued men in the same manner that men pursue women, the result might be that a man might be unable to preserve his integrity"<sup>1</sup>

This is how the Egyptian thinker and lawyer Qassim Amin, one of the earliest supporters of the "emancipation" of women in Egypt defended women's right to freedom and participation in public life. Amin, like many of his contemporaries, propagated ideas about women's moral superiority and their sexual passivity compared to men, who were depicted as sexually voracious and lacking control over their libidinal appetites. This image of moral, innocent and chaste woman subjected to men's trickery and deception that emerged from bourgeois writings in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Egypt contradicted the view of women's sexuality that dominated

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<sup>1</sup> Qassim Amin, *The Liberation of Women, The New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000), p.136.

medieval and pre-modern Arab literature and popular culture. In Abbasid literature, for example, poor and upper middle class women were depicted as reckless adulteresses.<sup>2</sup> In medieval Andalusia, proverbs warned men from trusting their wives in their absence since women's sexuality was difficult to control.<sup>3</sup> The understandings of male sexuality also underwent important transformations by the nineteenth century as well. After the nineteenth century, men were increasingly regarded as having no control over their sexual urges.

This study argues that there was a significant change in perceptions of the male and female bodies and sexualities that began with the transfer of Western medical theories to Egypt through Western educated Egyptian physicians. This process started with the opening of the first state-regulated and Western styled medical school at Abu Za'abal in 1827; the starting point of this research. This current study explores the transformations in the understandings of male and female sexualities by looking at public debates on the body, sexuality and gender in Egypt in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It argues that after the nineteenth-century, women and men came to be arranged horizontally, and the anatomical differences between male and female bodies were stressed. One of the most important consequences of the change in the medical conceptualization of sex differences the creation of a heterosexual culture. Both men and women were expected to have sexual desires for members from the other sex. Acts beyond the bounds of

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<sup>2</sup> Wajidah Majid Abd Allah Al-Atraqji, *Al-Mar'ah fi adab al-'asr al-'abbasi* (Al-'Ayn: Markaz Zayid lil-Turath wa al-Tarikh, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Nadia Lachin, "Andalusian Proverbs on Women," in *Writing the Feminine: Women in Arab Sources*, ed. Manuela Marin & Randi Deguilhem (London: I.B. Taurus, 2002), pp.41-48.

penetrative heterosexuality were considered unnatural. Whereas men were seen as sexually aggressive and controlled by their desires, women were encouraged to think of themselves as sexually passive. Women were warned about the negative consequences of their attempts to excite or satisfy their sexual desires in any way other than sexual intercourse with their husbands.

The research will proceed to trace the impact of scientific and medical theories of sex differences on controversial social debates such as gender equality, polygamy and prostitution as well as religious opinions on sex-related issues. I have divided the participants in these debates into two groups, Islamic modernists and conservatives, depending on their perspectives on the role that religion and tradition could play in the modernisation of Egypt. The study highlights the complex ways in which these two groups of intellectuals, religious scholars, legalists and feminists negotiated with Western scientific theories about the male and female bodies and sexualities to support their arguments on gender and sexuality. The study also emphasizes how they, implicitly and explicitly, contributed to the construction of sexual knowledge through prescribing permissible vs. prohibited male and female sexual behaviour

The period span of this research ends in 1928, since the emergence of political groups such as the Muslim brotherhood, Facist *Misr al-Fatat* and Communist parties mark the development of schools of thought which proposed complicated, and sometimes conflicting, perceptions of the relationships between religion, science and modernity.

To be able to understand the breadth and significance of the transformations of the views of sexuality and the changes in which sexual knowledge was constructed, the following section will provide an overview of



the rapidly expanding literature on the history of sex and sexuality in Islamic societies.

### **Current Research on the history of Sex and Sexuality in Muslim Societies**

In the last decade, a substantial body of research on sexuality in medieval and pre-modern Muslim societies has evolved. The gradual development of the historiography of sexuality was facilitated by the availability of primary sources such as Ottoman archives which encouraged in-depth research of social history. Gender history was also a significant stimulus to the exploration of social cultures in pre-modern Muslim societies.<sup>4</sup> These studies addressed many of the major methodological issues that characterized earlier attempts to discuss sexuality in Islam by both Muslim and Western scholars.

Published in 1975, 'Abd al-Wahab Bouhdiba's study *La Sexualite en Islam* is considered as the first major attempt by a Muslim scholar to address the topic of sexuality in Islam. In his research, Bouhdiba attempted to present Islam in a more positive light as a sexually enlightened religion and to encounter Orientalists' accusations that Islam that treats women as sex object. Bouhdiba argues that Islam promotes marital sexual relationships. The unity of man and woman in act, according to Bouhdiba, represents the unity of God and marital sex is thus a path to harmony. Although Bouhdiba admits the existence of a gender hierarchy in Islam, yet he stressed that Islam respected women and considered monogamous marriage as the ideal form of sexual union. What Bouhdiba describes as the "degrading" position of women in

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<sup>4</sup> Leslie Pollard, "Writing History of Sexuality in the Middle East," *The American Historical Review*, vol.114, No.5 (December 2009), pp.1325-1339.

contemporary Muslim societies and the "closed and repressed" sexuality came as a result of the patriarchal cultural influences that distorted the true message of Islam, pushed women into an inferior position and encouraged men to seek the company of other men. He concluded that the fear of sexual transgression and the segregation of women culminated in a deformed society. Sex in modern Arab Islamic world could be regarded as no more than mere pornography. Bouhdiba's study could be categorized as an apologetic study that aimed at defending Islam from what the Orientalist scholars considered as flaws in Islamic sexual ethics such as the maltreatment of women, polygamy and tolerance of homosexuality. In so doing, Bouhdiba adopted the same methodological approach of Orientalists: judging Islamic sexual mores by twentieth century criteria of 'normal' vs. 'perverted' sexual values.<sup>5</sup>

Recently, scholars started to address some of the methodological problems of earlier studies of sexuality in pre-modern Muslim societies by interpreting sexual history within their social and cultural contexts. These researches present a more complex picture of sexuality in pre-modern Muslim societies. The analysis of pre-modern medical discourse on sexuality enables scholars to examine the different influences on the process of constructing and propagating sexual knowledge in different Muslim societies. Basim Musallam's pioneering study on birth control methods prior to the nineteenth century examined how medical theories of conception influenced popular and legal discourses on birth control and on sexuality in medieval Islam.<sup>6</sup> Ahmad

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<sup>5</sup> Abd al-Wahab Bouhdiba, *La Sexualité en Islam* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 1975).

<sup>6</sup> Basim Musallam, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Middle East, 1500-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Dalal and Dror Ze'evi examined the medical conceptualizations of female and male sexualities within the framework of Greco-Islamic medicine. Dalal argues that the Hippocratic Galenic theory that male and female "semen" contribute to the formation of a fetus, adopted by the majority of medieval physicians, implied that female sexual pleasure and orgasm were crucial for conception.<sup>7</sup> In his study of discourses on sexuality in the Ottoman Middle East, Dror Ze'evi argues that the Galenic model of sex differences impacted social and cultural attitudes towards issues such as sexual inclinations and gender relations. Ze'evi explains that Ottoman medical treatises described women's sexual organs as resembling those of men and suggested that women were only flawed version of men because of women's colder temperament. Physiognomy treatises recommended that men marry women with excess blood, because they were believed to have a great sexual appetite.<sup>8</sup> The sexually voracious woman was a common character in the popular shadow plays.<sup>9</sup> Fedwa Malti Douglas study of women's portrayals in Arabic literature from medieval to modern times suggests that the fear of female sexuality was a common feature of different genres of Arab literary texts across centuries.<sup>10</sup> Some scholars argued that the fear of female active sexuality was used as a

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<sup>7</sup> Ahmad Dallal, "Sexualities: Scientific Discourses, Pre-modern," in *Suad Joseph*, general ed., *Encyclopaedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*, 6vols (Leiden, 2009), 3: 401-407.

<sup>8</sup> Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Change Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006)

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, pp.125-137.

<sup>10</sup> Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Women's Body, Women's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton: New Jersey, 1991).

pretext for enhancing male control over women's lives.<sup>11</sup> The current research will take the conclusions reached by scholars such as Musallam, Dalal and Ze'evi as its point of departure, as it explores the transformation in the understandings of female sexuality from the pre-modern to the modern period. It will examine how and why women were increasingly encouraged to think of themselves as sexually passive by professional doctors, reformist religious scholars, nationalists and middle class intellectuals.

There has been comparatively less work on the history of male sexuality in pre-modern Muslim societies. Historical research on male sexuality usually examines the topic within the context of homosexuality. An increasing number of studies have recently examined the complexities of male sexual desire. Many scholars such as Everett K. Rowson argued that that the male penetrator of other young males was not considered irregular or homosexual.<sup>12</sup> According to Dror Ze'evi, the blurring of boundaries between males and females, according to the Hippocratic Galenic model of sex differences, also implied that there was no deep or inherent difference between homo- and heterosexuality and that same-sex relations need "not be a travesty, at least as far as nature was concerned."<sup>13</sup> it was medically acceptable find cases such as effeminate males, or masculine females or extreme cases such as the Hermaphrodite. In his *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*, Khaled El-Rouayheb argues that homosexuality, as we define it today, was not even known in pre-modern

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<sup>11</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Cambridge, Mass: Perseus Books, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Everett Rowson, *Homoeroticism in Classical Arab Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Ze'evi, *Producing Desire*, p.23.

Arab-Muslim societies. Medieval Arabs did not think of homosexuality as a single condition shared by both partners in a homosexual intercourse. In pre-modern Muslim societies, it was believed that attraction to young men and boys was natural. El-Rouyaheb was careful to differentiate between the medical, social and cultural stereotypical images of the active and passive sodomite. Males who always preferred to be anally penetrated were sometimes believed to be inflicted with a disease (*ubnah*). The disease was discussed by several medieval physicians who examined its different causes and treatments. Outside the medical context, the passive sodomite was socially "looked upon" as the antithesis of masculinity, a person who possessed female sexual drives. Homosexual relations were usually perceived as involving an adult male and an adolescent beardless boy ( who would play the female role). A beardless boy, although a male, was not considered a completely man in the cultural and social sense. The penetration of an adult bearded man was perceived as a sign of this man's humiliation and degradation. According to El- Rouyaheb, this explains the social and cultural significance of the beard in pre-modern Muslim societies. In the works of Ze'evi, Rowson, El-Rouyaheb, historical research moved from an apologetic mode to a balanced view of Muslim sexual culture. Their research in medical, legal, religious and literary sources challenged the essentialist view of heterosexuality as a universal and ahistorical phenomenon. This current research thus argued that the normalization of heterosexual desire is a development of nineteenth-century discourses of sexuality.

## Methodological Considerations

Sexuality, as a topic of inquiry diminishes in historical scholarship of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and was far outweighed by women's and gender history.<sup>14</sup> This could be partly explained by the fact that the question of the "modern woman" dominated social debates in most Middle Eastern countries at the turn of the century. Historians have noted how nationalists were concerned with the formation of the ideal of the modern woman-the enlightened mother of the nation- and promoted the bourgeois family values.<sup>15</sup> The relative paucity of scholarship on sexuality in the early modern period could be also attributed to the absence of open discussions of sexuality in nineteenth-century works. Joseph Massad argues that the primary stimulus was that the shame felt by Arabs from the sexual component of their heritage disapproved by the West as a sign of backwardness and primitiveness.<sup>16</sup>

In late nineteenth and early twentieth century Egypt, there were no explicit references to sexual acts and desire disappeared from Arab writings in the period under study. However, the talk about sex did not disappear but rather took a different form. Sex was discussed as an object of knowledge to be studied and analyzed. Medical books, religious *fatwas*, legal texts, women's magazines and newspapers represent a store of sources that can be used to enrich the study of sexuality and gender. The question is how we can use these

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<sup>14</sup> Leslie Pierce, "Writing History of Sexuality," p. 1337.

<sup>15</sup> Marilyn Booth, *May her Likes be multiplied: biography and gender politics in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp.. Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley, University of California: 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), pp.1-161.

sources to understand transformations in perceptions and attitudes towards sexuality?.

The study has been selective in its choice of texts and authors. The chosen texts contributed to the construction of sexuality from medical, legal, moral and religious perspectives. Although the chosen texts might not have reached all the population because of low literacy rates, they had considerable impact on Egypt's expanding literate bourgeois. The latter played the most significant role in shaping Egypt's modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This research aims to sketch a body of writings, many of which have been neglected by historians, and examine others, often used in historical research, from a new perspective.

Historical analysis of the chosen texts in this research poses profound conceptual and methodological issues. Following the arguments of Michel Foucault and other, this study does not treat sexuality as a universal biological, but rather a historical, social and cultural construct.<sup>17</sup> In this research, sex is understood as discursively produced. This in consequence raises further questions about the underlying politics of sexual knowledge, the power relations that made some acts permissible and outlawed others and the idiom through which the sexual is defined and prescribed. The study is also aware of the equivocal nature of the relation between literature about sex and actual sexual practice. Texts are examined as sources which have been used to provide guidelines for defining appropriate sexual behaviour and activities and classify forms of sexual transgressions. Readers of these texts were not

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<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1992).

passive recipients: they read selectively and absorb only what they find acceptable.

Before approaching these texts, it is also important to keep in mind that the majority of texts examined in this research were written by men. These texts discussed gender and sexuality from men's perspective. At first sight, the influence of men's monopoly on the literature on gender and sexuality could be seen in the hierarchical division of labour between man and woman and the emphasis on phallogocentric sex. Historians such as Khaled Fahmy and Mervat Hatem have pointed out how nineteenth-century medical knowledge and techniques were employed by the state to regulate women's sexuality and reproductive lives.<sup>18</sup> However, the analysis of discourses on sexuality and gender demonstrate the complex ways by which feminists could negotiate a place for women in public spheres using male-created visions of the female body and sexuality. Although this study argues that women were encouraged to repress their sexual desires, this does not necessarily mean that male sexuality was emancipated. The study shows that the society was more tolerant of male reckless sexual behaviour due to ideas about men's inability to control their sexuality. However, this does not mean that male sexuality was totally liberated. In his discussion of the construction of male sexuality in French medical discourse, Robert Nye argued that medical theories played a significant role in confirming bourgeois sexual values. Medical authorities viewed "normal" male sexual behaviour and gender identity through the lens

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<sup>18</sup> Khaled Fahmy. "Women, medicine and power in nineteenth-century Egypt," in Lila Abu-Lughod ed. *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 35-71. Mervat Hatem. 'The Professionalisation of Health and the Control of Women' Bodies as Modern Governmentalities in Nineteenth-Century Egypt' in Pinar Ilkkaracan ed. *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies* (Istanbul, 2000) 67-80.



of legitimate reproductive fertility. Men-who departed from this standard by engaging in homosexual activities or even remaining celibate-were rigorously repressed.<sup>19</sup> This work argues that nineteenth and early twentieth century sexual discourse promoted heterosexual identity. Sex has been presented as natural and desirable, but only between heterosexual males and heterosexual females who be married. All other forms of sexual identity and practices have been subject to censure.

### **Structure of the thesis**

Chapter 1 examines ideas on sex differences in scholarly medieval and pre-modern scholarly thought. This chapters argues that there was a multiplicity of views on sex differences in pre-nineteenth century Arab-Islamic medical and scientific discourses. The complex and divergent interpretations of sex differences reflected and contributed to the social and cultural constructs of gender.

Chapter 2 discusses the medical discourse on male and female bodies and sexuality in the nineteenth centuries. The analysis of medical discourse on sexuality is based on the premise that medical knowledge is a product of their social and cultural contexts.<sup>20</sup> Feminists critics of science question the scientists' claims to neutrality and highlighted the impact of cultural

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<sup>19</sup> Robert A. Nye, "Honor, Impotence and Male Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century French Medicine," *French Historical Studies*, vol.16, N.1 (Spring 1989), pp. 48-71.

<sup>20</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, "The Social Construction of Medical Knowledge," *Social History of Medicine* vol.8, issue 3 (1995), pp.361-381. Thomas McKeown, "A Sociological Approach to the History of Medicine," *Medical History* (1970) October 14 (4), pp.342-351. Dorothy Porter, "The Mission of the Social History of Medicine: an Historical Review" *Social History of Medicine* (1995), 8 (3), pp.345- 359.

influences on scientific theories.<sup>21</sup> Considerations of race, sex and class, according to feminist and post-Kuhnian historians, played a role in the formulation of scientific and medical theories.<sup>22</sup> This chapter examines how professional Egyptian physicians negotiated and adopted Western theories of sex differences across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Chapter 3 ties the narrative of female sexuality to the creation of a new middle class idealized image of the respectable, chaste and maternal female in magazines, newspapers and books. The chapter argues that although the rise of the cult of the chaste woman allowed women, particularly middle and upper classes, a range of opportunities outside the confines of their homes, women's roles were constrained by beliefs about their mental and biological capacities and the moral standards that women were expected to uphold.

Chapter 4 examines the *fatwas* (opinions of religious scholars in response to inquiries) of four religious scholars on sex-related issues. The chapter argues that although religious *fatwas* were based in the inherited Islamic legal traditions, the *fatwas* represent a multiplicity of religious opinions, depending on each religious scholar's understanding of the legal traditions and the changing needs of the society. The chapter highlights the complex ways by which religious scholars responded to questions on sex related by borrowing, adopting and negotiating scientific theories about the human body alongside Islamic legal traditions.

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<sup>21</sup> Ruth Hubbard, "Science, Facts and Feminism," *Hypatia*, vol.3, N.1 Feminism & Science 2 (Spring 1988), pp.5-17. Sandra Harding, "The Norms of Scientific Inquiry and Masculine Experience," *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Associations, vol.2, Symposia and Invited Papers* (1980), pp.305-324. Barbara Imber and Nancy Tuana, "Feminist Perspectives on Science," *Hypatia*, vol.3(Spring 1988), pp.139-144.

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Potter, "Modelling Gender Politics in Science" *Hypatia*, vol.3, n.1 (Spring 1998), pp.19-33.

Chapter 5 examines the public discourses on the "prostitute"; the antithesis of the idealized respectable chaste woman. This chapter discusses the paradox between medical, religious and moral discourses on male and female sexualities and actual legal and social policies towards the prostitute. It will be argued that although the prostitute was projected by nationalists and feminists as a victim of men's aggressive sexuality, legal and institutional policies centred around the regulation of the prostitute and bringing her sexuality under the gaze of the state.

## Chapter 1

### Discourses on Sex Differences in Medieval Scholarly Islamic Thought<sup>23</sup>

Questions such as: How are men and women distinct from each other? How do men and women contribute to generation?, and how can one have a male or a female child?, were questions that received special attention from philosophers, physicians, theologians and religious scholars in medieval Islam. The main purpose of this study is to explore the scientific understandings of sex differences in medieval Islamic intellectual discourses. Medieval thinkers' interpretations of sex differences were, as this research argues, complex and divergent, reflecting and contributing to the social and cultural constructs of gender.

In his influential book *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Thomas Laqueur was amongst the earliest scholars to examine the historiography of the biological theories of sex differences and their relation to the social and cultural construction of gender. He argues that Greco-Roman medical and natural philosophical authorities offered their successors what could be termed as the "one sex model" for interpreting sex differences. The one sex model continued to dominate medical thinking about sex differences till the Enlightenment.<sup>24</sup> In the one sex model, according to Laqueur, male

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<sup>23</sup>The term medieval Muslim thought refers to intellectual discourses articulated in Arabic language and which emerged in lands under Muslim rule (9th-14thc.). The contributors to these discourses, however, whether scholars, physicians, philosophers were not merely Muslims, but came from different religious backgrounds.

<sup>24</sup> Although Thomas Laqueur's book is focused mainly on European physicians, he still referred to the works of the medieval Muslim physician Ibn Sina (known in the

and female anatomy and physiology are supposed to be functioning on a hierarchical continuum, in which the female body was a similar but lesser version of the male body.<sup>25</sup> The one sex model is founded on the humoral theory, which supposes that the human body is composed of four humors with different characteristics, cold, hot, moist and dry. Men have generally warm temperament, while that of women's is cold. Laqueur employed the Galenic anatomical teachings that suggest that women have the same sexual organs but theirs are trapped inside their bodies because of their lesser natural heat, as the most blatant exemplar of his argument.<sup>26</sup> Thomas Laqueur argues that, despite Aristotle's insistence on the opposition between male and female bodies, Aristotle considered the main difference between the sexes as that of a degree. He believed that the main difference between the sexes is that women's temperament is too cold that they lag so far behind men and can not produce seed. The biological boundaries between the sexes, according to this physiological system, were seen as flexible allowing room for the difference of the humoral composition of individual men and women. In the Enlightenment, Laqueur argues, the one sex model was replaced by a two sex model, in which the male and female bodies were viewed as incommensurable opposites, with rigid biologically inescapable boundaries between the sexes.<sup>27</sup>

Laqueur's study had a powerful impact on the history of gender. Historians of sexuality, gender and women examined the various social and

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West as Avicenna) (d.1037 A.D), which implies that the one sex model dominated both European and Islamic pre-modern discourses on sex differences.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 1-24.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 149-192.

cultural consequences of the shift in the understanding of biological differences of sex differences from pre-modern to Enlightenment Europe.<sup>28</sup> Dror Ze'evi's study of sexual knowledge in the Ottoman Empire (1600-1900) is the only study, to my awareness, that addressed the question of sex differences in Islamic culture. Based on his analysis of a number of Ottoman Turkish medical treatises, Ze'evi suggested that a one sex model, in which women's sexual organs were perceived as a flawed version of male genitalia, dominated thinking about sex differences in Ottoman medical literature. The dominance of the one sex model in Ottoman medical discourse was attributed, according to Ze'evi, to the harmony between the medical view of women as imperfect males and orthodox Islamic teachings about women's position in Muslim society.<sup>29</sup>

Not all scholars, however, accepted Laqueur's argument. Despite the immense importance of Laqueur's work, his approach to the history of the rich and complicated ancient and medieval biological theories of sex differences was criticized by many scholars. Helen King and Lesley Dean Jones argued that, based on their analysis of the Hippocratic corpus, that the ancient Greek medical tradition depicted the female body as distinct from the male's, and that these scientific ideas were used to justify the inferiority of women in

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<sup>28</sup> For examples of these studies, check: Londa Schiebinger, "Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy," in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth century*, 67-72. Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997). Tim Hitchcock, "Redefining Sex in Eighteenth-century England," *History Workshop journal* (Spring 1996), n.41, 72-90.

<sup>29</sup> Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900* (Berkeley; University of California press, 2006).

society.<sup>30</sup> Joan Cadden's study of medieval notions of sex differences in medieval Latin medical, natural philosophical and physiognomic texts also emphasized the plurality and complexity of medieval interpretations of sex differences, which, according to Cadden, contributed to constructing the view of women as physically and mentally inferior to men.<sup>31</sup>

By analyzing the interpretations of sex differences in a selected number of medieval Arabic medical, natural philosophical and other texts, this study would be the first to examine the application of Laqueur's hypothesis to medieval Muslim scientific discourses on sex differences. The analysis of these texts reveals, as this study argues, the diversity of opinions and lack of consensus on a single authoritative model for interpreting sex differences in medieval Muslim scholarship. Medieval discussions of sex differences implicitly or explicitly emphasized the inferiority of the female body. Nonetheless, the plurality and complexity of ideas about sex differences and the acceptance of the flexibility of barriers between the sexes made it difficult to assume that the biological knowledge about sex differences formed an ideological foundation for a system of gender hierarchy.

The wide spectrum of viewpoints on sex differences would be interpreted as part of the larger intellectual context of the medieval period. Medieval Islam (9th-14thc.) was a period of intellectual dynamism, which witnessed the rise of different schools of thought: legal-religious orthodox, philosophical, theological schools. Early twentieth-century historiography

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<sup>30</sup> Helen King, *Hippocrates' Women: Reading the Female body in Ancient Greece* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998). Lesley Dean-Jones, "The Cultural Construct of the Female Body in Classical Greek Science," *Women's History and Ancient History*, ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 111-137.

<sup>31</sup> Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

depicted the relationships between these schools of thought as antagonistic, emphasizing the hostility of religious scholars to Greek sciences. Recent scholarship on medieval Muslim thought, however, asserted that the relationships between different medieval schools of thought as more complex.<sup>32</sup> The topical boundaries between medieval schools of thought were often flexible, allowing the exchange of ideas from Greek or religious sources amongst different scholars with diverse intellectual backgrounds. Bassim Musallam's study of the means of birth control in medieval Islam demonstrates how religious scholars' justification of the practice of *coitus interrputus* was based on Greco-Islamic medical knowledge of conception.<sup>33</sup>

Such complexity of relationships and interactions between learned medical, philosophical and orthodox religious discourses on sex differences is particularly manifested in medieval discourses on sex differences. Inheriting a wide range of Greco-Roman natural philosophical and medical ideas on sex differences, medieval natural philosophers, learned physicians and religious scholars adopted, negotiated and refuted scientific and biological ideas on the subject in various contexts, ranging from medical literature to Quranic commentaries. In the process, they produced multivalent views of male and female bodily differences. Although medicine was included under the umbrella of natural philosophy, medical and natural philosophical authors still recognized medicine and natural philosophy as distinct intellectual disciplines each with its own authorities and sources to draw from. Religious

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<sup>32</sup> Aziz al-Azmeh, *Arabic Thought and Islamic Societies* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> Basim Musallam, *Sex and Society in Medieval Islam: Birth Control before the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).



scholars, employed Greek biological knowledge of sex differences alongside sources such as the Quran and the *Sunnah* (traditions and sayings attributed to Prophet Muhammad). The relation between religious and biological discourses was, in contrast to Ze'evi's assumption, not necessarily smooth. Different aspects of the medical discourse on sex differences and sexuality such as the possibility of hermaphrodites represented a challenge for religious scholars' commitment to a binary model of sex differences.

To achieve its goals, the study will, firstly, begin by examining the origins of biological knowledge about sex differences in medieval Islam derived mainly from the writings of Greco-Roman medical and natural philosophical authorities. Using primary sources as well as secondary literature, the study will provide an overview of the discourses on sex differences in Greek medical and natural philosophical thought. The goal of this overview is to demonstrate the diverse and conflicting Greco-Roman medical and natural philosophical theories of sex differences, inherited by scholars and physicians in medieval Islam. Secondly, it will proceed to examine how medieval scholars interpreted the differences between male and female bodies through the analysis of a selected number of medical, natural philosophical, religious and other texts in medieval Islam. The scrutiny of learned interpretations of male and female characteristics and bodily differences asserts, as this study argues, that there was no single coherent theory of sex differences with a well defined relation to medieval gender system, but rather a wide range of notions about sex and gender. By demonstrating how a selected number of scholars integrated and accommodated various ideas about sex differences in diverse ways, the study aims at unfolding the complexity of interactions and relationships between

medieval medical, natural philosophical and religious discourses on similarities and differences between males and females.

### **Sex differences in Greek and Roman Medical Thought**

The massive translation movement that took place in the ninth and tenth centuries made available in Arabic a large number of ancient texts in medicine and natural philosophy to scholars in medieval Islam. However, it was Greco-Roman medical and natural philosophical theories which became the main sources for the biological knowledge of sex differences in medieval Muslim thought. The emphasis in this study will be on a selected number of texts including the Hippocratic treatises on gynaecology, embryology and obstetrics, Aristotle's *On Generation of animals* as well as Galen's *on the Usefulness of the parts of the body*. Although ancient texts were written in specific contexts, they will be examined in this study, just as they appeared to scholars of medieval Islam, as authoritative and revered sources, that belonged to a past great civilization.

The great impact of the selected texts on different aspects of medieval Muslim thought, including but not limited to medicine and natural philosophy, is the main criteria for choosing them. For medieval scholars, Galen and Aristotle were not only considered crucial authors in their own rights, but the most acknowledged ones in their fields. In medieval thought, natural philosophy and medicine were considered two clearly defined intellectual disciplines each with its leading authorities, Aristotle for natural philosophy, and Galen for medicine and subsequently, their writings, thus, were considered the most authoritative sources on the topic. Subsequently, the different and controversial opinions of these authorities of antiquity on the

subject of sex differences, as demonstrated later in this research, had a great impact on medieval Muslim scholarship.

Although introduced to medieval Muslim scholarship through Galenic commentaries, the Hippocratic treatises became eventually widespread amongst medieval physicians because of their practical form and their accessibility for medieval practicing physicians. The Hippocratic treatises on gynaecology and obstetrics were commonly referred to by Muslim clinicians when discussing female diseases. Written in a practical manner, the Hippocratic corpus represents a rich and accessible mine of information on the diagnosis and treatment of diseases for practicing physicians. Hippocratic opinions were widely disseminated and cited frequently in practical health manuals for the use of practicing physicians.<sup>34</sup>

To be able to understand Greek and Roman medical notions of sex differences, it is important to interpret the theory of "humoral balance", which underlies Greek medical thinking. The theory presupposes that the world is composed of four elements: fire, air, water and earth. Each of the four elements is linked with one of the four principal bodily humours and each of the humors assumes certain qualities of the elements. For example, yellow bile is connected with fire and thus is hot and dry, blood is associated with air and hot and moist, phlegm is associated with water and thus is moist and cold, while earth is the element of black bile, which is cold and dry. The humors govern a person's temperament/complexion and physical appearance. Every human was believed to have his own innate complexion, which identifies his characteristics and behaviour. The complexion of a human being varied

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<sup>34</sup>A. Dietrich., "Bukrat," *Encyclopaedia of Islam: second edition*, ed. P.Bearman, C.E Bosworth, TH..Bianquis, E.Van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, volume XII, p.154, column 2.

according to different factors such as age, sex, or geographical location. Young people were generally regarded as hotter than elderly people. Generally, women were expected to have cold temperament while that of men is warm. People, who live in hot and dry climates, were believed to have hotter temperaments than those who live in cold weather.

In the light of the theory of humors, Greek and Roman physicians and philosophers, particularly the most influential such as Hippocrates, Aristotle and Galen, presented their view of sexual difference by focusing on the differences in fluid balance in the whole body, rather than the anatomy of specific bodily organs.

### ***The Hippocratic Corpus***

The Hippocratic corpus, a collection of medical treatises composed by different generations of authors, yet all attributed to the famous Hippocrates of Cos, included a number of treatises on gynaecology, embryology and obstetrics which greatly impacted medieval Islamic medical literature.

In the Hippocratic corpus, it is possible to distinguish two main models for understanding sex differences. On the one hand, the authors of Hippocratic treatises on obstetrics and gynaecology treated the female body as significantly different from that of the male focusing on the role of the womb and menstruation as definitive features of the female body, while the Hippocratic theory of conception suggests that both men and women contribute equally to reproduction.

The Hippocratic authors associated women's general and reproductive health with organs and functions that they believed to have no counterparts in the male body. The Hippocratics blamed the womb for many of women's

health problems. They described the womb as an independent creature inside the female body. When the womb is not fixed in place by pregnancy or moistened by sexual intercourse, the womb, which craves moisture, moves to moist body organs, such as the liver, heart, brain. The movement of the womb can cause many health conditions particularly hysteria if the womb rests beside the brain.<sup>35</sup> The regularity of menstruation was also considered essential for maintaining women's general health. The womb would act as a receptacle for this excess blood before discharging it from the body through the vagina (the latter defined as a passage to the womb and differentiated from the urethra). Thus, therapies, including bleeding and/ or regimen were described for women who do not menstruate regularly.

On the other hand, the Hippocratic theory of conception asserts the similarity between the reproductive functions of both the male and female. According to the theory, a child is formed from a mixture of the two seeds contributed by both the mother and the father.<sup>36</sup> The seed is a representative of the various parts of the body, as every part of each parent's body provides

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<sup>35</sup>Ann Ellis Hanson, "Hippocrates: Diseases of Women I", *Signs*, vol. 11 (Winter 1975), 567-584. Helen King, *Hippocrates' Woman*, 88-247. Lesley Dean Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science*, 114- 147.

<sup>36</sup> "Something like sperm, produced by the agitation of the womb, pours from the woman, when a male copulates with her, because of the friction of the generative organ in the womb; this is bloody and descends into the generative organs of the woman, bringing warmth and pleasure," In another passage, the author again asserts the existence of female sperm, "if the sperm descends inside the womb when the woman has sexual intercourse she conceives, and the sperm does not flow out, but remains in the womb, and the mouth of the womb contracts. When the mouth of the womb contracts, the sperm of the man and that of the woman join together in the cavity of the womb, ..... and the formation of the foetus is completed there." Hippocrates, *Kitab al-ajinna li-Buqrat: Hippocrates on Embryos (On the Sperm and On the Nature of Child)*, edited and translated from the Arabic text with introduction, commentary and glossary by M.C Lyon and J.N Mattock (Cambridge: Cambridge Middle East Center, 1978), p.3.

an aspect in itself, a theory known as "pangenesis".<sup>37</sup> The Hippocratic author supports his view with the argument that the intensity of sexual pleasure is felt throughout the body. The Hippocratic treatise does not differentiate between male and female seeds on a hierarchical basis. The seeds of either the males or females could be weak or strong.<sup>38</sup> The Hippocratic theory of conception, thus, provides a conventional explanation for the resemblance of children to both parents. A child is expected to resemble more the parent whose contribution is greatest.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, the Hippocratic theories of sex determination suggest a sliding scale rather than a total opposition between the sexes, accepting the possibility that a person would be more masculine or feminine than others in his own sex. The Hippocratics suggested different theories for having a male or a female child, including the strength and weakness of seed. The sex of the child, according to this theory, is determined by the outcome of a contest that takes place between the father and the mother's seeds. The son producing seed was depicted as stronger, although it does not necessarily prevail, and the daughter producing seed is weaker.<sup>40</sup> In the Hippocratic treatise on Regimen,

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<sup>37</sup> "I have said that the fertile sperm that flows from the whole body comes from everything that is in the body, that is to say, from the hard, the soft and the moist." Hippocrates, *Kitab al-ajinna*, p.3.

<sup>38</sup> "The woman's sperm is sometimes strong and sometimes weak. The same is true also of the man's sperm." Hippocrates, *Kitab al-ajinna*, p.5.

<sup>39</sup> "When a man's sperm is more than the woman's, the child resembles its father, and when the woman's sperm is more than the man's, the child resembles its mother." Hippocrates, *kitab al-ajinna*, p.6.

<sup>40</sup> "From the strength and weakness of the sperm come male and female, for, when the woman's sperm is strong, it engenders only males, and, when it is weak it engenders only females. Similarly, when the man's sperm is weak, it engenders females and when it is strong, it engenders males, and when it is strong, it

a girl would be more courageous than other girls, if she is produced from a female seed produced by the mother, which is stronger than the male seed produced by the father. If the father produces female seed, while the mother produces male seed, then the child will be female but will be masculine.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Aristotle***

Aristotle, given the title of the first teacher by Muslim philosophers, was widely known through translations of his works as well as numerous commentaries from the first century B.C to the sixth century B.C. His works were not influential only amongst philosophers but also amongst Muslim theologians. Many Arab scholars highly respected Aristotle and regarded him as the most famous teacher of the demonstrative science of man, the cosmos and the First cause, a science that was interpreted by them as rational equivalent of the belief of the oneness of God (*tawhid*).<sup>42</sup>

Unlike the Hippocratics, Aristotle was a natural philosopher, and not a physician, and subsequently, his purpose for examining sex differences and reproduction was distinct from the Hippocratics. Aristotle was not concerned with treatment of infertility or any other obstetrical or gynaecological health issues. He mainly aimed at providing an explanation for reproduction as a

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engenders males. Males and females inevitably comes from the strongest seed; when the seed is strong, it produces males, and when it is weak, it produces females. The result is in accordance with whichever of them is abundant."

Ibid, p.5.

<sup>41</sup> Hippocrates, "Du Regime," *Les Oeuvres Complètes d'Hippocrate*:10 vols, ed. Emile Littre (Paris: J.B Bailliere, 1839-1861), vol.6, 21-5. (The French source is cited because of the inaccessibility of the Arabic translation of this treatise).

<sup>42</sup> Cristina D'Ancona, "Aristotle and Aristotelianism," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* III, ed. Gurdun Kramer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Everett Rowson, Brill 2010, [www.brillonline.nl.lib.exeter.ac.uk](http://www.brillonline.nl.lib.exeter.ac.uk) (accessed 1 February 2010).

natural phenomenon, and he was not concerned with human reproduction, but with animal reproduction in general. Thus, Aristotle's theory of sex differences and generation had to be interpreted within the larger framework of his philosophical system, particularly his ideas about form and matter. According to Aristotle, all natural objects can be analyzed into two principles—form and matter. The form is the active force, which gives an object its nature. The form had to inhere in some matter, which is a pure potential without any actual properties. The matter has to be appropriate for the character of the form. The most basic forms are the forms of the four elements, earth, fire, air and water, which are considered the simplest form in existence. They can be shaped, in turn, into other more complex forms such as the forms of the various organs.<sup>43</sup>

Aristotle's stern distinction between the active generative power of the form and the passivity of the matter influences his theory of sex difference and generation. The temperaments of the bodies of men and women are regarded as opposites with complementary roles in reproduction. Aristotle rejected the theory of pangenesis considering sperm as the fourth stage of surplus nutriment, and that the pleasure felt during intercourse results from the excitement of the body and friction of the sexual organs.<sup>44</sup> As Aristotle considered the adult male as the perfect creature because he possesses greater natural heat, only the adult male is capable of transforming food residue not

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<sup>43</sup> Anthony Preus, "Science and Philosophy in Aristotle's Generation of Animals," *Journal of the history of biology*, (Spring, 1970) vol.3, No.1, 1-52, pp.1-5.

<sup>44</sup> فاما اللذة فهي تكون شديدة عند وقت المجامعة و ليس علة ذلك خروج الزرع من كل الجسد بل علته من قبل شدة التهيج و الدغدغة  
Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals- fi kawn al-hayawan: the Arabic translation commonly ascribed to yahya ibn al-bitriq* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), p.35.



only into blood but even into this white foamy fluid, the semen. The adult female body, according to Aristotle, is too cold, likened to ill bodies. The deficiency of the female body, which made her fail to perform the same procedure, and thus, women produce menses (*damm al-tamth*).<sup>45</sup> Only the semen could play the role of the active force (the form) that shapes the passive female contribution which is only the matter. He likened the female body to a workplace containing raw material, a generative matter, which a male activates and turns into a human being.<sup>46</sup>

Although Aristotle applied oppositional and hierarchical qualities to male and female bodies, active vs. passive, strong vs. weak, he still insists that women belong to the same species as men, being simply the deformed versions of men. He considered the bodies of women as similar to that of boys or an eunuch, as these groups lack the necessary heat for the production of sperm.<sup>47</sup> His discussion of generation suggests that all successful generations should result in males, and thus daughters result from a failure in the process of reproduction because of the weakness of the father's sperm or the badness of the mother's material. If the sperm of the father is strong, the child will be similar to him, but if it is "weak and defeated", then the child will be the

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و باضطراب تكون الفضلة كثيرة في الاجساد السقيمة و يكون نضج تلك الفضلة اقا او اضعف و ينبغي ان تكون تلك الفضلة كثرة رطوبة دموية و تكون اضعف لانه ليس فيها الا حرارة طباعية و قد بينا ان طباع الاناث ضعيف اعني اقل حرارة من الذكور فباضطراب يكون الدم الذي يخرج من الاناث فضلة مثل الدم الذي يخرج من الطمث Ibid, p.36.

اعني ان الذكر يعطى الصورة و مبدأ الحركة و النثى تعطى الجسد و الهيولى .... و هو و اضح ان الانثى هي المفعول بها و ان الذكر هو الفاعل الصانع الذي منه ابتداء الحركة فان اخذت اطراف كلاهما صار الذكر فاعل و المحرك و الانثى المفعول بها مثل ما يكون السرير من النجار و العود و مثل ما تكره الاكرة من الموم و الصورة Ibid, pp.43-44.

و المرأة في منظرها تشبه الغلام و الحدث الذي لم يبلغ مبلغ الرجال و هي مثل الرجل الذي يعرض لها من قبل ضعف الحرارة التي لا تقوى على زرع من الغذاء الاخير اعني الدم و الذي هو ملايم في الحيوان الغير الدمى كحال برودة الطباع Aristotle, *On the Generation*, 40.

opposite of the father, a female. If the menstrual blood is not "well cooked", the material will not be suitable enough for producing a son.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Galen***

A son of a rich architect born in Pergamum about 130 A.D, Galen had the opportunity to receive education from his father as well as famous teachers in medicine, philosophy and mathematics. He studied medicine at important centres for medical education such as Smyrna and Alexandria. After his education, he returned to Pergamum where he was hired as a physician to the school of gladiators. His fame as a physician took him to Rome where he had a successful career as a physician to some Roman emperors. In his medical literature, Galen crystallized the best medical traditions which had preceded him, and thus his works were considered as the apex of Greek medical knowledge. His works incorporated the Hippocratic notions of the humors and pathology, as well as the anatomical knowledge of noted Alexandrians.<sup>49</sup>

Although most of his chief works were in the fields of medicine and biology, Galen regarded himself equally as a philosopher, and authored books on philosophy and logic. He even maintained the view that philosophy was essential for the training of a good physician. His great influence by philosophy, including Aristotelian philosophy, is reflected in the methodology of his medical writings, characterized by rich general and clinical observations, and structured through analysis and deductive logic.<sup>50</sup> This form

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<sup>48</sup> Aristotle, *On the Generation*, 141-142.

<sup>49</sup> Temkin Owsei, *Galenism: The Rise and Decline of a Medical Philosophy* (Ithaca, New York: Collins University Press, 1973), p.1.

of scholarly Galenism, combining medical theory and practice, dominated, for several reasons examined in details later in the study, the Middle East up till the nineteenth-century. Galen was considered not only a highly respected medical authority, but the main one, in Muslim scholarship.<sup>51</sup>

Galen's theory of sexual differentiation rests on the concept of vital heat. The amount of vital heat that a body produces determines its position in a hierarchy of perfection. Humans possess the greatest amount of heat, and thus are the most perfect of all animals. Thus, Galen agreed with Aristotle that men are warmer while women are colder, and that women's lack of natural heat is a sign of their inferiority,

"Now just as mankind the most perfect of all animals, so within mankind the man is more perfect than the woman and the primary instrument. Hence in those animals that have less of it, her workmanship is necessarily more imperfect and so it is no wonder that the female is less perfect than the male by as much as she is colder than he."<sup>52</sup>

Galen, however, did not emphasize these differences as an evidence of complete opposition between the two sexes. In contrast to Aristotle, Galen emphasized the similarity between men and women in terms of their anatomical structures and their roles in generation.

In Galenic anatomical teachings, women and men were believed to have similar sexual organs, however, women's deficiency of natural heat made

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p.35.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, pp. 68-73.

<sup>52</sup> Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Publications, 1968), pp.628-629.

their sexual organs less perfect than that of the male, and left them trapped inside their bodies. Because men were hotter than women, their heat forced their sexual organs outside the body, while women's cooler constitution left them inside. Galen imagined the vagina as an interior penis, labia as foreskin, uterus as scrotum, ovaries as smaller and less perfect version of male testicles.

"Think first please of the man's external genitalia turned in and extending in between the rectum and the bladder. If this should happen, the scrotum would necessarily take the place of the uterus with the testes lying outside, next to it on the other side."<sup>53</sup>

His discussion of the theory of generation took a middle position between the Hippocratic and Aristotelian traditions, furthering his one sex model for interpreting sex differences. Like Aristotle, he argued that seed is the product of the last stage of the concoction of nutriment. He, however, asserted that women, like men, produce seed and that a child is composed of both male and female seed. Because of females' colder temperament, the seed they produced is less perfect, thinner, lesser in quantity and also cooler than that of the males'. But although women's seed is less powerful than that of men's, Galen still maintained the view that female seed is capable of transforming motions to the foetus, thus contradicting Aristotle's opinion that women only contribute matter to conception.<sup>54</sup>

The deficiency of natural heat in the female body, according to Galen, had important purposes. Galen suggested that the creation of half the human

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.630.

race "mutilated" is central for biological processes such as pregnancy. If women were as warm as men, their nutriment will be dispersed by heat and thus, it will not provide enough nutriments for the growth of the foetus. Women's seed are less powerful seeds than men's because it is necessary for maintaining the balance of the society, or otherwise, women can generate in themselves without any need for men.<sup>55</sup>

The survey of the above mentioned Greco-Roman medical and natural philosophical texts on sex differences demonstrated the diversity of the ideas of the ancients on the biological differences between the sexes. By suggesting that both men and women have similar sexual organs, Galen laid the foundation for the one sex model of sex difference. However, the Hippocratic treatment of the womb and menstruation as specific to the female body, as well as Aristotle's insistence on the vast difference between male and female temperaments and their inability to produce seed undermined the Galenic one sex model. The disagreement of the authorities of antiquity on aspects such as the anatomical differences between men and women, role of uterus or the contribution of the female to reproduction meant that their heirs were not left with a monolithic authority to follow. Rather their controversial opinions gave their medieval successors room for discussions, assimilations, and negotiations. Medieval Muslim scholars were not passive recipients of Greek wisdom, and their choices, as we will see later, were shaped by the cultural and ideological demands of their society.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, pp.631-632.

## **The Transmission of Greek Wisdom to Medieval Islam: The Graeco-Arabic Movement and its Ideological Framework**

The transfer of Greco-Roman medical and natural philosophical theories on sex differences to medieval Islam was part of a massive Greco-Arabic translation movement, initiated in the second half of the eighth century, with the accession of the 'Abbasid dynasty to power and the foundation of Baghdad.<sup>56</sup> The translation movement that reached its peak in the ninth century culminating in the translation of the majority of Greek philosophical and scientific corpus was, as Dmitri Gutas demonstrated, a complex process that was motivated and sustained by different social, political and intellectual factors functioning in early medieval Islam.<sup>57</sup> The translation movement made available a vast body of scholarship of practical utility needed in the emergent Muslim society. It also paid great attention to ideas and theoretical arguments across diverse subjects including medicine, philosophy and logic.

The success of the early Arab conquests in acquiring vast territories, including Persia, Mesopotamia, Fertile Crescent, North Africa, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent had immense economic and cultural consequences, which set the scene for the translation movement. The political,

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<sup>56</sup> The 'Abbasid dynasty (r. AD 750-1258) came to power after they benefitted from the weakness of their predecessors the Umayyads by disputes over succession, tribal conflicts and more importantly, the resentment of non Arab converts to Islam who did not enjoy the same privileges as the Arab Muslims. The 'Abbasids claimed to be the descendants of al-'Abbas, the prophet's uncle. For more information on the 'Abbasids, check: Hugh Kennedy, *The Early 'Abbasid Caliphate: A political history* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

<sup>57</sup> Dmitri L. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society, 2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998).

administrative and economic unity of the lands of Egypt and the Fertile Crescent with India and Persia ushered in a period of economic prosperity. First, it led to the flourishing of trade through the free flow of agricultural goods and manufactured products. Agriculture even benefited more from the lifting of barriers between India and the Eastern Mediterranean, with the introduction of new strains of legumes, fruits as well as agricultural techniques. The economic profits of this agricultural revolution reached different social groups including landowners, peasants and even urban people.<sup>58</sup>

The exchange of ideas and ways of thinking was another crucial consequence of the early Arab conquests. The introduction of the technology of paper making by Chinese prisoners of war to the Islamic world in 751 A.D, with its huge consequences on the diffusion of knowledge, is a clear example. But even more importantly, the Arab conquests encouraged cultural cooperation between Christian and pagan communities who have already been immersed in Greek culture for centuries. Secular Greek knowledge was already well established and taught in cultural centres in the Fertile Crescent, Mesopotamia, Gundishapur and Mosul, particularly amongst Nestorian and Monophysite communities. With the political and administrative unity of these centres of learning, scholars and experts in different academic fields were more capable of freely pursuing their studies as well as exchanging knowledge with each other. As these scholars were also multi-lingual, they eventually came to form the main body of translators, when the "Abbasids

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<sup>58</sup> A. M Watson, *Agricultural Innovation in the Early Islamic World: the diffusion of Crops and farming techniques* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Caliphs decided the sponsorship transmission of Greek knowledge to Arabs through translation.<sup>59</sup>

The rise of the "Abbasid dynasty to power and the challenges facing the ruling elites were amongst the most crucial impetus for the translation movement. As a dynasty that came to power after a civil war, the "Abbasids sought to establish an ideological foundation for their rule that would be particularly appealing to different factions under their rule, especially the Persian faction, who were instrumental in bringing the "Abbasids to power.<sup>60</sup> To gain the favour of the Persian faction, the "Abbasids projected their image as the successors of the Sassanian Emperors (rulers of Persia and Iraq before the Arab conquest). The 'Abbasids' cultural policies reflected their claims. By sponsoring the translation of Greek secular and scientific works, the 'Abbasids were following the footsteps of the Sassanians who considered the gathering of scientific texts as a religious duty.<sup>61</sup>

The 'Abbasids' quest for legitimacy was not their only problem. Throughout the first century of their rule, 'Abbasid Caliphs continued to encounter several ideological and cultural challenges, which not only provided a rationale for the translation movement but also dictated the choice of the texts to be translated. First, Muslims got engaged in religious disputes over doctrinal matters with members of other religions, particularly Christians,

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<sup>59</sup> Dmitri L. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Greco-Arabic Translation movement*, pp.13-16.

<sup>60</sup>By Persian, I mean different groups including Arab Muslims who had been living in Persia for at least two generations and became accustomed to the Persian culture, Persians who converted to Islam and Persians who remained Zoroastrian.

<sup>61</sup> According to Zoroastrianism, the religion of the Sassanian emperors, the God Ohmazad gave the Avesta, a text which contained all the knowledge to Zoroaster, but the destruction of Persia by Alexander the Great led to the dispersing of these texts. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic culture*, pp. 40-45.



with both sides producing apologetic polemics in defence of their religion. By virtue of their familiarity with Greek rational methods of disputations, Christian scholars were in a more advantageous position than their Muslim adversaries. Secondly, the rising popularity of Manichaeism amongst many Muslim intelligentsia, courtiers and even members of the 'Abbasids' family was another threat. As Mani's dualist ideas proposed an alternative religious system based on a cosmology of opposing forces (good/evil, matter/spirit), it was in stark contrast to the Muslims' monotheistic belief in a just and unitary God.<sup>62</sup>

These ideological challenges impacted the Greco-Arabic translation movement, particularly with respect to the selection of texts. The disputes between Muslims and non Muslims, for example, necessitated the translation of Greek books on logic and didactic to teach Arabs in the rational methods of disputation.<sup>63</sup> In medicine, the translation of the medical works of Galen also had to be interpreted within that intellectual context. Muslims found in Galenic medicine, with its holistic view which suggested interdependence among the cosmos, the elements, the body and the constitution, implying a giver of harmony (God/Creator), a rational alternative to Manichaeism compatible with their religious beliefs. Moreover, translators could easily assimilate Greek medicine to the cultural specificities of Medieval Muslim society, simply by deleting or replacing offensive passages (e.g. those referring to Greek Gods) without changing the whole meaning of the medical text.<sup>64</sup> In

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<sup>62</sup> On the threat Mani's ideas posed to Islam, check Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: religion and society in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.170.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, pp.61-69.

natural philosophy, the reliance of many ancient cosmological theories on the unity of nature was conformable with the idea of Divine principle (*tawhid*), overwhelmingly important to Islamic doctrine, while clearly contradicting the dualist ideas of Mani.<sup>65</sup>

It was, thus, no coincidence that the translation movement reached its peak in the reign of Caliph al-Ma'mun, ( in power 813-833), a sophisticated man known for his support for the *Mu'tazilah*, a circle of Muslim scholars who aspired to articulate Islamic doctrine on rational grounds.<sup>66</sup> The *Mu'tazilah* insistence on explaining Islam in a systematic fashion on rationalist basis, rather than relying on the literary authority of religious texts, interpreted by traditional religious scholars, was compatible with the Caliph's political agenda. Al-Ma'mun inherited the vast Muslim empire already divided by civil war, provincial rulers' attempts to gain political autonomy, as well as controversies over Islamic culture and theology. He, thus, planned to unify the Muslim empire not only politically and militarily but also ideologically by explaining Islam on rational basis and subsequently undermining the authority of the popular traditional religious scholars.<sup>67</sup>

As translations had important ideological ends, they were conducted, as Dmitri Gutas described, "with philological exactitude and rigorous

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<sup>64</sup> Lawrence Conrad, "Arab Islamic Medicine", *The Western Medical Tradition: 800 B.C to 1800 AD.*, ed. Lawrence Conrad, Michael Neve, Roy Porter, Andrew Wear and Vivian Nutton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 93-138, p.101.

<sup>65</sup> Seyyid Hosein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods used for its study by the Ikhwan al-Safa, al-Biruni, and Ibn Sina* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), pp. 1-18.

<sup>66</sup> Richard C. Martin, *Defenders of Reason: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern symbol* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997). Sabine Schmidtke, "Mu'tazila" *Encyclopaedia of the Quran* , vol.3 p. 466.

<sup>67</sup> Hugh Kennedy, *The Early 'Abbasid Caliphate*, pp.164-175.

scholarly methodology".<sup>68</sup> The lack of evidence made it difficult to elaborate on the translation mechanisms used in the medieval Greco-Arabic movement. The autobiography of Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d.873), a Nestorian physician considered the most productive translators of Greek scientific and medical works, reflects his concern with comparing different manuscripts of same texts with each other to ensure the originality and accuracy of information.<sup>69</sup> Although not all translators were as thorough as Ibn Ishaq claimed himself to be, the faulty translations were usually criticized and many texts were retranslated reflecting scholarly attention to details, consistency and accuracy.

In their translations of the medical texts, the choice of medical texts reflects the overall concern with theoretical medical ideas, not merely practice. As Lawrence Conrad points out, most of the early translated medical texts were Galenic, and even Hippocrates was known through Galenic commentaries.<sup>70</sup> Galen's organization of medical knowledge in a systematic and logical manner and his attention to medical theory seemed more appealing for medieval scholars and translators, aspiring for high standards of medical education and practice, and more appropriate to the intellectual needs of the period. Throughout the early medieval period, many learned physicians shared Galen's belief that the best physician is also a philosopher, considering their duty not only to treat patients but also to observe the nature and causes of diseases. Many of the famous medieval physicians were, in fact,

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<sup>68</sup> Dmitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arab Culture*, p.2.

<sup>69</sup> Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), pp.19-21.

<sup>70</sup> Lawrence Conrad, "Arab Islamic medicine," 102. Owsei Temkin, *Galenism*, pp.63-64.

encyclopaedic scholars, learnt in many sciences, and representing the exemplar of physician/philosopher.

Galen, however, was never accepted as the major authority in philosophy in medieval Islam. Galen's philosophical arguments were challenged by many scholars including the medieval physician and philosopher Al-Razi (d.925 A.D), known in the West as Rhazes and even more harshly by medieval Jewish scholar Musa ibn Maimun (d.1204 A.D), known in the West as Maimonides. Although al-Razi and Ibn Maimum admitted that Galen was a scholarly authority in medicine, they expressed their scepticism of his philosophical claims. The differentiation between the authoritative fields of Galen and Aristotle is crucial to our understanding of how medieval scholars react to disagreements between these ancient scholars on topics of sex differences.<sup>71</sup>

Following the translation of Aristotelian corpus, it was Aristotle who emerged as the eminent authority of philosophy in medieval Islam. Aristotle's influence was not merely limited to Arab philosophers who called him the "First Teacher", but extended to the school of Muslim theology (*Kalam*). The accurate translation of Aristotle's works convinced the majority of Muslim philosophers that his teachings reached the peak in both logic and philosophy. Despite the differences between the schools of Islamic philosophical thought, Aristotelian theories of man, cosmos, and the first cause were regarded by medieval philosophers as compatible with Islam.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Owesei, *Galenism*, pp. 76-79.

<sup>72</sup> F.E Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs: The Aristotelian Tradition in Islam* (London: University of London Press, 1968).

The recognition of Galen as an authority of medicine and Aristotle as an authority of philosophy is of major significance to the history of science. In medieval Islam, philosophy was not recognized simply as a narrow intellectual field of knowledge, but comprised a wide range of disciplines including mathematics, geography and natural science. According to Aristotelian tradition as accepted in medieval Islamic intellectual circles, natural science comprises all the disciplines that primarily rely on sense perception, hence it includes sciences such as meteorology, zoology and botany. Thus, Aristotle became the main authority of biological knowledge disseminated in natural philosophical and zoological literature.<sup>73</sup> Although medicine is included in the umbrella of natural sciences, its practical sides and different subfields such as anatomy make it a diversified field of knowledge with a distinct authority. In other words, medieval scholars inherited biological knowledge from different sources, each with their own separate authority.

This brief discussion of the translation movement provides readers with an understanding of the intellectual context in which medical and natural philosophical knowledge about sex differences was transferred to medieval Islam. The translation movement was a conscious process in which the selectivity of materials and their purposes were dictated by ideological as well as practical ends. Amidst the debates amongst Muslims and followers of other religions, the transfer of Greek knowledge of sex differences and sexuality took place in an environment favourable to theoretical discussion. By the end of the ninth century, the learned community of medieval Islam possessed a

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<sup>73</sup> Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 163-164.

significant amount of ideas and theories about sex differences, most important of which are the conflicting opinions of Galen and Aristotle. It was not long before medieval Muslim scholarship got engaged in discussions about sex differences and reproduction left open by ancient authorities.

### **Sex differences in medieval Muslim scholarship**

The approach of medieval Muslim scholarship towards the subject of sex differences, however, had to be understood within their larger medieval intellectual context. The investigation of sex differences in medieval Islam served many purposes: understanding the dynamics of natural world, providing a scientific explanation compatible with religious knowledge as well as the treatment of sex-related diseases and dysfunctions. Thus, natural philosophers, physicians and religious scholars were all drawn into the debate on the topic and examined male and female differences in different contexts. In the absence of an agreed upon theory of sex differences, authors, from diverse intellectual backgrounds, approached the different medical and natural philosophical theories of sex differences differently producing rich and multivalent representations of differences between males and female in medieval scholarship. The medieval discourses on sex differences were in fact a reflection of the complexity of relations and interactions between different intellectual circles in medieval Islam.

The introduction of Hellenistic ideas to medieval Islam led to the rise of different schools of philosophical and theological thought seeking the rationalization of Islamic doctrine, and created an atmosphere of intellectual debate and controversy. Although the *Mu'tazilah* school of thought, the earliest of these rationalist schools, was short lived, the ideas of the *Mu'tazilah*

impacted other schools of thought particularly the philosophers and the theologians (*mutakillimun*). Some schools of Muslim philosophy championed by philosophers (*falasifah*) such as al-Kindi (d.866), and his successors such as Ibn Sina (d.1037) were determined to rationalize Islamic dogma, developing a metaphysical world-view grounded in Neoplatonism, which they believed to be compatible with Islamic beliefs. Other schools of law insisted on pure Aristotelian philosophical traditions.<sup>74</sup>

The opinions of the Arab philosophers (*falasifah*), however, were challenged by the school of speculative theology (*kalam*), a theological school influenced by the rational ideas of the *Mu'tazilah*. The followers of this school (*al-mutakillmun*) favoured the application of philosophical methods to theological ends by illuminating the knowledge available in the Quran and *Sunnah* rather than seeking new knowledge. In the eleventh century, the most famous of all the *mutakillmun*, Al-Ghazali ( d. 1111), learned in Greek philosophy and logic, launched an attack on Muslim philosophy in which he refuted Greek philosophical principles (the bulk of the physical and metaphysical propositions), which he regarded as contradictory to Islam.<sup>75</sup> Alongside these schools of thought, the traditional legal schools of thought (Hanafism, Hanbalism, Malikism, and Shafi'ism) who championed the literal authority of the Quran and *Sunnah* above all other sources of knowledge, worried from the hegemony of the foreign Greek philosophy over Muslim thought.

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<sup>74</sup>For an introduction into some schools of philosophy in Islam, Seyyid Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its origins to the present: Philosophy in the land of Prophecy* (New York: New York state University press, 2006).

<sup>75</sup> George Makidisi, "Ash'ari and the Ash'arites in Islamic Religious History," *Studia Islamica*, vol.17 (1962), pp.37-80. Richard Frank, *Texts and Studies on the Development and history of kalam* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

Although modern historiography on the topic, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, emphasized the relationships between different schools of thought as antagonistic, ending with the triumph of Islam and the ultimate demise of rational sciences and philosophy after the eleventh century.<sup>76</sup> More recent scholarship stressed the complex nature of relationships between different schools of medieval thought.<sup>77</sup> In his study of medieval Arabic thought, Aziz al-Azmeh suggests a broader approach towards the history of ideas. Instead of looking at schools of thought as rigid institutions, we should look at them more as flexible entities with flexible topical boundaries, allowing the integration or rejection of certain ideas or subjects according to historical circumstances.<sup>78</sup> Philosophers, religious scholars and theologians borrowed ideas from different intellectual disciplines according to their backgrounds and purposes.

The medieval debates about sex differences reflected the complexity and diversity of the medieval cultural and intellectual contexts. The Greco-Roman theories of sex differences became a pool of ideas, shared amongst scholars of diverse backgrounds. As medicine and natural philosophy had distinct authorities, and thus produced conflicting biological theories, individual medieval medical writers and natural philosophers approached the question differently producing different models of sex differences. Religious

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<sup>76</sup> As an important example of this literature, check Ignaz Goldziher, "The Attitude of the Old Islamic Orthodox towards the Ancient sciences," *Studies in Islam*, ed. M.L Swartz (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1981), 181-215. The article was first published in German then translated into English.

<sup>77</sup> Aziz al-Azmeh, *Arab Thought and Islamic Societies* (London: Croom Helm, 1998). Dmitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arab Culture*, pp.166-175.

<sup>78</sup> Al-Azmeh, pp.198-199.



scholars accepted the opinions of certain Greek authorities while rejecting others depending on their compatibility with religious traditions.

Four examples illustrate the diversity and complexity of opinions on sex differences in medieval Islam: the medical and natural philosophical writings of the eleventh century physician and philosopher Ibn Sina, the medical encyclopaedia of thirteenth-century polymath Ibn Rushd, the medical commentaries of a thirteenth-century physician Ibn al-Nafis, and finally the Quranic commentaries and prophetic medical treatises by the religious scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah. The texts had different contexts and forms, yet they all address different aspects of the subject of sex differences such as the distinctions between male and female bodies and characteristics, the role of male vs. female parent in conception and sex determination as well as the procreative purposes of female pleasure. The authors of the chosen texts, who come from similar as well as diverse intellectual backgrounds, were not only familiar with the different Greco-Roman theories of sex differences, but also employed this knowledge in their writings. Each author's approach, nonetheless, differed significantly from the other producing complicated multivalent views of male and female differences. What all the authors had in common though is that they implicitly or explicitly suggest the inferiority of women.

### ***Ibn Sina (Avicenna)***

The scholar and physician Ibn Sina was born in 980 A.D in a village near Bukhara (a city in modern day Iran). When his family moved to the city of Bukhara, Ibn Sina's father, a wealthy governor, was keen on providing his son with the best available education available at the time. Ibn Sina learnt

mathematics, medicine, natural sciences, theology and jurisprudence. Like many scholars at his time, Ibn Sina became an encyclopaedic scholar who authored books in a variety of disciplines, yet he was particularly famous as a physician and as a philosopher. Ibn Sina relied mostly on the patronage of rulers whom he served, and his skills as a physician as well as his scholarly career not only made him a favourite in the courts of his patrons, but he also occupied the position of a *wazir* (minister) in the court of Hamadhan (city in modern day Iran). In medicine, Ibn Sina produced his *Al-Qanun*, in which he combined both Greek medical theory and practice, in a coherent accessible manner for future scholars of medicine. Ibn Sina's medical book *Al-Qanun* (The Canon) acquired fame not only in the Islamic lands, but also in Europe where it was studied for in medieval European universities till the end of the 17th century.<sup>79</sup> In philosophy, Ibn Sina attempted to develop a metaphysical view of the world that is based on neoplatonism. However, his philosophical writings were subject to attack by the medieval Sufi scholar and theologian Al-Ghazali in his book *Tahafut al-falasifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers). Despite this attack on his philosophical works, Ibn Sina remained a highly respected scholar, referred to amongst scholars, as *Al-Shaikh al-Ra'is*, a title describing him as the main authority in academic fields particularly medicine and philosophy.<sup>80</sup>

In his discussion of sex differences, Ibn Sina encountered the problem of the conflicting opinions of ancient authorities. His approach to such a

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<sup>79</sup> Nancy Siraisi, *Avicenna in Renaissance Italy: the Canon and Medical Teaching in Universities after 1500* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987).

<sup>80</sup> Soheil M Afnan, *Avicenna: His life and Works* (London, 1958), pp.57-82. Lenn Goodman, *Avicenna* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp.1-49.

controversy has to be interpreted within the framework of his career and belief. As Lenn Goodman, Ibn Sina's biographer points out, Ibn Sina's works could be seen as a summa or compendium in which he presented related ideas and themes in a coherent fashion, with the goal of presenting accessible information for readers.<sup>81</sup> Ibn Sina's works, thus, attempted to represent a learned organized and coherent approach to the question of sex differences, in which different contradicting theories and fragmentary information are logically put together to produce a reliable body of knowledge on the subject. As Ibn Sina acknowledged Galen as the main authority on medicine while Aristotle as that of philosophy, the contradicting opinions of these ancient authorities on sex differences, amongst other topics, were problematic for him. Although Ibn Sina recognized medicine as an academic discipline in itself, he still considered it a field within the domain of natural philosophy of which Aristotle was the master. Rather than taking a purist Galenic or Aristotelian position, Ibn Sina attempted to fuse, to certain degrees between Galenic medicine and Aristotelian philosophy, with the goal of presenting his readers with a single authoritative theory of sex differences.

Although he did not author any special works on sex differences, he examined the topic extensively in two of his main works, *Al-Qanun* and *Al-Shifa'*. In his *Al-Qanun*, Ibn Sina aimed to write a textbook for future physicians in which scattered arguments and information in the writings of the ancients are organized in a logical and systematic manner. As medicine, for Ibn Sina, was considered a branch of natural philosophy, his book *al-Qanun* situated Galenic medical writings within the large Aristotelian doctrine of three life forces. In the third book of *al-Qanun*, a book dealing with

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<sup>81</sup> Goodman, *Avicenna*, p.31.

localized disease, Ibn Sina explains the anatomy of male and female reproductive organs, their diseases, the roles of each parent in generation, as well as the means by which a male or a female child could be conceived. Ibn Sina's *Al-Shifa*, on the other hand, was mainly a philosophical compendium, divided into several dealing with topics such as logic, natural sciences, mathematics, and metaphysics. Book VIII of Ibn Sina's *al-Shifa'* entitled *al-Hayawan* (The Animal) is a discussion of natural history, in which he examined the characteristics and anatomy of different types of animals including humans. Although Ibn Sina copied some information from Aristotle's *De animalibus*, Ibn Sina added information which he either observed himself or collected from hunters. But another feature that distinguishes Ibn Sina's book from Aristotle's was Ibn Sina's great concern with humans, supplementing the book with anatomical information about the human body, based mostly on Galenic teachings.<sup>82</sup> Discussions of the physical and behavioural differences between men and women, and the role of the father vs. the mother in generation crop up in different parts of the book.

In his *al-Qanun*, Ibn Sina adopted the Galenic one-sex model. Like Galen, he described the female reproductive organs as similar to those of males, but the male one is "complete and protruding outside the body and the female one is incomplete and trapped inside the body" because of women's colder temperament. In Ibn Sina's model of sexual differences, the penis becomes the cervix and vagina, the scrotum is similar to the womb, and the female ovaries are male testicles, but the women's are smaller than those of

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<sup>82</sup> Ibrahim Madkour, "Introduction", in Abu Ali Hussein Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifa* vol.8, ed. Ibrahim Madkour, 'Abd al-Halim Muntasir, Sa'id Zayid (Qumm: Maktabat Ayat Allah al-'Uzma, 1986).

men and are buried inside their vaginas.<sup>83</sup> The language used by Ibn Sina stressed the similarity between male and female bodies, while still asserting the hierarchical relation between both sexes. The Arabic medical discourse on sex differences, like its Greco-Roman predecessor, was characterized with linguistic ambiguity when referring to male and female reproductive organs. The term *baydatayn* (eggs) or *khisiyatayn* (testicles), were employed to refer to testicles (*khisiyatayn*) and ovaries (*mubiyadayin*), which are referred to in modern Arabic as two distinctive terms. The trapping of the female reproductive organs inside her body was considered as a result of the failure of her body to develop properly. Ibn Sina thus employed terms such as *naqisah* (incomplete or imperfect) suggesting the defectiveness of the female reproductive organs, when compared to those of the perfect male.

In his *Al-Shifa*, Ibn Sina, although still adhering to Galenic anatomical teachings on male and female reproductive organs, he paradoxically considered that the physical and behavioural distinctions between males and females are more visible in humans than in any other animal species.<sup>84</sup> He enumerates few physical distinctions which are probably based on his observations of the external figures of men and women, and which suggests the defectiveness and imperfection of the female body. For example, Ibn Sina suggests that since nature did not intend perfection in the creation of women, their humid complexion made female babies grow up quickly, reach teenage

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نقول ان الة التوليد التى للاناث هى الرحم و هى فى اصل الخلقة مشاكلة لالة التوليد عند الذكران و هى للذكر و ما معه 83 لكن احدهما تامة متوجهة الى خارج و الاخرى ناقصة محتبسة فى الباطن فكانها مقلوب الة الذكران و كان الصفن صفاق الرحم و كان القضيب عنق الرحم و البيضتان للنساء كما للرجال و لكنها فى الرجال كبيرتان برزتان متطاولتان لاستدارة و فى النساء صغيرتان مستديرتان الى شدة تفرطح باطنتان فى الفرج موضوعتان عن جنبيه فى كل جانب من قعرة واحدة Abu Ali Hussain Ibn Sina, *Al-Qanun fi al-tibb*, ed. Ali Zayour and Edward Al-Qos (Beirut, Ezz Al-din Publishing Center,1993) vol 2, p.1627.

<sup>84</sup> Ibn Sina, *al-Shifa*: vol.8, 111.

and adulthood and then adult women age more quickly than men.<sup>85</sup> Women are also generally weaker than men with more delicate skins, smaller bodies and tighter skin pores. Ibn Sina's disregard for these physical distinctions in his *Al-Qanun* is significant. It implies his belief that such distinctions were not of any relevant medical importance. In other words, these distinctions did not mean that the bodies of men and women are fundamentally different and subsequently need special treatment. Moreover, none of these distinctions were based on any anatomical investigation, but rather on general observations, which might also explain that they concerned the natural philosopher rather than the physician.

Most of the distinctions between the two sexes were, according to Ibn Sina, behavioural rather than physical. Women are more coward, more delicate, lazier, more envious, more prone to crying, more cunning and more capable of lying, as well as more willing to tell despising matters than men. Ibn Sina associated such negative characteristics with the feminine nature. Female humans shared, according to Ibn Sina, traits such as laziness, weakness, submission, fear and cowardice with females from other species.<sup>86</sup> Although Ibn Sina did not attempt to justify these traits biologically, Ibn Sina's *al-Qanun* implicitly associated characteristics such as laziness, stupidity, idiocy, hesitancy with the cold temperament characteristic of women.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid, p.179.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p.111.

<sup>87</sup> Ibn Sina, *al-Qanun*, vol.2: 885.

Accepting the Galenic anatomical description of male and female organs, Ibn Sina still faced the questions of whether women orgasm and produce sperm and if they produce sperm, what role does their sperm play in generation. In his *Al-Qanun*, Ibn Sina briefly discussed the Aristotelian vs. the Galenic theories on the topic mentioning that physicians only need to know that women produce seed.<sup>88</sup> As for the nature of this seed or the role it plays in conception, these are matters, according to Ibn Sina, of concern only to the natural philosopher. Ibn Sina's classification of the topic as philosophical has to be interpreted within its intellectual context. For him, like most scholars of his time, medicine was a narrow field which deals mainly with the treatment of disease. Questions about female seed and its role in reproduction such as, if women do not produce sperm, then what are the functions of these testicles? But if women produce sperm, do their sperm have active principle? And if they have active principle and matter, then why do not women reproduce on their own? Why is there a need for men?, were all part of a larger investigation of natural processes. Addressing the topic as a philosophical debate, Ibn Sina judged the opinions of ancient authorities on the basis of the accuracy and the logic of their arguments rather than any anatomical evidence. Although Ibn Sina attacked Galen considering his arguments far from convincing, he preferred to compromise between the opinions of both authorities.

Instead of totally denying the presence of female sperm, Ibn Sina suggests that female bodies, although colder than men, could still concoct some menstrual blood to a further stage producing semen.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, he

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid, p.1591.

<sup>89</sup>Ibn Sina, *al-Shifa*: vol.8.

agrees with the Aristotelian view that female seed is more suitable to act as matter rather than as having a generative power equal to that of male sperm, which alone has the principle of movement. He explained that although the female bodies concoct some menstrual blood to a further stage producing a white thin foam that could be generally called seed. He adds, however, that this concocted menstrual blood is fit to be matter and not the principle of movement. According to Ibn Sina, only males, who have enough natural heat, are capable of producing seed with the principal movement. Ibn Sina did not however, totally negate that female seed might have some sort of power, but this power is minimum compared to that of the male. In conclusion, despite Ibn Sina's acceptance of the women's seed is necessary for conception, he still believed that the female semen's function in conception would be more or less the same function that Aristotle assigned to menses.<sup>90</sup>

Regardless of Ibn Sina's opinions on the exact role of female seed in generation, his medical and natural philosophical texts, surveyed in this study, established female orgasm as essential for reproduction. A child is conceived from both male and female seed, and thus, if females do not orgasm, then there would be no conception. This, according to Ibn Sina, justifies his mentioning of medical remedies and coital positions to enhance the sexual pleasure of both men and women. Female sexual pleasure, according to “women’s testimony” was presented by Ibn Sina as strong evidence that women produce seed. Ibn Sina, however, was careful to explain that the difference in the anatomy between male and female reproductive genitalia creates a difference in the mechanisms of their pleasure. As Ibn Sina explains,

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p.158-164.



the pleasure women feel was not the result of the emission of seed outside their bodies as is the case with men, but the movement of the seed from one place to another. If women have the same sexual organs as men, then the seed of women erupts out of the inside of her womb through tubes to the position of conception. During the intercourse, the mouth of the uterus, acting in contrast to the penis, does not ejaculate the seed, but rather attracts the female and male seed together in a vibrating mode. Female pleasure, according to Ibn Sina, is not reliant on male ejaculation, but mainly on the movement of her womb and the eruption of her own seed, which gives the body a pleasurable itching sensation.<sup>91</sup> Not only does Ibn Sina assert the idea of female orgasm, he even considers that women enjoy sexual pleasure more than men do, since they enjoy pleasure not only from the emission of their own seeds, but also from the ejaculations of their partners.

Interestingly enough, the comparison between the uterus and the penis and Ibn Sina's idea that women enjoyed sex more than men enhanced the view that the uterus is a lively active sexual organ, dominated by an insatiable appetite for male seed, and that women are voracious sexual beings, particularly in popular erotica. Popular literature's acceptance of the female ejaculation of sperm is worth attention. People's everyday experience must have shown that pregnancy is not dependent of female pleasure and that women could rarely emit something during sexual intercourse. However, popular literature not only insisted that women ejaculated sperm, but they

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يلتذذ بنفس الحركة التي تعرض للرحم و لا يصدق القول من يقول ان لذتهن و تمامها موقوفان على انزال الرجل كانه  
ان لم ينزل الرجل لم يلتذ بانزال نفسها و ان انزل الرجل و لم تحدث لرحمها هذه الحركات و لم يتمكن منها فانها لذة قليلة  
يكون له مثلها قبل حركة منيهم تشبه بالحكة و الدغدغة الودية

Ibn Sina, *Al-Qanun*, p. 1633.

even elaborated on the idea of her aggressive sexuality.<sup>92</sup> One possible explanation of the continuity of this paradigm in popular literature is that by depicting women as sexual being, their virtue and rationality are also questioned. It was common to find passages in popular literature commenting that "women's reason are in their vaginas", or stories about princesses or women of high status who, to satisfy their voracious sexuality, betray their husbands or had sex with "well-endowed" men, even if they come from a lower social status, sometimes even with their slaves.<sup>93</sup> Such popular stories implied in a sense that women's aggressive sexuality could be a threat to the existing social order, and thus, religious scholars stressed the duty of a husband to satisfy his wife sexually, in an attempt to constraint her morally and preserve the existing order. The feminist scholar Fatima Mernissi, for example, suggested that the social fear from women's sexual aggression could explain the rise of the institution of veiling.<sup>94</sup> In the same manner, Sheila Webster's study of Moroccan proverbs showed how women were stereotyped women as sexual animals who care only about having sex, and thus justifying another common belief that a man, who loves his wife and who wants to guard his wife, should prevent his woman from talking or interacting with other men.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Al-Tifashi, *Risalah fi al-bah*, manuscript in Al-Azhar, tibt 640, fols 1-2.

<sup>93</sup> Muhammad al-Nafzawi, *al-rawd al'atir fi nuzhat al-khatr*, published as part of a collection of Islamic erotic literature under the title of *al-jins 'inda al-arab* (Kuluniya, Almaniya: Manshurat al-Jamal, 1997-2006) pp.53-67.

<sup>94</sup> Fatima Mernissi, "The Muslim Concept of Active Female Sexuality," *Women and sexuality in Medieval Societies* (Istanbul: Women for Women's Rights/Kadinin Insan Haklan Projesi, 2000), pp.19-35.

<sup>95</sup> Sheila Webster, "Women, sex and marriage in Moroccan proverbs", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, (May 1982), vol. 14, No.2, pp. 176-179.

Despite Ibn Sina's attempt to build an all inclusive and authoritative theory of sex differences particularly for physicians, his model of sex differences, although accepted by many, was still challenged by different scholars and physicians on different grounds. The works of two famous encyclopaedic physicians and philosophers Ibn Rushd, known in the West as Averroes (d.1198) and Ibn al-Nafis (d.1288) represents two interesting approaches to re-examine the Avicennian model of sex differences. Whereas the former objected to Ibn Sina on philosophical grounds, Ibn al-Nafis criticized Ibn Sina from a medical perspective.

### ***Ibn Rushd (Averroes)***

Ibn Rushd was born in Cordova, Spain in 1126 into a prominent family of religious (Maliki) judges and statesmen. To be prepared to follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, Ibn Rushd studied jurisprudence, Arabic literature, theology, philosophy, medicine, logic and other sciences at the hands of many famous scholars of his time. Ibn Rushd became both as a court physician as well as judge. Modern scholarship considered Ibn Rushd as the pivotal figure of Andalusian philosophy, whose works marked the climax in the development of Arab-Islamic philosophy.<sup>96</sup> Ibn Rushd's background was strikingly similar to Ibn Sina's. Both were born in elitist and rich families who equipped with the best available opportunities in education. Both scholars also represented the exemplar of philosopher-physician, for whom

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<sup>96</sup> Majid Fakhry, *Averroes, Ibn Rushd: his life, works and influence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), p.2.

medicine was an intellectual field more than practical craft and a source of income.

The intellectual climate in al-Andalus, under the rule of al-Muwahiddun (almohads) dynasty, was favourable for Ibn Rushd's philosophical career to flourish. The founder of the dynasty, Ahmad Ibn Tumart (d.1128) introduced the study of theology, which in consequence, opened the way for the study of ancient sciences and philosophy. Although he was a Maliki, Ibn Tumart still accepted the philosophical approach to some questions, and believed that the conflicts between the theologians and philosophers could be solved only through resort to reason.<sup>97</sup> This favourable attitude towards the study of philosophy prevailed in the reign of many of Ibn Tumart's descendants. In fact, Ibn Rushd's career as a philosopher and commentator to Aristotelian philosophy began with the request of the Andalusian Caliph Abu Ya'qub Yusuf (d.1184) for proper translations of Aristotle's works.<sup>98</sup>

The writings of Ibn Rushd were vast in quantity and scope, yet he was distinguished for his philosophical writings. As a polymath, Ibn Rushd wrote in philosophy, medicine, jurisprudence and linguistic. Ibn Rushd, also a court physician, wrote a large number of medical works, the most famous of which is *al-Kulliyat fi al-tibb* (translated in Latin as *Colliget*), an encyclopaedic book, discussing the theoretical principles of medicine, anatomy, pathology, simple and compound medicine. Although *al-Kulliyat* was an important medical textbook, it never achieved the same fame that Ibn Sina's *al-Qanun*

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. XX.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, pp. 1-3.

did, most probably because of the fact that the importance of Ibn Rushd's philosophical writings overshadowed the importance of his other works. Ibn Rushd had a great interest in Aristotle, authoring a large number of commentaries on Aristotle's works in addition to writing philosophical books himself. The most famous of Ibn Rushd's philosophical writings was his *Tahafut al-Tahafut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence of Philosophers), a book written in defence of philosophy, in response to al-Ghazali's attack. In his book, Ibn Rushd criticized Ibn Sina and other Neo-platonists for distorting the teachings of Aristotle.

Ibn Rushd's stern support for Aristotle did not merely influence his philosophical writings, but also his medical works, particularly with reference to controversial topics amongst the philosophers and physicians. Like most scholars of his time, he acknowledged Galen as an authority of medicine, however, since medicine was a discipline amongst the natural philosophy, whose authority is Aristotle, Ibn Rushd takes a purist Aristotelian position and criticizes Galen where the latter's views opposed those of Aristotle. This is clearly manifested in his approach to the ancient authorities' controversial opinions on sex differences.

In his *al-Kulliyat*, Ibn Rushd strongly criticized the Galenic anatomical model of male and female reproductive organs. Like Aristotle, Ibn Rushd asserted that males and females have different sexual organs. The penis and the testicles, according to Ibn Rushd, are reproductive organs peculiar only to males, while the females' peculiar reproductive organs are the breasts and the uterus.<sup>99</sup> Although he did not entirely deny the existence of female "testicles"

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و هذه الاعضاء فيها ما يختص به الذكر و هي الانثيان و القضيب و منها ما يختص به الذكر و هو الرحم و الثدي<sup>99</sup>

describing them as similar, yet smaller than men's, he was still sceptical of their presence, suggesting that their existence is only based on Galen's claims.<sup>100</sup>

In his discussion of the contributions of male and female contribution to reproduction, Ibn Rushd again totally supported the Aristotelian position that women only contribute matter to conception, employing a philosophical argument. Ibn Rushd, like Galen and Aristotle, asserted that seed is the fourth stage of the concoction of food. However, he stressed that the bodies of females were too cold to produce seed. It is only males who have the necessary natural heat, according to Ibn Rushd, and thus, are capable of producing seeds. And thus, Ibn Rushd explained that "even if women had testicles as Galen claimed, then these testicles are useless."<sup>101</sup>

Ibn Rushd's argument against the idea of female seeds was based on philosophical discussion. He suggests that if women produce seeds that have the principal motion, then they can generate on their own and men would simply be unnecessary. Ibn Rushd's belief in the passivity of women's contribution to conception and defence of the male's generation role goes as far as refuting that the sperms of both males and females could not generate unless mixed.<sup>102</sup> Women's role in conception, according to Ibn Rushd, could

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Ibn Rushd, *Kitab al-kulliyat fi al-tibb*: 2 vols (Madrid: CSIC, Escuela de Estudios Arabes de Granada, 1987), vol1, p.70.

و يصير فيها دم الطمث الى الرحم زايدتان تسميان قرنى الرحم و خلف هاتين الزايدتين بيضتا المرأة و هي اصغر من تلك التى للمرأة  
Ibid, pp. 70, 35.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

و اما القول الموجب لذلك فلان منى المرأة و ان كان يفعل فعل منى الرجل فالمرأة مولدة بذاتها و لا حاجة هنا الى الذكر و ليس يمكن ان يتصور ان الفعل ينقسم بينهما بالكمية حتى يمكن منى المرأة بفعل بعض الاعضاء و منى الرجل يعقل ايضا و منى الرجل يفعل بعض الاعضاء فان الاعضاء و ان كانت واحدة بالمبدأ الواحد و معطى هذا المبدأ هو القلب فمنى

not exceed more than providing matter (*madah*), which also explains any resemblance between the mother and the child.<sup>103</sup> As Ibn Rushd regarded women's role in conception as completely passive, he, in total opposition to Ibn Sina, dismissed the importance of female pleasure as a necessary requirement for conception.<sup>104</sup>

By depicting females as passive vessels who play no role in conception, Ibn Rushd offered a fundamentally different model of sex differences to that of Sina. Such a purist Aristotelian stance was, however, rare particularly in medical literature. Most medical discussions of the role of females in generation provide richer and more complex description of male and female roles in conception operating on a continuum between the Galenic and Aristotelian positions. With the exception of only very few, the majority of physicians accepted that women produce seed, yet they disagreed on the nature of the role of female seed in conception. Whereas some physicians allocated to women's seed the same role of menstruum, others considered that female seed could communicate motion, yet they are still less powerful, less adequate and inferior to the perfect male seed. Diverse as these arguments were, they are not much in terms of their gender implication. Natural

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الذكر لا تأثير له في الولادة و ان كان منى المرأة كفاية في اعطاء هذا المبدأ فمنى الذكر لا تأثير له..... و ليس لقابل ان يقول ان منى المرأة و منى الرجل ليس لواحد منهما هذا الفعل على الانفراد حتي يمتزجا و يختلطوا و يصير لهما كون اخر  
Ibid, p. 71.

و كان يظهر ان المرأة تأثير في الولادة فمن الواجب ان يكون هذا غير فعل ذاك و يكونان يومان بفعلهما غير فعل هذا 103  
غير فعل تلك و هو وجود الولد فان كل واحد منهما يعطى الولد فكل واحد منهما يعطى الولد جزء و جزءا الشيء هو  
المادوق الصورة..... و الذكر هو معطى الصورة كما يقول ارسطو و الانثى تعطى المادة و ليس للانثى شيء يمكن  
ان نظن انه مادة الا منيها او طمئتها  
Ibid, p. 72.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p.71.

philosophers and physicians still agreed that women's contribution, whether menstrual blood or seed, is of unequal value to men's.

### ***Ibn al-Nafis: The Uterus as a female organ***

Like Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina, Ibn al-Nafis (d.1288) was an encyclopaedic scholar learnt in different intellectual disciplines including medicine, jurisprudence, linguistics and philosophy, yet his main job was that of a physician. It did not seem, however, that Ibn al-Nafis' was born into a privileged family, and he had to work to earn his living, which probably meant that he learnt both theoretical and practical medicine. Ibn al-Nafis was born and grew up in Damascus where he studied medicine in al-Bimaristan al-Nuri (Al-Nuri hospital). He travelled to Egypt, where he worked as a physician and a teacher of medicine in al-Bimaristan al-Nasiri where he eventually became the head of physicians.<sup>105</sup>

Ibn al-Nafis' literary activity was extensive. Some of his medical works were original, while others were commentaries composed mainly for the ordinary practitioner. Some of these works such as *Mujiz al-Qanun* (Summary of al-Qanun), a commentary of Ibn Sina's al-Qanun, but omitting anatomy and physiology, were very popular. His *Sharh Tashrih al-Qanun* was another popular commentary on the anatomical sections in Ibn Sina's al-Qanun. The works of Ibn al-Nafis proved that he was a critical and knowledgeable commentator. His most important achievement was his theory of the lesser circulation, which he set out in his *Sharh Tashrih al-Qanun*.

In his commentary on Ibn Sina's description of the male and female genitalia, Ibn al-Nafis objects to Galen's and Ibn Sina's one sex model,

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<sup>105</sup> Max Meyerhof, Ibn al-Nafis, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. III, p.897.



asserting that the womb is a definitive female organ with no match in the male body. Although Ibn al-Nafis accepted in principle that males and females have similar genitals, he questioned Ibn Sina's description of the womb as a replica of the scrotum. First, Ibn al-Nafis was clearly aware of the linguistic fusion of medical terms referring to male and female sexual organs. He assumed that the Hippocratic use of the same term to describe the womb and also the neck of the womb, which led Ibn Sina's to mistakenly assume that the womb as similar to the penis and the scrotum.<sup>106</sup> Ibn al-Nafis, thus, suggested that it is the neck of the womb and not the womb, which resembles the penis. Secondly, Ibn al-Nafis employs a logical argument employing available anatomical information. He argued that the womb cannot be logically regarded as similar to the scrotum because the scrotum contains the male testicles, while the female testicles are buried in the vagina, because the female semen is colder and more humid than that of men. The burial of the testicles, according to Ibn al-Nafis, provides the testicles with enough warmth to enable women to ejaculate their sperm in the same time as men.<sup>107</sup> Finally, Ibn al-Nafis referred to the womb's specifically female function that's carrying the embryo. Unlike Ibn Rushd, Ibn al-Nafis did not completely reject the Galenic anatomical view of male and female genitalia, but asserted the peculiarity of the uterus to the female body, presenting another complicated view of the differences between male and female genitals.

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يطلق لفظ الرحم تارة على العضو الذي يتكون الجنين فيه و هو الذى ذكرنا حاله قبل و هذا العضو هو ان الفاضل ابقر اط<sup>106</sup> الة التوليد فى الاناث و تارة على عنق هذا العضو و هو المخرج الذى يخرج منه الحيض ، و يدخل فيه القضيب و هذا هو الذى يشاكل الذكر و يشبه ذكر ا مقلوبا

Ibn al-Nafis, *Kitab sharh tashrih al-qanun* (Cairo: The General Organization of Books, 2007), p. 439.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid, p.440.

The idea that the womb was a particularly female organ was projected in medieval gynaecological literature, particularly because of the entirely female role that it performs: pregnancy. The emphasis on the womb as a female organ encouraged the view that women's bodies are different than that of men. Women were thus considered the main source of knowledge over their bodies. In an age when doctors relied mainly on patients for the diagnosis of diseases, the physicians' information about pregnancy and movements of the embryos relied mainly on the stories of their female patients.<sup>108</sup> Women's feelings during intercourse were treated as an evidence of her pregnancy. Physicians believed that if a sex act was followed with the shivering of the woman's body, particularly from her back, and the movement of the uterus to enclose upon itself, then this is an indication that she successfully conceived.<sup>109</sup> Clinicians and obstetricians relied heavily on women's stories throughout the different stages of pregnancy. For example, a woman can tell if her embryo is dead, depending on its movements inside her belly and if a dirty humid liquid leaks from her uterus. She can also realize if her childbirth is going to be natural based on the normality of her breath and the vibrations of the womb.<sup>110</sup>

Influenced by the Hippocratic traditions, the movements of the womb were associated with pain. Medieval gynaecological and obstetrical literature

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<sup>108</sup> On the relation between doctors and patients before the eighteenth-century, check: Roy Porter, "The Patient's View: Doing Medical History from below," *Theory and Society*, vol.14, No.2 (Mar. 1985), pp.175-198. Malcolm Nicholson, "The art of diagnosis: medicine and the five senses," *Companion Encyclopaedia of the History of Medicine*, ed. Roy Porter & W.F. Bynum (London: Routledge: 1993), vol.2, 801-826.

<sup>109</sup> Ibn al-Nafis, *al-Mujiz*, 249.

<sup>110</sup> Ahmad Ibn Yahya al-Baladi, *Tadbir al-habala wa al-atfal* (Baghdad; 1980), 98.

elaborated on hysteria or the "suffocation of the womb" a medical condition, believed to attacking teenage virgin girls and widows, because of the build up of seeds inside their bodies and the lack of regular sexual intercourse. The condition was expected to cause harrowing consequences, sometimes even leading to death. Although men were believed to suffer similar symptoms if they did not have a regular sexual intercourse, hysteria remained a particularly feminine disease, predominantly associated with the independent movements of the womb. Based on the Hippocratic traditions, the womb was treated as an independent creature inside the female body. Thus, if not stabilized by frequent sexual activities, the womb will distract and wander freely throughout the body. The resulting health problems depend on how far the womb wanders and where it chooses to attach itself. Thus, the wandering of the womb was blamed for causing many diseases including pneumonia, hysteria, if the uterus rests beside the brain. As a treatment virgins or widows were also advised to marry. Friction of sexual organs was believed to relieve women's pain and thus a midwife was supposed to use her hand and rub the uterus, till the woman gets rid of the seed, imprisoned in her body.<sup>111</sup>

The gynaecological literature's emphasis on the uterus as a specific female organ and its implications that women's body are different than that of men's explains the prestigious positions of midwives in medieval and pre-modern societies and their acceptance by intellectuals. In his *Al-Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun regarded the profession of a midwife as the highest in the hierarchy of professions.<sup>112</sup> Based on her analysis of court

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqadimmah*, tr.Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, 1958), 2: 368-373. Maya Shatzmiller, "Aspects of Women's Participation in the Economic Life of

records, Amira al-Azhary Sonbol showed that the midwives were respected in pre-modern Egypt. They were employed to provide expert advice or as witness in legal cases that concerned female body such as rapes and forced miscarriages.<sup>113</sup> In such cases, the court usually assigned two *dayahs*, the first one is the *dayah* of the district and the second one would usually be the head of the guild or the chief physician in the town.<sup>114</sup>

### ***Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah***

The writings of Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd and Ibn al-Nafis represent only few examples of the rich depictions of male-female differences in medical and natural philosophical literature in medieval Islam. The investigation of sex differences was not, however, of interest only to philosophers and physicians but also to religious scholars. Quranic passages as well as prophetic sayings refer to, sex differences, conception and foetal development, which made it necessary, particularly for orthodox religious scholars, to present their own opinion on sex differences based on religious sources rather than Greco-Roman traditions. This does not necessarily mean that they rejected Greek medical knowledge. Some of them rather sought in the Greek heritage for ideas and theories that support revelation and prophetic traditions. The writings of the fourteenth-century Hanbalite scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d.1350), for example, demonstrate their author's attempt to combine between revelatory and secular theories of sex differences.

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Later Medieval Islam: Occupations and Mentalities,” *Arabica* (March 1988) vol.35 No.1, 36-58, 41-42.

<sup>113</sup> Sonbol, “Doctors and Midwives”, p.138.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p.139.

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah was a Hanbali theologian and religious scholar, born in Damascus in 1292 A.D of humble origins. He was educated in different religious and rational sciences. He wrote extensively not only in traditional sciences such as jurisprudence but also in medicine. Although he belongs to Hanablism, a school of law that was stressed the primacy of Quran and prophetic traditions particularly over other sources of knowledge, Ibn Qayyim often mingled between revelation and rational sciences. He not only employed the writings of Greek authorities such as Galen and Hippocrates alongside religious sources, he demonstrated an excellent knowledge of the controversies amongst the natural philosophers and physicians over the subject of sex differences. As an orthodox religious scholar, Ibn Qayyim was avert to Aristotelian natural philosophical theories. Therefore, he resorted to the writings of other Greek authorities, particularly the Hippocratic corpus, which were compatible with the prophetic traditions.

Ibn Qayyim's texts examined in this study represent two important literary genres through which biological and religious knowledge of sex differences was disseminated in medieval Islam. In his *al-tibyan fi aqsam al-Quran*, a commentary on the oaths of the Quran targeting mainly the intellectuals, Ibn Qayyim indulged in the theoretical debates about the differences between males and females, as well as their roles in contributions, contributing a religious dimension to the controversy between the philosophers and the physicians. Ibn Qayyim's *al-tibb al-nabawi*, a treatise on prophetic medicine, was a therapeutic manual for the use of laymen, in which Ibn Qayyim only mentions the implications of his learned opinions of sex

differences on the ordinary people, for example, by mentioning drugs or pre-coital techniques for enhancing pleasure.<sup>115</sup>

In his *Al-Tibyan*, Ibn Qayyim presented a complex picture of sex differences. As the Quran made it clear that God divided all living creatures into males and females, Ibn Qayyim was committed to the opposition between men and women. Ibn Qayyim explained that God resembled the opposition between men and women to the opposition between light and darkness, day and night.<sup>116</sup> Although Ibn Qayyim provided an anatomical description of different body organs in *al-tibyan*, he, knowing that Galenic anatomical description of male and female genitals does not support his view of the two sexes as opposites, ignored the anatomical description of male and female reproductive organs. Ibn Qayyim, nonetheless, focused on the beard and the womb as markers of the distinction between the sexes.

The production of beard hair is highlighted by Ibn Qayyim as a distinguishing feature between men and women. Hair, according to Ibn Qayyim, could be divided into two types. The necessary type of hair such as the hair of the head, the body and the eyebrows, and the unnecessary type that is beard hair, which God creates to bestow on men respect and distinguish them from women.<sup>117</sup> The difference between the complexional heat of men

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<sup>115</sup> The 3rd/9th century witnessed the rise of a genre of medical writing called *al-tibb al-nabawi* (prophetic medicine). Authors of prophetic medical treatises were usually religious scholars rather than physicians, who usually advocated the traditional medical practices of the prophet's day as well as medical treatments mentioned in the Quran and Hadith (prophetic sayings) over Greco-Roman medical ideas. Although prophetic medicine was intended to be an alternative to Galenic medicine, it eventually became one source of medical knowledge in the pluralist medical system of medieval Islam.

<sup>116</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, *al-Tibyan fi aqşam al-quran* (Bayrut: Dar al-katib al-'Arabi, 1979), p.25.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid, p. 198.

and women is at the root of Ibn Qayyim's interpretation of the growth of beard hair, showing that although Ibn Qayyim realized that the main difference between men and women is that of heat, he still associated this difference with features that could distinguish between the sexes. The warmth and humidity of male bodies caused the eruption of vapour which emerged from specific pores that male bodies are equipped with, producing beard hair.<sup>118</sup> In another passage Ibn Qayyim associated the growth of the hair of the beard with complete masculinity, differentiating men not only from women, but also from children and eunuchs. According to Ibn Qayyim, the beard is connected with the testicles tubes through certain veins, and thus eunuchs and children do not grow beard hair.<sup>119</sup>

Ibn Qayyim's *al-tibyan* boasts two different pictures of the womb. On the one hand, the womb is, as described by Ibn Sina, a lively organ moving forward during intercourse actively seeking male seed. According to a prophetic tradition cited by Ibn Qayyim to add a religious dimension to the Avicennian view, God created an angel inside the womb that prays God for more seed during intercourse then once the child is formed asks God whether the embryo will be created male or female, then God made His will on the child's sex and destiny. On the other hand, in a juridical discussion of why the child takes his father's name and not his mother's, Ibn Qayyim suggests that women mainly provide the womb, which is no more than an empty vessel, a land where men plant their seed. According to Ibn Qayyim, God creates

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, pp.197-201.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid, p.200.

humans from males and females, but the male is the origin who provides the seed, while the female provides only the vessel for the children.<sup>120</sup>

Ibn Qayyim's commitment to the opposition between men and women was to an extent undermined by his suggestion that the common aspect between male and female bodies is their production of seed. Ibn Qayyim asserted, basing his arguments on prophetic traditions as well as Galenic-Hippocratic medical tradition that what women have in common with men is the production of seed which is essential for reproduction. According to a prophetic tradition transmitted by 'Aishah, Umm Salma asked the prophet if women had to wash if they have wet dreams, the prophet replies that they had to, only if they saw any nocturnal emissions. Umm Salma asked again if it is possible for women to have emissions and sperm like men, and the prophet affirmed her and explained that this is the reason for any resemblance between mother and child.<sup>121</sup> According to another prophetic saying in response to a question by a Jew, the difference between male and female seed, according to another prophetic tradition, is that men's seed is whitish and thick while women's seed is yellowish and delicate.

Ibn Qayyim even asserted that that both male and female seeds have generative power. In contrast to the Aristotelian one seed theory, Ibn Qayyim argued that a child has to be formed from the mixture of equivalent seeds, and denies that the father's sperm alone could have active principle. For him, both male and female seed have generative power yet women's is still weaker. Once the male and female seed are mixed together, they give rise to a third power

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p. 208.

<sup>121</sup> Ibn Qayyim, *al-Tibyan*, pp.210-211.



causing the creation of an embryo.<sup>122</sup> The religious acceptance of the idea that women produce seed is significant. Health manuals produced by religious scholars always cite prophetic sayings advising men to ensure the arousal and sexual satisfaction of their wives. In his *al-tibb al-Nabawi*, Ibn Qayyim emphasized the importance of foreplay and female orgasm for a successful conception.<sup>123</sup> The religious scholars' acceptance of the importance of female orgasm might partially explain the popularization of pre-coital foreplay in erotica manuals, targeting laymen.

In contrast to the physicians surveyed in this study, Ibn Qayyim adopted a Hippocratic theory of the origins of semen. Seed, according to Ibn Qayyim, is composed from a representative part of male and female bodies, and this explains the similarity between parent and child. Again, Ibn Qayyim's suggestion is supported by both rational and religious sources. He argues, like Hippocrates, that since one feels sexual pleasure in every part of his body, then this is evidence that the seed comes from every part of the human body. A person feels, upon ejaculation, as if he was taking off a shirt that was covering all his body, an evidence that seed is representative of each part of the human body. The compatibility between the pangenesis theory and Quran is evident, according to Ibn Qayyim, in God's commands that a person, whether male or female, should wash all his body from head to toe after sexual intercourse.<sup>124</sup> This command, according to Ibn Qayyim, aimed at replenishing the body with some of the moisture that it lost during sexual intercourse.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibn Qayyim, *al-tibyan*, p.211.

<sup>123</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *al-Tibb al-nabawi* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-tawfiqiah, n.d), 243-244.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 206-207.

To sum up, the learned interpretations of sex differences in medieval Islam were complex and sophisticated. Religious scholars, physicians and natural philosophers treated the question of male and female natures and functions differently, allowing for the complexity and plurality of notions of sex differences in medieval intellectual discourses.<sup>125</sup> None of the surveyed medical, natural philosophical and religious texts presented a model perceived as authoritative in medieval scholarship. Whereas some authors might have accepted that men and women have similar reproductive organs and functions, these same texts still stressed in different ways on biological and mental differences between men and women.

### **Continuity and Change in Pre-Modern Discourses on Sex Differences and Sexuality, 1500-1800**

In the late medieval and Ottoman period, however, it seems that the one-sex model increasingly became the dominant, yet by no means the only, model for explaining sex differences. Medieval anatomical textbooks such *Tashrihi-badan al-insan*, composed by the fourteenth-century Mansur Ibn Ilyas, include different anatomical figures of the arterial, nervous, venous, muscular system, as well as a figure of a pregnant woman. All the figures, except for the pregnant woman, assert that Ibn Ilyas thought of the human

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<sup>125</sup> Said Ibn Hibbat Allah, *Khalq al-Insan* (Bayrut: Dar al-kutub al-'ilimiyah, 2007), p.72. Muhammad Ibn Zakariyah al-Razi, *Kitab al-hawi fi al-tadawi* (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-'ilimiyah, 2000), vol.8, p.57. Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Yahya al-Baladi, *Kitab tadbir al-habalah wa al-atfal wa al-sibyan wa hifz sihathum wa mudwat al-amrad al'aridah lahum* ( Baghdad: Dar al-Rahid lil-nashr, 1980), pp. 99-100. Ali ibn Sahl al-Tabari, *Firdaws al-hikma fi al-tibb*, ed. M.Z Siddiqi (Reprint of edition published in Berlin, 1928, s.n, n.d), pp.30-31.

body as ungendered, with no distinctions between the male and female body. The figure of the pregnant woman is essentially the same as the arterial figure after removing the labels and adding a gravid uterus containing an embryo in a transverse position. In his study of Ottoman sexual knowledge, Dror Zeevi shows that the one sex model still held sway in the writings of physicians in Ottoman Istanbul.<sup>126</sup> In eighteenth-century anatomy treatises composed by the Egyptian encyclopaedic scholars Sheikh Ahmad Al-Damanhuri, the female reproductive organs were still treated as a replica of that of the male.<sup>127</sup>



**Figure 1: The arterial figure, shown frontally with the internal organs. Figure 2: The figure of a pregnant woman, which is essentially an arterial figure on which a gravid uterus with the fetus in a breech or transverse position is superimposed.**

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<sup>126</sup>Dror Zeevi, *Producing Desire*, pp. 22-26.

<sup>127</sup> Ahmad al-Damanhuri, *al-Qawl al-sarih fi 'ilm al-tashrih*, manuscript in Makatabat al-Azhar, Tibb 5660, fols 104-105.

Despite the complex medieval representations of anatomical sex differences, the uterus or the womb was never simply represented as an empty vessel designed only to carry babies, as it will become in modern medicine (as will be demonstrated more clearly in the second chapter of this dissertation). Learned, prophetic and popular medical discourses described the uterus more of an active, lively, and sometimes independent, organ inside the female body, whose movements can bring great pleasures or harrowing pains. Such anatomical descriptions had important implications on the understanding of female sexuality. In his study of medical texts in pre-modern Britain, Angus McLaren expected women not only to experience pleasure, but to actively seek it in sexual embraces.<sup>128</sup> In medieval and pre-modern Islamic medical literature, as demonstrated in this chapter, the uterus was described the movements of the uterus either to attract male sperm or to ejaculate on its own, as the main reason for female pleasures during the sex act. Prophetic medical treatises even elaborated on this idea, describing the uterus during an act, craving too much for sperm that it prays God for one more sperm.<sup>129</sup> The movements of the womb during the sex were not merely evidence of women's orgasm but an indication of her pregnancy. Physicians believed that if a sex act was followed with the shivering of the woman's body, particularly from her back, and the movement of the uterus to enclose upon itself, then this is an indication that she successfully conceived.<sup>130</sup> In an age when doctors relied

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<sup>128</sup> Angus McLaren, "The Pleasures of procreation: traditional and biomedical theories of conception," *William Hunter and the eighteenth-century medical world*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.330.

<sup>129</sup> Al-Suyuti, *Prophetic Medicine*,

<sup>130</sup> Ibn Hibat Allah, *Khalq al-Insan*, 62; Al-Baladi, *Tadbir al-habalah wa al-atfal*, 98.

mainly on patients for the diagnosis of diseases, the physicians' information about pregnancy and movements of the embryos relied mainly on the stories of their female patients.<sup>131</sup> As mentioned above, women's feelings during intercourse were treated as an evidence of her pregnancy. Clinicians and obstetricians relied heavily on women's stories throughout the different stages of pregnancy. For example, a woman can tell if her embryo is dead, depending on his movements inside her belly and if a dirty humid liquid leaks from her uterus. She can also realize if her childbirth is going to be natural based on the normality of her breath and the vibrations of the womb.<sup>132</sup> In cases, when the opinions of physicians contradict that of their female patients, physicians usually justified their patients' claims without ridiculing them. The medieval physician Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladi questioned some women's claims that they get pregnant for over 11 months and then give birth to healthy alive children. Instead of opposing their claims, Al-Baladi argues that the conflict between the opinions of physicians and women could have simply resulted from women's method of calculating their pregnant months, which might have differed from the patient.<sup>133</sup>

The belief that women are important source of information over their bodies, partially explains the positions of midwives and their acceptance by intellectuals. Physicians, for example, admitted that old experienced women,

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<sup>131</sup>On the relation between doctors and patients before the eighteenth-century, check: Roy Porter, "The Patient's View: Doing Medical History from below," *Theory and Society*, vol.14, No.2 (Mar. 1985), pp.175-182. Malcolm Nicholson, "The art of diagnosis: medicine and the five senses," *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine*, ed. Roy Porter & W.F Bnuyum (London: Routledge: 1993), vol.2, 801-826.

<sup>132</sup> Al-Razi, *al-Hawi*, vol.8, 1448 & 1458.

<sup>133</sup> Al-Baladi, *Tadbir al-habalah wa al-atfal*, p.121.

from which midwives were usually recruited, could tell if a woman is pregnant as well as the sex of her child, just by looking at her eyes, color of her face and her breasts.<sup>134</sup> In his *Al- Muqadimah*, Ibn Khaldun regarded the profession of a midwife as the highest in the hierarchy of professions.<sup>135</sup> Based on her analysis of Ottoman court records, Amira al-Azhary Sonbol showed that the midwives were regarded and respected in Ottoman Egypt, as they were employed to provide expert advice or as witness in legal cases that concerned female body such as rapes and forced miscarriages.<sup>136</sup> In such cases, the court usually assigned two *dayahs*, the first one is the dayah of the district and the second one would usually be the head of the guild or the chief physician in the town.<sup>137</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provides a preliminary overview into some of the rich and complicated ideas of sex differences in medieval and pre-modern Islamic scholarship. Scholars inherited a variety of Greco-Roman medical and natural philosophical theories on sex differences and reproduction. Depending on their individual intellectual formation, their careers and purposes, physicians, natural philosophers, religious scholars and others presented multivalent views of sex differences. Through the analysis of a number of medieval texts, this study suggested the absence of a single authoritative model of sex differences in medieval Islam. The research carried out in this chapter rather

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<sup>134</sup> Al-Razi, *al-Hawi*, vol.8, p.1459.

<sup>135</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqadimmah*, tr. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, 1958), 2: pp. 368-373. Maya Shatzmiller, "Aspects of Women's Participation in the Economic Life of Later Medieval Islam: Occupations and Mentalities," *Arabica*, vol.35 No.1 (March 1988), pp. 41-42.

<sup>136</sup> Sonbol, "Doctors and Midwives", p. 138.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, p.139.

suggests the presence of rich and complicated views of sex differences, none of which prevailed in the medieval period.

What most discourses on sex differences have in common is their implicit or explicit emphasis on the inferiority of female body and nature. Although pre-modern scholarship accepted that the main difference between males and females is simply women's deficiency of vital heat *vis a vis* men's, they still employed the concept of lacking vital heat to justify a biological and mental hierarchy between men and women. The concept of vital heat, for example, was usually implicitly or explicitly associated with a hierarchical value confirming the superiority of the male body. The hot and dry temperament, that a perfect male, was considered as a sign of perfect health, while coldness and moisture, that dominate women's temperament, were usually regarded as the cause of many diseases, making women, implicitly, more prone to diseases. Epilepsy, for example, was believed to result from the domination of the humid balance over the brain.<sup>138</sup> But the lack of the vital heat do not merely result in the inferiority of the body, but also of the character. According to the theory of humours, the human temperament can also shape his/her behaviour. Laziness, stupidity, impulsiveness, idiocy, and the inability to decide were all behavioural qualities attributed to cold and moist temperament, and subsequently characterized women's behaviour.<sup>139</sup> Although physicians considered the differences between male and female bodies as simply lack of heat, these sexual differentiations were still interpreted in favour of the patriarchal order. Nonetheless, it is still difficult to

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<sup>138</sup> Ibn Sina, *al-Qanun*, p. 909

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, p.885.

argue that scientific knowledge about sex differences provided the scientific foundation of a system of gender hierarchy, particularly because of the absence of a single authoritative model for sex differences and the wide range of different and conflicting notions of male female differences in medieval intellectual discourse.

The flexibility of boundaries between the sexes is another important reason for the inability to employ biological knowledge to justify medieval gender hierarchy. The acceptance of the theory of humors in medicine as well as other academic subjects opened the door for the possibility of crossing the boundaries between masculinity and femininity. The medical theories of conception, basing the possibility of having a male or a female child upon factors such as the strength of the male vs. female seed, and the location where the seed is produced (right or left testicle or right or left side of the womb) provided the rational justification for the presence of the hermaphrodite as well as men and women who were believed to have qualities not characteristic of their gender. Even though Quranic passages asserted that God created man into males and females, the majority of religious scholars accepted the presence of the hermaphrodite as true, yet rare, they still, as Paula Sanders pointed out, examined the hermaphrodite legal status in inheritance and other legal matters.<sup>140</sup> Popular literature, for example, provides us with different examples of women: assertive courageous warrior princesses<sup>141</sup>, intelligent and cunning female leaders, to beautiful slave girls,

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<sup>140</sup> Paula Sanders, "Gendering the Ungendered Body: Hermaphrodites in Medieval Islamic Law," *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting boundaries in Sex and Gender* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp.75-95.



thinking only of sex. The "beautiful" male body, was described in terms of his similarity to the female body: narrow waist, fat thighs, etc.

In such a scientific context, it is possible to argue that sexuality in pre-modern Islamic scholarship was socially and culturally constructed. Within heterosexual sex, for example, medical and religious discourses' preferences to certain coital positions depended on them being socially accepted. Although tens of sexual positions were discussed, particularly in popular erotic literature, the position of woman on top was particularly condemned. Physicians counted the different health dangers that could result from such a position. A religious scholar like Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah clearly explains that he objects to the position not only because of health reasons, but because women should be only below men, "the persons done to and not doers." Men playing a passive role in homosexual relationships, if they are beyond the ages of boys, were regarded as threatening the social order.<sup>142</sup> Ibn Sina recommended whipping as a treatment for older men who played a passive role in a homosexual relation.<sup>143</sup> As most pre-modern medical authorities considered the body of a boy similar to that of women, it was considered as biologically possible for a man to find a boy as sexually attractive as a woman. Jim Wafer's study of a prophetic tradition in which the prophet admitted that a boy could be sexually appealing and dangerous for true believers as much as women were, has shaped religious discourse about the bodies of young

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<sup>141</sup> Check for example, the popular medieval epic romance of al-Amirah dhat al-himmah. 'Ali ibn Musa al-Maqanabi, *Sirat al-amirah dhat al-himmah*, 7 vols. (Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-thaqafiyah, 1980-1981).

<sup>142</sup> Will Roscoe, "Precursors of Islamic Male Homosexualities," in *Islamic Homosexualities, Islamic Homosexualities: culture, history and literature*, ed. Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe (London, New York: New York University press, 1997), pp.55-86.

<sup>143</sup>Ibn Sina, *al-Qanun*, p.1612.

boys.<sup>144</sup> In other words, the masculinity of a man having sex with a boy was not threatened or questioned. In fact, some learned physicians argue that having anal sex with a boy might be less harmful because their bodies would not suck as much semen as the female uterus, and are thus less harmful to men, recommending sometimes anal sex with women so as not to contradict religious laws.<sup>145</sup>

The next chapter of this dissertation takes us into the modern period, precisely nineteenth-century Egypt, when important political, social, cultural and intellectual changes took place rapidly in the long nineteenth-century. These enormous changes had an important impact on medical knowledge, the ways knowledge was transmitted, as well as on medical practitioners, their qualifications, their treatment methods and their relations with their patients. Amongst the most crucial changes was the rise of the myth of the objectivity and neutrality of scientific knowledge, which was overwhelmingly dominated by men, in the nineteenth century. Simultaneously, the voices of women, whether the authoritative voices of the midwives or the opinions of female patients in their own diseases, were undermined. These changes that took place in nineteenth-century Egypt early modern discourses on sex differences, sexuality and gender.

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<sup>144</sup>Jim Wafer, "Muhammad and Male Homosexuality," *Islamic Homosexualities: culture, history and literature*, ed. Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe (London , New York: New York University press, 1997), pp.87-97.

<sup>145</sup> Ibn Sina, *Al-Qanun*, p.1594.

## Chapter 2

### Professional Medical Discourse on Sex Differences and Sexuality in Egypt, 1827-1928

How did nineteenth-century and early twentieth century Egyptian doctors identify the differences between male and female bodies and sexualities? This is the main question raised in this chapter. In nineteenth-century Egypt, the medical scene was composed mainly of pluralistic composed of a wide range of medical practitioners including barber-surgeons, midwives and even religious scholars. Only one group of practitioners, the Egyptian doctors who graduated from state-established medical schools and received Western medical education, claimed professional status. These doctors based their claims to professional authority on their special knowledge of Western modern medical concepts of the functioning of the human body, and the causes of health and diseases based on clinical experience and anatomical examinations.<sup>146</sup> This chapter examines the opinions of Western educated professional Egyptian doctors on sex differences and sexuality and interprets the contributions of these ideas to the construction of gender and sexual knowledge within their social and cultural contexts.

Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* is one of the earliest sources addressing the political and social significance of biological ideas on sex differences in Enlightenment Europe. Prior to the eighteenth century, Laqueur argues, physicians adopted the

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<sup>146</sup> Amira al-Azhary Sonbol, *The Creation of a Medical Profession in Egypt, 1800-1922* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991) pp.81-82.

Galenic one sex model of sex differences in which the female body was just an imperfect variant of the male's. The transition to the two sex model for interpreting sex differences in Enlightenment Europe, according to Laqueur, could be interpreted within its social and cultural contexts, particularly developments such as the rise of liberal thought and the tendency to provide scientific legitimacy for existing social inequalities.<sup>147</sup> Although Laqueur's hypothesis about the link between scientific discourse on sex differences and political and social changes was largely accepted amongst historians, Laqueur's argument was not universally accepted. Some historians challenged Laqueur's assertion that that one sex model dominated pre-eighteenth century scientific thought while others questioned Laqueur's chronology.<sup>148</sup> What remains significant about this study is its emphasis on the inextricable link between the scientific representation the human body and their social, cultural and political contexts; and it is on the basis of this premise that this research is based.

This study argues that the professional Egyptian doctors adopted a two sex model for explaining sex differences. According to this model, men and women were to be arranged horizontally: anatomical differences were stressed and their bodies came to be regarded as qualitatively distinct. By analyzing the interpretations of sex differences in a selected number of medical texts written

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<sup>147</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>148</sup> Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995). Michael Stolberg, 'A Woman down to her Bones: The Anatomy of Sexual Differences in the Sixteenth and early Seventeenth-century,' *Isis*, vol.94, n.2, pp.274-299. Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this study demonstrates the diversity of opinions amongst Egyptian doctors on the significance of these sex differences and their implications on the conceptualization of gender and sexuality. Such multiplicity of opinions reflect Egyptian doctors' diverse and sometimes paradoxical opinions on social changes and particularly women's increasing demands for gender equality. Although Egyptian intellectuals believed that gender regimes and attitudes towards women were part of an existing social landscape that must change, they debated the extent of these changes.

This chapter will begin by examining the historical trajectory of state regulated medical education in Egypt during the nineteenth and early nineteenth century. The state established medical schools had gone through important administrative changes, from the time of its inauguration in 1827 and till the British takeover of the medical educational system in 1893. These transformations in medical education, as this study demonstrates, led to the diversity of the social and intellectual composition of the medical school's graduates across the nineteenth century. Secondly, we will examine how Egyptian doctors interpreted the differences between male and female bodies by analyzing a selected a number of medical texts. The chapter will demonstrate how Egyptian doctors negotiated and assimilated Western theories of the human bodies alongside other sources of knowledge on the human body in a variety of ways, producing an indigenous medical discourse on sex differences.

### **Medical Education in Egypt, 1827-1893**

The Egyptian state under Muhammad Ali (1805-1827) initiated unprecedented wide-scale medical reforms targeting medical education, public health, and regulation of medical practice. Historians debated the motives that triggered the state's medical reforms. Some argued that the main impetus for reforming medicine was the need for a medical corps for the treatment of the army built by the Pasha to consolidate his power in Egypt and snatch it from the grip of the Ottoman Sultan.<sup>149</sup> Others believed that the shortage of manpower because of the deteriorating health conditions which hindered the Pasha from realizing his ambitious mercantilist policies was the reason behind these wide scale medical reforms.<sup>150</sup> Despite these different explanations for medical reforms, the continuity of the medical school to function, despite the dissolution of the Egyptian army in 1840, asserts that the Egyptian state realized the importance of reforming medicine to the modernization of the country.

The institutionalization of medical education was the first step towards the reform of medical practice. Before the nineteenth century, people acquired medical knowledge through different ways. Learned physicians acquired medical knowledge mainly through reading and memorizing theoretical medical literature while the majority of medical practitioners were simply medical craftsmen who acquired medical skills through apprenticeship.<sup>151</sup> In

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<sup>149</sup> Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, his army and the making of modern Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo, 2002), pp.209-226.

<sup>150</sup> Sonbol, *The Creation of a Medical Profession*, pp.22-23.

<sup>151</sup> Sherry Sayed gadelrab, "Medical Healers in Ottoman Egypt, 1517-1798," *Medical History*, vol.54 (3): 365-386.

the 19th century, the state started to interfere directly in regulating medical education. The first medical school, which offer modern Western standardized medical education, was the medical school of Abu Za'bal opened in 1827, under the supervision of the French surgeon Antoine Barthelemy Clot. In 1837, the medical school and hospital was moved to Qasr 'Aini area in Cairo, and the school was renamed as Qasr Aini hospital.<sup>152</sup> By founding a school for medical instruction in the 19th century, medical education was institutionalized, students were expected to learn a standardized medical curriculum and receive practical training appropriate for their specializations.<sup>153</sup> A general oral examination was held at the end of each scholastic year during the month ending Ramadan. These examinations were conducted in the presence of notables and European consuls.<sup>154</sup> Examination was another new institution that was introduced by Clot bey, and was soon spread to other educational institutions.<sup>155</sup>

The recruitment policies of the medical school's students changed across the nineteenth century. In its first phase, recruitment of students was a major difficulty. In urban cities, craftsmen feared that the children recruited for state established schools will be taken from workshops which in turn would jeopardize their crafts, while peasants preferred that their children stay to help them. Muhammad Ali turned to al-Azhar and the *kuttab* (elementary schools) for students. Students were recruited from amongst the poorest

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<sup>152</sup> Sonbol, *Creation of a Medical Profession*, pp.52-75.

<sup>153</sup> Sylvie Chiffolleau, *Médecines et Médecins en Egypte: construction d'une identité professionnelle et projet médicale* (Paris; Lyon, L'Harmattan: Maison de l'orient méditerrané, 1997).

<sup>154</sup>National Archives, Daftar 2061 Madaris, 27th Rajab 1256/1840.

<sup>155</sup> Sonbol, *Creation of a Medical profession*, p.61.

strata of the society, and most came from peasant origins. In the reign of Muhammad 'Ali's successors, the situation changed. Parents recognized that enrolment in state-established schools was a means for social mobilization and for guaranteeing a government post, and thus they were more than willing to send their children to these schools. More students were not only enrolled in higher schools such as the schools of medicine and engineering, but also in the state elementary and preparatory schools. The medical school's students became thus a mixture of students coming from upper, middle and lower classes, in addition to some foreigners. A large number of students were sons of Egyptian doctors who graduated from the medical school.<sup>156</sup>

These changes in the school's recruitment policies could also explain the diversity of the intellectual composition of the school's graduates. Many of the early graduates of the medical school were recruited from Al-Azhar and thus were already learnt in Islamic religious sciences. Some had also good knowledge of medieval Greco-Islamic medical literature. Dr. Ahmad Hasan Al-Rashidi received traditional learning in Islamic sciences and Arabic languages before joining the Abu Za'bal medical school firstly as an interpreter and then as a medical student. In 1832, he was sent on an educational mission to study medicine in France, after which he returned back to teach in the medical school and was eventually appointed as the head of the school of midwives in 1840.<sup>157</sup> His excellence in the Arabic language and his expertise in classical medicine qualified Al-Rashidi to translate several medical books. The analysis of his works also asserts that he was quite knowledgeable in Greco-

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<sup>156</sup>Sonbol, *The Creation of a Medical Profession*, pp. 52-55.

<sup>157</sup> Ahmad 'Isa, *Tarikh al-atibba* (Cairo: Matb'at Fatih-Allah, 1942) pp.132-133



Islamic medieval medicine. Al-Rashidi was thus a character who combined between the traditions and heritage of the learnt Sheikh and the scientific expertise of a modern physician. Later in the nineteenth century, most medical students received their elementary and preparatory education in state schools. They were taught Arabic, arithmetic and given basic lessons in religious sciences.<sup>158</sup>

The school's curriculum consisted of anatomy, pathology, personal and military hygiene, clinical sciences, medical therapeutics, toxicology, chemistry, physics, physics and medicines preparation. In their first year, students received particular attention. First year students were introduced to these subjects in addition to instruction in chemistry, physics, astronomy and geometry. Most of the books that students used were however written by the professors teaching at the school. Medical students, who travelled in educational missions, were asked to translated books which they acquired in Europe to guarantee the continuity of the translations of the recent contributions to medical sciences.<sup>159</sup>

One of the challenges facing Clot bey was to make sure that the divergence and contradiction between schools of medical thought would not be imported to the Qasr Aini school. Clot Bey decided that medicine would be taught in the Egyptian medical school in accordance with the principles of the physiological school known as Broussaism.<sup>160</sup> According to Broussaism, the

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<sup>158</sup> Ahmad 'Izzat Abd al-Karim, *Tarikh al-ta'lim fi 'asr muhammad 'ali* (Cairo: Maktabat al-nahda al-misriyah, 1938).

<sup>159</sup> Al-Shayyal, *Tarikh al-tarjamah*, p.102.

<sup>160</sup> La Verne Kuhnke, *Lives at Risk: Public Health in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1990), p.36.

disease was not a foreign element but simply a change in function and disease results from an irritation that spreads from one organ to another through the sympathetic nervous system causing general inflammations. By choosing Broussaism, Clot Bey introduced two major changes to medical learning. Firstly, the shift of focus from bodily liquids and humors to bodily organs was a clear cut departure from medieval Islamic medicine. The study of anatomy became of paramount importance to medical education. Secondly, Clot bey brought the different theories of pathology together with bedside clinical practice ( a standard practice in nineteenth-century Paris school of medicine that was considered revolutionary at the time).<sup>161</sup>

The process of transferring modern Western medical knowledge was complex. The process of transferring western medical sciences to nineteenth-century Egypt took place under the auspices of the Egyptian state, which hoped that its reforms would put an end to the encroachment of European powers.<sup>162</sup> Students, who were sent to the West for educational missions, were entrusted with the task of figuring out the reasons for the superiority of the West. Muhammad Ali insisted that Arabic language became the main language of study in all state schools, including the medical school. This meant that Egypt could become self-sufficient in medical faculty and dispense with foreign assistance.<sup>163</sup> The translation of medical sciences to Arabic

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<sup>161</sup> Daniel Panzac, "Medecine révolutionnaire et révolution de la médecine dans l'Égypte de Muhammad Ali: Le Dr. Clot bey," *revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, vol.52-53 (1989), pp.94-110.

<sup>162</sup> Pascal Crozet, « À propos de l'enseignement scientifique en Égypte », *Égypte/Monde arabe*, Première série, 18-19 | 1994, [Online], put online 8 July 2008. URL : <http://ema.revues.org/index140.html>. consulted 9 october 2009.

<sup>163</sup> Sonbol, *The Creation of a Medical Profession*, p.60.

language was facilitated by the fact that medical knowledge was not transferred into "scientific vacuum" The Arab classical sciences formed an important scientific context in which modern medical and other branches of Western scientific knowledge was transmitted.<sup>164</sup> The efforts of the Azhar scholars employed as interpreters and editors in state schools should not be underestimated. Drawing on their vast knowledge of Arab sciences, these Azhar sheikhs were responsible for finding proper scientific terminology from classical Arabic literature constructing a modern Arabic scientific language.<sup>165</sup> By 1833, a vocabulary of 6000 new medical words were assembled and clearly defined.<sup>166</sup> Although medical educational reforms followed the French model, the Egyptian state still kept its ties with the Ottoman heritage. Students were expected to be aware with the developments of medical sciences in Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Archival records assert that Egyptian medical students were also commanded to learn Turkish.<sup>167</sup> He also encouraged that some modern Ottoman medical texts were translated into Arabic for the use of students throughout the nineteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century, a medical manual on sexual health written by a Turkish physician Hussayn Ramzi was translated to be distributed amongst Egyptian soldiers.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Jamal al-din al Shayyal, *Tarikh al-tarjamah wa al-harakah al-thaqafiyah fi asr Muhammad 'Ali* (Cairo: Maktabat al-thaqafah al-diniyah, 2000), pp.102-109.

<sup>165</sup> Pascal Crozet, "Langue scientifique et fait national: le cas de l'Egypte à partir du XIX siècle," *Les sciences coloniales : figures et institutions*, éd. P. Petitjean, ORSTOM-UNESCO (Paris, 1996), pp. 259-284.

<sup>166</sup> Amira Sonbol, *The Creation of a Medical Profession*, p.60.

<sup>167</sup> National Archives, abhath, ta'alim, 58, 1263 hijri/1846.

<sup>168</sup> Hussayn Ramzi, *Hifz sihat al-mutzawij wa al-'azib*, trans. Muhammad Tawfik al-mar'ashly (Beirut, 1901).

Finally, it is also important to remember that the process of transferring Western sciences to Egypt was intended to be utilitarian aiming mainly at transforming Western technologies, more than the sciences themselves. The emergence of modern science in enlightenment Europe was intrinsically linked to ideas of philosophical schools (Baconism, Newtonism, etc), that could have challenged the social and cultural of Egyptian society. Thus, the process of transferring Western scientific knowledge was meant to be selective, ensuring that the imported European ideas and technologies would not cause any major cultural and social upheavals.<sup>169</sup> The contacts with the West, nonetheless, brought important social and cultural changes to the Egyptian Muslim society and graduates of the specialized schools were the catalysts of these changes.

### **Egyptian Medical Education under British control**

In 1889, seven years after the British occupation of Egypt, British colonial authorities regulated directly medical education in Egypt. The British administration of the Qasr 'Aini medical school had to be interpreted within the larger framework of their educational policies in Egypt. For Lord Cromer, the first British consul general of Egypt, education was only a means to create a compliant educational staff to fill the lower ranks in the Egyptian government and carry out British commands. The British administration introduced a two tiered educational system. According to this system, the majority of Egyptians were offered only free basic education through the

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<sup>169</sup> Pascal Crozet, « À propos de l'enseignement scientifique en Égypte". URL : <http://ema.revues.org/index140.html>. consulted 9 october 2009.

*Kuttab*, while students were expected to pay fees for higher education in specialized schools.<sup>170</sup> Douglas Dunlop, advisor for the ministry of education known for his lack of sympathy for Egyptians, decreed that the curriculum in specialized schools would be taught in English, which undermined the importance of the Arabic language and created a conflict between him and the nationalists.<sup>171</sup> As for lower rank education, the British government made use of existing *kuttab*s (small offices providing elementary education) and changed their supervision from the ministry of *awqaf* (religious endowments) to the ministry of education. The funding of these *kuttab*s became subject to a number of stipulations, according to which the *kuttab*s became obliged to expand its curriculum by including basic religious sciences to its curriculum before receiving any funding. However, the British disqualified any *kuttab*s which taught foreign languages from receiving funds, despite the importance of European languages in social mobilization in Egypt at the time.<sup>172</sup>

Despite British claims that their occupation of Egypt was a "civilizing" mission, some historians argued that their policies "revamped" the spread of education.<sup>173</sup> The British educational system was a radical departure from the educational policies followed by Muhammad 'Ali. However, the British authorities justified their educational policies by claiming that they were focusing on the quality of education rather than on the number of the

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<sup>170</sup>David C. Kinsey, "Efforts for Educational Synthesis under Colonial Rule: Egypt and Tunisia," *Comparative Education Review*, vol.15, N.2. Colonialism and Education (June 1971), pp. 176.

<sup>171</sup> Mona Russell, "Competing, Overlapping and Contradictory Agendas: Egyptian Education under British Occupation, 1882-1922" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. XXI (2001), p.52.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, p.52.

<sup>173</sup>.*Ibid*.

educated. Lord Cromer even claimed that providing free education in specialized schools would create a shortage of manual labour.<sup>174</sup> Amongst the most important consequences of the British educational policies was the change in the composition of students in the specialized schools. Specialized education was accessible only to the upper social classes, whilst the majority of the population were deprived of modern education. The policies of Lord Cromer towards education had to be interpreted within the context of his general administrative policies which aimed primarily at achieving financial solvency, particularly since his own family owned a big share of the Egyptian debt.<sup>175</sup> The two tiered educational policies also served the interests of the Egyptian class of landowners. For Egyptian landowners who had strong economic and trade links with the British, they were more interested in improving the transportation and communication networks and the expansion of cultural productivity even if the expense of the educational, social and health services presented to the ordinary people.<sup>176</sup>

The British educational policies left its impact on medical education in the Qasr 'Aini medical school. Although the British took pride in their administration of the medical school of Qasr 'Aini, historians such as Amira al-Azhary Sonbol doubts the success of the British in reforming medical education. Sonbol argues that the British policies of limiting expenditures on public education and imposing fees on students in specialized schools negatively impacted the growth of medical education. Entry into the medical

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, p.52

<sup>175</sup> Afaf Marsot, *Egypt and Cromer* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University press, 1985), p.54.

<sup>176</sup> Amira Sonbol, *The New Mamluks: The Egyptian Society and Modern Feudalism* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000) , pp.89-121.

school was limited only to the upper classes and the number of the overall students enrolled in the school also dropped. Between 1883 and 1893, 1,541 doctors graduated from al-Qasr 'Aini medical schools. After the British complete control over the school in 1893, the number of students dropped till it reached only 12 students in 1896. Between 1902-1911, the total number of doctors graduating from the Qasr 'Aini were 185 doctors.<sup>177</sup>The British authorities also did not allow Egyptian doctors to specialize in specific medical areas, aiming at creating "low clerk" doctors who would serve as general practitioners in hospitals. Although Egyptian students were allowed to continue their education and specialize by studying in a European medical school, the government refused to finance educational missions. The numbers of students on educational missions were very small.<sup>178</sup> The limited funds for research meant that the Egyptians continued to lag behind Europe in scientific and technological advancement and to continue to rely on Western scientific knowledge. After their graduation, Egyptian doctors faced harsh competitions from foreign doctors allowed to practice in Egypt. Under the pretext that Egypt needed more medical personnel, the British authorities allowed foreign doctors with a degree from any accredited university to practice medicine freely in Egypt. As a consequence of these decrees, the vast majority of the doctors practicing medicine in Egypt from 1892-1914 were foreigners. In port cities like Alexandria, large number of foreign doctors were practicing in early

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<sup>177</sup>Amira al-Azhary Sonbol, *The Creation of a Medical Profession* , p.109.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p.110.

twentieth century Egypt, out of 144 doctors, only 18 were Egyptian and the rest were Greek, Syrian or Italian.<sup>179</sup>

### **Antoine Barthelemy Clot on Sex Differences**

Although Egyptian doctors were encouraged to keep themselves updated with the most recent developments in medicine by reading European medical books, the transfer of Western medical knowledge took place mainly through the translations of the writings of their teachers in Abu Za'abal and then Qasr 'Aini medical schools. The works of the chief physician Antoine Barthelemy Clot were particularly important. Six of his works on human anatomy, general health, child health and physiology were translated to be studied as textbooks by students of the medical school. Some of his books were also read by the public. In fact, Clot's bey's book *Kunuz al-sihah* (Treasures of Health) was very popular and was published several times.

Anatomy was the highlight of the modern medical curriculum at the Qasr 'Aini medical school. Not only did Clot Bey devote two books to human anatomy, he also discussed the topic sporadically in his other writings. In 1827, the same year the first medical school of Abu Za'abal was opened, Clot bey wrote his first book on general anatomy. The book on anatomy was translated by the Syrian translator Yuhanna 'Anhori and edited by Sheikh Muhammad Al-Hirawi. The book was given the title of *Al-Qawl al-sarih fi 'ilm al-tashrih*, after a manuscript on anatomy written by Sheikh Ahmad al-Damanhuri, sheikh of al-Azhar between 1767-1776.<sup>180</sup> In his introduction to

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<sup>179</sup> Sonbol, *The Creation of a Medical Profession*, p.110.

<sup>180</sup> 'Abd al-Rahman Hassan al-Jabarti, *'Ajaib al-athar fi tarajim al-akhbar* (Cairo: 1879) vol.2, pp.25-26



Clot Bey's book on anatomy, Sheikh Muhammad Al-Hirawi emphasized the both medieval Islamic and modern medicine had their origins in Greco-Roman medicine. He explained that the books of Ibn Sina were studied in European universities for six centuries, but medical sciences started to decline in the Islamic and Arab lands after the thirteenth century. Al-Hirawi also pointed out to the flaws of Greco-Roman anatomy because the ancient physicians did not dissect human bodies. Al-Hirawi was thus preparing his readers to understand the importance of human dissection, probably to undermine the opposition of the students of the medical school to the study of anatomy through dissections and to prepare them to accept the differences between medieval and modern medical knowledge.

The book was mainly an examination of the structure of the human body, its tissues, muscles and organs and their functioning. Clot bey also included information for his medical students about preparing parts of the body for dissection. In his discussion of human body, Clot bey, however, did not detail the differences between the male and female bodies except with regards to the sexual organs. What was significant about his book is the allocation of distinct terms to describe male and female reproductive organs. Pre-nineteenth century Arab medical discourse was characterized by linguistic ambiguity when referring to male and female sexual organs. The term *baydatayn* (eggs) or *khisiyatayn* (testicles), were employed to refer to testicles and ovaries, as many Arab physicians adopted the Galenic one sex model of anatomy which presupposes that female sexual organs were

regarded as similar to the male's but inverted.<sup>181</sup> In the nineteenth century, translators described male and female sexual organs using different terminology. Clot bey described the male and female reproductive systems in details. The male reproductive organs consists of the scrotum (*safn*), the testicles (*khisyatyn*) and the penis (qadib), while that of the female consists of ovaries (*mubyadayn*), vagina (*farj*), clitoris (*badhr*), cervix (*mihbal*) and the uterus (*rahm*).<sup>182</sup> The use of different names for male and female sexual organs signified the disappearance of sexual homology from nineteenth-century Egyptian professional medical discourse.

In his *Kunuz al-sihah*, Clot provided an elaborate discussion of physical and mental differences between the male and female bodies and sexualities. According to Clot, there are fundamental physical differences between male and female bodies, "when comparing women with men, it will be found that women are more sensitive, less rational, feebler in physique and that women have slower heartbeats, more sensitive skin."<sup>183</sup> Clot also emphasizes that the female body goes through distinctive physiological processes such as menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>184</sup> Clot asserts that the female physiology made her body prone to several physical and mental diseases, implying the inferiority of the female body .

Clot describes the contributions of men and women to contribution as different but complimentary. The roles of the male and female sexual organs

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<sup>181</sup>Sherry Sayed Gadelrab, "Discourses on Sex Differences in Medieval Scholarly Islamic Thought," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 66 (2011), vol.1, pp. 40-81.

<sup>182</sup> Antoine Clot, *Al-Qawl al-sarih fi 'ilm al-tashrih* (Cairo: 1827), pp.423-437.

<sup>183</sup> Antoine Clot, *Kunuz al-sihah fi yawaqit al-mihnah* (Cairo: 1879), p.113.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid, p.114.

in conception were interpreted by Clot in terms of opposition, "the female sexual organs are designed to receive, while that of men are designed to give."<sup>185</sup> He emphasizes the importance of the male sperm describing it as the main force behind reproduction. It is no wonder thus that Clot pays special attention to men's reproductive health. Once male children reach puberty and throughout the period of their youth, "they are dominated by desire and they can't stop thinking about women and their sexual organs started to grow in size."<sup>186</sup> Clot's discussion of male sexuality implied the aggressiveness of male sexuality, the difficulty of men to control their desires and that these desires are naturally directed towards women. Clot advises men to invest their sexual energies only through marriage. Males should marry only a while after reaching their puberty, probably after they are fifteen or sixteen. Married men should not approach their wives during menstruation and not to overindulge in sex, and to have sex twice a week only.<sup>187</sup> The translators of Clot's book supported his advice with Quranic verses suggesting the avoidance of women during menstruation and prophetic traditions that prohibited Muslims from immersing in sexual pleasures.<sup>188</sup> However, Clot also recognizes that his recommendations that men should regulate their sex lives was difficult for polygamous men to implement, "many men ask how they can not have sex with my wives except twice per week especially that I want to enjoy and to have many children and if I follow this advice my life will be miserable especially that I have to spend each night with a different wife and if I do not

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid, p.26.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid, p.107.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid, p.66.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, p.67.

have sex with each wife, she will make our lives miserable and I also lose the opportunity of having many children."<sup>189</sup> At this point, Clot attacks the institution of polygamy justifying his views from a scientific and religious standpoint, "Why are you marrying several wives, while only one is enough. If you say that Islamic shari'ah permits that Muslims should marry more than one wife, I will reply that the shari'ah is not to be contradicted but that shari'ah allows polygamy but does not make it incumbent upon Muslims..... If you follow our advice and protect your semen, rather than overindulging in sexual pleasures which will destroy you, you will have a happy life, live healthy and have strong offspring."<sup>190</sup> Clot's writings on monogamy, presented in a religious context probably by the translators and editors of his work, represent one of several channels, as will be examined later in this book, through which European marriage values start to influence Egyptian upper and middle classes' sexual lives.<sup>191</sup> In contrast to medieval Muslim physicians who prescribe medical treatments, Clot considered these medical treatments as threatening to men's health.

Despite associating women's role in conception with passivity, Clot describes Egyptian women as sexually voracious and blames them for the spread of syphilis amongst Egyptian soldiers.<sup>192</sup> His view, which he shared with other Europeans at the time, were based on Greco-Islamic theory of

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<sup>189</sup>Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing and Liberating Egypt, 1805-1923* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), pp.7-11.

<sup>192</sup> Antoine Barthelemy Clot, *Aperçu général sur L'histoire de L'Egypte* (Paris, 1840), p.336.

humours, which presupposes that women living in warm countries have voluptuous sexuality. The reproductive health of women was central to Muhammad 'Ali's mercantilist policies. Clot recommends that girls should not be married as soon as they reach puberty, and that girls should not be married except when their bodies start to grow into adulthood, "the marriage of young girls is a habit refused by rationality and the *shar'iah* ..... if a man marries an adult woman, his marriage will be happy and productive and the wife will be more capable of maintaining the house. As for the *shari'ah*, girls should marry only after reaching puberty and start to turn into full women, or otherwise girls will be hurt from intercourse and her uterus might be harmed and any action that could cause harm is prohibited."<sup>193</sup> Clot's *Kunuz al-sihah* instructs women on the right procedures that they should follow to protect their health and the health of their offspring during pregnancy and childbirth. Clot also promotes the view that mothers are by nature most ideal for taking care of their children and thus they should be responsible for the upbringing of their children.<sup>194</sup>

The Arabic translations of Clot's medical writings were one of the earliest conduits through which modern European values of gender and sexuality were conveyed to the Egyptians. Clot criticized existing sexual habits such as marriage at a young age and polygamy and introduced his readers to Victorian European values of monogamy and sexual moderation. Although Clot did not discuss sex openly, his scientific discussion of male and female physiology and contributions to reproduction had important implications for

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<sup>193</sup> Clot, *Kunuz al-sihah*, p.65.

<sup>194</sup> Antoine Clot, *al-Durrar al-ghiwal fi amrad al-atifal*, trans. Muhammad Al-Shafi' (Cairo, 1868), p. 16.

the understanding of sexuality. The transmission of Clot's views would not have been possible without the translators and editors of his work who succeeded in presenting his opinions in a manner acceptable to his Muslim readership through matching his opinions with religious traditions. Throughout the nineteenth century, Clot's writings were used as medical textbooks.

It is important however to keep in mind that Egyptian doctors were not passive recipients of European medical knowledge. The question of indigenous responses to modern Western medicine in the epoch of imperialism is a matter of controversy. Some historians argue that colonial science was used as a tool of cultural imperialism.<sup>195</sup> Others, however, assert that the indigenous responses suggested that Western scientific ideas were never passively implanted into colonial settings but were reconstructed in several ways. <sup>196</sup> Like other professional groups who received Western education at the time, the Egyptian doctors' reactions to the British occupation of Egypt were complex. Many of these Western educated professionals, including doctors, believed in the supremacy of Western civilisation, yet that did not necessarily translate into a rebellion against their

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<sup>195</sup> Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1884-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.182-241. Michael Adas, *Machines and the Measures of Men: Science, Technology and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>196</sup> Lewis Pyneson, "Cultural Imperialism and the Exact Sciences Revisited" *Isis*, 1993, vol.84, pp.103-108. Saptal Sangwan, "Indian responses to European Science and Technology 1757-1857" *British journal of the History of Science*, 1988, 21: 211-232. David Arnold, *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). D. Wade Chambers and R.Gillespie, "Locality in the History of Science: Colonial Science, Techno-science and Indigenous Knowledge" in Roy MacLeod, *Nature and Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp.221-240.

own society's norms and values. Several examples demonstrate that Egyptian doctors graduating from Qasr 'Aini medical school accepted medical knowledge only when it did not openly challenge the social and cultural traditions of the country. For example, although Clot bey criticizes female circumcision and described it as a savage medical procedure, his student Ahmad Al-Rashidi considers it a successful treatment for some vaginal inflammations caused by masturbation.<sup>197</sup> Clot also discusses the different reasons that could cause the virginity sheet to be torn other than sexual intercourse. He explains that parents and families should understand these different causes for the loss of virginity so that they would not accuse their daughter of indulging in pre-marital sex if her virginity sheet was found torn on the day of her wedding.<sup>198</sup> In a forensic medical textbook written by Ibrahim Pasha Hassan, the author asserts that a virginity sheet could be torn only as result of sexual activities such as sexual intercourse or masturbation with fingers.<sup>199</sup> Hassan argues that sports activities such as horse-riding and dancing could not destroy the virginity sheet because it is deep and resistant.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Ahmad Hassan al-Rashidi, *Bahjat al-ru'assa'fi amrad al-nisaa'* (Cairo: 1844), vol.1, p.25.

<sup>198</sup> Antoine Barthelemy Clot, *Kunuz al-sihah wa yawaqit al-mihnah* (Cairo: 1879), p.113.

<sup>199</sup> وكذا قد يزول الغشاء عقب الاحتكاكات الاصبعية المتكررة التي يقصد بها قضاء الشهوة و اما الرقص و الوثب و ركوب الخيل و خروج دم الحيض فلا تكفى لتمزق غشاء البكارة نظرا لوضعه الغاير و درجة مقاومته Ibrahim Pasha Hassan, *Al-Dustur al-mar'i fi al-tibb al-shar'i* (Cairo, 1888), p. 60.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

## **Ahmad Hassan al-Rashidi**

Sheikh (and later Dr.) Ahmad Hassan al-Rashidi belonged to the first generation of the graduates of the state-established medical school of Qasr 'Aini. He, like many other Azhar students, came from humble rural origins. As mentioned earlier, Al-Rashidi was familiar with classical Greco-Islamic knowledge, whose authorities he cited frequently. He was also knowledgeable in modern European medicine and he frequently referred to the writings of European physicians such as François Broussais.<sup>201</sup> Al-Rashidi had also translated a French book on childbirth which, according to al-Rashidi, was met with success and used as a textbook in the medical school. Al-Rashidi was thus encouraged to write a book on women's health and another on children's health. In 1844, he published his book *Bahjat al-ru'assa'fi amrad al-nisaa'* (The Happy Guide for the Chiefs in Women's Diseases). Al-Rashidi aimed at gathering and presenting information about female anatomy and physiology and the different types of diseases to which the female body is subjected in an accessible and simplified manner to his readership.<sup>202</sup>

The book starts with the author's emphasis on the peculiarity of the female body. Al-Rashidi confirms that doctors are "certain" that the female body is fundamentally different from that of the male's in terms of its anatomy and physiology; such assertion probably served to end any debates.<sup>203</sup> The author identifies a list of anatomical differences between male and female bodies, which extended to include the number of bones, shape of skeleton,

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<sup>201</sup> Ahmad 'Isa, *Mu'jam al-atibba: dhayl 'uyun al-anbaa fi tabaqat al-atibba*, p.133

<sup>202</sup> Ahmad Hassan al-Rashidi, *Bahjat al-ru'assa fi amrad al-nisa* (Cairo, 1844), p.5.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, p.6.



strength of voice, size of lungs and brains, colour and odour of urine and even the width of veins.<sup>204</sup> For specialists in women's disease, sexual difference was not just a theoretical issue, but it also has practical relevance. The physicians had to be aware of the differences between the male and female bodies and take them into consideration when choosing the treatment. Al-Rashidi explains that there are many diseases that were specific to women because they attack the uterus.<sup>205</sup>

Al-Rashidi's interpretation of sexual differences supported the view that the female body was inferior than that of men's. In his discussion of the sizes of the brain in males vs. females, Al-Rashidi argues that the discovery that the female's brain is smaller than that of the male's eliminates any claims that "there are many women who are equal to men in intelligence". In the eyes of al-Rashidi, women lack men's perfect ability to master different types of knowledge and the comparison between the writings of men and those of women demonstrate the latter's lack of accuracy and shortness of talent.<sup>206</sup> Al-Rashidi considers that women were by their nature riddled by disease due to the great influence of the uterus over the female body.<sup>207</sup> Physiological processes such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth contribute only to the

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<sup>204</sup> Al-Rashidi, *Bahjat*, p.581.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, p.6.

و قد ظهر لك بطلان ما زعموه من انه وجد الكثير من النساء اللواتي هن اصحاب ذكاء و فطنة مساوية لما يوجد في نوع الذكور من صفات الكمال و انواع المعارف و العلوم الادابية و غيرها و الصنایع مع ان وجود ذلك فيهن نادر جدا و النادر لا يقدح في القاعدة الاغلبية بل لم تعمقنا في البحث في معظم من اشهر من النساء بالذكاء و الفطنة و قضينا على مدة استحقاقهن بقطع النظر عن الاغراض لراينا ان منهن من كان اشتغال حافظتها بالعلل و النتائج و الاعمال المتعلقة بالذكور و تلك طبيعة فيهن و منهن من كان المرشد لها هو الالهامات الحاصلة من احوال استيرية تزيد قوة في عضو الاحساس العسقى و بالجملة لا يوجد في كتبهن الغوص في المعانى و لا الترقى فيها و لا دقتها الدالة على صحة العقل و الملكة التي تؤخذ من كتب اجلاء المؤلفين مثل نوتون و ديكرت و باقون و راسين و روسو

*Ibid*, p. 584.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, p.7.

female body's weakness and fragility.<sup>208</sup> Because of women's sensitive temperaments and kind hearts, women easily fell easily into grief which could cause many of their diseases.<sup>209</sup>

Amongst the various physical and mental disorders that Al-Rashidi associates with women was hysteria. Hysteria, no longer recognized as a disease, was diagnosed for women, usually between 15-30 or menopausal women, showing any of a broad multitude of symptoms including nervous insomnia, loss of appetite for food or sex, irritability, abdominal contractions as well as "insane" behaviour. In the nineteenth century, the term insane behaviour became a flexible term used to refer to any socially contradictory or rebellious female attitude. Al-Rashidi, for example, described women who attempt to author books and "delve deeper into causes and results and do other jobs that are all men's" as "victims of hysterical influences."<sup>210</sup> Hysteria has its origins in the writings of the Greek medical authorities such as the Hippocratic corpus and was also discussed by medieval medical authorities such as Ibn Sina. In ancient and medieval medical writings, hysteria was believed to be caused by the movement of the uterus to various locations in her body due to the lack of bodily fluids, and thus hysteria has been known as the "wandering womb" condition for centuries.<sup>211</sup> Al-Rashidi summarized the different controversies over hysteria in nineteenth century Europe. Whereas

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<sup>208</sup>Ibid, p.589.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, pp.6-7.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, p.585.

<sup>211</sup> Ann Ellis Hanson, "Hippocrates: Diseases of Women I", *Signs*, vol. 11 (Winter 1975), 567-584. Helen King, *Hippocrates' Woman*, 88-247. Lesley Dean Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science*, 114- 147. Ahmad Ibn Yahya al-Baladi, *Tadbir al-habala wa al-atfal* (Baghdad; 1980), p. 98.

some doctors agreed with Hippocrates and Galen that the uterus is the seat of disease, others such as Sydenham located the disease in the brain. Due to his observation that many hysterical women suffer from menstruation problems, Al-Rashidi infers that the uterus is the seat of disease, however he rejects the ancient and medieval view that the disease is caused by the dislocation of the womb.<sup>212</sup> Al-Rashidi elucidates that the disease is rather caused by the inflammation of the uterus, which is connected to the nervous system, causing various symptoms such as seizures.<sup>213</sup> By situating hysteria in the uterus, Al-Rashidi considers hysteria a disease peculiar only to women.

Al-Rashidi suggests that any actions that might cause the excitability of the female genitalia were to expected to cause hysteria. Masturbation, reading romantic literature, attending weddings when young girls mix unsupervised with more sexually experienced women, drugs which "supposedly" enhance sexual performance are all acts that excite the sexual organs and create in women a need for copulation.<sup>214</sup> The author argues that if this need exceeds the limits reaching the extent of obsession (*ghalmah*), it affect these women's mental faculties. The evidence, as Al-Rashidi claims, could be seen in women's hospital, "all you need to do is see these women's *maristans* (mental hospitals), and you will find most of them not only suffering from insanity but also from sexual obsession."<sup>215</sup> Hysterical women tend to imitate and women and can engage in lesbian relations, argues Al-Rashidi, which will arouse their

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<sup>212</sup> Al-Rashidi, *Bahjat*, p.278.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, 291.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*, p.298.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*.

sexual lust and aggravate their conditions.<sup>216</sup> Al-Rashidi also refers to same sex relationships amongst women when discussing the complex hermaphrodite (*al-khuntha al-mushkil*) as a medical condition. He points out that there are cases when women are born with a long thick clitoris and "this could make these women have sex with other women just as men do..... and it is also observed that some of these women might go as far as loving girls and even get jealous if someone else approached their beloved."<sup>217</sup> Al-Rashidi, just like Clot, promoted the view that the engagement in homosexual sex is unnatural and associated with mental or physical irregularities.

Al-Rashidi's writings project women as sexually active, however he advises that women's sexual desires must remain dormant to be alive only during sexual intercourse with their husbands. He agrees with medieval Muslim physicians such as Ibn Sina, to whom he referred as the Chief, that women's orgasm is essential for a successful conception. In medieval Islamic medical thought, many physicians such as Ibn Sina and Al-Razi advocated Hippocratic-Galenic medical theories which suggest that women ejaculate during sexual intercourse producing "seeds", and a child is formed from a mixture of male and female seeds.<sup>218</sup> Although Al-Rashidi does not confirm that the substance women ejaculate during orgasm could be defined as seeds, he stresses that women's enjoyment of the sexual intercourse is crucial for conception.<sup>219</sup> Therefore, he recommends that a husband should prepare his

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid, p.299.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, p.25.

<sup>218</sup> On the conception theories in medieval Islam, check, Bassim Musallam, *Sex and Society: Birth Control before the Nineteenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.39-59.

wife through foreplay before penetrating her. He also prescribes medical treatments that enhances sexual performances for both men and women and instructs his readers that "there is nothing shameful for a doctor to discuss topics such as the tightening of the vagina since sexual incompatibility between men and women could lead to separation."<sup>220</sup> Women start to develop sexual desires, according to Al-Rashidi, once they reach their puberty and their uterus start to grow in size. He warns parents of delaying their daughters' marriage and informs them to marry their daughters yet on the condition of finding them a suitable husband, who suit their temperament. Unlike his teacher Clot, Al-Rashidi, influenced by his upbringing in rural Egypt, encourages the marriage of girls at a young age. Penetrative sexual intercourse with men, in Al-Rashidi's book, was associated with many health benefits for women. Spinsters could suffer from harrowing mental and physical ailments. Moderate sexual intercourse, on the other hand, "improves women's blood circulation, their muscles get stronger.....their mental state improves, shy girls turn into confident and friendly women."<sup>221</sup> In her study of Western medical discourses on women's insanity, Jane Usher argues that this tendency amongst nineteenth-century physicians to emphasize the health advantages of penetrative sex was an attempt to assert the superiority of the phallus and subsequently the superiority of men over women."<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup>Al-Rashidi, *Bahjat*, p.407

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, p.408.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, p.593.

<sup>222</sup>Jane Ussher. *Women's madness: misogyny or mental illness* (New York; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp.79-81.

Since Al-Rashidi believed that the uterus is the root of all women's physical and mental disorders, the strict supervision of female sexuality is the ideal solution for guarding women's health. He advises doctors to take into consideration that women are much more sensitive than men and thus must follow more strict rules. Women's indulgence in pleasures could "easily damage her health and irritate their desires and this is the origins of all women's health troubles."<sup>223</sup> Women, according to Al-Rashidi, must be taught to be modest and be prevented from anything that might their sexual desires from an early age. Although Al-Rashidi was not against girls' education, he preferred the traditional methods of educating girls by female teachers in their own homes. He warns parents from sending their children to Western styled schools because "regardless of how much the supervisors in these schools are religious, girls' manners could be easily corrupted..... They could have bad female companions or could be encouraged by their colleagues to befriends boys...Girls will be implicated in provoking the shar'iah and she will get used to committing sin in a short period."<sup>224</sup> Al-Rashidi recommends that girl could engage their minds by reading books on geography, history, public morals rather than reading romantic fictions, which might ignite their sexual desires.<sup>225</sup> Al-Rashidi points out the positive influence of practicing sports on women's health, but he encourages women to learn swimming and horse-

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<sup>223</sup> Al-Rashidi, *Bahjat*, p.586.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, p.589.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, p.590.

riding, rather than imitating European women whose only sport is walking in gardens and public places.<sup>226</sup>

The writings of Al-Rashidi suggest that he was not a passive recipient of Western medical teachings, and that he was keen on protecting the country's social and cultural traditions. He disagreed with his teacher Clot bey on different issues such as circumcision and early marriage. However, his writings suggest that although he was not against the modernization of the country, he favoured a cautious approach towards Westernization. For example, his suggestion that women practice sports such as horse-riding and swimming, sports that the prophet recommended that all young Muslims should learn, demonstrate Al-Rashidi's preference for a modernization based on Islamic traditions, which could be more acceptable in the society. Finally, it is important to note that Al-Rashidi's writings targeted mainly women from the urban upper and middle classes, rather than poor urban or rural women. Al-Rashidi was not concerned about this latter group of women, who were already enjoying greater freedom of movements. He was, however, resistant to the increasing visibility of upper and middle class women who started to imitate Western women. The changing attitudes of the latter were threatening to the social and cultural foundation of nineteenth century Egyptian society.

### **'Isa Hamdi**

'Isa Hamdi (d.1923) belonged to the second generation of the graduates of the Qasr 'Aini medical school. He was born in a village in Damietta in 1844. He joined the Sa'idiyah hospital as a surgery apprentice in 1857. Three years later, he joined the Qasr 'Aini medical school in 1861 with a direct order from

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid, p.588.

Khedive Sa'id after Hamdi successfully circumcised the Khedive's orders. Unlike Al-Rashidi, Hamdi did not receive education in Al-Azhar, and it is unknown whether he was familiar with medieval Arab medicine. Because of his outstanding success in his studies, he was sent in a mission to complete his studies in France at the expense of the Egyptian government. He was trained in the military school in Paris, and gained his doctorate in 1873. He returned to Egypt in 1879 and worked as a teacher in the medical school, and then he was appointed as a director of the Qasr 'Aini hospital. He wrote on different medical topics such as diagnosis, clinical medicine and children and women's health.<sup>227</sup>

In his *Hibbat al-muhtaj fi al-tibb al-batini wa al-'ilaj*, 'Isa Hamdi classifies diseases according to the system or organ involved. In his discussion of each disease, the author lists its causes, its symptoms, the methods for its diagnosis and then its treatments. In his book, Hamdi implicitly suggests the inferiority of the female body by blaming the female reproductive cycles, for women's fragility and their subjection to a number of physical disorders such as cerebral inflammations, asthma and tuberculosis.<sup>228</sup> According to Hamdi, the latter disease's most victims are women, particularly when they are menstruating either because of pregnancy or due to reaching the menopausal age.<sup>229</sup> He also reinforces the idea that women's physiology increases their readiness to be attacked by mental disorders such as *junun* (insanity) and

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<sup>227</sup> The biography of Hamdi 'Isa is documented by his son Ahmad 'Isa in, Ahmad 'Isa, *Mu'jam al-atibba*, pp.328-326.

<sup>228</sup> 'Isa Hamdi, *Hibbat al-muhtaj fi al-tibb al-batini wa al-'ilaj* (Cairo: Matb'at al-watan, 1880), v.1, pp.134, 259, 291.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid*, p. 291.



epilepsy.<sup>230</sup> In his explanation of hysteria, Hamdi acknowledges that the disease primarily targets women but could also affect men, particularly those inflicted with anaemia or those with sensitive temperaments.<sup>231</sup> He attributes the spread of hysteria amongst women to the troubling changes in their uterus, and thus it attacks women between the age of puberty and till they reach 40 years old. Like Al-Rashidi, Hamdi blames women's upbringing for hysteria, "the disease is mostly seen amongst ill-mannered and corrupt (*fajirat*) women who spent all their time immersed in pleasures or reading love books."<sup>232</sup> To help medical students diagnose "hysterical" women, the author compiles an extensive list of symptoms, that could result from several physical or mental disorders,

"Hysterical women get easily influenced by the slightest thing, if there is something upsetting, they get sad and if there is something joyful they will laugh. Their mental is always changing in times of happiness and satisfaction and this is what we can call the neurotic state.....Their bodies become very sensitive and they feel pain at the slightest touch, especially the terrible headache pain .....the terrible pain she feels might be also felt elsewhere in kidney, liver, stomach, intestines..... She is subject to losing her senses and feels cold or even paralysed in her limbs.... Her digestive system might show symptoms of instability and she might lose her appetite..... She might experience terrible chest pains because of problems with her nervous

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<sup>230</sup> 'Isa Hamdi, *Hibbat al-muhtaj*, pp.132-134.

<sup>231</sup>Ibid, pp.156-157.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

system..... Many of these women go through fits then faint.....Some also hallucinate and isolate themselves from the rest of the world."<sup>233</sup>

Hamdi's long discussion of the symptoms that hysterical women is crucial, not because of its medical significance, but because it implicitly prescribes how a "healthy" woman, from the author's point of view, should behave. Women were expected to control the expressions of their feelings and regulate their general manners. Women who failed to stick to this Victorian inspired model of behaviour could have been easily deemed "hysterical" if she manifests any of the symptoms, mentioned above.<sup>234</sup> Hamdi reinforces Al-Rashidi's argument that the proper upbringing of girls and their seclusion from factors that might arouse their sexual desires and marriage were important cautionary methods against the disease. Again, like Al-Rashidi, Hamdi defends the continuity of female circumcision, "Although the surgery might be painful at the time, but it is hygienic because these parts could produce fats which can cause inflammations.....In addition, the surgery reduces girls' desires because she will have no clitoris to rub and excite her desires, and then the girl will not grow up neurotic."<sup>235</sup> In case of treatment, the author

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<sup>233</sup> Isa Hamdi, *Hibbat al-muhtaj*, pp.157-159. 'Isa Hamdi, *Kitab al-mu'ayanah wa al-'alamat al-tashkhiyah fi al-amrad al-batiniyah* (Cairo: al-matb'ah al-amiriyah, 1906), pp. 344-345.

<sup>234</sup> For more information on Victorian notions of womanhood, check: Martha Vicinus ed., *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (London: Metheun, 1980).

<sup>235</sup> 'Isa Hamdi, *Kitab lamhat al-sa'adah fi fan al-wiladah* (Cairo: al-matb'ah al-amiriyah, 1902), p.14.

recommends cold ice baths to reduce women's sensitivity in addition to some drugs composed of zinc, potassium and iron.<sup>236</sup>

The cautionary measures and treatment methods suggested by Al-Rashidi and Hamdi verify their selective transmission of Western medical knowledge. For example, they did not adopt some of the methods of treatments prescribed by nineteenth-century European doctors such as inducing orgasm through massaging the pelvis especially for non-married women suffering the disease. In late nineteenth-century Europe, the "vibrator" was a technological tool developed and used widely by European physicians to produce orgasm in women.<sup>237</sup> Pre-nineteenth century Arab physicians also suggested that midwives should massage the pelvis of hysterical woman as a cure.<sup>238</sup> In the nineteenth century, Egyptian male doctors must have been aware that their practice of the same treatment would be culturally unacceptable.

'Isa Hamdi's writings illustrate a complex attitude towards male sexuality. On the one hand, Hamdi did not judge men's sexual behaviour from a moral point of view. This is particularly noticeable in Hamdi's discussion of diseases attacking the male reproductive organs such as syphilis. Hamdi warns doctors to keep in mind that men could only get inflicted by these diseases through sexual intercourse with an infected woman, even though

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<sup>236</sup>Hamdi, *Hibbat al-muhtaj*, p.159.

<sup>237</sup> Rachel Maines, *The Technology of Orgasm: hysteria, the vibrator, and women's sexual satisfaction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp.67-110.

<sup>238</sup> 'Ali Ibn Abi Hazm Ibn al-Nafis, *Al-Mujaz fi al-tibb* (Bayrut: Dar al-kutub al-'ilimiyah, 2004), pp.249.

some men might hide the truth out of shame.<sup>239</sup> Hamdi, however, did not advise his readers on the necessity of restraining their sexual relations with prostitutes. In fact, Hamdi recommends that men, who suffer from erectile dysfunction because of shyness or fear, should flirt (*mul'abah*) with prostitutes.<sup>240</sup> On the other hand, Hamdi regarded men's engagement in any sexual activity, other than penetrative heterosexual intercourse, as invoking health dangers such as physical and mental illnesses. Hamdi warns men, engaged in sexual activities such as masturbation or overindulged in sex, from diseases such as cerebral inflammations or insanity.<sup>241</sup>

Hamdi discusses the topic of male and female sterility in considerable details. He emphasizes that there are permanent and temporary causes for sterility. Defects in male and female reproductive organs were incurable causes for sterility. Overindulgence in sex and masturbation could make men sterile temporarily. Hamdi also refers to women's failure to achieve sexual pleasure during intercourse as a reason for sterility, however, he also adds that some doctors consider female's sexual pleasures irrelevant to successful conception. At the time Hamdi was writing his book, the importance of female orgasm was starting to diminish after the scientific discovery that ovulation occur periodically and involuntarily.<sup>242</sup> This is evidenced by Hamdi's

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<sup>239</sup> Hamdi, *Hibbat al-muhtaj*, pp.172-173.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, p.179.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, pp.143-144.

<sup>242</sup> Isa Hamdi, *Kitab lamhat al-sa'adah*, pp.26-28.

description of different methods of artificial insemination to overcome some problems of sterility.<sup>243</sup>

In his *Kitab lamhat al-sa'adah fi fan al-wiladah*, a book on gynaecology, Hamdi explores health issues related to pregnancy and childbirth. He defines women's primary medical function as "to ovulate, then carry her fertilised eggs, feed the foetus from her blood and then breastfeed her child."<sup>244</sup> It is possible to discern from Hamdi's interpretation of the anatomy of the female body a model of purposefulness. The structures and organs of the female body are designed to serve medical functions such as pregnancy and childbirth. For example, women had a wide pelvis to accommodate the child during pregnancy.<sup>245</sup> Another example is the perineum. The perineum's function is preventing surprising childbirth by slowing down the ejection of the child during childbirth.<sup>246</sup>

Hamdi depicts the mother as the natural medical caretaker of the her children. In 1881, Hamdi wrote his book *Bulugh al-amal fi sihat al-hawamil wa al-atfal*, a book on the health of pregnant women and infants. The book was written "in simplified language to be understood by everyone even those with basic knowledge of medicine."<sup>247</sup> Isa's book was an exemplar of medical literature which popularized prescriptive advice to Egyptian women which rendered them medical caretakers of the "modern" Egyptian family. Hibba Abu-gidderi highlights the role of Egyptian doctors in promoting the idea that

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<sup>243</sup> Hamdi, *Hibbat al-muhtaj*, pp.262-263.

<sup>244</sup> Isa Hamdi, *Kitab lamhat al-sa'adah fi fan al-wiladah*, p.3.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, p.5.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, p.8.

<sup>247</sup> Isa Hamdi, *Bulugh al-amal fi sihat al-hawamil wa al-atfal* (Cairo: 1881), p.3.

women's social role is rooted in her biology. This medical discourse of the "republican motherhood" "a discourse that ought to nurture the maternal and domestic instinct in women for the political purpose of modern nation building".<sup>248</sup> The idea that Egyptian mothers were responsible for the high rates of infant mortality was proposed by Clot bey as early as the 1830's. Clot believed that women's ignorance endangered children's health.<sup>249</sup> After the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, Lord Cromer laid the blame of high infant mortality rates on the irresponsibility and ignorance of parents, ignoring as Judith Tucker argues, the absence of public health initiatives and chronic poverty of much of the population.<sup>250</sup> The writings of many Egyptian physicians such as 'Isa Hamdi propagated these ideas in late nineteenth and early twentieth century medical books and medical magazines. He advises women to recognize their responsibility for their own health and the health of her pregnancy. Because the main goal of pregnancy is to have a healthy progeny, Al-Rashidi informs women that they should take of their nutrition and their sleeping times.<sup>251</sup> Al-Rashidi instructs Egyptian mothers on how to medically care for their infants arguing that negligence is the main cause for child mortality in Egypt.<sup>252</sup> He advocates that women breastfeed their own infants unless they were suffering from physical or mental illness and criticises upper class women who refused to breastfeed their children out of

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<sup>248</sup> Hibba Abugideiri, *Gender and the Making of Modern Medicine in Colonial Egypt* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), p.1-2

<sup>249</sup> Judith Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth-century Egypt* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.116.

<sup>250</sup> Clot, *Kunuz al-sihah*, p.102.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid*, p.20.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid*.

fear that they look older.<sup>253</sup> In cases when women were forced not to feed their children, Hamdi provides his readers with guidelines on choosing proper wet-nurses, and ensuring her cleanliness and the quality of her milk.<sup>254</sup>

### **Ahmad 'Isa**

The Egyptian doctor Ahmad 'Isa (1876-1946) was born in Rashid and received his primary education in the khedival school. He then joined the Qasr 'Aini medical school and specialized in the study of gynaecology. 'Isa was interested in the study of Semitic language and supplemented his education by attending evening language classes in Cairo University. Unlike Al-Rashidi, 'Isa did not receive education in traditional religious institutions such as Al-Azhar. However, he acquired good knowledge of Arab classical literature and history of Islamic medicine. He became a member in the Egyptian parliament in 1925. He wrote two medical books on gynaecology and women's health, as well as books on the history of hospitals and physicians in Islamic civilization.<sup>255</sup> 'Isa was also impressed with Western civilization, and found in England a model of progress and success that Egypt must follow. In his *sihat al-mar'ah fi adwar hayatihah* (The Health of Woman during her Life-cycle), 'Isa attributes the success of the English nation to their observance of the proper and healthy methods of rearing their children mentally and physically.

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid, p.37.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, pp.24-26.

<sup>255</sup> Khayir al-din al-zirikli, *Al-'Alam: Qamun li-ashahar al-rijal wa al-nisaa min al-'arab wa al-must'aribin and al-mutashrikin* (Beirut: Dar al-'lim, 1980), vol.1, p.191.

The book was written thus to educate mothers about their own health and the scientific methods of the proper methods of raising their children.

In his book, 'Isa, greatly influenced by Darwin, examines women health while taking into consideration their ancestors and their changes across history and their adaptation mechanisms.<sup>256</sup> 'Isa describes women as the first slaves on earth, who suffered from humiliation and persecution. Both women and manual labourers, according to Isa, shared discrimination in common, however women are in an even worse condition, since they even ranked as inferior to labourers in the social hierarchy. Such low social position was conferred upon women by centuries of male dominance and control and female submission. 'Isa argues that Nature might have given the early Man and Woman equal physical and mental capacities, in the evolutionary development of the human race, women lagged behind men in body and mind. The reason for women's arrested development is her reproductive functions, which made women in constant need for men's care.<sup>257</sup> Although women assisted men by taking care of the household, making clothes, and harvesting, however the man was always in control and the person who supervised women's tasks, and thus men became superior to women in body

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<sup>256</sup> The success of Darwin in compiling facts and logical arguments made the theory of evolution appealing to scientists, physicians and biologists in the late nineteenth century. Darwinism left its impact on the scientific discourses on sex differences. According to Darwin, sex differences could be attributed to the failure of women to evolve in the same way women did because their energies were spent in reproduction. Women's physical weakness was also necessary for the continuation of the human race since their fragility became attractive for men. Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>257</sup> Ahmad 'Isa, *Sihat al-mar'ah fi adwar hayatiha* (Cairo: 1904), pp.5-6.



and mind.<sup>258</sup> According to 'Isa, the origins veiling, isolation of women and the dowry are customs explicable within the context of the history of women's submission. Since men developed to be powerful and dominant, they secluded women in their houses (probably referring to the harem) and isolated them from the rest of men. In warm Eastern country, where people are more sexually desirous, such social customs were more widespread. Dowry also came into existence because men valued women as bearers of their children, and thus women "turned into a property to be sold or exchanged by her family in return for weapons, hunted animals, or as people do now, for gold."<sup>259</sup> By attempting to rationalize practices such as veiling and harem, 'Isa defends the continuity of these social traditions, particularly in the early twentieth century when veiling became a topic of intellectual controversy.

The evolutionary development of women makes it clear, according to 'Isa, that "women had always been and are up till now in an inferior position to men because of her sex."<sup>260</sup> The author supports his view by misinterpreting certain Quranic verses. He cited a verse of the Quran which suggests that women are created from men, "O ye people! fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul and created therefrom its mate."<sup>261</sup> 'Isa interprets the verse as evidence of the inequality between sexes since "it is impossible for women who are created from men to be equal to men."<sup>262</sup> The proof of female inferiority, according to the author, could be also discerned

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid, p.6.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ahmad 'Isa, *Sihat al-mar'ah*, p.7.

<sup>261</sup> Sura 4:2

<sup>262</sup> 'Isa, *Sihat*, p.7.

from another Quranic verse: "His mother bears him with pain, and brings him forth with pain. And the bearing of him and his weaning takes thirty months."<sup>263</sup> For 'Isa, this verse refers to women's worry and pain during childbirth and during breastfeeding, which suggests the negative influence of women's physiology on her overall health.<sup>264</sup> The fragility of women was necessary for the survival of the human race. Nature bestowed upon women the role of mothers to protect the human species and women successfully performed that role.<sup>265</sup>

'Isa proceeds to provide his readers with a detailed examination of male and female anatomical differences. The overwhelming consensus of 'Isa discussion is that women were inherently different from men in anatomy, physiology and intellect. On average, women are shorter, have smaller skeletons, wider pelvis, bigger breasts and weaker bones. Some of these anatomical differences, argues 'Isa, assisted women in carrying out their natural role as mothers, e.g. breasts used for feeding her infants. However, these differences also revealed the weakness of female body. The processes of life such as respiration manifested themselves more vigorously in men than in women.<sup>266</sup> Women are sensitive, delicate and guided by their feelings, while men are wise and capable of weighing matters rationally. 'Isa confessed that doctors recently discovered that there was no disparity between the sizes of the brains of men and women, if we take the ratios of the size of the brain to

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<sup>263</sup> Sura 46: 16.

<sup>264</sup> 'Isa, *Sihat*, p.7.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid*, p.8

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid*, p.14.

the overall size of the body. Nonetheless, he recited the familiar view that women were intellectually inferior to men. He claims that women might have strong powers of intuition and memorization, rapid perceptions, but they lack the intellectual faculties of reason and abstraction, and thus women were only superficial "who could only see the shell of things."<sup>267</sup>

For 'Isa, women's physiology was the main indicator of the extent of the difference between men and women. Before puberty, the bodies of the girls looked similar to that of boys. Once girls reached puberty, their bodies would go through enormous changes and girls start to attain the female body characteristics, such as a wide pelvis. 'Isa embraces the view that a woman was only a "uterus served by other organs" and he emphasises the importance of the uterus as the most principal organ in the female body after reaching puberty."<sup>268</sup> Like Al-Rashidi and Hamdi, 'Isa describes menstruation more of a health crisis than a natural process, and projects it as the cause of several diseases.<sup>269</sup> Puberty affects girls' psychological well being: they become shy, disorientated, always upset, isolated from their families and friends, and disinterested. Girls suffer these psychological fluctuations, clarifies 'Isa, because of her reproductive instincts which urges her to seek solace in a male companion and to satisfy her longing to motherhood.<sup>270</sup> Female desire, as 'Isa implied, is not purely sexual but a craving by girls to fulfil their instinctive motherly needs. 'Isa warns parents that their daughters sexual desires must be

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, p.23.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, pp.30-35.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid, pp.26-28.

suppressed. To protect girls' nervous systems, they should be educated only according to her immediate needs and with respect to her social milieu. 'Isa perceives of the Islamic methods of upbringing with its emphasis on veiling, as the ideal way of raising children.<sup>271</sup>

It was marriage, however, that 'Isa prescribes as the best cure for women's problems. Influenced by Darwinist theories of nature, 'Isa evaluates marriage as a means for the continuity of the human races and creates a number of stipulations for the production of a healthy progeny. Firstly, he opposes the marriage of girls before the age of 15 because early marriages threaten the lives of mother and child. To ensure the health of the offspring, the author asks families to take into consideration factors such as the health of the prospective bride or groom and the degree of kinship between them. 'Isa criticises men who engage in pre-marital sexual relations, get infected by diseases such as syphilis and then marry virgin girls. The transmission of syphilis from the husband to his wife might lead to the sterility of the parents.<sup>272</sup> 'Isa cautions his readers against hereditary diseases that might be transmitted to the offspring due to marriages between close relatives. However, he does not prohibit marriage between cousins was allowed by Islam and prevalent in Egyptian society. In fact, he asks his readers to be guided by the Quranic rulings which prohibit marriages to certain relatives.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid, p.38.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, p.50.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, pp.47-49.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined sex as an object of scientific study in texts written by nineteenth and early twentieth century Egyptian doctors. The overwhelming consensus of these texts is that women were inherently different than men in anatomy, physiology and intellect. It is possible to discern two models for interpreting sex differences in the writings of these differences. The first model is a model of female inferiority. The texts examined in this chapter accentuated women's physical and mental inferiority. Gynaecological texts, on the other hand, emphasized female anatomy as designed to carry out women's reproductive function: pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding.

The medical texts, examined in this chapter, also shared a major shift in the conceptualisation of the sexual natures of men and women. Egyptian doctors did not see women as innately sexually passive, yet "healthy" women should keep their desires dormant till their marriage. Penetrative sexual intercourse was emphasised as the only outlet for the satisfaction of female sexual desires. Doctors advised parents to strictly monitor their daughters' sexuality and to ensure the suppression of their sexual fantasies. Men's sexuality was not liberated either. Men were seen as incapable of controlling their aggressive sexuality, which implied social tolerance of sexual transgression. Nonetheless, men were also expected to channel their sexual energies in penetrative sexual intercourse.

The nineteenth and early twentieth century medical discourse on sex differences could be interpreted within their social and cultural contexts. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the social and cultural impact of Egyptian society were visible in upper and middle class Egyptians' lifestyles

and patterns of consumption. As early as 1843, the British Orientalist Edward William Lane commented that "Cairo is rapidly more and more unlike it was" in reference to the adoption of European manners, dress, and architectural style.<sup>274</sup> The Europeanization of Egyptian society became more blatant in the reign of Khedive Isma'il, known for his fascination of Europe. 'Isma'il's admiration for Western ideas, services, fashions, consumer products soon spread to Egypt's upper classes, including women. Opera houses, theatre, cafes and restaurants opened in urban centres such as Cairo and Alexandria and presented its services to the Westernised elites and the upper classes. Upper and middle class women were educated in French and English missionary schools, joined sporting clubs and special societies, and attended theatrical shows.<sup>275</sup> The most dramatic change that occurred in the late nineteenth century was the rise of Egyptian feminism.<sup>276</sup> There was an increasing demand amongst women as well as men supporting the female cause for gender equality. Women questioned the legitimacy of traditional institutions such as veiling and the *harem*.

Like other members of the male bourgeois, Egyptian doctors were faced with these social and cultural changes, and their reaction to Westernisation was quite complex. Marilyn booth argues that in nationalist and feminist discourses on modernity, the West was perceived both as a promise and as a

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<sup>274</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Edward William Lane: A study of his life and works and of British ideas of the Middle East in the nineteenth century* (London: William Clowes and Son: 1978), p.45.

<sup>275</sup> Mona Rusell, *Creating the New Egyptian Woman: consumerism, education and national identity, 1863-1922* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.11-17, 31.

<sup>276</sup> Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and the nation: gender and the making of modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp.29-47.

threat.<sup>277</sup> Egyptian doctors represented a middle class professional group squeezed between the Turkish aristocratic elites and the majority of the peasant population. Egyptian doctors owed their social privileges to the Westernisation of the educational system, which provided them with skills and expertise that distinguished them as a specialised professional groups. Their perception of the West was multifaceted. They perceived of the progress of the West as a model to be emulated so that Egypt also would advance. Some of Egypt's upper and middle classes admired and started to adopted European gender values such as monogamy by the late nineteenth century.

The West was also perceived as a threat. The rapid Europeanization of Egyptian society and the rise of feminism threatened the existing social and cultural fabric of the society. Many male intellectuals hence perceived of the West as a corruptive threat. Doctors, like other members of the male bourgeois, were faced with the rising demands for gender equality and the emancipation of women. Doctors response to this question was governed by their own belief that they were moral guardians of the Egyptian society.<sup>278</sup> In his book, *Wajibat al-tabib* (The Duties of the Doctor), Dr. 'Abd al-'Aziz Nazmi included moral guidance for ordinary people with the goal of ameliorating their social conditions, amongst the most important duties of Egyptian doctors.<sup>279</sup> Although Al-Rashidi, Hamdi and 'Isa came from diverse educational backgrounds, they almost shared the same view of the relation

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<sup>277</sup> Marilyn Booth, *May her Likes be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p.xxvii.

<sup>278</sup> Khaled Fahmy, "Science and Power: Towards a Social History of Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Egypt," *New Frontiers in the Social History of the Middle East*, ed. Enid Hill (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000), pp.36-38.

<sup>279</sup> 'Abd al-Aziz, *Wajibat al-tabib* (Cairo: Matb'at al-jaridah, 1908), p.130.

between Islam and modernity. The three doctors used their authoritative works, armed with beliefs of scientific rationality, to synchronise religious and scientific views on Their works rationalised women's subordination by stressing their physical and mental deficiencies, and empowered males to supervise female sexuality. Some manifestations of Westernisation such as schooling outside home, attending theatrical shows or operas were depicted as health hazards. Egyptian doctors, however, did not reject the West, but rather favoured selective adoption of Western knowledge and technologies which improves the society without challenging or altering its traditional Islamic identity. For example, they share a concern over women's roles as mothers, and they advise women to be aware of medical precautions during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding.

The developments in the medical profession and in medical knowledge also could help us interpret the views of Egyptian doctors on sex differences and on sexuality. The shift in the concept of disease, the rise of anatomical medicine and the use of stethoscopes provided doctors with power and authority in patient-doctor relationship. Doctors were capable of penetrating the patient's body to diagnose the disease and the experience of the patient was no longer relevant to the diagnosis of a disease. The consequences of this transition in the doctor-patient relationship is most evident in the relation between male doctors and their female patients. Doctors not only disregarded women's opinions, but they also accused mothers of endangering their children's health. Female popular healers, long accepted in the Egyptian society, were discredited by male professional doctors on the basis of their negligence, ignorance and also mental inferiority. In 'Abd al-Rahman Isma'il's *Tibb al-rukkah* (Popular Medicine), the author classifies different categories



of popular female healers and describes their "irrational", "superstitious" and "ignorant" methods of healings. Women's weak mind and their belief in magic were, according to Isma'il, the cause of the decline of medicine and the diffusion of disease in Egyptian society.<sup>280</sup>

Finally, it is helpful to keep in mind the multiplicity of medical discourses on gender and sexuality in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Given the high rates of illiteracy in Egypt, medical literature could only target specific sectors of the society, namely literate members of the upper and middle classes. The medical writings of 'Isa, Al-Rashidi and Hamdi clearly targeted these social groups. Even so, literate people also acquired sexual knowledge from other sources such as classical Islamic medical literature. Medieval and pre-modern Greco-Islamic medical works such as the sixteenth century medical text *Tadhkirat Dawud al-Antaki* was published several times during the second half of the nineteenth century. The vast majority of Egypt's rural and poor urban families continued to rely on the services of barber-surgeons, midwives and other traditional healers. Both the medieval works and the traditional popular healers posed a significant challenge to doctors' opinions on sexuality.

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<sup>280</sup> Ahmad Isma'il, *Tibb al-rukkah* (Cairo: 1894) p.8.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Science, Medicine and Debates on the Woman Question**

The previous chapter of this study explored the shift in professional medical understandings of sex differences in nineteenth-century Egypt. In the nineteenth-century professional medical discourse, men and women were perceived as opposite sexes, and anatomical sex differences were interpreted as evidence of women's biological and intellectual inferiority, the physical suitability of their bodies to perform only motherhood and domestic duties and their inability to compete, in what was described, as men's domains. Professional doctors projected women's bodies as governed by their reproductive functions and more importantly by their maternal instincts. Although they were medically perceived as kind, nurturing and morally superior to men, they were still incapable of in-depth thinking, less reasonable and more emotional than men. Finally, whereas men were, according to medical elites, sexually active and aggressive, women were expected to suppress their sexual desire and invest their sexual energies only in marital intercourse. Any sources of sexual excitement e.g. masturbation, reading erotic novels etc were blamed for endangering women's naturally feeble mental health causing diseases such as hysteria and insanity. During most of the nineteenth century, this information being of technical nature was rarely disseminated beyond the limited circle of nineteenth-century Egyptian physicians and doctors and could be merely found in medical books and journals.

By the 1870's, however, these ideas about male and female bodies were disseminated through other mediums, such as general books, newspapers and magazines, particularly with the rise of the question of Egyptian women. This

chapter demonstrates how these medical and scientific ideas about the nature of male and female bodies were employed as the cornerstone of intellectual debates on women's rights, particularly the issues of education, women's public role, polygamy, veil and seclusion in Egypt by intellectuals on both sides of the debates. It will demonstrate how feminists, nationalists, religious scholars used scientific and medical theories on the male and female bodies and sexualities in a variety of ways to support their argument on the topic of gender equality. Opponents of women's increasing presence in the public spheres justified their views by drawing on medical theories that assert the inferiority of female body and their suitability only to domestic life. Feminists and supporters of women's rights still operated within the context of the concepts of sex differences. Rather than challenging the male dominated medical theories of sex differences, they employed certain notions of sex differences such as female superior morality were used by feminists to carve a place for themselves in the public sphere and to demand gender equality.

As it is considered one of the earliest movements towards the "emancipation" of women in the Middle East in the late nineteenth-century, the Egyptian experiment has always received considerable scholarly attention. The last two decades witnessed the emergence of particularly thorough and critical studies re-assessing many of the givens about this historical experience. *Leila Ahmad's Women and Gender in Islam*, for example, demonstrates how the colonial use of veiling as the utmost symbol of the oppression of women in Egypt shifted attention from more important issues such as women's right to education and to public roles.<sup>281</sup> Lisa Pollard

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<sup>281</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Roots of a Historical Debate* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992).

emphasises how, by connecting between the private familial practices and state reform, domestic and sexual practices became part of the vocabulary of both colonial and nationalist discourses in the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries.<sup>282</sup>

Modernity as some scholars have recently pointed out had its pro and cons. Beth Baron argued that the use of maternal imagery in nationalist discourse might have allowed women to carve for themselves some political gains, the use of maternal language also confirmed women's domestic roles as their main priority.<sup>283</sup> Marilyn Booth's study of biography in Arabic literature drew attention to the complexity of nationalists and feminists perceptions of Westernisation and of different aspects of the woman question: gender equality, women's education and their participation in public spheres.<sup>284</sup> The current study is built largely on this body of scholarship, and it aims at contributing to this rich body of literature through examining the scientific dimension of the intellectual discourses on the woman question in Egypt.

Because of the connections between scientific knowledge and technological achievements, science was believed to be capable of providing a certain truth and subsequently science became the most decisive authority on social debates in nineteenth-century Europe. After the French revolution and with the rise of liberal thought, the modern social secular order was expected to be dictated by nature rather than religion and metaphysics, scientific

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<sup>282</sup> Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, colonizing and liberating Egypt, 1805-1923* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>283</sup> Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005).

<sup>284</sup> Marilyn Booth, *May her likes be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

knowledge, as mentioned earlier, was employed in debates determining women's position in the modern European society. In the third quarter of the nineteenth-century British society, for example, scientific and medical opinions on male and female bodies and capacities were heavily employed in gender debates as a response to women's increasing demands for equality with men.<sup>285</sup>

By employing scientific knowledge as a basis for their debates on women's rights, nineteenth-century Egyptian scholars and intellectuals were merely imitating their European counterparts, particularly, in Britain. Nonetheless, the defensive context for the rise of the women question in Egypt was significantly different giving the Egyptian experience its own particularities. Although the beginning of the woman question in Egypt could be dated to the early 1870's, the topic of gender equality and the "emancipation" of Egyptian women came to be inextricably linked to the British occupation of Egypt in 1882. The topic of the reform of women's position came to the fore as Egyptian intellectuals responded to colonial authorities' accusations that domestic and sexual practices such as polygamy, the *harem*, and the veiling of women were evidence of the corruption amongst the Egyptian ruling elites, which subsequently justified the British presence in Egypt. As mothers of the future generations, British authorities insisted on the

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<sup>285</sup> For more information, check: Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989). Katharine Rowold, "Introduction," *Gender and Science: Late Nineteenth-Century Debates on the Female Mind and Body*, ed. Katharina Rowold (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996). <sup>285</sup> Susan Sleeth Mosedale, "Science Corrupted: Victorian Biologists Consider "The Woman Question", " *Journal of the History of Biology* (Spring 1978), vol.11 no.1, pp.1-55.

improvement of women's conditions in Egypt mainly through abolishing the veil and polygamy as central to the liberation of Egypt.

Nineteenth-century scientific theories of races and civilisation, as will be argued, were at the heart of British imperial attitudes towards the Egyptian question, which lent credibility to the accusations of the British colonial authorities. Victorian science, particularly socio-cultural evolutionary theories, considered monogamous marriage and Victorian family values which ideally described men as the main breadwinners and women as the fully occupied mothers and perfect domestic wives, as the most civilised form of marriage. Progress of human civilisation, according to the Victorians, also implied the improvement of human behaviour and the encouragement of certain values such as self-denial, postponement of sexual gratification, and the regulation of human sexuality.<sup>286</sup> Since women were regarded medically as emotionally vulnerable, scientific theories placed great emphasis on the necessity of the restrictiveness women's sexual desires for the attainment of civilisation.<sup>287</sup> Thus, the long held view that the Egyptian society was sexually lax and that Egyptian women, in particular, were drowned in their sensualities, confirmed by British travel literature, made of the Egyptians "half civilised, half savage" nation. The codification of Victorian social and cultural domestic values and sexual mores in science justified not only the colonial administrators' attempt to propagate these values in British colonies and protectorates, but also, as demonstrated in this chapter, the adoption of these

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<sup>286</sup> George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York : Free Press ; London : Collier Macmillan, 1987), pp35-36, 219-228

<sup>287</sup> Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science*, pp.54-57.

values by the colonised as part of their nationalist struggle as an attempt to show themselves as part of the civilised world.

To reach its goals, this chapter will be divided into two parts. The first part explores nineteenth-century British views of domestic practices and sexual behaviour in nineteenth-century Egypt, with particular focus on their depictions of Egyptian women's sexuality, showing how such views were influenced and contributed to the racial construction of Egyptian as barbaric. The British travellers' representations of Egyptian women and their sexuality, as will be shown, became the lens through which British colonial administrators viewed the character of Egyptian woman and the nature of her problems. The second part of this study examines the different Egyptian and Egyptian-based scholars' approaches towards the women question in Egypt during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This study argues that Egyptian intellectuals, regardless of their orientations on topics such as the veiling, polygamy, women's education etc, employed science, specifically scientific theories on differences between male and female bodies and sexualities, as the cornerstone of their debates on the modern Egyptian woman and her expected role in society. In the writings of local nationalists, feminists, Islamic revivalists, the "new" Egyptian woman was encouraged to be morally superior, innately chaste, and to have domesticity as her main concern.

## **Scientific racism and nineteenth-century British construction of the Egyptian woman**

The nineteenth century was a period of unprecedented expansion in the contacts between the British and non-European peoples, whether through exploratory travels and/or imperialism. Contemporary to these contacts was the emergence of a wide range of scientific theories of race and human civilisation that were at the heart of British approaches to non-European cultures and nations. These theories were based on the belief in the existence of a hierarchy of civilisations and races, in which the European civilisation and races reached the apex.

By the mid-century in Britain, the question of the progress of human civilisation has been problematic for almost a century. Enlightenment thinkers raised several questions about the reasons for the success of certain nations to “civilise” themselves and the failure of others to develop, as well as the reasons that cause the stagnation of other civilisations such as the ancient Egyptians after reaching the heights of civilisation. Relying on the Hippocratic traditions, Enlightenment scholars considered climate as mainly responsible for the promotion or stagnation of civilisation. The famous *L'Esprit des Lois* by Montesquieu correlated between climatic and geographical conditions and the state of civilisation that a nation could reach.<sup>288</sup>

Such an important work, as well as others, had a great influence on the debates of the progress in Enlightenment Britain. Influenced by the Lamarckian concept of evolution as well as Montesquieu, Scottish

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<sup>288</sup> George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York : Free Press ; London : Collier Macmillan, 1987), pp.10-20.



Enlightenment thinkers such as Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson linked between the civilisation of nations and its mode of subsistence. They proposed the idea that society "naturally" or "normally" progressed over time through four more or less distinct and consecutive stages, defined as hunting, pasturage, agriculture and commerce, and each stage corresponds to a different mode of subsistence and a different set of ideas, institutions relating to law, property and government and also different sets of customs, manners and morals.<sup>289</sup> These intellectual debates created a hierarchy of civilisations of which European societies reached the apex, while other nations occupy lower stages of this hierarchy.

In Victorian Britain, intellectual debates on socio-cultural evolutionism were influenced by the Enlightenment intellectual heritage, in addition to the major effects of other broad forces of historical change, including the industrial revolution, the changing class structure, as well as the revival of traditional Christianity. Developed in the shadow of the Industrial Revolution, British theories of the progress of civilisations defined civilisation as the development of economic institutions such as the factory system, free trade which subsequently corresponds with political developments including representative government and liberal political institutions. Conservative Christian scholars, on the other hand, did not accept the view that early humans were savages, and suggested that although early humans were civilised, they “degenerated” in the wake of the flood, but Europeans, blessed with the moral values of Christianity, could develop, while other nations deteriorated. They also asserted the compatibility between Christianity in its

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<sup>289</sup> Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the ignoble savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.2.

protestant form, with free commerce and industry and the role of Christianity in the maintenance of social order and curbing the immoral consequences of capitalism.<sup>290</sup>

Both secular and religious approaches to the question of civilisation in Britain were united, in a sexual context, by the doctrine of prudential restraint. Progress was defined as the ability of humans, whether as a consequence of natural outgrowth or by divine assistance, to exercise control over their basic primal instincts and delay sexual gratification, which consequently formed the basis for individual liberty and political responsibility. European middle classes were believed to have reached the highest level of progress by liberating human reason from the forces of instinct, through the middle class ethic of self-discipline and sexual restraints. Deeply rooted in Christian tradition and precisely the moral reformation of the middle and upper classes in the Evangelical revival, Victorian sexual values were reflected in a basic structure of taboos: including the renunciation of all sexual activities except the procreative intercourse of Christian marriage, the education of men and women in chastity, secrecy of sexual matters, and the prudence in sexual behaviour.<sup>291</sup> The monogamous marriage (similar to the one in Victorian Britain), whose main purpose is procreation and the successful upbringing of children rather than satisfying carnal lust, was considered the result of a long evolutionary process in which monogamous

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<sup>290</sup> George Stocking, *Victorian anthropology*, p.33.

<sup>291</sup>George Stocking, *Victorian anthropology*, p.36.

marriage evolved from earlier forms of marriage such as polyandry and polygamy.<sup>292</sup>

Victorian moral and sexual values did not weigh equally on both sexes. Although men, like women, were encouraged to be chaste, the Victorian patriarchy could implicitly justify men's premarital and extra-marital sexual relationships.<sup>293</sup> These double standard values were even confirmed by contemporary medical theories sustaining male aggressive sexuality and women's sexual passivity. The contemporary Victorians cultural ideology idealised women's natural purity and angel instincts considering the pure-hearted ideal and devoted wife and a mother, was the hope of society. Alternatively, women were still feeble prisoners of their reproductive organs and the unrestrained sexually female "the fallen woman" was depicted as the main threat to the human progress, and thus women's sexuality had to be kept under firm control through education and innocent hobbies.<sup>294</sup>

The scientific codification of Victorian domestic and sexual values had an important impact on the relations between the British and non-European nations. The age old ideas about the superiority of Europeans and non-Europeans' barbarity and savagery, once grounded in folk cultures, became established scientific theories in both natural and social sciences, particularly the emerging field of anthropology. Subsequently, the British, coming into

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<sup>292</sup> Elizabeth Fee, "The Sexual Politics of Victorian Social Anthropology," in *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary Hartman and Lois W. Banner (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp.86-118.

<sup>293</sup> Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>294</sup> Eric Trudgill, *Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Developments of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (London: Heinmann, 1976).

contact with non-Europeans either through exploratory travels or as imperialists, could classify, on scientific and pseudo-scientific basis, non-Europeans as savage through judging their domestic practices and sexual behaviour. On the other hand, the socio-cultural evolutionary theories provided the hope for "savage" or "half civilised" nations that they would eventually progress but only through imitating one path of human progress, that is through following the same patterns of political, social, and cultural developments as Western European societies, particularly England.

The emergence of sex and its derivative sexuality as axis by which civilisation and savagery could be measured is a modern phenomenon, more precisely, in the nineteenth century; an age when European process of constructing sexuality collided with the epoch of imperialism and both were interconnected.<sup>295</sup> The terms sexuality, as Michel Foucault, itself did not appear until the beginning of the nineteenth century. In his famous *History of sexuality*, Michel Foucault argues that the term sexuality itself appear until the beginning of the nineteenth century. The European construction of sexuality “was a matter of seeing how an experience came to be constituted in modern Western societies, an experience that caused individuals to recognise themselves as subjects of sexuality, which was accessible to very diverse fields of knowledge and linked to a system of rules and constraints”.<sup>296</sup> Ann Laura Stoler criticised Foucault’s disregard for the impact of imperialism had on the construction of sexuality in Europe. Stoler questioned whether the

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<sup>295</sup> Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien, “Race, Sexual Politics and Black Masculinity: A Dossier,” in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, ed. Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988), p. 106.

<sup>296</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol.2, The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Vintage, 1984), pp. 3-4.

masturbating child, the hysterical woman and the perverse adult, the objects of Foucault's analysis of the discourse on sexuality, "exist as objects of knowledge and discourse in the nineteenth century without a racially erotic counterpoint, without a reference to the libidinal energies of the savage, the primitive, the colonized— reference points of difference, critique and desire?". She concluded that both the sexual discourse of empire and the biopolitic states were connected aiming at bolstering the ideal of the bourgeois European family, while undermining the colonised's sexual values.<sup>297</sup> In the following, I will try to examine how travel literature contributed to the construction of Egypt as a barbaric nation through depicting Muslims as sexually lax and criticising Islamic laws concerning marriage, divorce, and veiling.

In the nineteenth-century, Egypt attracted a significant number of British travellers, many of whom wrote travel accounts describing their stays in Egypt as well as the Egyptians' social, cultural and religious habits. One of the most noticeable features of nineteenth-century British travellers' accounts was their obsession with describing the Egyptians' domestic and sexual practices. According to Edward Said, sex was an important feature of Orientalism, as Orientalists always described the Orient as feminine, and considered the sensual woman and the harem as its main symbols.<sup>298</sup> The Orientalists' obsession with the sexual practices came at a time when sex in Europe was increasingly institutionalised entailing a web of moral , legal,

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<sup>297</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) pp. 6-7.

<sup>298</sup> Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Cultural Critique* (Fall, 1985): 103.

economic and even political obligations. For many Orientalists, thus, the Orient remained a place where sexual desires were unlimited and free.<sup>299</sup>

Although British travellers' approaches towards these questions varied, according to their social backgrounds, sex, and purposes, the vast majority of these travellers described Egyptian society as sexually lax, highlighted reasons for Egyptians' immersion in sensual pleasures and paid special attention to Egyptian women as lazy, degraded and voracious sexual beings whose chastity could be guaranteed only through veiling and harem. Such nineteenth-century British representations, grounded in contemporary scientific racism, implied that Egyptians' domestic and sexual customs were evidence of the barbarity of Egyptians and as reason for the overall "moral" decline of Egypt, and its lagging behind the civilised world.

The nineteenth-century British Orientalist and lexicographer Edward William Lane (d.1876) is a palpable exemplar of how a typically Victorian British traveller approached sexuality and domesticity in Egypt and Middle East in general. Son of Reverend Theophilus Lane, Edward William Lane belonged to a middle class English family from a rather conservative background. He was educated at Bath and Hereford schools. Because of the failure of his health and his interest in Egypt through his work as an engraver, he set sail to Egypt in 1825 where he stayed for three years. During his first visit and two other following visits, Lane wrote a book describing his contemporary Egyptian society, an Arab-English lexicon in addition to translating the Arabian Nights and parts of the Quran. Upon his arrival to Egypt, Lane started to write his book on the customs and habits of modern Egyptians that had become one of the most successful books of the time and

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<sup>299</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), pp. 188-190.

was republished in different editions. Through his *Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians*, Lane played a significant role in coining British ideas about domestic practices and sexual behaviour in nineteenth-century Britain. The significance of the travel account, as Leila Ahmad points out, lies mainly in its author's approach to non-European cultures, considered revolutionary at the time.<sup>300</sup> While writing his book, Lane avoided the ordinary travel account form, learnt the Arabic language and isolated himself from the rest of the European community in Egypt preferring to live amongst the Egyptians, hoping to provide his readers with "accurate" and supposedly neutral information about Egyptian social and cultural norms. Lane's approach does not necessarily mean that he eroded all the ideas about non European cultures that he acquired in his home. Despite his claims to project an objective image of Middle Eastern social norms and cultural beliefs, Lane's writings still echoed many of the European convictions, shared by other male Western travellers, about Egyptian and Middle Eastern societies, particularly when describing their domestic and private lives.

Lane's book included several chapters discussing domestic life amongst upper and middle class Egyptians with descriptions of the life inside the harem, laws governing marriage and divorce in Egyptian society as well as an account of the Egyptians character, particularly their sensuality. Marriage was one of the highlights of Lane, since he confirmed that celibacy was far from desirable in the Middle Eastern societies. Upon reaching puberty usually between the age of twelve to fifteen, Egyptian boys and girls are expected to

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<sup>300</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Edward William Lane: A Study of his Life and Works and of British ideas of the Middle East in the nineteenth century* (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1978), pp.87-88.

marry. Being unmarried, Lane told found it problematic to rent a house, since landlords refused to lease a house to him as long as he was not married or without owning a slave girl, since in Egypt, it is “improper and even disreputable” for a man to remain unmarried once reaching a proper age.<sup>301</sup> According to Lane, one of his landlords even suggested a widow who lived in the neighbourhood, who accepted to marry Lane despite knowing that he would divorce her upon his return to his country.<sup>302</sup> Despite his Egyptian "disguise", his narration of this story as well as his description of marriage arrangement project his picture in stark contrast with the cultural and social norms he claimed he identified with. Whereas Lane depicted himself in terms of Victorian values, as a dutiful person who postponed his sexual gratification for the sake of his duty, and who also understood his own responsibilities as a husband, the attitudes of Egyptians to marriage were described by Lane in contrast. Marriage at a young age, the inability of the husband to see his wife before marriage also showed that marriage was regarded merely as a trivial means for Egyptians to satisfy their sexual desires to the extent that a woman accepted to marry Lane despite knowing that he was only staying temporarily in Egypt.

Although Islam was just depicted as a religion that encourages marriage rather than celibacy, Egyptian marriage was regarded as a purely physical partnership devoid of happiness, a phenomena that was attributed to Islamic social laws. Strict rules of gender segregation were usually blamed for the failure of Egyptian marriages. Most men and women, if not married to

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<sup>301</sup> Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), p.155.

<sup>302</sup> *ibid*, p.156.



their relatives, would marry through a *khatbah* (matchmaker), who, according to Lane, could trick both the bride and the groom describing falsely each to the other, since men were not allowed to see their wives before marriages.<sup>303</sup> Comparing between marriages in Egypt and England, Ellen Chennels, the governess of an Egyptian princess daughter of Khedive Ismail, concluded that most marriages in Egypt were miserable. Despite the love the Egyptian princess' husband had for her, she was always sad and wearisome because of the strict rules of gender segregation that prevents her from sharing the same pursuits as her husband.<sup>304</sup> Similarly, Sophie Lane Poole claimed that although she did not expect to find happy marriages similar to English marriages in Egypt, especially in the light of the prevailing domestic mores, most of the Egyptian wives she knew were happy and contented with their married lives, which showed that they were at least treated with consideration.<sup>305</sup>

Besides gender segregation, polygamy was seen as another factor for the failure of marriages in Egypt and the unhappiness of Egyptian wives. Polygamy, deemed savage by contemporary scientific theories was depicted by some travellers as characteristic of Muslim societies, particularly Egyptian society, subsequently implying its barbarity. Alexander William Kinglake, for example, considered the Ottoman Empire as the land of "death, Koran and plural wives" and believed that Osman effendi, a Scottish convert who lived in

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<sup>303</sup> *ibid*, pp.157-158.

<sup>304</sup> Ellen Chennels, *Recollections of an Egyptian Princess: being a record of five years residence at the court of Ismail Pasha, Khedive by her English governess* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1893), p.278.

<sup>305</sup> Sophia Lane Poole, *The Englishwoman in Egypt, Letters from Cairo written during a residence there in 1842-46* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), p.116.

Egypt, had to marry two wives so as not to arouse the suspicions of Muslims, implying the widespread of polygamy in the Egyptian society.<sup>306</sup> Similarly, Harriet Martineau, a female activist, considered polygamy, which she referred to "hell upon earth", as common in Egyptian society, and that Egypt "is the lowest depth of this hell".<sup>307</sup> Polygamy turned wives into sad miserable empty minded women doing nothing but drinking coffee and sherbet and even some wives were too used to being humiliated to the extent they sought new wives for their husbands.<sup>308</sup>

Despite the prevailing opinions about polygamy amongst British travellers, Lane asserted that polygamy was not a widespread institution, and was a rare practice. His ideas about polygamy and easy divorce seem to be nonetheless contradictory, reflecting his own personal beliefs about polygamy and divorce in Islam. Although he attributed easy divorce and polygamy to gender segregation, he considered that these two institutions are more widely spread amongst the lower classes where gender segregation was least observed. He argued that upper and middle class men did not usually take a second wife, not because of their respect of their wives and marriages, but because of the cost of having a second wife. Poor men, on the other hand, would marry women, who could through a craft, sustain themselves.<sup>309</sup>

Apart from being evidence of the failure of the marriage institution as Lane argued, the Islamic licensing of polygamy and easy divorce provoked

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<sup>306</sup> Alexander William Kinglake, *Eothen* (Leipzig, 1846), pp.5 & 204.

<sup>307</sup> Harriet Martineau, *Eastern Life: Present and Past* (London: E. Moxon, 1850), p.293.

<sup>308</sup> *ibid*, p.294-295.

<sup>309</sup> Edward William Lane, *Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians*, p.182.

Lane for another reason. The two institutions were considered as the root for all evils and "morality" in Egyptian society and held them responsible for the Egyptians' "indulgence in libidinous passions". Lane shared the beliefs, based on the Hippocratic traditions, with many of his contemporaries that hot climate heightened the libido of Eastern peoples, however, he suggested that climate alone was not the only reason for the Egyptians' immersion in sexual pleasures but polygamy and easy divorce were also to be blamed.<sup>310</sup> In other words, Lane's words again reflect the long held Western and Christian prejudices against Islamic sexual mores. According to Lane, Egyptians even exceeded their neighbouring Muslim nations particularly because of the Mamluks who had long governed Egypt and spread debauchery amongst its people even more than in any other Eastern country. Lane's remarks highlighted two factors which explained the Egyptians' lack of control over their sensuality, and subsequently from progress and civilisation: the Islamic civil and moral laws, and the sexual habits of the ruling elites, two factors which will also be employed by colonial administration to justify their presence in Egypt.

Lane was clearly concerned with the sexual lives of Egyptians, but it was Egyptian women's "unrestrained" sexuality that particularly alarmed him. Despite the important fact that he gathered all his information about women's sexuality from men, Lane devoted a significant part of his discussion of sexuality in Egyptian society to women's sexual behaviour. Because of their overindulgence in sexuality, Lane categorised Egyptian women as the typical exemplar of fallen and savage women since they had "the character of being

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<sup>310</sup>ibid, p.295.

the` most licentious in their feelings of all females who lay any claims to be considered as members of a civilised nation'.<sup>311</sup>

He believed that Egyptian women were obsessed with sex to the extent that their sexual lives of Egyptian women were outrageous resembling the stories of women in the *Arabian Nights*. He peppered his account with stories of Egyptian women who betray their husbands, because of their failure to satisfy their wives' sexual appetites either because of old age, illness etc.<sup>312</sup> Egyptian men accordingly employed all possible means to meet their wives' sexual needs (probably because it was commonly believed that women's orgasm is necessary for conception), but the husbands also carefully monitored their wives to prevent the latter from satisfying their desires "unlawfully". The harem, according to Lane, was a justified security measure resorted to by men since Egyptian women were shameless and so cunning to the extent that "what liberty they have, it is said, they abuse" despite the prudence of the most careful of husbands. <sup>313</sup>

Just like the harem, the veiling was another measure employed by Muslims to guard against their women's sexual obsession, but for British travellers, the veiling was no more than another evidence of the immodesty of Muslim including Egyptian women. According to Lane, the majority of Egyptian women, particularly amongst the upper and middle classes, cover the upper and back part of the head, however, Egyptian women found it incumbent to cover these parts of their bodies more than other parts. Lane

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<sup>311</sup> *ibid*, p.295.

<sup>312</sup> Edward William Lane, *Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians*, p.298-300.

<sup>313</sup> *ibid*, p.296.

still claimed that he often saw young and old women "with nothing on the body, but a narrow strip of rag bound around the body."<sup>314</sup> Another British traveller, John Augustus St John, who visited Egypt during the reign of Muhammad Ali also found young Egyptian women's dress too revealing that "the immodest costume, which Europrides objects to the Spartan women, was decent compared with that of this young Arab matron".<sup>315</sup> Like Lane, St. John concluded that although women found it incumbent to cover their faces, they "care not what other parts of their person they exhibit."<sup>316</sup>

In the absence of female travellers' explicit discussions of sexuality in Egypt, the representations of Egyptian women in as actively pursuing their sexual desires whether lawfully or unlawfully without deterrent in travel literature, written by men, became the basis of the dominant view of Egyptian women in nineteenth-century Britain. Such descriptions echoed British prejudices against non-European women and cultures in general and Muslim women in particular. The prejudices against the latter had a particularly long history that could be traced to medieval Christian interpretation of the conjugal life of the Prophet. The polygamous married life of the Prophet was interpreted as evidence that Muslim women were treated by their husbands as mere sex objects. The accusation of adultery against Aisha, wife of the Prophet, after she had to spend the night in the company of one of the prophet's friends, an incident that was followed by the revealing of Quranic

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<sup>314</sup> *ibid*, p.52.

<sup>315</sup> James Augustus St. John, *Egypt and Mohammed Ali* (London: Longman, 1834) p. 82.

<sup>316</sup> *ibid*, p.82.

verses on the veil, was also interpreted to reflect Muslim men's fear from their wives' unrestrained sexuality.<sup>317</sup> Ancient Egyptian history full of stories of strong ancient Egyptian queens might explain the male travellers' comments that Egyptian women were the most determined in pursuing their sexual desires.

Most male travellers, particularly Lane, judged sexuality in Egypt from a typical Victorian perspective. Victorians were obsessed with boundaries, particularly gender boundaries. For example, although Lane blamed gender segregation for polygamy and easy divorce and subsequently immorality in Egypt, he still considered gender segregation as a successful means to prevent further immorality as is the case in Europe where men and women were allowed to meet before marriage. For British travellers, Egyptian women from different social backgrounds seemed to have crossed the boundaries between the sexes. Despite being locked in their harems, women were still allowed to watch, behind their windows, to immoral songs sung by men whom they pay for this entertainment and to view the voluptuous dances of the *ghawazi* (dancers) and of the effeminate *khawals*. Moreover, the *ghawazi* enter the harems to teach women of the harem their voluptuous arts.<sup>318</sup>

Even the most respectable of women, according to Lane, talk in a “coarse” language, using “obscene” expressions and talk freely of subjects that are too “indecorous” even in the presence of men. What Lane suggested was

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<sup>317</sup> Minou Reeves, *Muhammad in Europe* (Reading: Garnet: 2000). Derek Hopwood, *Sexual Encounters in the Middle East* (Reading: Ithaca press,1999), p.7.

<sup>318</sup>Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians*, p.297.

not to enhance further liberty for Egyptian women, but further regulations for the strict observance of women's behaviour.

Finally, British travellers, were keen on confirming the "degraded" position of Egyptian women. Lane relates stories of how Egyptian women are humiliated and maltreated by men to the extent that they are not even allowed the privilege of eating with the master of the house.<sup>319</sup> After observing some poor working Egyptian women, another British traveller confirmed the same view, claiming that although women should be treated with tenderness and kindness because of their sex, Egyptian women "are reduced to mere beasts of burden."<sup>320</sup> Another also considered Middle Eastern wives to be "absolute slaves to their husbands", and described how wives had to kiss their husbands' hands after serving the food and waited upon their husbands till they finished their food.<sup>321</sup> The "lazy" and "bored" lives of rich women, on the other end, were also condemned by travellers. Lane considered the lack of any "innocent pastimes" for women as another reason for women's sensuality. Women who, unlike men, could penetrate the insides of the harem considered poor peasant women much freer, despite their destitute condition, than those locked inside the harem. British travellers criticised upper class women for being dull, bored, miserable, had no motivate to pursue knowledge and spent the vast majority of their time, fighting with each other over their shared husband,

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid, p.186.

<sup>320</sup> St. John, *Egypt and Mohammed Ali* , p.267.

<sup>321</sup> William Rae Wilson, *Travels in Egypt and the Holy Land: with a Journey through Turkey, Greece, the Ionian Isles, Sicily, Spain* (London: Longman,1824), p.132.

being petted and spoilt by their husbands or dotting their children with so much love to the extent of corrupting them.<sup>322</sup>

The British travel literature's representations of Egyptians' domestic and sexual practices became an instrumental weapon in the hands of the British colonial administration. In his *Modern Egypt*, Evelyn Baring (later earl of Cromer), British consul general in Egypt 1883-1907, laid out the foundations for British policies of "reform" in Egypt, mostly based on the Cromer's racist understanding of Egyptian character, frequently citing travel accounts to foster the authenticity of his work. The Egyptians were depicted by Cromer as undeveloped nation "akin to children" who were in need for the guidance of the Englishman who came in "the garb of the saviour of the country".<sup>323</sup> The inability of the Egyptians to govern themselves was usually attributed, as Lisa Pollard points out, to the Egyptians', particularly their elites, sexual and familial practices.<sup>324</sup>

Using the scientific language of the time, Cromer highlighted the basic characteristics of the Egyptian character in particular, and that of the oriental character in general, which were usually defined in contrast to the character of the superior European, particularly the English. Whereas the European employs reasons, relying on facts, logicians, sceptical, energetic, inquisitive and intelligent, the Easterner, including the Egyptian, is superstitious, ambiguous, lazy, incapable of proper thinking, unmotivated and careless of time waste. The Egyptians, according to Cromer, were also known for their

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<sup>322</sup> Harriet Martineau, *Eastern Life: Present and Past*, p.294-295. Sophie Lane Poole, *The Englishwoman in Egypt*, pp.184-190.

<sup>323</sup> Evelyn Baring Cromer, *Modern Egypt* (London: Macmillan, 1911), p.555.

<sup>324</sup> Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation*, p.74-75.



quick ability to mimic, which Cromer regards as an optimistic trait since they would learn to imitate their colonial masters quickly. Nonetheless, Cromer insisted that with the absence of the colonial teacher, the Egyptians would not be capable of initiating any projects on their own.<sup>325</sup>

Once a centre of a great civilisation, Cromer implied that the decline of Egypt and the degeneration of Egyptians was to be blamed on Egyptians' embracing of Islam, and particularly the application of Islamic social and moral laws. In Cromer's opinion, Islam succeeded in taking some tribes "above the level of barbarism", but he was not yet sure if Islam could sustain civilisation without succumbing in the process.<sup>326</sup> The "failure of Islam as a social system" was considered the main obstacle for the progress of Egyptians, and the "first and foremost" manifestation of this failure was the degraded position of women in Muslim societies.<sup>327</sup> Like many nineteenth-century British travellers, Cromer depicted the Egyptian women as victims of institutions such as gender segregation and veiling, which handicaps their intellectual and mental development. Because Egyptian women got cloudy information, their interference in politics, usually through the influence they exert on their husbands and sons, had disastrous consequences.<sup>328</sup>

Likewise, polygamy, another sexual practice accepted in Islamic doctrine, was depicted as the main cause of the destruction of family life in Egypt. Cromer implied that the superiority of European civilisation lies in the

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<sup>325</sup> Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, pp.573-578.

<sup>326</sup>Ibid p.563.

<sup>327</sup>Ibidt, p.564.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid p.583.

Christian concept of a monogamous marriage, which promoted family and the proper upbringing of children.<sup>329</sup>

As Cromer expected the “enlightened” Egyptians to be monogamous, he precisely highlights the guidelines for the ideal sexual behaviour expected of Egyptian women, which were presented in the framework of the contrast between the Christian and Islamic cultural beliefs. According to Cromer, the polygamous life of the prophet as evidence that Islam recognised women as mere sex objects, and thus when “the Moslem when his passion is sated, can if he likes throw off his wife like an old glove.”<sup>330</sup> In contrast, the more civilised Christian found in the life of the Virgin Mary, the ideal of womanhood. In other words, the Egyptian woman was expected to be the chaste virgin, the devoted and kind mother, the role the Egyptian girl is expected to play for her nation to join the civilised world.

Cromer’s rhetoric about the improvement of Egyptian women could be interpreted within the framework of nineteenth-century colonial feminism. Despite the fact that feminism directed against British men was ruthlessly suppressed, the use of scientific ideas about the oppression of women and the degree of the civilisation of the society were employed by colonial administrators to justify the eradication of the cultures of the colonised people, in the case of Egypt, Arab-Islamic culture.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>329</sup>Ibid, p.584.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid, p.581.

<sup>331</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Roots of a Modern Debate* (London; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 152-153.

## **Battling savagery: The Creation of the Modern Woman in Egyptian discourse**

Although scholarship usually associates the rise of the woman question in Egypt with the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, the beginning of the debates on Egyptian women's status and role in society could be traced as early as 1870's. By the mid nineteenth-century, the monogamous Victorian family was increasingly regarded as a symbol of modernity and the rise and success of a nation-state. In the two decades before the British occupation of Egypt, male and female intellectuals such as Riffa Tahtawi, 'Aisha Taymur and others wrote in books and in journals asserting the relation between the proper functioning of the family to that of the state, past and present. They prescribed the monogamous family and the reformed modern domicile as ideal for Egypt's transformation into a liberal constitutional state. The cause of Egyptian women's education and emancipation was at the core of these debates on reforming Egypt's domestic sphere. In male and female authored press, the ignorant Egyptian woman was evoked as a symbol of the state's decline, while the educated housewife, who would transform her whole family, was stressed as Egypt's way for salvation.<sup>332</sup>

The ascendancy of the image of the modern monogamous family and the Victorian wife as means for Egypt's political transformation came as a response to nineteenth-century political and social transformations. The transformation of Egypt's economy, bureaucracy and educational system under Muhammad Ali gave rise to a new class of Egyptians whose habits and

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<sup>332</sup> Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation*, pp. 12-15.

tastes different from its preceding generation. The state-funded Western styled educational reforms aiming at creating a modern efficient bureaucracy exposed students not only to Western sciences but Western ideas, institutions and habits. European domestic values became part of the vocabulary with which Egyptians defined modernity.<sup>333</sup> The Egyptian elites and the growing educated middle classes were further exposed to Western domestic habits under the rule of Khedive Isma'il, who aimed at transforming Egypt along Western lines, importing not only patterns of consumption and fashions but also ideas. Isma'il Pasha was the first to open schools offering public education for these girls, stirring controversy.

The debates on domestic reform and women's emancipation gained momentum as a response to British colonial discourse on Egyptian women, yet the Egyptian intellectuals' approaches towards the Egyptian woman cause and means of emancipation differed. Firstly, Egyptian intellectuals, deprived of the right to discuss political issues under the British rule, directed their attention to social reforms, and subsequently, the controversy over the Egyptian woman engaged scholars as well as ordinary people from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Secondly, Egyptian intellectuals, influenced by Orientalist and colonial discourses, changed the priority of problems encountering the Egyptian woman. In the 1870's, male and female intelligentsia envisaged women's ignorance as the major obstacle in front of reforming women's status encouraging public and free education for women. Two decades later, however, many male and female bourgeois writers, particularly amongst secular nationalists, shifted attention towards the topic of unveiling overemphasising it as a main requirement for women's

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid, 15-47

emancipation, rearticulating in native voice the colonial gender discourse.<sup>334</sup> This shift in the priorities could be hardly explained given the fact that only a small number of Egyptian women, mostly from the upper and middle classes, were actually veiled and strictly segregated from men, while the vast majority of Egyptian women, mostly living in peasants, were not under strict rules of segregation.

The responses of Egyptian intellectuals to the Egyptian women's problems were complex ranging across a continuum. Rather than strictly adhering to a precise ideology, the majority of scholars and intellectual selected elements of different ideologies to promote their own arguments. The majority of opinions evolving on women's problems could be divided into two groups: modernist and Islamist. The modernists considered that the innovative explanation of religious sources to suit modernity could solve Egyptian women's problems, while Islamists asserted that Islam gave many rights to women and only a return to proper and true Islam could provide solution for the Egyptian women's problems. It is worth noting, however, that the posture of individuals could shift over time depending on situation and audience. It is also difficult to describe one's position towards women's issue as conservative or modernist. The opinions of individuals could also shift depending on the aspect of the women's issue they were discussing. An individual could object to women's unveiling but could support women's rights to education. Despite their different orientations, participants in the debate of the Egyptian woman questions believed in the importance of strictly regulating female sexuality aiming at creating a new chaste Egyptian woman.

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<sup>334</sup> Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp.162-163.

In the following, I will examine how scientific theories were employed in the different debates on women's problems. Interestingly, the debates engaged not only intellectuals but also ordinary men and women from different social backgrounds, who also used medical and scientific information to prove their views on women's cause; asserting that nineteenth-century scientific knowledge on sex differences was disseminated to the literate middle classes.

### **Debates on Gender Equality: Domesticating the Egyptian Woman**

By the end of the nineteenth-century, the question of whether men and women are equal probably became the most popular social debate, engaging professionals, intellectuals and even housewives. The debate on women's issue was sparked in 1872 when Khedive Ism'ail opened a public school offering primary education for girls from different social backgrounds. Before the nineteenth-century, rich girls used to receive private education in their houses at the hands of a tutor, whilst the *kuttab* offered free education for poor girls and boys alike. Education for girls was, thus, not new. The fact, however, that the state directly interfered in female education and that these schools required students to leave their families' houses, in the same manners of boys, seemed to raise controversy, particularly amongst upper and middle classes. If women were to have the same rights to education and public roles as men, questions about the equality between the sexes were raised.

Muslims traditionally sought for answers for these questions in religious sources such as Quran and *Sunnah*. In the nineteenth-century, however, these sources were no more sufficient. Egyptian intellectuals as well

as the growing middle classes, responding to Western accusations of ignorance by demonstrating their respect to science, turned to modern Western science for information on sex differences. The question of gender equality was a pressing universal debate, in which the scientific community actively participated, it is not surprising thus natural and social sciences did indeed provide an immense body of theories on the topic. As most members of the scientific community were male, they “lent their knowledge to the negative side of the woman question” not only by stressing the differences between men and women, but also interpreting sex differences in favour of male superiority.<sup>335</sup> The extent of the influence of nineteenth-century Western scientific theories on discourses on gender equality was by no means limited to Europe, but it eventually influenced other parts of the globe, particularly with the increasing European expansion, as was the case with Egypt. As the previous chapter of this study showed, Western-educated Egyptian doctors acted as a vehicle for transforming these Western scientific medical theories to the Egyptian readers. In Egypt, these scientific theories were used by all participants in the gender which led to the creation of a new gender hierarchy based on science rather than on religion only.

Conservatives and Islamists found these scientific theories perfectly compatible with the long held patriarchal interpretations of Quran and *Sunnah* (prophetic traditions). Muhammad Farid Wajdi<sup>336</sup> (1875-1954), an

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<sup>335</sup> Susan Sleeth Mosedale, “Science corrupted: Victorian Biologists Consider the Woman Question,” *Journal of the History of Biology* (Spring 1978), vol.11, no.1, pp.1-55, p.1.

<sup>336</sup> Muhammad Farid Wajdi, 1875-1954), unusually fertile Egyptian author, including of a ten-volume encyclopaedia, *Dā`irat ma`ārif al-ḵarn ar-rābi` ‘ashar al-`ishrīn*, “The encyclopaedia of the 14th/20th century”. As the title of this work indicates,

early twentieth-century Islamist scholar who wrote extensively on the harmony between Islam and modern science, chose the field of anatomy to assert the physical and mental inferiority of the female body *vis a vis* the male's and subsequently "the impossibility of any real equality between the sexes and women's independence from men."<sup>337</sup> According to Wajdi, anatomy proved that the male body is much more "evolved" than the female one, to the extent that scientists argued that "the current woman is the female of another creature who is similar to her in weakness, and which went extinct because of the stronger human male, and the current woman is no more than the progeny of this female creature."<sup>338</sup> Such idea which was in striking contrast to Islamic traditions, and thus described by Wajdi as extremist, was nonetheless evidence of the discrepancy between the bodies of men and women. Men, according to early modern anatomical theories heavily cited by Wajdi, were taller, heavier and subsequently more muscular and stronger than women. Men's physical superiority could be, as argued by Wajdi, be indicated by other dominators, such as their bigger hearts and lungs and "subsequently their

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Farīd Wajdī aspired to integrate modern knowledge into the classical system of Islam. The same motive lies behind his Qur'ān commentary, now known as *al-Muṣḥaf al-mufassar*, "the Qur'ān interpreted". Wajdī's Qur'ān commentary appears to be the first commentary in which exegetical preoccupation with modern natural history is just one aspect of Qur'ān interpretation. His commentary is not devoted exclusively to *tafsīr 'ilmī*, as are so many earlier works like, e.g., those by Ṭanṭāwī Djawharī (1870-1940), or later ones like those by, e.g., Ḥanafī Aḥmad (ca. 1968). In his lifetime, Wajdī took part extensively in the many debates that went on concerning the issues that were thought to be of great relevance to the defence of Islam: the authenticity of pre-Islamic poetry, the emancipation of women, etc. Jansen, J.J.G. "Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs.. Brill Online. University of Exeter, 25 May 2011 [http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_SIM-5395](http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-5395)>

<sup>337</sup> Muhammad Farid Wajdi, *al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah* (Cairo: Matb'at al-taraqi,1901), p.30

<sup>338</sup> Ibid, p.31



more efficient respiratory and circulatory systems” as well as their higher rates of burning calories. Other physiological and anatomical evidence also demonstrate men’s superior rationality and women’s emotional sensitivity and inability to focus her ideas. Wajdi also showed that science asserts that women would never be equal with men regardless of how much better education she could receive but rather the sex difference would continue to widen since the development of the male sex would not cease. Women. Wajdi concluded, should not consider men’s authority over her as shameful because “it is a natural authority”.<sup>339</sup>

Although Wajdi vehemently attacked Westernised modernist claims to the equality of the sexes, he seemed to share in common with many male and female defenders of women’s rights the overemphasis on the importance of women’s domestic duties. Historians of the Middle East argued that the cult of domesticity was introduced in the Arab context towards the end of the nineteenth-century, under the influence of Europeanization. The scholar Afsaneh Najmabadi asserted that it was “the father, not his wife, was the manage of the household (mudabbir elmanzil) and in charge of the discipline of children.”<sup>340</sup> Beth Baron made a similar point arguing that much of medieval Islamic literature that dealt with issue of childhood was addressed to the father not the mother.”<sup>341</sup> In contrast to the Islamic heritage and in imitation of the colonial discourse, Wajdi placed great emphasis on the role of

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<sup>339</sup>Ibid, p.36

<sup>340</sup> Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran” in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998) pp.91-125.

<sup>341</sup> Beth Baron, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt*, p.158.

women as mother, considering it women's primary role in life. The natural bodily differences between men and women were stressed as purposeful since nature allocated for women a specific "natural" function, which is preserving the progeny of the human race. This function, with its different stages: pregnancy, childbirth, nurturing and upbringing children, is too complicated that a woman, Wajdi asserted, could never perfect it while sharing men their own jobs. A pregnant woman, according to Wajdi, is idle during her pregnancy, which is "a status of illness" since the growth of the foetus could influence her overall health leaving the mother's body suffering painful symptoms, and subsequently, mothers had to be away from the stress of the male world for a safe delivery.<sup>342</sup> The upbringing of children is equally crucial. He regarded the mother as the main influential factor in determining the character of the child, creating either brave successful children to benefit the nation, or coward stupid monsters. In fact, Wajdi considered women's delicate nature and kind feelings as her most natural weapons which prepare her for her motherly functions. Through being a mother, she could influence politics to the extent that "she could turn countries from royal regimes to republicanism just through raising their children, who in consequence became the future politicians of the country, without having to "go through the pains of life that her sensitive nature and superior morals would not be able to handle."<sup>343</sup>

Given the immense importance of her career, any improvement in women's life had to be directed, as Wajdi emphasised, towards improving her

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<sup>342</sup> Wajdi, *al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah*, p.41

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid*, p.42.

position as mother. If a woman was expected to learn any science, Wajdi recommended that female education should be limited to the upbringing of her children and other domestic arts, which according to him, would create the perfect mother and woman and subsequently the perfect generation of men who would serve their countries. Likewise, the *salafi* scholar Muhammad Rashid Rida, surprisingly reflecting the same ideas of Lord Cromer, considered domestic sciences as the main source of knowledge that a woman should master, since she should only learn nothing more of her religion than the performance of religious rituals, totally ignoring the long history of Muslim women, who mastered religious sciences such as Islamic jurisprudence and *hadith* commentaries.<sup>344</sup> Rida considered that the process of reproduction echoed the natural division of labour between the sexes, since men perform their sexual roles (ejaculation of sperm) with their own will and choice, while women had no control over ovulation. The sperm played the active role, going all way to the egg to fertilise it, creating the embryo, just like a man worked hard outside the house to feed his family and children.<sup>345</sup>

Scientific theories provided a new rationale for the continuity of patriarchy in the modern times, yet, the growing prestige of science made it obligatory for the majority of supporters of women's rights to operate within this scientific framework rather than challenging it. The defence of women's rights was thus based on the argument that the sexes were different but still equal and should play complimentary roles in society. Such ideas were particularly appealing to male reformists who maintained a cautious approach

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<sup>344</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Huquq al-nisaa fi al-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-Adwaa, 1989), p.48.

<sup>345</sup> *ibid*, p. 54.

towards the emancipation of women such as Qasim Amin. Amin, the writer of the famous book *Tahrir elmar'ah* (The Liberation of Women) was always regarded as the liberator of Egyptian women, since he was the first Muslim intellectual to call for the unveiling of Egyptian women. Revisionist scholars scholarship criticised Amin accusing him of rearticulating in native voice the colonial Orientalist view of Islamic culture and Egyptian women blaming the latter of the decline of Egypt. Amin's views were also perceived to be far from revolutionary. Leila Ahmed argued that Amin's call for the unveiling of women targeted only a small category of rich and upper middle class veiled and secluded women, yet the majority of Egyptian women, who were either peasant or poor urban, were not veiled and mingled freely with men. Amin's views on the education of the women did not differ much from that of the conservative, as he argued that women should only receive primary education. Amin was a representative of a generation of male supporters of boosting women's freedom, yet within the limits of preserving the existing social order.

In his *Liberation of Women*, Amin challenged the view that women's soft complexion and emotional nature could hinder women from study and work, considering this talk as degradable for women, who are also gifted with intelligence and thus could aspire towards men's ability. Nonetheless, he still stressed that the woman "is not yet a man's equal".<sup>346</sup> Like many conservatives, he employed science to stress women's maternal duties as the most suitable and "natural job" for women, since "we do not dispute that women's nature has prepared her for her household responsibilities and the

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<sup>346</sup> Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women, the New Woman, Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism*, trans. Samiha Sidhom Peterson (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000), p.153.

bringing up of children or that there are natural impediments such as pregnancy, childbirth and nursing that may hinder a woman from pursuing the same activities as men.”<sup>347</sup> For Amin, female education was not a means for women to achieve their potential but rather merely a means to better perform their “natural” duties as mothers and housewives. This is why he suggested a simplified curriculum composed of learning Arabic, foreign knowledge and basic knowledge of history and natural sciences, while emphasising the learning of domestic sciences, household economics and needlework.<sup>348</sup> Although women had to play the role of a domestic housewife and a mother, he recommended that women should be learnt in other areas of expertise in the “exceptional” cases of having to work outside the house in case of a husband’s death or divorce. Such fields of expertise were again dictated by women’s “physique and mentality”. Women’s “natural inclination to compassion, patience and concern” made her, according to Amin, more suitable to be trained in medicine and school teaching or they could work in commerce as long as jobs as long as they did not demand “physical strength and nerves”.<sup>349</sup> Many male and even female activists, supporting the emancipation of women, embraced Amin’s vision of the reform of the status of Egyptian women.

The debate on women’s future in a modern Egypt was never the private zone of elitist intellectuals. Amongst the participants were many ordinary people from the emerging educated middle classes, who also employed

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<sup>347</sup> Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women*, p.154.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid*, p.181

<sup>349</sup> Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women*, p.159.

scientific theories to prove their views. For these ordinary participants, the large number of journals and magazines burgeoning by the end of the nineteenth century became the medium through which these ordinary readers were capable of voicing their opinions. A certain M.Zaki effendi, a reader of al-Hilal magazine, sent a letter to the al-Hilal magazine demanding them to open the door for discussions on the question of whether women have the right to ask for men's rights, and providing his own view on the topic. Zaki argued that the reply to the question of whether women could demand men's rights is in answering another question which is whether women could have the same capacities of men or not. Employing Darwinism theories of evolution, Zaki explained that the physical and mental differences between men and women could be attributed to women's seclusion. In reality men and women have the same mental and physical capacities, however, the seclusion of women handicapped the development of these capacities particularly in cities. Zaki used Bedouin women as exemplars of women who have the same physical strength of men and capable of doing the same jobs as men.<sup>350</sup> In another journal al-Muqtataf, Wadi' Effendi Khuri criticised the writers who described women as inferior physically and mentally. Nonetheless, Khuri did not challenge his day's scientific theories asserting women's mental inferiority. Rather, he proposed that although biological and anatomical sex differences assert men's physical superiority, it is still possible to explain sex differences in favour of women. Although women are physically weaker than men, Khuri argues, there was no biological evidence that she was less intelligent than

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<sup>350</sup> M.Zaki, "Hal lil nisaa kol huquq elrigal?." *Majallat al-hilal*, vol 10 (January 15, 1894), pp.304-306.

men. The physical strength, according to Khuri, could by no means be seen as proof of intellectual superiority. In fact, he asserted that some women could be intelligent enough to rule nations on their own.<sup>351</sup> Both Khuri and Zaki, like Amin, agreed that women's education is first and foremost a means to enhance her role as a domestic housewife and a mother.

For at least the first three decades of the twentieth century, this male patriarchal vision of the reform of Egyptian women's status through educating women, yet limiting her role to the domestic sphere was common. In a book published by the Egyptian nationalist author and journalist Muhammad Amin linked women's emancipation with the liberation of Egypt, adopting the slogan "you free the woman, she will give birth to free children." Muhammad Amin considered it necessary for girls to receive education, yet he also recommended basic knowledge of reading and writing, arithmetic, and natural sciences, whilst focusing on domestic skills such as sewing, cooking, etc.<sup>352</sup>

Surprisingly, the majority of female activists and bourgeois male writers' vision of the reform of the status of women despite its limited scope for female education. The views of these female activists could be attributed to their lack of desire to openly challenge the existing patriarchal society as well as their submission to the power of the scientific theories, which undermined their cause. The poetess Warda Yazigi<sup>353</sup> (1838-1924) considered it crucial for

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<sup>351</sup> Wadi' Effendi Khouri, "Huquq al-nisa wa wujub ta'limuhun", *al-Muqtataf*, vol.10 (June 1886), pp.613-614.

<sup>352</sup> Muhammad Amin, *Fi al-tarbiya wa al-ta'alim* (Cairo: Maktabat al-taqaddum, 1913), pp.33-35.

<sup>353</sup> Warda Yazigi (1838-1924) produced mainly poetry which was published in a *diwan* of about 100 pages (Beirut 1867, 1881; Cairo 1913) entitled *Hadikat al-ward*. Her poetry consisted principally of elegies (*marāthī*) which reflected the classical tradition more than the contemporary scene. Of more significance, perhaps, is that she was one of the early women writers in Arabic of the 19th century. The esteem in

women to be educated. Ignorant superstitious women, according to Yazigi, was incapable of properly upbringing her children and satisfying their curiosity for information in natural sciences. Although Yazigi recommended that women should be educated in basic physical and natural sciences to be better mothers, she criticised those whom she described as going to extremes in pursuing sciences, considering their behaviour to be in opposition to their biological condition:

“It is true that some Western women went to extremes in pursuing sciences by working in astronomy and sciences to a limit that contradicts women’s natural capacities, and which would prevent her from pursuing her most natural duties, that’s the upbringing of children. We only recommend that women should read some books in history, poetry, basic knowledge of sciences to help her perform her duties as a mother more effectively.”<sup>354</sup>

Although domesticity dominated debates on the future of women in modern Egypt, they were not the only discourses propagated in the nineteenth century. Hoda ElSadda argued that the writings of some female activists such as Zaynab Fawwaz<sup>355</sup> biographies of famous highlighted the successful

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which she was held as a key representative of women in society at that time can be seen in the tribute paid to her by Mayy Ziyāda [*q.v.*] in a lecture published in the journal *al-Mukhtaṭaf* in 1924, in which she acknowledged her as one of a group of geniuses that manifests “the cognitions and emotions of its society”, and as a “blessed daughter” of the Arabs. She died in Egypt, where she in fact spent most of her life. Gully, A.J. "al-Yāzidī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011. Brill Online. University of Exeter. 25 May 2011 [http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_SIM-8007](http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-8007)>

<sup>354</sup> Warda al-Yazigi, “al-Mar’ah al-Sharqiyah”, *majallat al-Diaa*, 30 April 1906, p.456.



participation of women in the public spheres in different roles.<sup>356</sup> Some female activists dared challenge the authoritative scientific theories and their role in establishing a modern patriarchy. Nabawiya Musa<sup>357</sup>(1886-1951), an active Egyptian feminist and a schoolteacher, was one of very few female intellectuals who challenged the medical and anatomical facts and their patriarchal theories. Having no medical training, Musa resorted to logic to undermine the authority of the dominant view of women's natural weakness. She argued that since there was no recorded evidence of any difference between the capacities of the instincts between male and female animals depending on sex; "no scientist has claimed that the female cats like to jump and play and devours mice, while the male cat is reasonable, serious and does not hurt a mouse or steal meat."<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Zaynab Fawwaz (1846-1914) is a Lebanese essayist, novelist, poet, and dramatist. She immigrated from south Lebanon to Egypt as a young woman and became a prominent writer on gender issues in the nationalist press. She became the protégée of newspaper publisher and litterateur Hasan Husni Pasha al-Tuwayrani, in whose newspaper, *al-Nil*, she published essays in the early 1890s while also publishing in women's journals and other periodicals. She is considered an Arab feminist pioneer; her work is notable for emphasizing the importance of women's access to income-generating employment.

<sup>356</sup> Hoda ElSadda, "Gendered Citizenship: Discourses on Domesticity in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Hawwa*, 2006, vol.4, pp.1-28.

<sup>357</sup> Nabawiya Musa Born on December 17, 1886. She was the first Egyptian girl to have a high-school education in 1907 and for 21 years later she was the only Egyptian girl to have this degree. Her name is imprinted on the history of education in Egypt. For many reasons she was said to be the *pioneer* of women's education in the country. For nearly forty years (1904-1946), women's education was her main cause. Thanks to her, women were able to go through all the posts of the education process. Earlier, Egyptian women working in this field were allowed only to teach while foreigners worked as managers and supervisors. Her efforts paid off and she was the first headmistress, the first supervisor, the first manager.

Musa, pointing to the dominance of men over the scientific field and subsequently their patriarchal interpretations of anatomical facts, explained that although it was suggested that men's bigger size of muscles and brain made them stronger and more intelligent than women, these ideas were not true since, for example, bulls were not necessarily more intelligent or stronger than cows, despite their bigger size.<sup>359</sup> She asserted women's ability to be total independent from men and their ability to perform the same jobs as men "in the same way a short slim man can do what a big tall man does," and thus claiming that women were merely destined to the house is "patently untrue."<sup>360</sup>

### **The Free but Chaste Egyptian Woman: Veil Debates**

By the end of the nineteenth century, a significant number of scholars and intellectuals, from Qasim Amin onwards, believed that the veiling of Egyptian women is the essence of the process of "emancipating" Egyptian women from the long imposed social bondages, and the primary step for the improvement of women's position. During that period, veiling was not merely a head cover, but was described in the words of a contemporary scholar as the coverage of the whole of women's body and her seclusion to her house, leaving it only for extreme necessity, thereby making veiling inseparable from Islamic strict rules of gender segregation. It was only ordinary that suggestions for the abolishing the veil stirred such controversy amongst intellectuals and

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<sup>358</sup> Nabwiya Musa, "The Effects of Books and Novels on Morals" in *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing*, ed. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), p.263.

<sup>359</sup> Nabwiya Musa, "The Effects of Books and Novels on Morals", p.264.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid p.264.

scholars, most of whom belonged to the upper and middle classes, the two social categories whose women would be directly influenced by abolishing the veil. Male intellectuals, supporting the abolishing of the veil, offered alternative means to guarantee the modesty of Egyptian women, and allowing men to continue their overseeing of her chastity. Nineteenth-century scientific theories that depicted women as sexually passive with no carnal lust and who are morally superior to men, provided an ideal basis for debates against the veil.

In his *Liberation of Egyptian women*, Qasim Amin was the first scholar to draw attention to the necessity of abolishing the veil, employing scientific arguments. For Amin, the socio-cultural evolutionary theories provided perfect means to explain the origins of veiling. He explained that the progress of human societies from nomadic to agricultural societies ultimately led to the rise of the institution of patriarchy. At this stage of human history, women, incapacitated by their weak physical power, were enslaved by men who could acquire wives in the same way they acquired sheep and cattle. Treating women as properties rather than as free individuals, men forced veiling and seclusion on women to guard them, just like they guard the rest of their possessions. As Amin considered veiling as a savage practice characteristic of early human societies, the Muslim civilisation was implicitly regarded as an intermediary stage of civilisation, and thus, by only ridding itself from such savage practice, Muslim civilisation could aspire to be similar to the superior Western civilisation. In attempting to convince his readers with the necessity of eradicating the veiling, Amin first attacked the basis on which veiling was practiced in Muslim societies, and secondly offered his

readers an alternative, and in his opinion, effective, yet modern method of guaranteeing the chastity of their women.

For centuries, the practice of veiling and gender segregation in Muslim societies was based on the belief in active female sexuality and the voracity of their sexual desires, but these ideas, as Amin suggested, were declared void by modern scientific theories. Quranic verses (e.g. story of Joseph) and prophetic traditions implied women's active sexuality and unrestrained sex needs; ideas later confirmed by Hippocratic-Galenic traditions. These beliefs in female sexuality made it incumbent for men to satisfy their wives, on the one hand, and to lock their wives and daughters to prevent the spread of problems such as adultery, traditionally blamed on women's sexual desires. By the nineteenth century, scientific evidence, according to Amin, proved the contrary. Citing a number of medical and anthropological authorities, Amin aimed to demonstrate to his readers that it was men who were sexually aggressive, and more near to animals when it came to sexual desires. Women, in contrast were, as Amin pointed out, less prone to carnal desires than men, who regarded love as a means to unite souls, while men use love only as a means to get their main objective which is sex, using trickery and deception in the process. The moral superiority could not be better manifested than in the relationship between the mother and the son, where the woman is self-sacrificial, selfless, while men love themselves first and then their children.<sup>361</sup>

In his discussion of the female sex or how they should be to fit in the modern projects of the liberation of Egypt and joining the civilised world, Amin described them as if they were akin to angels. Nonetheless, his

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<sup>361</sup>Qassim Amin, *The Liberation of Women, the New Woman*, pp. 135-137.

contemporary Egyptian women, as Amin saw them, did not fit this description since their lifestyle led to the corruption of their morals. The upbringing of Egyptian children, and girls in particular, according to Amin, lowered their moral standards. Parents, friends and relatives always talked freely and referred to many private things, including conjugal relation between husband and wife, using their real name, not minding the presence of children. Strict rules of gender segregation contributed even further to the corruption of morals amongst teenage girls. As girls got locked inside their houses as soon as they reached their teenage years and prevented from seeing any foreign men, this quickly drew their attention to the differences between them and men, and subsequently they started to search for answers amongst their female friends.<sup>362</sup> Thus, gender segregation would make of sexuality the main concern for Egyptian girl whose mind, finding nothing else to think about because of the leisurely life she led, would be preoccupied with men.

The behaviour of Egyptian women that Amin described seemed to reflect his ideas about the dangers of secluding women. According to Amin, it is "predominantly" common amongst Egyptian women to try, though subconsciously and unintentionally, to attract men's attention, which did nothing but cheapen her in the eyes of men. Such behaviour resulted, as Amin suggested, from the inability of Egyptian women, in contrast to the European women, to hide their internal feelings for the sake of keeping up appearances, since their deprivation of seeing men made their sexual desires easily

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<sup>362</sup> *ibid*, p. 141.

motivated once they saw one.<sup>363</sup> The veiling itself did nothing but assist women in pursuing their natural desires without any deterrent, since it would be difficult to follow them.

Amin offered his male readers the modern alternative, yet in his opinion more effective, method of guaranteeing the chastity of Egyptian women, which according to him, was an undisputable right for men. In return for their freedom from gender segregation rules and the removal of the veil, Egyptian women would be expected to replace men as guardians of their own sexuality. Amin aimed at recreating the Egyptian women following the Victorian model, in which women were not necessarily veiled or secluded, but were forced by social and cultural norms to observe their own morals and suppress any sexual desires. In this new model of patriarchal control over female sexuality, men did not lose all forms of supervision. He made it clear that girls, now unveiled and faces appearing, would be forced to respect themselves and observe even more strict morals, because they would be afraid of being detected by their families (despite his complaints that *hijab* protects against adultery by force).

Amin's proposal of a new form of control of female sexuality was accepted by feminists. They too employed the same rationale for supporting their demands for women's education and removal of the veil. In an article published in *al-Muqtataf* magazine, a certain Mrs Muhagah Suki explained that women could be either demons or angels depending on the level of education she received. It is the lack of education and not freedom, Suki argued, that caused the corruption of women. Ignorant women, according to

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<sup>363</sup> *Majallat al-jins al-latif*, issue 2, year 1, August 1908, in *Majallat al-jins al-latif*, reprinted. ed. Abir Hassan (Cairo: Dar al-'Arabi,2001), p.99

Suki, cared only about their looks spending all their husbands' money on jewels and make up, whilst leaving their children barefoot in streets. Suki argued that education, on the other hand, made women feel more dignified and subsequently "they would be moral and more observant of their behaviour because they would not want to undermine their newly acquired social status."<sup>364</sup>

Other female activists who even went further into stressing women's responsibility for guarding their own sexuality, blaming women and young girls for any violations of the traditional rules and demanding that such women would be severely punished. The editors and contributors to *majallat al-jins al-latif* (magazine of the delicate sex), mostly women and girls from the upper and middle class Coptic families, emphasized these ideas. In an article discussing the "elevated" status of women in Ancient Egypt, the author explained that ancient Egyptian women were respected by men because they could demonstrate that they could be free but still chaste. Ancient Egyptian women, according to the author, respected men and recognised their "sacred" rights and thus they protected their modesty by all means. But like Amin, the author, not wholly accepting the idea that women would carry the responsibility of guarding their sexuality without any patriarchal interference, added that the laws of ancient Egypt ensured that men and women would observe rules of chastity, probably hoping that modern Egyptian state would make equal laws for punishing both sexes. Although ancient men were usually punished by death, women underwent more severe forms of punishments as

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<sup>364</sup> Muhigah Suki, "Huquq al-mar'ah wa al-ta'lim," *Al-Muqtataf*, June, 1892, 17: 472-475.

"their faces got mutilated to be a warning for any woman who would dare violate her modesty."<sup>365</sup>

Advice articles, on the other hand, also encouraged girls to keep themselves busy with study and domestic work and to free their minds from any "dirty ideas". And although defenders of unveiling emphasised that unveiling would allow more opportunities for women and girls to mix with members from the other sex, girls were warned not to talk to young men at all or to believe their lies because they "alone would carry the responsibility of their mistakes."<sup>366</sup>

Female intellectuals' acceptance of these modern yet harsh rules of morality could be attributed to several factors. On the one hand, non-veiled women were attempting to gain ground in traditional Egyptian society by demonstrating their observance of traditions and customs. But more importantly, the majority of Egyptian feminists wholly embraced the Western and specifically the English ideal of pure and moral womanhood, partly because this model was a reflection of colonial superiority, and partly because modern scientific theories considered this model as the epitome of modern human civilisation.

Despite the guarantees that female activists attempted to present to the society in return for unveiling and accordingly women's "emancipation", the issue stirred a great controversy, and was opposed by many Intellectuals and ordinary people alike. Although professional doctors suggested that women were generally not interested in sex, they did not deny that women still have

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid, p.100.

<sup>366</sup> *Majallat al-jins al-latif*, issue 5, year 1 (November 1908), in *Majallat al-jins al-latif*, p.179-180.



sex desires, and even warned that the pursuit of the female sexual desires could lead to major health issues such as hysteria and other mental disorders. This was the basis for debates against the free mingling between men and women. Abd Allah al-Nadim was one of the earliest scholars who warned against the consequences of the mixing between the sexes. He believed that women in Europe were rarely chaste since the mingling with men ignites the sex desires which would influence the brain increasing the need for sex contact, especially if the woman was young married to an old man. Nadim believed that some European women even used education to pursue their sexual desires more intelligently and cunningly.<sup>367</sup> Tal'at Pasha Harb (1867-1941), a reformist in the field of economics, held a conservative view towards unveiling, demanding the maintenance of the institution of veiling and gender segregation. Harb used the same argument by Nadim, even citing statistics on adultery in different countries to prove his argument. These statistics demonstrated that Turkey had the lowest rates of adultery incidents, which he attributed to the practice of veiling and gender segregation, while other countries such as England and Germany, where women are unveiled, scored much higher incidents of adultery.<sup>368</sup> Hamdi Al-Nashar, a writer, employed the nineteenth-century scientific theories against the cause of unveiling women. He argued that although medicine proved that women generally have no interest in pursuing carnal desires, medicine did not deny that women still have inherent sex desires that could be excited by different factors. The medical fact, according to al-Nashar, is that women have a much more

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<sup>367</sup> 'Abdallah al-Nadim, *al-Ustadh*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azim Ramadan (Cairo, 1994), vol.1, p.94-95.

<sup>368</sup> Hamdi al-Nashar, *al-Mar'ah fi al-Islam aw al-Hijab wa al-sufur* (Cairo, 1911), p.63-64.

delicate and emotional nature jeopardise them. Men were like beasts who would use all means from violence to sweet deceptive words to satisfy their sexual desires. Because of their naïve character, women might submit to these seductive words that men use, and this was when zina would occur.<sup>369</sup> Hijab, thus, was not a means of isolating women because of their sexual desires but a means of protecting them from men's sexual desires. The author also demanded from his readers not to be tricked by the notions of the purity of female Bedouins and peasants, despite their free mingling with men. He again drew on the medical theories discussing the influence of environment on the biology and physiology of humans. The sedentary lifestyle of women living in cities ignited their sexual desires as they did nothing but mingling with fellow women and listening to stories about sexual desires. Peasant and Bedouin women, on the other hand, spent their lives toiling in farms and working as hard as men till the end of the day where they lay extremely tired having no time for sexual fantasies.<sup>370</sup>

Nonetheless, the vast majority of Egyptian or Egypt based scholars and intellectuals who supported the veil, did not attempt to challenge nineteenth-century scientific ideas about the passive nature of female sexuality and women's moral superiority, considered then as solid scientific facts, and made use of these theories as a basis for their arguments. The veiling, which was regarded for centuries as a means to restraint female sexuality, became in the early twentieth century, and up till now, a way to protect women from men's aggressive and beastly sexuality. Employing some accusations that veiling and

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid, p.63

<sup>370</sup>Ibid, p.63.

gender segregation led to the spread of homosexual relationships between older men and boys, it was argued that this sexual behaviour is no more than evidence of the limits that men could go to achieve their desires. Since heterosexual sex was the “natural” form of intercourse, it was argued that God created women naturally attractive to men and thus men, who followed their natural desires, could attempt by all means to trick the woman into adultery, and regardless of women’s natural chastity, some of them could eventually succumb to these men’s lies since women were also by nature emotionally sensitive.<sup>371</sup>

### **Creating the Perfect Egyptian Family: Debates on Marriage and Divorce**

The institution of marriage and the Islamic legal regulations concerning marriage and divorce also became the subject of controversy by the end of the nineteenth century. The majority of male and female intellectuals believed that the salvation of the Egyptian family lies in a happy and a successful marriage, who would in consequence produce a healthy and well-educated generation of Egypt. They boosted the image of a proper marriage as a monogamous relationship built on mutual respect and love.

Female activists, in particular, were amongst the main supporters of this new ideal of marriage based on mutual respect and monogamy. They usually did not challenge the gender hierarchy within the marriage institution established by religion, social traditions and later by scientific theories. In

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<sup>371</sup>Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women*, p.82-83.

fact, some believed that the challenge of this hierarchy harmed women. Aisha Taymur<sup>372</sup>, one of the earliest female activists in the nineteenth-century, was very critical of the marriage practices in the upper and middle classes. She particularly loathed husbands who marry women in quest for their wives' wealth. The men, argued Taymur, are preferred over women both mentally and physically, but men's domination over women erupted when it was women who spent on the household. The husband failed to play his role as the head of the house, and some even spent their wives' money in gambling. Although some wives tolerate this behaviour, others might go as far as betraying their husbands, who through "inherent instinct of jealousy" would revenge for themselves.<sup>373</sup> Other female activists used science to remind men of their duties and as a weapon against men's excesses. The Lebanese writer, Labiba Hashim argued that the responsibility of a successful marriage fell more on the husband rather than the wife. After all, it was men who were more intelligent and wiser than his wife. She asked men to be generous with their wives, kind, observant and to take into consideration women's delicate nature.<sup>374</sup> Although Hashim implicitly acknowledged husbands' domination

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<sup>372</sup> A'isha Taymur (1840-1902), one of Egypt's most distinguished social activists. Born to a literary upper class family, her father was keen on providing her with adequate education through home schooling like girls from the same class to which she belonged. She was well versed in the sciences of Quran, Islamic jurisprudence. She was capable of writing poetry in Turkish, Arabic and Persian.

<sup>373</sup> Aisha Taymur, *Mir'at al-ta'mul fi al-umur*, ed. Mervat Hatem (Cairo: mutlaqa el-mar'ah wa al-dhakhirah, 2002).

<sup>374</sup> Labiba Hashim (1882 - 1952) is a pioneering Lebanese novelist, and journalist. In 1900, at the age of 18, she moved with her family to Cairo, where she met men of literature and though in the literary salon of Warda al-Yazigi. In 1906, Hashim published one of the earliest women's magazines fata el-sharq, which continued to be in circulation till 1935. She was the first Arab woman to hold the position of a lecture

over their wives, she demanded from men to widen the margin of freedom they allow for their wives, so that women would not feel like slaves and subsequently act as such and resort to trickery. She, nonetheless, warned men to still keep their eyes on women to protect them from their “inherent weakness.”<sup>375</sup>

Some male modernist reformists were more daring in criticising the institution of marriage, arguing that Muslim jurists undermined the institution of marriage. After searching many Islamic writings, Qassim Amin claimed to have found no definition of Islam beyond “a contract by which a man has the right to sleep with a woman.” This symbolised, according to Amin, the extent by which Muslim theologians degraded women, since these writings neglect the true purpose of marriages and the nature of the duties of man and wife, by focusing on sexuality. Although Amin propagated the same views held by Orientalists and colonialists, he did not see Christian ideal of marriage as the proper alternative to Muslim marriage. Rather, he tried to interpret Islamic sources such as the Quran to justify his view of marriage, that should be similar to that of the West. The Quran, according to Amin, defines marriage in a way that is even more advanced than those in modern legal systems, however, theological writings and traditions were blamed for destroying the ideal of marriage in Islam. The Quran made of marriage an

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in Cairo university (known then as Ahmad Fouad University). In 1921, she immigrated to Chile where she published the magazine, *al-sharq wa al-gharb*. In 1942, she returned to Egypt to continue publishing her first magazine *Fatat el-Sharq*. The magazine was known for its columns on famous women. Her non-fiction works include *Kitab al-tarbiyah* (The book of Education), a collection of her university lectures from 1911, as well as her writing on the difference in men's and women's treatment of women's issues.

<sup>375</sup> Labiba Hashim, “Wajibat el-Zawj”, *Al-Diya*:15th April 1906, pp.426-430.

institution, in which the couple is expected to find peace and love and in which both partners are supposed to treat each other with love and mercy.

Theological writings and Egyptian traditions were blamed for the destruction of the real essence of marriage in Quran. Practices such as gender segregation, polygamy and easy divorce, accepted by religious scholars and by common traditions, were impediments in front of the achievement of these ideals. Gender segregation, as argued by Amin, deprives men and women from the right of seeing each other and knowing if there is any harmony between them before marriage. After marriage, the couple could discover their incompatibility and thus problems would erupt leading to divorce. But it was polygamy against which Amin launched his greatest attacks. Although accepted in the Quran, Amin drew attention to the fact that God warned Muslims from their inability to treat more than one wife equally, which means that the Quranic verses were more restrictive than permissible. Besides the Quranic verses, Amin tried to scientifically support his attack against polygamy by arguing that the possession over the love of a husband or a wife is a trait that humans acquired through time as they moved from savagery to human civilisation.<sup>376</sup>

Islamists did not oppose this new ideal of marriage. In fact, they stressed that a monogamous affectionate marriage epitomised the true essence of marriage as prescribed in Quran. Nonetheless, some such as Rashid Rida defended practices such as polygamy, founding his defence on the medical discourse on differences between male and female sexualities. In explaining Islamic permission for a man to take more than one wife (polygamy), Rashid Rida employs the usual practical excuses alongside

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid,87.

biological ones. Islam allowed polygamy but did not make polygamy an obligation. Islam did not outlaw polygamy because it is more practical in times of war when women outnumber men, so it becomes more honourable for women to be married to be second wives rather than prostitutes. The reproductive biology of men and women are again used as scientific evidence for the justice of the Islamic system of polygamy. Males are always ready to reproduce till the end of their lifetimes, while women can not have children after their menopause, usually occurring between 50-55. During breastfeeding, women's preparation for pregnancy is also minimal, while men can perform their sexual duties and reproductive roles if not daily, then at least once per week. Experience also demonstrated that because of their reproductive biology, there are many more women who might not be interested in having sex with men, than there are men who do not desire women.<sup>377</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This study examined how scientific knowledge became the foundation of both colonial and anti-colonial discourses on women's position in Egyptian society. Although the British claimed that they aimed at promoting the status of Egyptian women's position in society, their vision of the Egyptian woman was based on British travellers' orientalist depictions of Egyptian women as lazy, socially inferior and suppressed woman, whose minds were occupied with sexuality. For the British, the only solution for the salvation of Egyptian

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<sup>377</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Huquq al-nisaa fi al-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-Adwaa, 1989), p.87.

women, and Egyptian society at large was the adoption of Victorian moral and sexual values. Their vision of the new Egyptian woman amongst the nationalists was not much different that of the British. The new Egyptian woman was expected to be typical to her English Victorian counterpart: a loving wife and mother preoccupied mainly with the domestic sphere and a woman with self-regulated sexuality. The chapter argues that although the rise of the cult of the chaste woman meant the restriction of women's sexuality and the constraint of their lives by beliefs about their mental and biological capacities, it allowed women, particularly middle and upper classes, a range of opportunities outside the confines of their homes.



## Chapter 4

### The Fatwa and its role in Constructing Sexual Knowledge

Like medicine, religion was a significantly important source for the construction of the ordinary person's sexual knowledge. Classical books of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) have always dealt with sex related issues when discussing different branches of law ranging from laws of ablution and personal hygiene after sexual intercourse to criminal laws dealing with adultery and other sex related crimes. From all sources of *fiqh*, it was the genre of the *fatwa* that was probably the easiest to understand and access for the ordinary Muslim. *Fatwas* usually took a personal form, in which the questioner approaches the religious scholar, for his opinion on a point of law concerning religious or civil matters, it was common that people could approach their muftis for sex-related questions.<sup>378</sup> This chapter thus aims at examining how fatwa literature, produced between 1849 to 1928, contributed to sexual knowledge about licit vs. illicit sexual behaviour, Muslim sexual ethics as well as gender relations.

Recently, many scholars examined the importance of the fatwa as a source for historical research into social and intellectual developments in Muslim societies. In his *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Change*, Wael Hallaq opposes the long accepted view that developments in Islamic law came to a halt in the late medieval and pre-modern periods because scholars resorted to *taqlid*. *Taqlid* is perceived by many scholars as mindless and blind acceptance of the opinions of the founders of the Sunni *madhahab*. Through

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<sup>378</sup> For more information on the genre of fatwa, please check, Tyan, E. Walsh, J.R "Fatwa", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, vol.II, page 866, column 1.

analysing *fatwa* literature, Hallaq argues that legal developments were channelled usually through structures embedded to Islamic law, and through agents such as muftis who consciously fashioned Muslim laws according to the needs of their contemporary societies.<sup>379</sup> Judith Tucker emphasises how the fatwa could be regarded as a historical source on the muftis' application of law in their societies with respect to different social issues.<sup>380</sup> As the genre of fatwa provides a window on the way a certain issue was approached in a particular time and place, it is important that any reading of fatwas had to be understood within the historical context in which the muftis functioned and the fatwas issued. Before analysing the following fatawa, the study raises the following questions: Who is the mufti? Why does he issue the fatwa? Does the mufti hold an official position or is he non-official? Is a particular fatwa a response to an inquiry from a state official, a judge, a member of the elites or an ordinary person? What are the intellectual and socio-economic conditions for a fatwa?.

This chapter examines the *fatwa* literature as representative of religious discursive literature on gender and sexuality in Egypt in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This period witnessed important historical changes that influences the process of issuing *fatwa*. Firstly, nineteenth century administrative and legislative policies led to the institutionalisation of the *fatwa*. The state interfered directly in regulating the credentials of the muftis, and subsequently it could intervene indirectly in the

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<sup>379</sup> Wael Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>380</sup> Judith Tucker, “ “And God Knows Best” The Fatwa as a Source for the history of gender in the Arab World,” in *Beyond the Exotic: Women’s Histories in the Islamic societies*, ed. Amira al-Azhary Sonbol (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), pp.165-179.

content of the *fatwa*.<sup>381</sup> Secondly, the period under study was an era of intellectual and cultural dynamism. Intellectuals and religious scholars were involved in lengthy debates on the revival and reform of Islam that touched on different issues including identity, women, the state, tradition and renewal, text and reason, science and Islam.

It is within this complex historical context that a large number of *fatwas* concerning marriage, divorce, licit and illicit sexual behaviour, "proper" vs. "forbidden" sexual desires were issued. To achieve its goal, this study will focus on the works of three muftis, Sheikh Muhammad 'Abbas al-Mahdi (d.1897), Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh (d.1905), and Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida (d.1935). The *fatwas* of these religious scholars spanned from the mid nineteenth century till the second decade of the twentieth century. These religious scholars were chosen because they had different educational backgrounds and followed different career paths, and thus their *fatwas* would represent the wide spectrum of ideas that evolved in this critical period. The chapter examines a wide variety of sex-related *fatwas*; ranging from enquiries into sexual relations and marriage to questions on the divine wisdom behind certain Quranic verses on gender and sexuality. The opinions of all muftis were based in the inherited Islamic legal traditions, yet the opinions of each mufti was informed by his own understanding of the legal traditions as well as the needs and circumstances of the members of their communities. The analysis of the *fatwa* literature suggests the multiplicity of religious opinions on sexual topics. it also allows to understand the variety of ways through

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<sup>381</sup> The mufti is the person who issues the fatwa. He/she should be selected according to certain qualifications that books of fiqh set as the criteria for this career.

which some religious scholars, particularly the reformists, tried to negotiate and adapt from scientific and medical theories to support their *fatwas* on different sex-related topics.

### **Issuing a Fatwa in the Nineteenth Century**

Before examining nineteenth and early twentieth century *fatwas* on sex-related topics, it is important to define what the *fatwa* is and explain how nineteenth-century legal developments affected the process of *ifta'*.

As a genre the *fatwa* belongs to the juristic domain yet it could be clearly distinguished from the court judgement. In pre-nineteenth century Muslim societies, the mufti, unlike the *Qadi* (judge), usually acted in a private capacity providing advice for people on different topics. The *fatwa* was mainly to help them to confirm their behaviour to the “properly Islamic ideal”.<sup>382</sup> *Fatwas* and judgments also marked two different approaches to Islamic law. The *fatwa* is a non-binding religious advice that followed textual analysis with no heed paid to the gathering of information through evidences or testimony. The court judgment is, at least theoretically, a binding based primarily on evidence and oral testimony. Moreover, the judge was only approached to solve worldly cases, while the mufti could be asked for real-life questions, hypothetical situations, or even questions about the after life.<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> It was not until the Ottoman period, when some muftis particularly in the centre of the Empire, became eventually part of the judicial administration.

<sup>383</sup> Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick, David S. Powers, “Muftis, Fatwas and Islamic legal Interpretations” in *Islamic Legal Interpretation, Muftis and their Fatwas*, ed. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick & David S. Powers (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 3-32: pp.17-19.

By the mid nineteenth-century, important transformations in the legal and administrative policies influenced the way the *fatwa* was issued. Egyptian bureaucracy expanded and became more specialized. Important posts in military and civil administration were held by bureaucrats with specialised administrative skills. Rules and regulations increasingly governed the relations between the official and subjects.<sup>384</sup> Besides these administrative developments, the Khedives introduced wide-scale legal reforms establishing secular courts and specialised legal councils, particularly in the fields of criminal, commercial and administrative laws.<sup>385</sup> The Egyptian state's centralisation and bureaucratisation reforms started to reach the sphere of the *ifta'*. The procedures of issuing *fatwa* went through a gradual process of centralisation that culminated in the formation of *Dar al-ifta'* (House of Fatwa) and the office of the Grand Mufti of Egypt, occupied by a Hanafi mufti, in 1895.<sup>386</sup>

Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, the office of the Hanafi Mufti had gone through gradual changes leading to its institutionalisation. After the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517, the Hanafi *madhab* (school of law) came to prevail in the administration of justice. Only Hanafi muftis could

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<sup>384</sup> Robert Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives, 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984).

<sup>385</sup> J.N.D Anderson, "Law Reform in Egypt: 1850-1950," *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt* ed. P.M Holt (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp.209-230, p.216.

<sup>386</sup> Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of Dar al-Ifta* (Leiden: Brill 1997),p.100. Rudolph Peters, "Muhammad al-'Abbasi al-Mahdi (D.1897): Grand Mufti of Egypt and His al-Fatawa al-Mahdiyya," *Islamic Law and Society* 1 (1994) pp. 66-82.

exercise the function of the *al-futyah al-qadai'yah* (judicial fatwa) , while the representatives of other *madhabs* were confined to the *al-futyah al-'ammah* (general fatwa).<sup>387</sup> During the nineteenth century, the Egyptian government started to appoint Hanafi muftis to various posts within the judiciary and administration in different levels and their services were consulted by authorities, litigants and *qadis*.<sup>388</sup> In 1873, the government assigned Hanafi muftis in key positions: provincial administration, *waqf* (pious foundations) administration, and the *ifta'* of Cairo and Alexandria.<sup>389</sup> In 1880, the position of the head mufti was strengthened by decrees which stipulated that the head of Cairo court should consult the head mufti in complicated issues. The head of the *hanafi* muftis was to be assigned as a member in a committee that chooses judges.<sup>390</sup> Hanafi muftis were also attached to regional *shari'ah* courts, provincial administration, as well as a number of *diwans* (ministries) such as that of *al-haqqaniyah* (justice) and *waqf*.<sup>391</sup> Through these decrees, the Hanafi mufti came at the top of a hierarchy of muftis who were expected to consult in problematic cases by judges and bureaucrats.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> See 'Abd al-Rahim 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Rahim, "Al-qada' fi Misr al-'Uthmaniyya 1517-1798," in 'Abd al-Rahim 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Rahim, *Fusul fi tarikh Misr al-iqtisddl wa'l-ijtima'l fi'l-'asr al-'Uthmani* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-amma lil al-kitab, 1990), pp.319-49.

<sup>388</sup> Rudolph Peters, "Muhammad al-'Abbasi al-Mahdi," p.74.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid, p.74.

<sup>390</sup> Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State*, p.103.

<sup>391</sup> Jad al-Haqq Ali Jad al-Haqq, "Dar al-ifta" in *al-Fatawa al-Islamiyyah* (Cairo: al-Majilis al-a'la li sh'un al-Islamiyah, 1983) ed. Zakariyya Barri, vol.10, p.3655.

<sup>392</sup> Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State*, p.103.

Alongside the institutionalisation of the process of *ifta'*, the state also took active measures in regulating the qualifications and the activities of the muftis. Although elite religious scholars have always demanded that the qualifications of people who issue *fatwas* should be regulated, the state started to interfere in the process of *ifta'* only after 1865. A Khedieval note was sent to the ministry of Interior to take measures against those who issued *fatwas* without having a license. The state justified its new decree by claiming that it was the state's duty to ensure that the muftis met the necessary criteria and to prohibit ignorant and pretenders from issuing *fatwas*.<sup>393</sup> These new decrees could also be interpreted as within the context of the state's centralisation policies and its monopoly the activities of religious scholars who could potentially be a threat to the state sovereignty.<sup>394</sup>

The institutionalisation of *fatwa* and the formation of the office of the Grand Mufti had important consequences on the process of fatwa issuance. In his analysis of the career of the first Grand mufti, Rudolph Peters argues that the office of the Grand Mufti played an important role in standardising the legal change through imposing strict adherence to the most authoritative opinions within the Hanafi school.<sup>395</sup> Although Hanafis used to accept *fatwas* given by scholars from other *madhabs* in the past, this was no longer the case after 1849. The Grand mufti consistently rejected any *fatwas* that do not comply with the Hanafi *madhabs*.<sup>396</sup> The official muftis were represented by the state as the spokespeople of true and moderate Islam in Egyptian society.

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<sup>393</sup> Rudolph Peters, "Muhammad al-'Abbasi al-Mahdi," pp.74-75.

<sup>394</sup> Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State*, p.102.

<sup>395</sup> Rudolph Peters, "Muhammad al-'Abbasi al-Mahdi," pp.66-82.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.76-82.

Both the state and the public were expected to refer to official muftis if they needed answers for answers to questions on religious matters. Despite its institutionalisation of *fatwa*, the state failed to monopolise the process of *ifta'*. There were other non-official venues through which people could have access to *fatwa*; the press being the most important of which.

Printing was introduced in Egypt during the French expedition. Yet, it was Muhammad 'Ali who made effective use of the printing technology publishing hundreds of books, and issuing the first official newspaper in Egypt, *Al-Waqai' al-Misriyah* (The Egyptian Events). Under the reign of Sa'id (r.1854-1863), the first popular newspapers were issued, and they flourished under the rule of his successor Khedive Ismail (r.1863-1876).<sup>397</sup> By the end of the nineteenth-century, tens of newspapers were issued. Although some newspapers were pro-British occupation, many nationalists as well as reformists made use of the press to resist the European rule in Egypt, criticising the political and social conditions in Egypt.<sup>398</sup> Not all journals, however, were political. Many newspapers were specific dealing with subjects such as science, medicine, women's issues as well as religion.

It is true that the introduction of press in nineteenth-century Egypt adversely influenced the majority of 'ulama, many of them succeeded in making use of the press for effectively spreading their ideas amongst a wider segment in the Egyptian society. When first introduced in Egypt, printing broke the 'ulama's traditional monopoly over the word as well as threatened

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<sup>397</sup> Ibrahim 'Abdu, *Tatawur al-Sihafa al-Misriya, 1798-1981* (Cairo: Mua'ssat Sijil al-Arab, 1993), pp.91-230

<sup>398</sup> Ramzi Mikhail, *Al-Sihafah al-Masriyah wa thwarat 1919* (Cairo: al-Hayah al-Ammah lil kitab, 1993), pp.13-82.



the livelihood of lower class 'ulama who used to work as manuscript copyists. Nonetheless, many 'ulama recognised the power of the new technology and even used it as a means to enhance their own opinions for the literate through a cheap and easily accessible manner. Newspapers started as a tool of the new secularised Egyptians but were soon also employed by religious scholars. In fact, Sami al-Kumi argues that the Islamic element was always a crucial element in the Egyptian press. This was clearly evident in al-Waqa' al-Misriyah under the editorship of Rifa'a Tahtawi. Tahtawi employed the newspaper for the revival of the Arabic language and to discuss his opinions about the possibility of reforms from an Islamic point of view.<sup>399</sup> In the last decade of the nineteenth century, many newspapers and magazines had columns specified for *fatwas*, in which they answered questions posed by their readers.

The reformers such as Gamal Eldin Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh and Muhammad Rashid Rida were amongst the first religious scholars who made use of newspapers and journals. In general, reformers claimed the right to interpret the Quran and Sunna (*ijtihad*) independently from the prevailing opinions of the four *madhabs* (schools of law).<sup>400</sup> Followers of these madhabs opposed these claims on the basis that nobody was qualified to interpret these sources on his own, and that all Muslims should abide by the opinions of the

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<sup>399</sup> Sami 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Kumi, *al-Sihafa al-Islamiya fi Masr fi al-qarn al-tas' al-'Ahshar* (Mansura: Dar al-Wafaa, 1992).

<sup>400</sup> It is important to point out that reformers' views were still rooted in traditions. Reformers differ over the qualifications of the *mujtahid* (religious scholar who can exercise making his own judgement independently and directly from the Quran and Sunna) as well as when it is allowed for a *mujtahid* to provide his opinion in a matter previously discussed by his predecessors. Rudolph Peters, "Idjtihad and Taqlid in 18th and 19th century Islam," *Die Welt des Islams*. XX, 3-4, pp.131-145.

founders of the main four schools of law. The fatwa columns or sections, in particular, were amongst the easiest methods for reformers to present to their readers their solutions for their contemporary issues and problems. Since *fatwas* were the most public part of Islamic fiqh, reformers used the printed *fatwas* to offer their proposed solutions to different problems facing their contemporary Muslims by fashioning Islamic law according to the needs of their society, i.e. the results of the new *ijtihad*.

For the current study to be representative of a wide range of the religious opinions concerning contemporary issues of sexuality and gender, it will examine four religious scholars whose career and intellectual background differ from each other. Two of these religious scholars, Muhammad ‘Abduh and Muhammad Rashid Rida, already well-known in scholarship on the Middle East, are categorised as reformers who attempted to stress the link between modernity and Islam. The two other scholars Muhammad ‘Abbas al-Mahdi and Muhammad Bakhit have attracted much less attention from scholarship. Both al-Mahdi and Bakhit held the position of the Grand Mufti in Egypt. Although they were not known as enthusiastic reformists, their careers were also influenced by the intellectual challenges by the West and the internal demands for Islamic revivalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Before introducing the muftis in more depth, it is important to highlight the intellectual challenges that bear their marks on their careers.

### **Islam, modernity and the Muftis**

In 1840, when Sheikh al-Mahdi came to occupy the position of the grand Mufti, Egypt was different than it was two decades earlier. The Westernised reforms that Muhammad Ali introduced in Egypt seemed to leave its impact on every walk of life in Egypt. The ‘ulama as a category started

to feel this influence even more than the rest of the society, as the Pasha stripped them from their traditional hold over waqf land. The Westernised specialist schools established by Muhammad Ali led to the creation of a new category of Western educated intellectuals who competed with the ‘ulama over their prestigious position in Egyptian society. The greatest threat for the ‘*ulama* came from the West. Western scholars characterised Islam as an irrational and traditional, and hence inimical to modernity.

The Western accusations against Islam had their roots in the Western definitions of modernity in Enlightenment Europe. These Western concepts of modernity “presumed a necessary break with the past. The modern is defined in terms of institutional arrangements in which religion has been marginalised from civil society, state and politics.”<sup>401</sup> Whereas the modern is projected as a progressive emancipating historical process, traditions becomes the site of political tyranny and intellectual and social stagnation. By conceptualising the modern in terms of the institutions and practices of Western liberal societies, Islam was depicted as a major obstacle against individuality, liberty and democracy.<sup>402</sup> The Egyptian ‘ulama became increasingly obliged to carve a place for Islam, and consequently for themselves, in a modern Egypt. The following muftis were all influenced to an extent or another by these intellectual challenges, but they also reacted differently to them as shown in the content of their *fatwas*.

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<sup>401</sup> Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p.1.

<sup>402</sup> Muhammad Khalil Masud and Armando Salvatore, “Western scholars of Islam on the Issue of Modernity,” *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp.36-54.

## **Muhammad Al-'Abbasi Al-Mahdi**

The first of our muftis Sheikh Muhammad al-'Abbasi al-Mahdi was born in 1827. He was the son of the Hanafi mufti Sheikh Muhammad Amin al-Mahdi (d.1831-1832). In 1848, al-Mahdi was appointed as the Grand mufti by Ibrahim Pasha. There is no explanation why he was appointed in such an important position despite being young. Because of his youth, Khalil al-Rashidi, al-Mahdi's teacher, was appointed as his secretary to assist him in his duties.<sup>403</sup>

During his 40 year long career, al-Mahdi clashed with two members of the royal family. When the governor 'Abbas (r.1848-1854) wanted to confiscate all properties belonging to Muhammad 'Ali's descendants for his own use; a project that was opposed by al-Mahdi. Again, Isma'il Pasha attempted to convert the royal family *waqfs* to public waqfs again to bring them under his control. Although both projects failed because of al-Mahdi's opposition proving the mufti's integrity and independence from Egypt's rulers, al-Mahdi was still loyal to the royal household. During the 'Urabi revolt against Khedive Tawfik, Al-Mahdi refused to sign a fatwa calling for the deposition of Khedive Tawfiq on the grounds that he disobeyed the Ottoman sultan/caliph.

Al-Mahdi lived in an age of rapid economic, intellectual and institutional reforms. Through analysing his career through his *Al-fatawa al-Mahdiyah* (Al-Mahdi's *Fatwas*), Rudolph Peters argues that al-Mahdi, in his capacity as a Grand mufti, was not considered as an "innovator".<sup>404</sup> He was

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<sup>403</sup> For more information on the biography of Muhammad 'Abbas al-Mahdi, check: Jirji Zaydan, *Tarajim mashahir al-sharq al-sharq fi al-qarn al-thalith al-'ashar* (3rd edition. Beirut: Maktabat dar a-hayat, n.d), vol.II, pp.25-255.

mainly concerned with the application of "shari'ah in strict conformity with the most authoritative opinions of the Hanafi school".<sup>405</sup> When he was asked to comment on the legal validity of *fatwas* founded on the ruling of the other schools of Islamic law, Al-Mahdi consistently rejected them as invalid and even called as the punishment of the mufti who issued them.<sup>406</sup>

Al-Mahdi's *fatwas* were published in May 1887 by the publishing house of Azhar University in a seven volume collection of *fatwas* issued by Muhammad Al-'Abbasi al-Mahdi in 1848. This collection of *fatwas* contains about 13,500 *fatwas* selected from the *fatwas* that he has issued during the period between 1848-1886. The *fatwas* were arranged into chapters reflecting the standard order of other Hanafi legal texts, within each chapter, the *fatwas* are arranged in a chronological order according to the date when they were.

The *fatawa al-mahdiyyah* included a significant number of questions on the opinions of Islamic law with regards to certain aspects of marriage such as guardianship. Early marriage was a common phenomenon in the nineteenth century and even through the first half of the twentieth century. The four Islamic schools of law discussed guardianship and the consent of the wife as one of the most important legal aspects of marriage. Almost all schools of law, except for the Shafi's, made it obligatory that although a woman could be married off by her natural guardian, she should consent to marriage as long as she is in her legal majority or otherwise the marriage contract would be invalid. The consent had to be ascertained directly from the non-virgin bride, while the shyness of the virgin should be taken into consideration and

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<sup>404</sup> Rudolph Peters, "Muhammad Al-Abbasi al-Mahdi," p.81.

<sup>405</sup>Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid, pp.79-82.

subsequently her smiles or silence would constitute consent. Girls under the legal age (pre-puberty or less than 9 years old) were minors who lacked the legal capacity to consent to marriage and thus, it was allowed that a father could marry off his minor daughters. The same rule also applied to his minor sons.<sup>407</sup> The *fuqaha* however made it clear that there was a fundamental difference between the marriage contract and the actual consummation of the marriage. All schools of law asserted that the consummation of marriage should not take place before girls reach puberty. Reaching the age of puberty was either determined by the beginning of menstruation or depending on the opinions of the women who raised her. Reaching puberty was made a condition to ensure that the woman would be capable of enduring the sexual act. Once girls reach puberty, they could exercise the right of annulling marriage.

In his section on marriage in *al-Fatawa al-Mahdiya*, Muhammad Al-'Abbasi al-Mahdi received many questions about the marriage of young girls. One of the enquiries sent to Al-Mahdi demonstrate the discrepancy between the writing of the contract and the age by which a marriage of a minor could be consummated.

**Question:** A young girl who can not tolerate sexual intercourse escaped from her husband's house because of the harm he was causing her. She left her bride shower behind. Should she be only returned to her husband when she is more capable of having sexual intercourse? And is it allowed for her father to take her shower?

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<sup>407</sup> Dawoud S. El-Alami, *The Marriage Contract in Islamic Law* (London: Graham and Trotman, 1992), pp.51-59.

**Reply:** yes.<sup>408</sup>

Another *fatwa* also attest to the spread of early marriages and the problems that it caused for young girls and guardians.

**Question:** A husband wants to consummate his marriage with his young wife claiming that she was capable of tolerating marriage; the father however says that she does not, so what is the rule of the shari'a in the matter?

**Reply:** The mufti Khayr al-din al-Ramli answered this question saying that if the girl is big and fat capable of tolerating men, and the prospective husband already handed over the dower, then the father is forced to hand the wife over to her husband. However, the most accurate of all opinions is that if the girl was those who leave their houses, then she should go to the judge and he decides whether she is physically ready or not. If she is ready, the judge should force the father to give the girl to her husband. If the girl is one of those who do not leave their houses, then the judge should consult the experienced women about their opinions in the physical suitability of the girls.<sup>409</sup>

In these two *fatwas*, Al-Mahdi adhered strictly to the Hanafi school of law's opinions on early marriages. In his two *fatwas*, al-Mahdi took the side of the bride asserting the necessity that a girl should reach puberty and be capable of

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<sup>408</sup> Muhammad Al-'Abbasi al-Mahdi, *al-Fatawa al-Mahdiyya* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Azhar, 1883) vol.1, p.17

<sup>409</sup> *ibid*, vol.1, p.26.

tolerating sexual intercourse before consummating marriage. In his second *fatwa*, Al-Mahdi explained in more details the procedures that should be followed so that the young wife would not be subject to any physical harm. An older woman or a *dayah* should assert that a young girl was physically fit for marital intercourse. The evidence from Al-Mahdi's *fatwas* assert that early marriage was a common practice, however, this practice was not unregulated. Although we do not know who asked these questions, but it seems that many parents were aware of the rights of their daughters in the *shari'ah* law and could have recourse to it whenever necessary.

Although young girls in their legal minority had no voice in the marriage, this was not necessarily the case with women and girls in their legal majority. The *fatawa* demonstrate that not only the Hanafi fiqh gave women the right to select their own husbands and to marry them without the permission of their fathers or uncles, but those women themselves had their own voice in their own marriages. In a question addressed to the mufti most probably from a girl, she asked if an adult virgin girl was allowed to marry a qualified man without the permission of her father if she received a suitable dowry, the mufti agreed.<sup>410</sup> Adult girls also had the right to forfeit a marriage contract her father conducted if he did not take her permission. Another question addressed to al-Mahdi explained that whether the behaviour of an adult virgin girl who forfeited her marriage contract conducted by her father without her knowledge was approved by the *shari'ah*, and the mufti's response was yes.<sup>411</sup> Again we do not know have enough information about who asked these questions, but it is very probable that women themselves were asking

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid, vol. 1, p.29.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid, vol.1, p.28.



about their rights to forfeit marriages conducted by their guardians. This is an evidence that women were familiar with the Islamic legal opinions and could use it effectively in their interests.

Al-Mahdi's adherence to Hanafi fiqh opinions is evident in two of his *fatwas* on illicit relations. The following fatwa is an example:

**Question:** This is a question regarding a man who was accused by his wife of having homosexual relations with his two male servants. The man swore that the servants would never serve him in his house and that he would never have a homosexual relation with them. The man expelled the servants from his house. Later that man travelled to Cairo with a friend of his. This friend requested one of the two servants to serve his friend, and the servant came to where the two friends stayed and assisted them in their business. The servant stayed with them in the same place and the man would be alone with his former servant in the house, and he was asked about that; so he responded by saying that he never assigned any payment to that servant, he never entered his house and he did not do anything with him that displeases God. Given all that, would not this man have been within bounds of his earlier vow since he did not let the servant into his house again and he did not have anything unacceptable with him?

**Reply:**

Since the husband has linked his pledge to a matter which has not materialised, then he is not bound to the divorce. And God knows best.<sup>412</sup>

Al-Mahdi's short and abrupt response might seem shocking. Although he was asked about illicit homosexual behaviour, he was indifferent, and unlike other muftis such as Rashid Rida whom we will discuss later, did not attempt to use his fatwa as a literary exercise to present Islam as a moral religion. Al-Mahdi's *fatwa* must be interpreted within the context of Islamic juristic debates on ruling on homosexuality.

The Quran's treatment of the topic of homosexuality was not explicit and confusing. The Quran only referred to male homosexual acts in the context of narrating the story of Lot's people and it did not specify any punishments for homosexual acts. In fact, certain verses of the Quran (56:16) describing heaven implied that beautiful boys will be sexually accessible for believers in heaven. *Hadith* literature was more elaborate yet equally complex in their discussions of homosexuality. A *hadith* attributed to the prophet warned men from looking with desires on boys and acknowledged that young boys could be as sexually tempting as women. Nonetheless, the majority of *hadiths* condemned homosexual practices. Jim Wafer argues that the complex and contradictory attitudes towards homosexuality in Quran and Sunnah explains the tolerance of love between males provided it is chaste in Arab Islamic culture.<sup>413</sup> Deliberations of the punishments of same-sex relationships

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<sup>412</sup> *Al-Fatawa al-Mahdiya*, vol.1, p.181.

in juristic literature were influenced by each school of law's definition of what constitutes *liwat*. The Hanafi legal school was unique in the way it treated the topic of same sex penetrative anal intercourse (*liwat*). The Hanafi jurists did not consider *liwat* to be an act of fornication, and thus not a *hadd* crime at all. Hanafi jurists explained that same sex intercourse does not have the same consequences as adultery (e.g. bastard children). For the Hanafis, homosexuality was to be punished by a limited number of lashes or imprisonment.<sup>414</sup> The Shafi' school of law considered *liwat* as equivalent for *zina*, yet they differentiated between the punishment of the active and passive partner. If the active partner is *muhsan* (i.e. in a legally valid marriage) then he should be punished by stoning, if not, then he should be punished by 100 lashes. On the other hand, the passive partner was assumed as being incapable of deriving sexual pleasure except through being penetrated, and thus he was not liable to stoning.<sup>415</sup> The Hanbalis asserted that same sex anal intercourse should be punished in the same way as illicit vaginal intercourse without differentiating between active and passive partners. If *muhsan*, a person involved in *liwat* should be stoned, otherwise 100 lashes.<sup>416</sup> Finally, the Malikis prescribed the harshest punishment for *liwat*, demanding that those who are involved in the act should be stoned unconditionally.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Jim Wafer, "Muhammad and Male Homosexuality," in *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History and Literature*, ed. Stephen Murray & Will Roscoe (New York, London: New York University Press, 1997), pp.87-96.

<sup>414</sup> Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World* (London; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p.118.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid, p.119.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid, p.120.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid, p.121.

Al-Mahdi's above mentioned *fatwa* could be partly explained with the context of Hanafi ruling on the topic of homosexuality. Although the Hanafis condemned homosexuality, they were more lenient than other schools of law when prescribing punishments for men involved in homosexual relations. Al-Mahdi was also more concerned with the protection of the family, the nuclei of Muslim community, than with the application of punishments prescribed in Hanafi law to the husband. In her study of the *fatawa* of two Grand muftis (sheikh al-Islam) in seventeenth-century Istanbul on sexuality and gender, Art Gocken argues that their *fatawa* demonstrate that scholars were pragmatic concerned more with the protection of the family, which represented the foundation of Ottoman society, than with strict adherence with Islamic shari'a.<sup>418</sup>

In another enquiry, Al-Mahdi was asked whether a young girl who was raped and who lost her virginity as a consequence would be entitled to a dowry that girls her like received. Al-Mahdi's reply to this enquiry was detailed. According to Al-Mahdi, the man who committed this act was either subject to the implementation of the *hadd* or he should pay a dowry for the raped girl. This, however, depended on the age and physical status of the girl. Al-Mahdi states that if this girl was young yet still sexually desirable for men, then in that case the *hadd* should be carried out. But if the girl was too young to be sexually desirable, then no *hadd* would be implemented and the man is responsible for paying only the dowry that the likes of this girl receive.

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<sup>418</sup> Gocken Art, 'Women and Sexuality in the Fatwas of SheikhuIslam in Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire,' in *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies*, Pinar Ilkcaracan ed. (Istanbul, 2008) pp 81-90.

Al-Mahdi's opinions on illicit sexual relations were influenced by the extent of threat each illicit sex act could pose to the society. This concept was well established in Islamic law, particularly amongst the Hanafis.<sup>419</sup> The Hanafis were very specific in defining zina as a relation between a man and woman who was not his wife or his slave. Sexual relations with a man or with a girl under the age of puberty were not seen as threatening to the society as sexual relations with adult girls. In his *fatwa* on the man who raped a girl, Al-Mahdi was intolerant of the behaviour if the victim was an adult girl.

### **Muhammad 'Abduh**

Muhammad 'Abduh was an influential Muslim thinker who had a lasting influence on the Muslim mind, not only in Egypt but far beyond. 'Abduh was born in a middle class peasantry family, which benefited from Muhammad 'Ali's reforms. His family was a traditional peasant family, in which the father was the head of the family and its main authority. 'Abduh's father was determined to make his son a man of learning. 'Abduh demonstrated a natural aptitude for learning by memorising the whole of the Quran in only two years. He joined the Ahmadi centre for Islamic sciences, but the methodology of instruction repelled the young scholar. He escaped the school and asked to work as a peasant like his brothers. According to 'Abduh's autobiography, his meeting with his uncle Sheikh Darwish changed his life. He told him to learn Islamic sciences by "heart" and through inner discernment. 'Abduh then left to Cairo to join al-Azhar mosque where he studied Islamic philosophy, logic, history, in addition to other subjects that were traditionally

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<sup>419</sup> Elyse Semirdijan, *Off the Straight Path: illicit sex, law and community in Ottoman Aleppo* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), p.26.

taught at Azhar such as *fiqh*.<sup>420</sup> Whether 'Abdu's narrative of his life story was based on real events or it was created for a certain purpose, it reflected Muhammad 'Abdu's dissatisfaction with the existing system of Islamic education in his times.<sup>421</sup> 'Abduh was also a keen disciple of Sheikh Jamal al-din al-Afghani. Both shared the zeal for the reform of Muslim country and the formation of a pan Islamic movement. Under Al-Afghani's influence, he began to study philosophy such as Ibn Sina's *Al-Isharat*.

In 1877, Muhammad 'Abduh started a career of teaching at Al-Azhar. He lectured informally in his book on a wide variety of books including Guizot's book on the history of civilisation in Europe.<sup>422</sup> Between 1800-1882, Muhammad 'Abduh was appointed as the editor of the official newspaper *Al-Waqai' al-misriyah* (The Egyptian Gazette). During that period, the Egyptian Khedive Isma'il became hugely unpopular because of his extravagant expenditures. Muhammad 'Abduh contributed to forming the public opinions through publishing a series of articles in which he criticised the country's economic and social policies.

After the British occupation of Egypt, 'Abduh was exiled outside of Egypt. He lived in Beirut and in Paris where he and Al-Afghani published *Al-Urwah al-Wuthqa*. In 1888, he was allowed to return back on intercession from the British agency and others. 'Abduh had good relations with Lord Cromer, and his critic Wilfred Blunt. He learnt European languages and read

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<sup>420</sup> Mark Sedgwick, *Muhammad 'Abduhh* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010), pp.1-15.

<sup>421</sup> Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p.20.

<sup>422</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.132.

Jacque Rouseau Emile, Herbert Spencer *Education* Strauss' *Life of Jesus*. In 1899, he was appointed as the Grand mufti. In this position, 'Abduh could reinterpret religious laws in accordance with the needs of the age through his *fatwas*.<sup>423</sup>

'Abduh's *fatwas* had to be understood within the context of his thought. The core of Muhammad 'Abduh's thought was the problem of inner decay. He was conscious of the decline of Arab Muslim societies. 'Abduh was a witness to the social transformations of Egyptian society. 'Abduh did not reject these changes; he rather found them unavoidable. However, he was wary of the dangers they could pose to society. 'Abduh observed the division of society into two spheres without any real connection: a sphere which is ruled by Islamic principles always shrinking and another always growing sphere ruled by human reason without consideration to religion. He believed that despite the attempts of secularisation, the Egyptian society would never be wholly secularised.<sup>424</sup> Although 'Abduh admired the achievements of modern Europe, he still criticised Muhammad 'Ali and his successors' attempt to implant European institutions and laws in Egypt. For 'Abduh these new laws were not understood or respected by the people and thus could not be called laws at all.<sup>425</sup>

'Abduh's vision of a reformed Islam was based on the view that Islam is a rational religion which could be used as a basis of a modern life. The Muslim society needs a new type of *'ulama* who should teach and propagate the

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid, p.134.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid, p.136.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid, p.137.

teachings of true Islam. 'Abduh thought Islam would enable Muslims to distinguish between what was good change and what was bad change. The core of 'Abduh's defence of Islam was a conception of a true religion.<sup>426</sup> Muslims ought to accept the entire of Quran and *Sunnah* without hesitation. However, he considered individual *ijtihad* as essential, within certain limits, in matters of *mua'malat*, these transactions directed towards other men and life in this world.<sup>427</sup> The ideal society, according to 'Abduh, the one which submits to God's commandments rationally, already existed in the golden age of Islam. The early community, the *salaf*, represents to 'Abduh what the *umma* ought to be.<sup>428</sup>

During his six years career as a mufti, Muhammad 'Abdu delivered over 1000 *fatwas*, which Muhammad 'Amara, editor of 'Abdu's work, divided into three categories. The first category deals with monetary issues such as religious endowment, inheritance, lease, rent, mortgage, and economic concerns. The second category includes about 100 *fatwas* dealing with family matters, marriage, divorce, alimony and child care. Finally, there were 29 *fatwas* related to crime such as murder and retaliation.<sup>429</sup> The *fatwas* of Muhammad 'Abdu are published in a massive collection of *fatwas* issued by grand muftis of Egypt, from the beginning of the *Dar al-Ifta* to 1989, through al-Azhar publishing house.

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid, p.145.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid, p.148.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid, p.149.

<sup>429</sup> Muhammad 'Abduh, *Al-'Amal al-kamilah*, ed. Muhammad 'Amara (Bayrut: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyah li-Dirasat wa al-Nashr), 2:483-501.



Marriage figured prominently in 'Abduh's writings. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Islamic rules concerning marriage was criticised by Europeans as no more than a means for sexual satisfaction. The European view was justified on the basis of medieval Muslim juristic discussion of marriage. The main thread of these juristic discussions on marriage is “that having licit sexual intercourse become the primary motivation and the most important effect of the marriage contract”.<sup>430</sup> Assuming that marriage is naturally a part of every Muslim’s life unless they are hindered by physical impediments, Muslim jurists did not dwell on the necessity or benefits of marriage but rather focused on the legal procedures of marriage.<sup>431</sup> In his discussion of marriage, Abduh tried to present a different image of Islamic marriage. He discussed the moral and social benefits of marriage as envisaged by the *shari’ah*. The lengthy debates on the sexual rights of the husband vs. that of the wife disappeared from Abduh’s juristic discussion of the institution of marriage. 'Abduh defined marriage as an institution aiming at fostering a family, and focused on the “moral” duties of the couple towards each other. The *shari’ah* asked both men and women to treat each other kindly and to abstain from doing any behaviour that would jeopardise the harmony of their family. It is only through the protection of the sanctity of the family, the family could achieve its goal as envisaged by the *shari’ah*. Abduh thus concluded that marriage in itself is not a pursuit of sex desire itself, but rather marriage is an

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<sup>430</sup> Judith Tucker, *Women, Family and Gender in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.41.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid*, p.41.

institution in which sex could be invested in bringing benefits to people and cooperation between humans.<sup>432</sup>

During his work as a Grand Mufti, 'Abduh was required to issue a *fatwa* on whether it was allowed to formulate a law that prohibited polygamy. 'Abduh supported the formulation of such law. He justified his *fatwa* both rationally and theologically. He explained that polygamy was not characteristic of Islam or even the East. Polygamy was widespread amongst the Gals and the Germanic people. Polygamy occurred because rich and strong men always sought more women, particularly in areas where women's number far exceed that of men. Before Islam, Arab men married an unlimited number of wives as long as they were sexually capable and wealthy, and those wives were no more than properties that men used solely for sexual pleasure. It was Islam, according to Muhammad 'Abduh, that limited the sexual rights of men and ordained more rights for women. As for slave girls, Islam did not put a limit on them. 'Abduh argues that since Quranic verses asserted the impossibility of men's applying just treatment amongst their wives if they marry more than one, then the maximum number of wives should not exceed four including slave girls. 'Abduh believed that Muslim should consider prohibiting polygamy because it was causing social chaos. 'If the condition for polygamy is justice, and justice is deemed impossible by the Quran, then the Quran prohibits polygamy. A judge has the right to prohibit polygamy out of fear of its dire consequences on wives and children.<sup>433</sup> 'Abduh described men who acquired more than one wife as motivated by their sexual desire only. The

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<sup>432</sup> Muhammad Abduh, *al-'Amal al-kamilah*, vol.2 , pp.68-72.

<sup>433</sup> Muhammad Abduh, *al-a'mal al-kamilah*, vol.2 , ed. Muhammad 'Imarah (Beirut: al-mu'assasah al-'arabiyah lil dirasat wa al-nashr. 1980), vol.2, pp.84-90.

end result of polygamy is women's gossip or inter-fighting because of jealousy and half-brothers who would grow to hate each other. These social ills, explained 'Abduh, was part of everyday life. Thus, prohibition of polygamy was a practical solution for these social problems.<sup>434</sup>

Many of 'Abduh's other *fatwas* discuss legal aspects of marriage such as guardianship and marriage between Muslims and converts or Muslims and Christians. In the majority of his *fatwas*, the opinions of 'Abduh did not differ much from that of other Hanafi scholars. However, 'Abduh could make use of certain aspects of Islamic law to support his views of what constitutes a proper marriage and to enhance the rights of wives. The following fatwa issued in 1903 is an example:

**Question:** A girl was married when she was seven years old to another seven year old boy by her father. This father was known to be a drunkard and a gambler. When the girl reached adulthood, she declared the contract to be void. The boy is now a grown up but poor and can not afford a dowry or an alimony. Is that marriage accurate or not ? and if it is not accurate, does it need the agreement of the shar'iah to separate between the two?

**Reply:** The father's bad choice and his reckless behaviour does not make him fit for being a guardian for the girl. It is allowed for the husband and the wife to violate the marriage contract upon reaching adulthood...We are in an age when corruption becomes the norm and the father does not care anymore for the future of his daughter. This corrupt father does not deserve sympathy and should be deprived of his rights. The Islamic fiqh differentiates between men who are capable of

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid, vol.2. pp.78-83.

making correct choices and those who can not. It is also clear from the words of the uncle of the groom is that he was too poor and incapable of spending on his wife, and thus if the girl remains married, she will be harmed. In this case, the husband is not qualified because of his poverty. The poverty of the girl is irrelevant because she is not required to maintain her husband. As the husband is poor and incapable of maintaining his wife, then the marriage is void anyways. The wife has the right to violate the marriage contract after taking her case to the court and the judge should consent to the divorce if all the provided information is accurate.<sup>435</sup>

The examined case is informative. On the one hand, the inquiry itself is an example of the ways in which the guardian could abuse his guardianship rights and marry his daughter against her wish. Nonetheless, it also demonstrates how a mufti could use Islamic law to protect the rights of the minor even from his/her guardians. In this case, ‘Abduh utilises the legal criteria set by the Hanafi fiqh for a proper guardian to deprive the father of his guardianship rights. The guardian, according to Hanafi fiqh, was supposed to be adult, sane and well behaved. A misbehaving (*fasiq* or *majin*) man should not be allowed to be a guardian.<sup>436</sup>

In another inquiry, ‘Abduh was faced with the question of whether the male relatives of a woman in her legal majority had the right to terminate her marriage under the pretext of the husband's unsuitability.

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<sup>435</sup> Zakariya Barri ed. *Al-Fatawa al-Islamiyah min dar a-Ifta al-Misriyah* (Al-Qahira: al-Majilis al-‘ala lil Shun al-Islamiyah, 1980-), vol.1, pp.157-158.

<sup>436</sup> Wahbah al-Zuhahili, *Al-fiqh al-Islami wa adilituhu* (Damascus: Dar al-fikr al-‘arabi, n.d), vol.10, p.69.

**Question:** A Christian man, who converted to Islam, married a Muslim woman whose relatives are Muslim. This woman has an adult son who accepts the marriage contract, and the marriage was consummated. Now, the woman's male cousin wants the marriage to be terminated under the alleged pretext that this husband is not qualified for the wife. Does this male cousin have any right to violate this marriage despite the son's acceptance of the marriage, especially if the son who is the natural guardian in that case agrees to it?.

**Reply:** The *'ulama* agreed on a hierarchy of males relatives in terms of their right to exercise guardianship. The nearest of male guardians to a woman are the son, then the grandson (son of a son), then the father then the grandfather, then the brother, then the nephew (son of a brother), then the uncle and then the cousin ..... etc. The *'ulama* then agreed that it is the right of the male relatives to terminate a marriage if a woman married herself to a man regarded as unsuitable. This right exists to protect the male relatives from the shame that this marriage could bring upon them. However, the acceptance of one of her guardians to her marriage means that other male guardians were deprived of the right to protest against the marriage. Since the son accepts the marriage of his mother, then this marriage is legally accurate.<sup>437</sup>

Intermarriages between Muslims and Dhimmis (Christians and Jews) was very common in the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth

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<sup>437</sup> *Al-Fatawa al-Islamiyah*, vol.1, p.160.

century. This is evident from the number of enquiries on interfaith marriages sent to Muhammad 'Abduh and other muftis. In this *fatwa*, the person who sent the enquiry is unknown but it is possible to discern from the *fatwa* that he/she was familiar with Islamic legal debates on guardianship. In Islamic law, the right of a woman in her legal majority to marry herself was established, however, it is undermined by the right of her male relatives to terminate the marriage. This was the dilemma that the woman in this question was encountering. In this case, 'Abduh again utilised the allowances within Islamic law to protect this woman against the abuses of her male cousin. Muhammad 'Abduh's *fatwas* on marriage should be understood within the context of his thought on reform. Although 'Abduh advocated the improvement of women's position, he attempted to do so within the context of Islamic law because he perceived of Islam as a rational religion and suitable for being the foundation of a modern Egyptian society. In his *fatwa* on polygamy, for example, 'Abduh resorted to the reinterpretation of certain Quranic verses in a manner sympathetic to women. In his other *fatwas* on marriage, 'Abduh could use existing *fiqh* rulings to assert women's rights in Islamic law and ensure that women would not be subjected to male abuse.

### **Muhammad Rashid Rida**

Muhammad Rashid Rida was born in 1865 in a village near Tripoli, in modern day Lebanon. The inhabitants of the village were exclusively Muslim, and the majority claimed descendency from the Prophet. In his childhood, Rashid received traditional elementary education in a *kuttab* in his village. He later continued his education in an Ottoman state school established in 1879. In 1897, Rashid Rida travelled to Egypt, where he became one of 'Abduh's closest disciple.

Throughout his life, Rashid Rida played several active political roles. He was a supporter of the revival of the Ottoman Caliphate, however his ideas fell on deaf ears, particularly in Turkey. From 1911-1912, Rida shifted his support to the pan Arab movements against the young Turks and founded a secret political association with pan Arab goals. The mission of the organisation was to reconcile the rulers of Arab countries. He had good relations with the rulers of the Arab Peninsula such as Sharif of Mecca. He supported the Arab revolt against the Turks led by the Sharif. However, his dream of an Arab caliphate dissipated after the war. Modern day Syria and Lebanon fell to French mandate and Iraq and Palestine came under British mandate. After the Wahabi takeover the Hijaz, Rida established good relations with the Saudis. He defended Wahabism considering it the true form of Islam, even if the Wahabis sometimes inclined to certain exaggerations.<sup>438</sup>

Although Rida was 'Abduh's closest disciple, they had different educational background and perceptions of "true" Islam. Unlike 'Abduh, Rida did not have close interaction with European civilisation. He travelled to Europe only once and for political purposes. He read little or nothing in European language and had close contacts with only one European. He made several hostile remarks of Christianity and was very critical of the European way of life. Rida did not admire the European civilisation, yet he thought it was necessary to borrow certain aspects of it for the development of the Muslim societies.<sup>439</sup> The starting point of Rida's thought was the question of

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<sup>438</sup> W. Ende "Rashīd Riḍā." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011, Brill Online. University of Exeter. 19 June 2011  
<[http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_SIM-6240](http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-6240)

<sup>439</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arab Thought in the Liberal Age*, p.235.

why Muslim countries declined in almost every aspect of civilisation?. Like his teacher 'Abduh, Rida saw in Islamic teaching the road to success in this world.<sup>440</sup> The Quran was the basis of creating an Islamic civilisation out of nothing and Muslims could rebuild their civilisation by returning to the Quran. He attributed the success of the Europeans to their loyalty to their countries (nationalism), and argued that Islam created a sense of unity amongst Muslims across the world. Muslims should feel the same loyalty but to the Muslim community (*ummah*) and to their religion. Unity between Muslims is dependent on finding the true values of Islam. Like 'Abduh, Rida also advocated the view that there was a "true" Islam, and that it was practiced in the early community of Muslim (Salaf). Although 'Abduh defined the Salaf as everyone who contributed to the golden age of Islam from prophet Muhammad to Al-Ghazali, Rida defined the *Salaf* more exclusively. For Rida, the *Salaf* was the first generation of Muslims who had known the prophet and who were mostly influenced by his message.<sup>441</sup>

Like 'Abduh, Rida encouraged *ijtihad* and regarded it as essential of Muslim revival, particularly when it came to matters of *mu'amalat*. He regarded the fiqh concept of *maslaha* and argued that since people's interests varied from one time to another, there can be no *ijma'* in matters of social morality. He regarded that it is the duty of the Muslim community to give themselves a "system of just laws appropriate to the situation in which its past history had placed it."<sup>442</sup> There can be a body of *qanuns*, yet it should be

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<sup>440</sup> Ibid, p.239.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid, 240.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid, 234.



subordinate to the shari'ah. If there is a conflict between both, then it is the shari'ah that is more valid and binding. Like 'Abduh, Rida considered it incumbent upon Muslims to accept the whole of the Quran and Sunna. His interpretation of Sunnism followed the strict Hanbali school, which was popular in Syria. He believed that the revival of Islam is the duty of *ahl al-hal wa al-'iqd* (those who have the power to bind and loose). Rashid Rida advocated the partnership of political and religious authority: a just ruler and a knowledgeable 'alim. He defined *ijma'* as a legislative principle, similar to a parliamentary process.<sup>443</sup>

Muhammad Rashid Rida, unlike Al-Mahdi and 'Abduh, was not an official mufti. Nonetheless, his *fatwas*, which he published in *al-Manar*, were very popular. He received questions from Muslim men and women from different parts of the world. His magazine *Al-Manar* targeted a growing number of Muslims who received secular education needed Muslim learned opinions on everyday issues. The printed press thus formed an important means through which people could easily demand replies for their questions. The *manar* received questions from men and women with different socio-economic background. The majority of people who asked questions were Egyptians but there were questions raised by Muslim readers from other parts of the world. In his *al-Manar*, Rida received questions on marriage, polygamy adultery, foreplay, homosexuality and even about sex in the after life. Rida's responses were usually detailed. In several cases, Rida used the fatwa as a literary exercise to highlight the virtues of Islamic sexual ethics.

Like Al-Mahdi and 'Abduh, Rida was faced with questions on male guardians and women's right to marry on her own. An enquiry sent to Rida by

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

a teacher about the right of a woman in her legal majority to marry without her male guardian's consent. Rida's fatwa was significantly different than those of Al-Mahdi and 'Abduh. For Rida, a woman who married without the consent of her male guardian is an "adulteress".<sup>444</sup> He argued that the Quran and *Sunnah* made it obligatory that the male guardian should be present in all marriages and that a woman must not marry herself. In the same time, Islamic law does not permit a male guardian to marry a woman without her consent. This, according to Al-Rashidi, meant that Islam gave women more social rights prescribed by other religions. Islamic law established male guardianship over women but made it conditional upon justice and kindness to protect the interests of both men and women. Rida justified his *fatwa* by citing a hadith that described women who marry themselves as adulteresses and another that asserted that the marriage of a woman without a guardian is void. According to this *hadith*, if a woman does not have a *wali* then the sultan is her guardian.<sup>445</sup> Rida always compared pre-Islamic society (Jahiliyyah) to the Muslim society to highlight the positive influence of Islam on women's lives, " Before Islam, women were treated like slaves and then God has made them equal to men in right. They were also given financial autonomy."Rida treated women as legally dependent. They were expected to be under male guardianship constantly. Before marriage, women were to be under the guardianship of their fathers, uncles or nearest relatives. After marriage, her husband became her legal guardian. Women's freedom is

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<sup>444</sup>Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Fatawa al-imam Muhammad Rashid Rida* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid,1970-1971),vol.1, p.192-198.

<sup>445</sup> Some Hadith collectors doubted the accuracy of the hadiths as Rida himself admitted.

accordingly restricted: she is not permitted to travel for a far distance without the permission of her guardian, marry without his presence or even demand divorce without consulting with her male relatives. Rida concluded that these restrictions aimed at protecting the dignity of both men and women because women's marriage to the wrong man could bring disgrace and shame upon the family. Because God's purpose of marriage is cooperation between different families and tribes, then a woman's wrong choice could end into bloodshed or the humiliation of reputable households.

Rida's *fatwa* reflects the dilemma between the rights of women in the foundational texts of Islam and in the juristic discourses. Although women were assigned full legal capacity in inheriting and managing their private properties, some legal schools deprived women of the right to conduct their own marriage arrangements since the choice of a husband influences the male relatives and therefore must be vetted by them.<sup>446</sup> Unlike Al-Mahdi and 'Abduh, Rida resorted to strict Islamic legal views on the rights of women to conduct their own marriages. Rida's main concern was the maintenance of gender hierarchy in Muslim society, in which women were expected to be subordinate. In medieval juristic thinking, men were depicted as the main breadwinners and women were seen as dependents.

Rashid Rida's fatwa on polygamy was also significantly different than that of his teacher 'Abduh. In his *Al-Manar*, Rida received two enquiries about the divine wisdom behind polygamy. One of these questions was raised by an Egyptian doctor living in America. He complained that his American friends criticised Islam because men were allowed to have more than one wife. The

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<sup>446</sup>Judith Tucker, *Women, Family*, p.173.

second question was asked by a woman who was questioning the divine wisdom behind Islamic permission of polygamy. The two questions started to reflect the doubts of men and women who received modern Western education of Islamic sexual ethics.

In his *fatwas*, Rida defended polygamy and asserted the necessity of the continuity of the institution. However, he justified his opinions by drawing from his contemporary medical theories on sexuality. Polygamy could be explained, according to Rida, by referring to men and women's different sexual nature. Men are by nature always interested in having sex with women and thus it is possible for a man to have more than one woman. Some women, by contrast, could spend their entire lives without a man because they were by nature much less interested in sex. Rida added that men were also allowed to marry more than one woman because they could have children all their lives, while women could have children only till they reach menopause. Rida did not defend the prophet's multiple marriages in the same way he defended the institution itself. The prophet was not interested in sex or otherwise he would have selected the most beautiful of women. On the contrary, the prophet married widows sometimes as a charitable acts. The prophet's other marriages were intended to form political alliances with the wife's tribe, or to strengthen his relations with closest Companions, or to show respect for elite women who were enslaved during the Muslim campaigns.<sup>447</sup>

Rida's fatwa again asserted his keenness on maintaining the status quo. Unlike his teacher, Rida did not admire Western cultural habits and was cautious about the transformations of Muslim societies. He regarded

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<sup>447</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Fatawa al-imam Muhammad Rashid Rida* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid, 1970-1971), vol.1, p.118-120.

polygamy, since it was permitted by the Quran and practiced by the Prophet and his companion, an institution that should be preserved. He tried to defend it by borrowing from the medical discourses on male and female sexualities to convince the opponents of polygamy amongst his readers, who probably received modern secular education. He criticised those who object to polygamy as falling under the spell of Christianity and the European exaggerated ways of showing respect to women. He nonetheless admitted that polygamy could have many ill effects, however, he did not see these negative consequences too harmful to justify outlawing polygamy. Rida was not against the improvement of women's position, however, he also supported the continuity of a gender hierarchy unchallenged. In his two *fatwas*, Rida believed that women should not aim to get more rights than those described in Quran, Sunnah and legal traditions. Unlike 'Abduh, rather than using religious rulings to leverage women, he used much strict views reflecting his interest in protecting the existing moral and cultural traditions.

What is the exact meaning of *Zina*?. This was a question sent to Muhammad Rashid Rida. The question was not new and has been subject of medieval juristic discussions. Islamic law divides sex into legal and illegal sexual intercourse. According to the Quran, Sunnah and the works of medieval jurists, lawful sex is defined as approved acts between sex partners who are legally permitted for each other. Lawful sexual intercourse was divinely approved form of sexual pleasure. Unlawful sexual acts, on the other hand, are defined as illegitimate sexual intercourse between partners who are forbidden to each other and/or engagement in prohibited sexual acts (even if these prohibited acts took place between a legally married couple). Amongst all illicit sexual acts condemned by Muslim jurists, adultery (*zina*) came to

occupy the lion's share of Muslim jurisdiction. The discussion of zina in Islamic jurisprudence was mainly founded on the Quranic references to Zina. The Quran refers to zina in three instances. Surat al-isra (17:32) states that zina "is a shameful deed and an evil opening the road to other evils." In Surat al-Nur, the Quran prescribes punishment for zina, "The adulteress and the adulterer guilty of adultery or fornication, flog each of them with a hundred stripes." The Quranic verses prescribed equal punishments for both men and women, married or unmarried. In Surat al-Nur (24:2-5), the Quran also sets the criteria for confirming the crime of adultery and subsequently carrying out the punishment. The verse specified that at least four witnesses should testify to seeing the act of adultery or punishing those who accuse innocent women without proof: "All those who launch an attack against chaste women and produce not four witnesses (to support their allegations), flog them with eighty stripes." The Quranic verses set the punishment for committing the crime of adultery described as could be leading to major crimes, yet they also warned against the abuse of these laws, particularly against women.

In the literature of *hadith* (prophetic traditions) alongside the actions and sayings of his Companions, there are also references to *zina* and its punishment. It seemed, however, that there was a discrepancy between the punishments prescribed for zina in the Quran and those prescribed in some prophetic traditions and Companions' actions. Many prophetic sayings agreed with the Quran that flogging should be the punishment for *zina*, others, however, prescribed stoning as a punishment for adulterous affairs. According to *hadith* collectors, cases of stoning adulterers and adulteresses actually took place during the time of the prophet, as well as during the rule of the four Guided Caliphs. The inconsistency between the punishments prescribed by

the Quran for *zina* and those believed to be carried out by the Prophet and his Companions was even spelled out by one of the Prophet's Companions, Caliph 'Umar, who expressed his fear that the practice of stoning as a punishment for adultery would not be carried out after a long time because it is not mentioned in the Quran.<sup>448</sup> The punishment of stoning was borrowed by Muslims from their neighbouring Jews as an incident in which the prophet had to carry out a punishment of adultery on a Jewish couple. The Prophet asked about the punishment prescribed in the Torah for adultery and when he knew it was stoning, he carried out the punishment on the Jewish convicts.<sup>449</sup>

Muslim jurists encountered the problem of finding an exact definition of what constitutes "zina", before setting the rules for these punishments. The works of jurists from the four schools of law agree that zina is a sexual intercourse between a man and a woman outside a valid marriage, semblance (*shubha*) of marriage, or unlawful ownership of a slave girl.<sup>450</sup> All Sunni jurists agree that the essential element for the hadd crime is the man's penetration in

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<sup>448</sup> Umar is believed to have said "I am afraid that after a long time has passed, people may say we do not find the verses of *rajim* in the Holy Book, and consequently they may go astray by leaving an obligation that Allah has revealed. Lo! I confirm that the penalty of *rajim* be inflicted on hom who commits illegal sexual intercourse if he is already married and the crime is proved by witnesses or pregnancy or confession..... 'Umar added, Surely Allah's apostle, peace be upon him, carried out the penalty of *rajim*, and so did we after him." 'Abdur Rahman I. Doi, *Shari'ah: The Islamic law* (London: Ta Ha publications, 1984), pp.239-240.

<sup>449</sup> Elyse Semerdijane, *Off the Straight Path: Illicit Sex, Law and Community in Ottoman Law* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), pp.13-14.

<sup>450</sup> Colin Imber, "Zina in Ottoman law," in *Studies in Ottoman History and Law* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1996), p.176.

the vagina, except for the Hanbalis who also include anal intercourse.<sup>451</sup> Zina must be established either by confession taken in four different situations or by the testimony of four witnesses, who must all agree to have witnessed the actual act of penetration.<sup>452</sup> According to this specific definition of zina agreed upon by all four schools of law, any sex acts which do not amount to a sexual intercourse between a man and a woman do not count as *zina* and subsequently are not punishable in the same way.<sup>453</sup> The Islamic juristic definition of zina and limiting it only to penetrative vaginal sexual intercourse to the exclusion of other unlawful sex acts taking place between a man and a woman was perceived by nineteenth-century Orientalists as a reason for the Islamic moral decline.

In the twentieth century, Muhammad Rashid Rida was asked by one of his readers to define *zina*. The question was sent to him by an Egyptian man whose friends define zina differently. One group defined zina as *al-fahisha al-kubra*, a complete vaginal sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who are unmarried. The second team defines *zina* as the ejaculation of sperm, in any manner. Rashid Rida's *fatwa* defined *zina* in a fashion more strict than the majority of medieval and modern jurists. He started by citing a prophetic tradition that states that “all humans will have a share of adultery, which he/she will commit regardless of any reasons. The eyes’ adultery is the look, the ears’ adultery is listening, tongue’s adultery is talking, and hands’ adultery

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<sup>451</sup> Rudolph Peters, *Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law: Theory and Practice from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth-first Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.61.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid, p.60.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid, p.66.



is the touch , .... And the heart loves and wishes and the *farj* (penis or vagina) carry this out or not.” What is meant by the *hadith* is a man’s look to a forbidden woman with desire is *haram* (religiously unacceptable) and also every touch to a forbidden woman is *haram*. On the basis of these prophetic traditions, Rashid Rida assumed that a man’s enjoyment by looking at the body of a woman who is not his wife or slave girl is *haram*.<sup>454</sup> Rida defined *zina* as having an inappropriate desire for a foreign woman.

He divided adultery into grades, the lowest of which is a look with desire and the highest of which is having sexual intercourse. According to Rida, the governors implemented the *hadd* only when the highest grade of the crime is committed because of its potential moral, physical and civil damages. As for other forms of adultery such as kissing, touching and looking with desire, they are punishable as any *ta’zir* crime because they cause less damage to the *ummah* or its social organisation.<sup>455</sup> Finally, Rida asserted that enjoying a forbidden woman’s body without having complete sexual intercourse with her still had negative consequences. Firstly, the involvement in such an act would weaken a person’s religion and belief in God. A man could become sexually obsessed and occupied by his beloved till the satisfaction of his desires by sexual intercourse. Secondly, men could feel less masculine and act as eunuchs because they were enjoying women's bodies without having a complete intercourse with these women. Finally, this act could have damaging social consequences. It could lead to quarrels between the families of the involved man and woman. Men would be less interested in marriage and

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<sup>454</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Fatawa al-imam Muhammad Rashid Rida* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid,1970-1971), vol.1p 72.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid, p.72.-73.

because of its responsibilities as long as they were capable of satisfying their desires somewhere else.

Another enquiry about homosexuality addressed to Rashid Rida attest to his strict attitudes towards all illicit sex acts. The question was addressed to him by a person who had some knowledge of *fiqh* or at least with juristic discussions of homosexuality. This person asked whether both active and passive partners were liable to punishment and he also referred to the Hanafi ruling that homosexuality should not be regarded as a *hadd* crime at all.

Rida replied explained that God commanded punishing those who commit sex acts outside the boundaries of marriage including homosexual acts. Rida implicitly criticises the Hanafi jurists for excluding those involved in same sex penetrative intercourse from *hadd* punishments. The denial of the punishment of homosexual sex was, according to Rida, a denial of the Quran itself. Rida justified his view by drawing an analogy between the social chaos that could result from *liwat* and *zina* arguing that the spread of homosexuality in a nation could cause the loss of progeny and the destruction of a family. Rida thus advocated the application of *hadd* punishment to both the active and passive partner.<sup>456</sup>

Rida's harsh approach towards *zina* and *liwat* could be partly attributed to his strictness in the interpretation of Quran and *Sunnah*. His *fatwas* on *zina* and *liwat* did not adhere to any of the legal opinions of the four major schools of law, and were based entirely on his own *ijtihad*. He employed Quranic verses and prophetic traditions to completely outlaw not only the illicit sex act itself, but also the desire. Rida, like his contemporaries,

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<sup>456</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Fatawa al-imam Muhammad Rashid Rida*, vol.1,pp.271-273.

encountered Orientalist accusations of the laxness of Islamic sexual ethics, and subsequently the inferiority of Muslim civilisation. By interpreting Quran and Sunnah in a strict fashion, Rida was merely attempting to stress the superiority of Islamic moral system.

The Orientalist accusations alone could not justify Rashid Rida's strict views on illicit sexual behaviour. The increasing Europeanization of Egyptian society was a source of anxiety for many religious scholars, particularly in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Some of Rida's *fatawa* echo his worries from the increasingly weakened control over the mixing between men and women, women's participation in public life and more importantly the spread of secular ideas amongst the growing middle classes in Egypt. In a *fatwa* that comes as a response to a question by a Lebanese former student of al-Azhar on the laxity of Egyptians morals, Rida criticized openly the predominant social and political conditions in Egypt. He demanded the government and 'ulama to take an active role in putting an end to the increasing corruption of Egyptian society:

**Question:** The Egyptian women are increasingly behaving wildly in the streets. They are dressed in tight cloths which reveal the curves of their body and short dresses that show their legs and necks. This recklessness causes *fitnah* (social chaos) and threatens one's belief. I do not understand why the Egyptian government is tolerating this behaviour, is it not its duty to control the reasons for *fitnah* in which its subjects are now immersed? What is exactly the reason for the government's silence on these issues despite the danger these acts pose for the neighbouring countries such as Al-Hijaz, Najd and Sudan? And

what about the Egyptian *ulama*, is it not their duty to advise people against these sins and try their best to put an end to this corruption, is it not a sin to ignore all these misbehaviours? What are they silent in front of all this corruption?.

**Reply:** Women's laxness is increasing in Egypt and its evils are spreading a year after another. It is becoming a danger that could destroy the bonds of families and nations. The Egyptian government is silent because it is being Westernised and it is controlled by the British occupation. The colonising Franks are determined to destroy the religion of this nation and its morals to resolve all the ties by which our nation could be a unified nation with special characteristics to live to and by nature refuse colonisation. The beginning of this moral corruption could be attributed to the reign of Ismail Pasha i.e. before the British occupation so it paved the way for what his men did by resisting religious education and weakening it by opening governmental schools and allowing moral corruption. Hundreds of men working in the government became atheists (secular) or morally corrupt who do not did not pray or fast and who made fun of those who prayed and fasted describing them as retarded or old fashioned. As for coining the government as Islamic then it means only that it is a government that rules a nation whose majority are Muslims and that it respects the feelings of those Muslims by building mosques or opening *mulids* (festivals held for a saint's anniversary). This, however, has nothing to do with being a truly Islamic government as the Imamiyah government in Yemen or the Saudi government in Najd, which establishes the *shari'ah* and prohibits all the evil deeds. To sum up,

what spread amongst the Egyptians from women's laxness would have never come to this harrowing extent except because of the acceptance of the men of the government and other rich extravagant Egyptians. As for the *'ulama*, It is proven from the hadith and the sunnah that it is a necessity upon every Muslim to command the good and forbid the bad. And this behaviour is the basis of a sound religion upon which the umma could build its foundations, and the *'ulama*, above any other, should be committed to commanding only the good amongst Muslims. And when we tried to encourage the *ulama* to carry out this duty, there were others who blamed us and demanded the people to stop reading *al-manar*. We thank God that these years there are many Muslim scholars and organisations who resist the spread of atheism and forbid people from committing sins or believing *bid'ahs* and the ministry of *awqaf* assists them such as the organisation of the Muslim youth and the guidance organisation in Cairo and we, by God's help, assist all these organisations, and we have brothers and supporters in them.<sup>457</sup>

By the 1920's, Westernisation influenced people's lifestyles in Egypt. The policies of Muhammad 'Ali's successors dramatically altered the country. The chasm between traditional and Westernised spheres of the society was widening. Rida was also critical of the European culture and civilisation which he saw as endangering the Muslim society. Rida was the first of a line of religious scholars who objected to these rapid social changes regarding them as evil and focusing their opposition to women's code of dress. He was clearly disappointed by the Egyptian state's indifferent attitude to social morality.

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<sup>457</sup>Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Fatawa Muhammad Rashid Rida*, vol.6, p.2203.

This could perhaps explain his admiration of the Wahabi regime in al-Hijaz because of their strict application of Islamic law.

Rida's fear of sin and insistence that Muslims should follow a strict code of Islamic law could also explain his *fatwas* on some non reproductive sex acts between married couples. He was asked by a husband if sucking his wife's breasts would make him ser on and violate their marriage. Rida replied that religious scholars distinguished between sucking breasts for sexual pleasure and breastfeeding of an infant. The latter case only has a sanctifying effect. He explained that in only one exceptional case, prophet Muhammad commanded the wife of one of his companions to breast her slave (a young boy) because she used to treat him as a son. Although Rida asserted that Islam is merciful, understanding and respectful of the strong social bonds, he recommended that the husband should stop this sexual act as a precautionary measure.<sup>458</sup>

Despite Rida's strict attitude to illicit sexuality or non-reproductive sex act, he warned Muslims from negatively perceiving of sex desire. One of the questions sent to him Muhammad Rashid Rida was asked two questions on the nature of sexual pleasure in the afterlife. The first question came from an Egyptian man whose friend, a student in Dar al-'ulum, told him that Heaven does not have food, drink or sex as it is known in this life. The friend from Dar al-'ulum explained that whenever a person desires these things in Heaven, he would feel their pleasure only and that the heaven promised for believers were different than that where Adam and Eve were. The student, from Dar al-'Ulum, was clearly influenced by some of his contemporary apologetic

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<sup>458</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Fatawa*, vol.6, p.2237.

explanations of Muslim Heaven which tried to deny the existence of uninhibited and unlimited sexual pleasures.

Rida's response came contrary to this apologetic trend asserting that sexual pleasure is a need of humans, which Islam accepts:

There is no controversy amongst Muslims that humans are brought back in the afterlife in the same way he was in this life. In other words, his reality does not change from humanity to any other form, and he can not be more evolved in heaven than he was in this life, and thus his life becomes healthy and free from any defects. As long as the person is human there is no need to deny that he will be eating or drinking or that there would be sex between the married couple. The verses came perfectly clear on that matter so there is no need to take them out of context or explain them according to people's different desires. It might be true that the pleasures one would feel in heaven surpass any pleasure one felt in this life but there is nothing to contradict that these pleasures would mix between sensual bodily pleasures and spiritual pleasures, because the human has no soul. And I do not know the reason behind the spread of the ideas of the Greek and Christian philosophers that sensual pleasures are defects in the human creation which does not suit the afterlife. If they investigate it properly, they would recognise that it is part of the perfection of the creation. If the human exaggerates in seeking pleasures and might be even driven by his pleasures to attack other people's rights, then these pleasures become harmful and a good person has to be moderate in his pleasures. As for your opinion about heaven as being the same in which Adam

used to live there is no evidence on that and it is probable that heaven would be one of the beautiful basatin (gardens) of this world as the story was not a proper representation in the stages of humans in this life.<sup>459</sup>

The enquiry demonstrated Muslims' attempt to defend the Quran in an era largely influenced by Victorian sexual mores and racist theories of civilisation. It is clear from the enquiry that some Muslims, including jurists, adopted attempted to interpret these Quranic verses in an apologetic mode or at least confer a spiritual dimension to pleasures in Heaven. Rashid Rida rejected this approach. Rather than depicting sexual pleasure as a human deficiency, he stressed that it as an evidence of the perfection of human creation. The sexual pleasures promised for Muslim in the heaven should not be denied, yet he still warned Muslims from being obsessed in seeking sexual pleasures.

In another enquiry, Muhammad Rashid Rida responded to another type of doubts about sexual pleasures in Heaven. A woman asked Rida about the reason behind favouring men over men in heaven by giving the former hur to enjoy while depriving women of similar sexual pleasures although Heaven should be given to men and women because of their good deeds. In response to her enquiry, Muhammad Rashid Rida challenged the pictures given by medieval scholars on the nature of *hur*. He explained that the hur were always assumed to be women of heaven but there is no Quranic evidence to prove that. He argued that since women, like men, would go to Heaven and enjoy sexual pleasure with their own partners, then it is likely that the hur are the

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<sup>459</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Fatawa al-imam Muhammad Rashid Rida* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid, 1970-1971). Vol.2, pp511-513.



same as these believing woman.<sup>460</sup> This was certainly a different explanation provided by the medieval commentators. It is true Quranic verses promised women that they will enjoy sexual pleasures in heaven like men as the virtuous amongst them will return back to their husbands and become their legal wives. The women would not suffer any earthly cares and pains and would only spend time enjoying themselves, yet we do not find any claims that the huris are the same as believing women. Muhammad Rashid Rida's fatwa was one in many ways modernist religious scholars attempted to encounter the doubts on Islam and its attitudes towards sexuality.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the role played by religious scholars to shape ordinary people's views on gender and sexuality through the important and popular medium of fatwa. The study examined the works of four muftis who came from different backgrounds, with different techniques and careers. In the examined period, the making of the fatwa went through a process of institutionalization which limited the flexibility of opinions that Muslims could have resorted to before the mid-nineteenth-century.

Despite the state's attempts to monopolize the *fatwa*, the analysis of the *fatwas* of three religious scholars asserted the multiplicity of religious opinions on sex-related issues, such as marriage, polygamy and illicit sex. The fatwa of each religious scholar was influenced by his own educational background and intellectual outlook. The three muftis used different

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<sup>460</sup>Ibid, vol.2, p.517.

techniques including the use of medicine or social sciences to justify their *fatwas*.

We know that by the early twentieth century, the *fatwas* were more accessible through the printed press. People asked questions about a wide range of sexual issues including very private details about their sexual lives. It is however difficult to determine the extent by which the *fatwas* literature could influence people's actual sexual behavior. The multiplicity of religious opinions meant that people could select those which mostly suited them. This chapter focuses on three famous muftis, belonging to the high-ranking *'ulama*. It will be thus helpful not to undermine the contributions of low-ranking *'ulama*, preachers or imams of small mosques, to constructing knowledge about what was considered proper or improper sexual behavior from a religious point of view.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Sexual Fears: Public Discourses on Prostitutes and Prostitution in Egypt 1828-1928**

In this thesis, it has been argued that gradually over the course of the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries how women were encouraged to think of themselves as the “weak sex”, sexually passive and lacking in sexual desire. On the other hand, men were projected to be biologically sexually aggressive and incapable of controlling their sexual desires. Despite their different visions on topics such as gender equality, veiling and women’s public role, feminists, nationalists and religious scholars agreed that the “modern” Egyptian woman would be a chaste and a respectable mother, wife and daughter. In opposition to this “ideal” of Egyptian womanhood stood the prostitute; the woman who failed to conform to the ideal of Egyptian womanhood as constructed by intellectual and social discourses. In pre-modern Egypt, the prostitutes were merely members of an ill-reputed profession. However, by the late nineteenth century, this chapter argues that the representations of the figure of the “prostitute” changed.

In the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, prostitution became too a widespread phenomenon to be swept under the carpet. The rapid political and socio-economic transformations of the nineteenth century led to the proliferation of prostitution in Cairo, Alexandria and other major Egyptian cities. The prostitute and prostitution became the topic of serious debates by medical professionals, religious scholars, nationalists, and feminists. Rhetoric against female prostitution was influenced by interrelated discourses on modernity, nationalism and anti-imperialism. This chapter

examines public discourses on prostitution and the legal and social policies designed for its surveillance and control. The shift in the medical and scientific conceptualizations of male and female sexualities influenced nationalist and feminist discourses, which projected the prostitute as “victims” of men’s rampant sexuality and socio-economic conditions. Through the “victimization” of the prostitute and campaigning against prostitution, nationalists and feminists could voice their opposition to the British, the government and the prevailing social conditions.

There was a discrepancy, however, between public discourses on the prostitutes and the social and legal policies designed to curb prostitution. The “prostitute” , and not her male partner was to be punished or marginalized. The segregation between the “chaste” woman and the prostitute remained the main official and social concern.

### **Prostitution in Mamluk and Ottoman Egypt**

Prostitution was a common feature of urban life in Mamluk Egyptian society. Prostitution was one of very few options for poor women without education in medieval Muslim societies.<sup>461</sup> In Mamluk Cairo, prostitution proliferated in several quarters of the city, such as *Harat al-zayny*, *Ard al-tabalah*, *Bulaq*, and *harat al-rum* (the Frankish quarter). The Frankish quarter was populated by Franks, captured during Mamluk wars against the Crusades and settled in Cairo, and their descendants. Settled in Cairo, Frankish captives had to work for their living. Being Christian was an advantage for the Franks who worked primarily in the making and selling of

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<sup>461</sup>Maya Shatzmiller, “Aspects of Women’s Participation in the Economic Life of Later Medieval Islam: Occupations and Mentalities,” *Arabica* , v.35 (March 1988), p.44.

wine. Historical chronicles provide evidence that large quantities of wine were produced in the Frankish, which suggests a large clientele. Egyptian historians such as Al-Maqrizi (1362-1442) accused Frankish owners of brothels of arranging prostitution for both men and women.<sup>462</sup> Female prostitution and transvestism were particularly visible during popular celebrations of Coptic Nawruz.<sup>463</sup> The Mamluk state generally tolerated prostitution and even imposed taxes on prostitutes. The first Mamluk Sultan Mu'izz al-din Aybak imposed taxes on whorehouses and sellers of wine and *hashish* (opium).<sup>464</sup> Later on, Mamluk sultans continued to recognize prostitution as a profession, and to collect taxes from prostitutes through the guarantor of prostitutes (*daminit al-maghani*) who was responsible for collecting taxes from her fellow prostitutes in return for the state's protection.<sup>465</sup> The Mamluks' state tolerance of prostitution was pragmatic. Mamluk sultans recognized that the prohibition of prostitution would not mean the end of the practice but that the state would only lose an important source of revenue.

Occasionally, Mamluk rulers banned prostitution in response to the demands of orthodox Muslim scholars who condemned prostitution as a form

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<sup>462</sup> Julien Loiseau, "Frankish Captives in Mamlūk Cairo," *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean*, vol. 23, issue 1, April 2011, pp.37-52.

<sup>463</sup> Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.40-51. Huda Lutfi, "Coptic Festivals of the Nile: Aberrations of the Past?" *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, ed. Thomas Philipps and Ulrich Haarmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.254-282.

<sup>464</sup> Taqi al-din Ahmad ibn 'Ali Al-Maqrizi, *al-Mawa'iz wa al-'Itibar* (Cairo: Maktabat althaqafah al-diniyah, 1987), vol.2, p.90.

<sup>465</sup> Muhammad Ibn Ahmad ibn Iyas. *Nuzhat al-umam fi al'ajaib wa al-hikam* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1995).

of adultery.<sup>466</sup> Historical chronicles assert that some Mamluk sultans banned prostitution in response to the *'ulama's* complaints. The Mamluk Sultan Baybars I (1223-1277) launched a wide-scale campaign to ban prostitution, drugs and wine drinking. These campaigns must be understood within the context of the symbiotic relationship between the Mamluk sultans and the *'ulama*, which enabled the Mamluk state to rule and endowed its rule with its Islamic content. The gains of the *'ulama* from their relationship with the sultans were enormous. They preserved their position as the class that embodied Islam and defined and protected its values. The *'ulama* could also preserve the Islamic identity of the society and harmonize Islamic theology and social practice by encouraging sultans to impose strict moral codes on the people.<sup>467</sup> Simultaneously, Mamluk sultans' campaigns boosted their legitimacy. In his official biography of Baybars I, Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir (1223-92), chief clerk in the chancery, described Baybars's ban of drugs and wine and campaigns against prostitution as examples of his pious acts.<sup>468</sup> The tyrannical enforcement of public morality was subject of public criticism. In his famous play *Tayf al-khayyal*, the poet Ibn Daniyal (d.1310 A.D.) projected Cairo as a battleground between two moral extremes, those who violate moral codes boastfully and those enforce morality with the sword. The poet implicitly criticized the sultans who, in their attempts to impress the *'ulama* and their

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<sup>466</sup> Ahmad ibn Ali Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Inbā al-ghamr bi anbā al-'um*, ed. Hassan Habashi (Cairo: 1998), vol.1, p.127.

<sup>467</sup> Yacov Lev, "Symbiotic Relations: Ulama and the Mamluk Sultans," *Mamluk Studies Review*, (2009) vol.13, issue 1, pp. 1-26.

<sup>468</sup> Amina El-Bendary, "The Sultan, the Tyrant and the Hero: Changing Medieval Perceptions of al-Zahir Perceptions," *Mamluk Studies Review*, vol.5, 2001, pp.141-157.

subjects, became too stringent in their application of the *shari'ah*. It is possible to conjecture from Ibn Daniyal's play that sultans' grandiose display of piety, suggested Ibn Daniyal, was only a measure to legitimize that they came to power through murder and deception.<sup>469</sup>

Like the Muslim states that predated it, the Ottoman state was expected to uphold public morality. Historical evidence suggests that the Ottomans tolerated prostitution and considered it a lowly profession. Like other occupational groups under Ottoman rule, prostitutes were organized in a guild. The head of the guild was responsible for overseeing the prostitutes' affairs and collecting taxes from the prostitutes for the state. The degree of the Ottoman state's tolerance of prostitutes, however, differed from one place to another. In Istanbul, capital of the Ottoman Empire, the state was vigilant of prostitutes' activities. Sultanic decrees confined the prostitutes to red light districts, prevented Muslim prostitutes from sleeping with non-Muslim men and sometimes prevented prostitutes from practicing their trade in the holy month of Ramadan. In the eighteenth century, the Ottoman state tightened its grip over prostitution in Istanbul. Organized and non-organized prostitution were on the rise due to economic hardships and migration from rural areas to the city. The court records of Ottoman Istanbul demonstrated that the police sometimes raided whorehouses and arrested prostitutes, especially in response to neighbours' complaints. The measures taken by the state, however, were not effective in curbing prostitution. Prostitutes were usually banished to other cities or only imprisoned for a limited time.<sup>470</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> Cyrus Ali Zargar, "The Satiric Method of Ibn Daniyal: Morality and Anti-Morality in "Tayf al-Khayyal", " *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol.37, N.1. (2006), pp. 68-108.

In Ottoman provinces, local communities, not the state, policed the crimes of prostitution mostly due to the ineffectiveness of the Ottoman police. In Ottoman Aleppo, prostitution prevailed and often involved entire households. The court records of Ottoman Aleppo showed that resident of a certain quarter brought prostitutes to the court complaining of their activities. The court records of Aleppo showed that corporal punishment was never practiced in cases of prostitution or procuring of prostitution. Although prostitution was clearly a violation of Islamic law, removal or banishment from the city quarter was the only punishment administered against prostitutes in the courts of Aleppo.<sup>471</sup> This in turn suggests that prostitutes were given the green light by legal authorities to practice their trade.

In Ottoman Egypt, the local authorities also tolerated prostitution yet regulated it. In his account of his travels in Egypt, the Ottoman traveller Evliya Chelebi (1611-1682) described the different categories of female and male prostitutes in Egypt, their numbers and their relations with the state. Chelebi included prostitutes and pimps in the list of the ill-reputed guilds and described them as “damned people who had neither manners nor religion”. These guilds of low status also included beggars, slave sellers, surgeons who perform castration on eunuchs, thieves and pick pockets, streets sweepers, and those who sell poor quality foods such as butchers of camel meat and cooked rats.<sup>472</sup> According to Chelebi, about 800 professional prostitutes lived in *Bab al-Luq* (a district in Cairo) where they practiced their trade openly,

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<sup>470</sup> Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Ottoman Istanbul* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), pp.86-111.

<sup>471</sup> Elyse Semerdijan, “Sinful Professions: Illegal Occupations of Women in Ottoman Aleppo, Syria” *Hawaa*, vol.1, issue 1 (2003), pp. 60-85.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid*, pp.483-487.



while more than two thousands women lived in respectful neighbourhoods and attracted their clients through intermediaries. The prostitutes were in guilds led by one of them. The names of the prostitutes and the pimps for whom they worked were kept in police (*shurtah*) registers. The police officers knew the names of the prostitutes and the locations of the whorehouses where they could keep them under their gaze, but would only interfere directly if the prostitutes were involved in violent crimes. <sup>473</sup>

How can we explain the Ottoman state's lenient attitude towards prostitution? For the Ottoman state, prostitution was mainly a mean profession yet the taxes collected from the prostitutes were considered an important source of revenues. It is also possible to argue that it was difficult for the legal authorities to establish the evidence needed for proving the crime of zina, which made it difficult to carry out the *hadd* punishment. Finally, the proliferation of prostitution and the fact it was sometimes a family business suggests that some families were facing severe economic problems that the state failed to solve.

### **Prostitution in Modern Egypt, 1800-1928**

In the first two decades of the nineteenth-century, the Egyptian government under Muhammad 'Ali (r.1805-1840) continued to recognize prostitution as a profession and collect taxes from prostitutes. In fact, the state collected large sums of taxes from prostitutes, dancers, and entertainers throughout Egypt. In 1821 budget, these taxes amounted to about 300 pounds from a total of 240,040 pounds, while in the 1833 budget it was about 60,000

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<sup>473</sup> Evliya Chelebi, *Siyahatnamah Misr* (Cairo: Dar al-kutub wa al-wathai'q al-qawmiyah, Markaz Tarikh Misr, 2009), p.482.

francs out of 62,778,750 francs.<sup>474</sup> Although Muhammad ‘Ali decreed that all prostitutes and public dancers should be banished to Upper Egypt, prostitution mushroomed in Egypt throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The rise of prostitution in the nineteenth century could be attributed to the major socio-economic transformations of Egyptian society as a consequence of rapid modernization. The Egyptian army’s conscription policies deprived many women from their male supporters, which forced many of these women into prostitution.<sup>475</sup> Rural migration to Egyptian cities was also an important reason for the spread of prostitution. In the nineteenth century, some Egyptian cities of Cairo and Alexandria developed and expanded. New urban neighborhoods were built, factories were opened which attracted rural migrants, and travel to the city was facilitated by the construction of railways in 1870’s. Rural migration created a growing supply of poor women who sometimes had no alternative except prostitution to earn a living.<sup>476</sup> In Cairo, prostitution concentrated in the quarters of Bulaq and Azbakiyah. By the 1850’s, Bulaq was turning into one of the poorest slums in Cairo, whose population was mainly poor immigrants living in woodsheds (*‘ishash*).<sup>477</sup> On the other hand, Azbakiyah developed in a different way in the

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<sup>474</sup> Karen Van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade Like any Other: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (Cairo 1996), p.196, n.2.

<sup>475</sup> Khaled Fahmy, “Prostitution in the Nineteenth-century”, *Outside in: On the Margins of the Modern Middle East*, ed. Eugene L.Rogan (London ; New York : I.B. Tauris, 2002), p.77-103.

<sup>476</sup> Liat Kozma, “Women on the Margins and Legal Reform in late Nineteenth-Century Egypt” PhD dissertation, University of New York, 2006, pp.165-171.

<sup>477</sup> Nelly Hanna, *An Urban History of Bulaq in the Mamluk and Ottoman Periods* (Cairo: IFAO, 1983), p.104.

nineteenth century. It changed dramatically from a residency quarter for Ottoman aristocrats to a totally Europeanized quarter. About a quarter of Cairo's coffee houses and almost half of its taverns were based in Al-Azbakiyah.

The abolition of slave trade in 1877 filled the Egyptian prostitution markets with freed female slaves. Although many of the freed slaves stayed in the houses of their previous owners as domestic servants, many others became homeless. These homeless slaves were forced into prostitution either directly or indirectly.<sup>478</sup> Whereas some worked as prostitutes, others were domestic servants, yet they were still obliged to offer sexual services to their new masters. In his magazine *al-Ustadh*, 'Abd-Allah al Nadim discussed the sufferings of freed women who found themselves forced into selling their bodies or left without a job through an imaginary conversation between two freed slaves.<sup>479</sup>

From 1834 to 1850, the police seemed took an active role in monitoring prostitution. Male and female prostitutes who were arrested were either chastised or banished.<sup>480</sup> By the late 1850's, the police became less observant in regulating prostitution. The police seemed to interfere only if members of a neighbourhood made a complaint against prostitutes living amongst them. In the nineteenth century, it is possible to argue that a complex and multi-layered system of regulating prostitution continued to exist. The

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<sup>478</sup> Clot bey, *Apercu General sur l'histoire de L'Egypte* (Paris: Maison et cie, 1840), 1:275. Imad Hilal, *al-Raqiq fi misr* (Al-Qahirah: 'Al-'Arabi lil nashr wa al tawzi', 1999), p.122.

<sup>479</sup> 'Abd Allah al-Nadim, *Majallat Al-Ustadh* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutubkahanah, 1985), vol. 1, p.90-92.

<sup>480</sup> Liat Kozma, "Women on the Margins and Legal Reform in late Nineteenth-Century Egypt" p.172-186.

neighbourhood community continued to exercise its privilege to expel prostitutes, pimps and other unwanted elements from its midst. The Sheikh of the neighbourhood was given the authority to ban a prostitute from residing in the neighbourhood under his jurisdiction. As a result of nineteenth-century urban transformation, the family unit and the local community were dislocated and the neighbourhood surveillance mechanisms became less effective in the anonymity of the growing cities.<sup>481</sup>

After the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, there was an increasing demand for the services of prostitutes by the British soldiers stationed in Egypt. To protect the health of British soldiers, the Egyptian government recognised prostitution, issued laws to regulate the trade, and licensed pimps to open whorehouses and prostitutes to practice their trade as long as they were regularly checked by medical authorities.<sup>482</sup> Besides Egyptian prostitutes, many poor European women, mostly Greek and Italian, came to Egypt to work as prostitutes.<sup>483</sup> In the early twentieth century, the demand was so high for prostitutes that certain gangs were specialised in kidnapping European women and selling them to Egypt. In 1907, the number of kidnapped women was only 759, but reached 2263 by 1910.<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> Idarit 'umum al-sihah, *dikritat wa lawaih sihiyyah* (Bulaq: al-Matb'ah alamiriyah, 1895), pp.54-56.

<sup>483</sup> Imad Hilal, *al-Baghaya fi misr: dirasah tarikhayah ijtim'aiyah, 1834-1949* (Cairo: Dar al-'arabi, 2001), pp.70-76.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid,p.72.

## **Feminists, Nationalists and the “Fallen Woman”: Prostitutes as Victims**

The figure of the prostitute attracted the attention of many female writers in the emerging women’s press in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Women’s campaigns against prostitution started with the state’s legalization of prostitution in 1882. The decree was met by public opposition. Feminists, nationalists and religious scholars challenged these decrees as immoral. Female authors attacked prostitution and white slavery as manifestations of irresponsible male lust. They demanded that the government should protect their sex against male sexual abuse, and to outlaw prostitution.

In their campaigns against prostitution, female writers rejected the prevalent social view of fallen women as corrupting men. Rather they argued that it was women who were victimized by men. The editor of the *majallat al-sharq wa al-gharb* argued that even if women are ignorant, men are far better educated yet it is men who seduce women to fall. Even if women, as some claim, are destined to fall since the beginning of humanity and that it is Eve who seduced Adam till he ate from the forbidden tree and fell from heaven, are men supposed to stand on the shore and leave women to drown?”<sup>485</sup>

The author treated prostitution as a result of the constraints enforced on women’s education, economic activities and their powerlessness in a male dominated society like Egypt. Women fell into prostitution because of their weakness, ignorance and poverty. Poor illiterate women, according to the author, were left helpless such as “a person who fell from a ship and left

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<sup>485</sup> *Majallat alsharq wa al-gharb*, 6 December 1907 pp 230-233.

struggling with the big waves”, while men were watching ruthlessly. Drawing on the medical theories of sex differences, she asserted that the fall of women was the responsibility of men, “if women are weak, men are stronger yet they do not support women. If women are poor, men are richer yet they deprive women in need from the loaf of bread.”<sup>486</sup>

In a culture where women were victims of sexual abuse yet they were punished for it, the exploitation of the concept of female sexual passivity gave feminists leverage over their opponents. As we have explained earlier in this thesis, desexualisation empowered feminists to attack the prerogatives of men and allowed them to carve a role for themselves in public life. The new woman struggled to achieve sexual autonomy yet on the expense of her sexual identity. Feminists used the same strategy in their attack against the state’s recognition of prostitution. The message that some feminists sent was that women from all social classes were vulnerable to male sexual abuse and could end up as prostitutes. For women to avoid this destiny, feminists argued that they had to be educated to avoid this destiny. In another article published in *Jaridat thamrat al-funun*, the author supported female education on the basis that it is women’s only defence so as not to be fallen women and become victims of men’s seduction, “Some believe that the education of girls could benefit women in their duties as brides, mother or sisters and I feel hurt that people could not understand the importance of properly education women..... Men, whether rich or poor, honest or dishonest, handsome or

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<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

ugly, are driven by their sexual desire towards seducing the woman and assault her purity.”<sup>487</sup>

Stories about the entrapment of women or their rape to force them into prostitution enabled feminists to project prostitutes to be victims not only of their pimps and clients but also of police tyranny and corruption. At the turn of the century, newspapers were littered with stories of rural girls who were kidnapped by a gang of men and women and forced to practice prostitution. These stories of prostitution horrors encouraged feminists to be more outspoken against government policies towards prostitution. The editor of *majallat al-zuhur* complained that it was compulsory that the state should take a more active role in combating prostitution particularly after the stories of evil men who sold the bodies of young girls and traded in their bodies. The article focused mainly on poor defenceless women, most likely to fall prey to pimps. In Egypt, the magazine pointed out that domestic service turned “young naïve girls” objects for sale leaving masters choose the ones they liked and then use them to serve their sexual desires and not their houses. The state was required to control domestic employment agencies. The magazine also criticized the government for failing to observe how many young teenage girls, who were beneath the age permitted by the government, were forced to sell their bodies, “young girls are forced to lose their innocence and display and act like older women to attract clients.”<sup>488</sup>

Besides feminists, the presence of licensed prostitution outraged political reformers and nationalists of different stripes. Their views on prostitutes had to be understood within the context of nineteenth and early

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<sup>487</sup> *Jaridat thmarat al-funun*, 20<sup>th</sup> of April, 1900.

<sup>488</sup> *Majallat al-zuhur*, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1911, pp.513-515.

twentieth century politics of “constructing” the Egyptian nation. Nineteenth and early twentieth century nationalist discourse used family metaphors in their rhetoric to emphasize the emotive power of the nation. The nation was considered as a “family” and young girls and men were the daughters and sons of the nation.<sup>489</sup> Nationalist heroes were regarded as the founding fathers of the nation. This rhetoric aimed at generating a bond amongst inhabiting one country yet separated by ethnicity, race, class and religion. Since the nation was envisioned as a family, the concept of family honour could be easily appropriated as the basis for national honour.<sup>490</sup> Prostitution disgraced a family’s honour and subsequently nationalists considered prostitution as a disgrace for the honour of the whole nation.

Nationalists depicted the prostitute not only as the victim of men’s sexual abuse but also of Western imperialism. In his magazine *al-ustaz*, the Egyptian journalist ‘Abdallah Al-Nadim (d.1896), known as the orator of the ‘Urabi revolution, launched a campaign against prostitution. According to al-Nadim, prostitution became a feature of Egyptian life because Egyptians started to adopt Western values. However, the West distorted the Egyptians’ understanding of civilization and modernity. Instead of learning Western science and knowledge, Egyptians learnt bad Western habits and misunderstood the true meaning of freedom. They drank wine in pubs and bars, behaved like beasts spending their nights in whorehouses and satisfying their illicit sexual desires with their “national sisters” who in turn suffered

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<sup>489</sup> Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005), pp.4-5.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid. pp. 40-56.



abuse from their clients and pimps. Their behaviour, according to al-Nadim disgraced the whole nation.<sup>491</sup> The Egyptian Grand Mufti Sheikh Muhammad ‘Abduh also blamed the Western educated Egyptian man for the proliferation of prostitution, “The so called educated bachelor.... did not learn anything from the West except some European languages so they can communicate with Western prostitutes..... When they return to Egypt, they refuse to marry honourable [native] women and resort to prostitution. If it were not for those educated bachelors, the market of prostitution would not have flourished in Egypt.”<sup>492</sup>

The fact that the British soldiers were amongst the main clients of prostitutes further aggravated the nationalists. The Egyptian government, which legalized prostitution in 1882, was attacked as a complicit and corrupt government. Al-Nadim, for example, complained that in the time the British forced the Egyptian government to legalize prostitution, the British themselves took all measures to curb prostitution back in their homes. Al-Nadim argued that the Egyptian government did not only allow prostitution but commanded the physicians working in government hospitals to check on prostitutes to “make sure that they are fit for adultery”.<sup>493</sup>

The figure of the prostitute features heavily in the poems of Bayram al-Tunisi. Al-Tunisi. Bayram al-Tunisi was a nationalist and a popular poet who could reach a wide audience of readers and listeners through popular satirical poems and writings. Bayram’s works aimed at “successful rejection of external threats, the reorientation and redistribution of powers in society and

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<sup>491</sup> *Al-Ustaz*, vol.2, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1896, pp.785-779.

<sup>492</sup> *Al-Manar* 5, no. 9 (5 August 1902), p. 340.

<sup>493</sup> *Al-Ustaz*, vol. 2, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1893, p.912.

the construction of a strong and independent nation.”<sup>494</sup> The proliferation of prostitution in Egypt, particularly during the first World War, was amongst the major social problems that Bayram criticized. In his *al-baladi* poems, Al-Tunisi told the story of Umm Fayiq, the bored wife of an elderly retired civil servant, who procured young women of the quarter into prostitution. The economic pressures and hardships forced *baladi* Egyptian men to trade in offering their wives and daughters into prostitution. and Um Fayiq could bring in a wider circle of women into prostitution, including a very beautiful bride.<sup>495</sup> Al-Tunisi described the exploitation of the bride/prostitute by Umm Fayiq and her customers particularly her British clients, as “the bride allows herself to be taken from bench to street to alley to dome and thence to a spot which has become a camp for five thousand Johns.”<sup>496</sup> After the end of WWI, the pimps such as Umm Fayiq made a large fortune and used her money to reverse her image by going to pilgrimage, while the exploited women found themselves rejected on every front.<sup>497</sup>

Bayram’s poems also criticized the state’s exploitation of prostitution. In response to the furore in the national press over the growth of prostitution in Cairo, the government attempted to increase its control by recruiting members of the Cairo police force for duty in *shurtat al-adab* (moral police). This resulted in an energetic, yet ill trained, police division that the began to arrest women and couples arbitrarily. The exploited women, not their pimps

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<sup>494</sup> Marilyn Booth, Bayram al-Tunisi’s Egypt: Social Criticism and Narrative Strategies (Exeter: Published for the Middle East Centre, St.Anthony College, Oxford by Ithaca, 1990), p.12.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid, p.197.

<sup>496</sup>Ibid, p.198.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid, p.199.

or customers, were the most obvious targets of this police abuse. One of Bayram's poems illustrates the uneven system of implementing justice. When the two lovers of a prostitute, one of whom was rich bey and the other was just a poor man, the police arrested the prostitute and her poor client while the *bey* escaped lightly. The prostitute was taken into the police headquarters where she was subjected to medical examination and intimidation pressures.<sup>498</sup>

Both feminists and nationalists projected the figure of the "prostitute" as a victim. They used the topic of prostitution as a platform to voice their opinions against male domination, imperialism, and the corruption of government and rulers. Nonetheless, the interests of feminists clashed with many nationalists' opinions about curbing prostitution. Some nationalists used prostitution as a platform to justify new restrictions on the mingling between men and women, and between chaste women (*hurrah*) and the prostitute.

### **Campaigning Against Prostitution: To Allow or Not to Allow**

In his magazine *al-ustadh* (The Teacher), 'Abd Allah al-Nadim discussed the various threats of legalizing prostitution and the measures necessary to curb these dangers. The article was written at the end of the nineteenth century, when Egyptian intellectuals and social policy makers were engaged in heated debate over questions such as veiling, harem, and monogamy. Al-Nadim commenced the article by criticising those intellectuals who were concerned with the reforms of the morals of married Egyptian men and women, whilst "ignoring women who were selling their bodies and

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<sup>498</sup> Ibid, p.200.

honour".<sup>499</sup> He attacked the Egyptian government for legalising prostitution, which not only contradicted "our manners but also the basic laws of a civilised country that made it incumbent that whorehouses to be opened from heavily populated areas."<sup>500</sup> Al-Nadim was mainly concerned with the consequences of the unrestricted mixing between "decent" woman and the prostitutes. He argues that some of the clients of whorehouses might wrongly claim to have had sexual relations with decent married woman living in the neighbourhoods. He advised men from to protect their honour by preventing their wives from leaving their houses since the government was not longer capable of protecting them or their wives. He criticised the Egyptian government for the promulgation of laws that not only made prostitution permissible, but also entailed that the state should check on the health of prostitutes and then issue them medical certificates. Like many nineteenth century intellectuals, Al-Nadim encouraged the transmission of Western knowledge and technology to Egypt, but opposed blind imitation of European customs and values. He attacked some Egyptians' perceptions of freedom which "ignored" Egyptian social ethics, "every nation has its social values and ethics that must be respected, otherwise we can not call this freedom but barbarity."<sup>501</sup> The legalisation of prostitution, according to Al-Nadim, did not only defy the teachings of Islam, but also those of Christianity and Judaism. These new laws took Egypt to the age of *al-Jahiliyah* (term used to describe the pre-Islamic era to denote ignorance and disbelief in God). Although he admitted that prostitution was practiced and tolerated in Egypt before the

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<sup>499</sup> 'Abd Allah al-Nadim, *al-ustadh*, 11th April 1893, pp.779-785.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>501</sup> 'Abd Allah al-Nadim, *ul-ustaz*, 16th May 1893, p.912.

British occupation, the issue was always covered up. Fallen women had to run away from her village or town and deny any links to her family so as not to bring them shame. Al-Nadim implored from the Khedive 'Abbas II and his Prime Minister Riad Ghali Pasha to implement the *hudud* on prostitutes, to prohibit prostitution or to remove the houses of prostitutes away from the houses of the "free chaste" women.<sup>502</sup> The fear of crossing boundaries between the chaste woman and the prostitute was the primary concern for other campaigners against prostitution.

After the Egyptian revolution in 1919, Sheikh Muhammad Abu al-'Aynayn launched a huge campaign against prostitution in the 1920's. Abu al-'Aynayn had much in common with Al-Nadim. He also came from rural background. He was born in Upper Egyptian village in 1882. He studied in al-Azhar and received the *'alamiyah* certificate in 1908. He joined the resistance against the British occupation and became the orator of the 1919 revolution. In the 1920's, Abu al-'Aynayn published a series of articles in *Al-Ahram* newspapers in which he attacked the government for legalising prostitution. It was shameful, declared Abu Al-'Aynayn, that the state's official religion is Islam, yet the government was allowing prostitution. Abu Al-'Aynayn employed a number of government reports by the ministries of Interior and Health to strengthen his argument for prohibiting prostitution. These reports asserted that the deficiency of government doctors made it too difficult to check on the health of prostitutes and ensure they were free from diseases. He asked the government to follow the footsteps of Britain, America and

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<sup>502</sup> 'Abd Allah al-Nadim, *al-ustadh*, 11th April 1893, pp.779-785.

Germany which prohibit prostitution and implement other measures to prevent the transmission of syphilitic diseases.<sup>503</sup>

Not everyone accepted Abu al-'Aynayn's calls for disallowing prostitution. Muhammad Husayn Haykal, editor of *Al-Siyasah* newspaper issued by the Liberal Constitutionalist Political Party. Haykal clarified that the prohibition of prostitution would inhibit the police from searching whorehouses, and subsequently diseases would spread more rapidly. Haykal added that the prohibition of prostitution should be a result, and not cause, of social reform,

"Islam prohibited prostitution, but did not leave people as victims of their sexual desires. God allowed man to marry more than one woman and to have sex with his slave girls..... Now it is difficult for a man to marry one wife and laws prohibited slavery. It has now become difficult to resist prostitution and it has become a necessary evil."<sup>504</sup>

For Haykal, the debate over legalising prostitution was part of a wider controversy over the role of religious scholars in shaping Egyptian politics. He complained of religious scholars who interfered in debates without having enough expertise to justify their opinions, and accused their opponents either of ignorance or disbelief.<sup>505</sup> In another article, Haykal ridiculed Abu Al-'Aynayn's argument that Egypt must follow the footsteps of countries like

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<sup>503</sup> Abu Al-'Aynayn, "madhabih al-a'rad 'ala maraa wa masm'," *Al-Ahram*, 27th November, 1923, p.1.

<sup>504</sup> Muhammad Husayn Haykal, "Ilghaa al-baghaa al-rasmi: masala ijtimaiyah khatira yajib al-hadhar fi mu'alajitihah," *Al-Siyasa*, 9th September 1926, p.1.

<sup>505</sup> *ibid.*

England and Germany because of the differences between the levels of awareness, literacy and hygiene between Egypt and these countries.<sup>506</sup>

Fearing that they themselves would be regarded as prostitution because of their unveiling and their public role, feminists sided with religious scholars demanding the combating of legalised prostitution.<sup>507</sup> An anonymous author wrote in the women's weekly magazine *al-Hisan* to support the campaign against prostitution, which she defined as the selling of a woman's honour and dignity.<sup>508</sup> In the 1920, the Islamic activist Labiba Ahmad campaigned for the sanctioning of legalised prostitution because it was humiliating for women and provoking for people's social values.<sup>509</sup>

Abu Al-'Aynayn's campaign also aroused public sentiments against prostitution. Many people wrote to *Al-Ahram* in support of Abu Al-'Aynayn's campaign. One reader even sent a list of whorehouses in Cairo's neighbourhoods, in case the government claimed that it could not crackdown on whorehouses because it did not know their places.<sup>510</sup> Participants in the debate, whether supporting or opposing legalised prostitution, did not seem to address the root of the problem or care about the prostitute herself. Opponents of legalised prostitution did not offer any alternatives for the prostitutes if they were prohibited from plying their trade, while its supporters

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<sup>506</sup> Muhammad Husayn Haykal, "Ilghaa al-baghaa al-rasmi: al-farq bayn misr wa al-bilad al-urubiyah" *Al-Siyasa*, 15th September 1926, p.1.

<sup>507</sup>Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), p 52.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid, p.51.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

<sup>510</sup> Anonymous, "Madhabih al-'arad 10-16 sa'ah," *Al-Ahram*, 17th December, 1923, p.1.

were only worried about the health of the prostitute's clients. A letter written by an anonymous writer who claimed to be a prostitute reflected this dilemma. The prostitute pleaded Sheikh Abu Al-'Aynayn to think carefully about the future of prostitutes if they were prohibited from practicing the only trade they knew and to start by addressing the problems that made women resort to prostitution.<sup>511</sup>

In his report on prostitution, Dr. Fakhri Mikhail Faraj criticised the different proposals to solve the problems of prostitution. Faraj started by pointing out that there were three systems of dealing with prostitution in European countries. Some countries such as England outlawed prostitution. In Germany, the police allowed prostitution but kept it closely monitored, while in France, prostitution was legalised. None of these different policies succeeded in solving the problem of prostitution.<sup>512</sup> Faraj envisaged that the real solution for the problem of prostitution was by improving the economic standards and increasing public awareness about moral behaviour. He explained that none of the policies implemented in Egypt or even in European countries tend to punish the prostitute to the exclusion of her male partner.<sup>513</sup> Faraj condemned the existing laws which punished the woman while leaving men who slept with these prostitutes free enjoying his life. He warned that if there were no laws or regulations to punish men who procure the services of prostitution, prostitution would continue to spread, whether prostitution was prohibited or legalised. Faraj also called for the strict regulation of

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<sup>511</sup> Anonymous, "limadha saqat," *Al-Ahram*, 11th September 1926, p.3.

<sup>512</sup> Fakhri Mikhail Faraj, *Taqrīr 'an Intishar al-bigha' wa-al-amraḍ al-tanasuliyah bi-al-qutr al-Miṣri wa-ba 'ḍ al-turuq al-mumkin ittiba 'uha li-muḥarabatihā* (Cairo: 1924, p.87.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.



whorehouses, or otherwise the owners of whorehouses would carry on profiteering from the prostitutes. He elucidated that owners of whorehouses forced a prostitute to sleep with more than eight men every day and to sell her body to men seeking irregular sexual activities.<sup>514</sup> Faraj proposed that if the police enforced owners of whorehouses to adhere to certain rules about treating the prostitute, then these pimps would not make much profit, and whorehouses would be subsequently closed or reduced in number. Faraj proposed a number of gradual policies that would reduce prostitution. Firstly, women who were under the age of 22 should not be allowed to practice prostitution. Secondly, owners of whorehouses should not be allowed to have more than 3 whores, to make sure that anyone who abused prostitutes were punished, and to ensure that a prostitute would not be stripped from her belongings when leaving a whorehouse. Finally, the police should prevent the sale of wine and opium in whorehouses because it was a big source of profit.<sup>515</sup>

### **Law, Social Policy and the Prostitute**

In the first half of the nineteenth century, religious scholars were the main, but no longer the only group, concerned with banning prostitution. The medical establishment joined the '*ulama*' in their efforts to campaign against prostitution. For doctors, prostitution was a health hazard that endangered the lives of soldiers as well as ordinary people. The French surgeon Antoine Barthelemy Clot described prostitution as the major vehicle for transferring venereal diseases amongst army officers and amongst ordinary people. He stressed the importance of the medical observance of prostitutes, who could

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<sup>514</sup>Ibid, p.92.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid, pp. 99-102.

be a potential threat not only to her clients but to their wives and offspring as well. Clot, thus, recommended the confinement of prostitutes in state hospitals and their subjection to thorough medical examination and treatment.<sup>516</sup> In 1834, Muhammad 'Ali Pasha seemed to have taken strong measures against prostitution. The Pasha commanded the closure of all brothels inside Cairo, relocation of prostitutes to new districts, and punishing any man who entered a whorehouse with 300 lashes and the prostitute with 50 lashes. The government also ceased to levy taxes on prostitutes. In 1836, the Pasha banished all prostitutes outside Cairo, forced them to live in specific guarded places, and gave each a sum of money "as charity from the Pasha". If a prostitute was proven to repent, she was allowed to marry and move to a new location. If any prostitute broke the law or returned back to her career, she was to be banished to Sudan.<sup>517</sup>

In the 1840's, the legal authorities started to turn their attention to brothels as a source of rabble-rousing and danger.<sup>518</sup> Just as the prostitute was projected as threatening to the *hurrah* woman, so was the brothel depicted as a threat to the *nas ahrar* (free people/respectable people). As early as 1852, a government circular issued by the Interior ministry commanded prostitutes to dress and walk properly in public thoroughfares and to prevent brothel owners from residing near populous areas.<sup>519</sup> The circular came in response to

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<sup>516</sup> Diwan al-Jihadiya Register 437, doc 143, p.169, 24 May 1847.

<sup>517</sup> 'Imad Hilal, *Al-Baghaya fi misr: dirasah tarikhayah ijtimaiyah min 1834-1949* (Cairo: Dar al-'Arabi, 2001), pp.155-157. Majlis al-ahkam, *daftar majmu' umur jina'iyya*, (not numbered), p.213 (10 Rabi'i awl, 1252/ 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1836).

<sup>518</sup> Khaled Fahmy, "Prostitution in Egypt in the nineteenth century," *Outside in: On the Margins of the Modern Middle East*, ed. Outside in: On the Margins of the Modern Middle East (), pp.77-103

complaints by “respectable” families that prostitutes and brothels threatened the tranquillity of their neighbourhood. Khaled Fahmy argues that the state's policies towards the prostitute and brothels became the lens through which one could judge the nineteenth-century state's changing policies with relevance to issues such as public security and public health.<sup>520</sup>

In Khedival Egypt (1840-1882), prostitution was treated ambiguously. It was neither outlawed nor was it openly tolerated and licensed. After the death of Muhammad 'Ali, prostitution made a strong come back after prostitutes were no longer prohibited from practicing their trade in Cairo. In the reigns of Muhammad Ali's successors, Khedive 'Abbas I (1848-1854) and Khedive Said (1854-1863), the pace of the state's military and educational reforms slowed down which could account for the state's more liberal attitudes towards prostitution. The Egyptian government interfered in whorehouses only when crimes were committed. Court records proved that the police attacked whorehouses only if someone reported a crime such as theft or murder in a whorehouse or brothel. In cases of minor crimes, such as quarrels between drunkards, the police only warned the owner of the whorehouse or brothel from causing problems to his/her neighbours.<sup>521</sup> In the reign of Khedive Isma'il (1863-1879), the numbers of foreign prostitutes increased dramatically because of Isma'il openness to the West.

The Egyptian government did not alter its policies towards prostitutes except in 1880, when it issued a number of decrees to regulate all

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<sup>519</sup> DWQ, Muhafazat al-'Arish, Register L/10/30/1, 111 (old), letter no.90, pp.20 and 24, 2 Rabi' II, 1311/12 October 1893, as cited in Khaled Fahmy “Prostitution” p.101.

<sup>520</sup> Khaled Fahmy, “Prostitution in the Nineteenth-Century,” pp.77-103

<sup>521</sup> 'Imad Hilal, *Al-Baghaya fi misr*, pp. 160-163.

marginalised professions and trades including prostitution. The provincial major police officers were ordered to arrest beggars, snake charmers and women who served in *mulids* (celebrations of the birth-day of saints). New laws were imposed to restrict the prostitutes' freedom of movement. The police expelled prostitutes from quarters, long known to be centres of prostitution, and ensured that prostitutes were not allowed to live in "respectable" neighbourhoods. In case of foreign prostitutes protected by the Capitulations, the police was obliged to notify their consulates and follow all the necessary legal procedures before expelling them.<sup>522</sup> The stipulations made by the government used vague definitions such as "respectable" vs. "unrespectable" communities. This meant that the prostitutes were left at the mercy of the policy who implemented these decrees, and who, in turn, exploited them to pressure prostitutes for bribes or sexual favours. From the 1830's and up till 1882, the state's stipulations to regulate prostitution were sporadic and inconsistent. Only the decrees taken by Muhammad 'Ali Pasha took into consideration the prostitute herself and offered her an alternative source of income, and another lifestyle if she wished. By contrast, the decrees taken by the Khedive's government in 1880 sought to cleanse the capital and other urban centres from the marginalised members of the society, who were regarded as a source of disgrace. Simultaneously, the state ignored these "outcasts" leaving them to fend for themselves without having an alternative career.

The British occupation of Egypt in 1882 signalled a new chapter in the Egyptian government's policies towards prostitution. Prostitution was

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<sup>522</sup> Filip Jallad, *Qamus al-idarah wa al-qadaa* (Alexandria: Bani Laghudaki, 1895), vol.3, p.215-221.

legalised and prostitutes were expected to be medically checked by physicians in governmental hospitals before being licensed to practice their trade.<sup>523</sup> In 1885, prostitution was subject to further promulgations under the name of *La'ihat buyut al-'ahirat* (A List of the Regulations of Whorehouses). The list included 23 stipulations detailing the criteria for organising prostitution in whorehouses, and explaining the role of the police in dealing with any transgressions.<sup>524</sup> The only goal of these new regulations, as Hanan Khloussy argues, was to monitor the sexuality of Egyptian prostitutes when it became a source of threat for the British.<sup>525</sup> The regulations again did not reserve certain quarters for prostitutes and thus whorehouses were opened even in populated areas; a cause for the increasing anger of ordinary people against prostitution.

The government's decision to license prostitution was not welcomed by the people. Public reactions to prostitution was, however, random. In response to public protests, the head of the local council in the Minufiya governorate closed a local station for regulating prostitution with the pretext that only ten prostitutes were registered. The decision was soon annulled after the unexpected rise of cases infected with venereal diseases, between 1909-1912.<sup>526</sup> In his memoirs, the Egyptian nationalist Muhammad Farid narrated that a number of *'ulama* gathered and decided to close down whorehouses,

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<sup>523</sup> 'Abd al-Wahab Bakr, *Mujtam' al-Qahirah al-sirri, 1900-1951* (Cairo: Dar al-'Arabi, 2001), pp.15-16.

<sup>524</sup> See Appendix for detailed information about the *La'ihat buyut al-'ahirat*.

<sup>525</sup> Hanan Kholoussy, 'Stolen Husbands, Foreign Wives: Mixed Marriage, Identity Formation, and Gender in Colonial Egypt, 1909-1923', *Hawwa: Journal of Women in the Middle East and the Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2003), pp. 206-40.

<sup>526</sup> Muhammad Farid, *Muzakrat Muhammad Farid*, p.210

ban prostitutes from dancing in public places and forcing them to walk and dress properly.<sup>527</sup> The *'ulama's* decisions, which blatantly challenged state authority, were never implemented.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were no social policies directed mainly at the improvement of the conditions of prostitutes. Social policy towards prostitutes should be thus interpreted within the wider context of strategies of poor relief. In Islamic lands, policies of poor relief were always grounded in religious imperatives. In medieval Muslim cities, hospitals, schools or other charitable foundations were funded by religious endowments. During famines, plague outbreak or other national disasters, Muslim rulers distributed food to the needy. These charitable acts were usually taken by the ruling elites to boost their legitimacy. Until the nineteenth century, the poor-relief services were only temporary solutions and decentralised.<sup>528</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the impulsive for poor relief policies remained religious, however these policies were more centralised and bureaucratised. They represent a break from prior non-interventionist practices, reflecting the new relation between the state and Egypt's public. The state based its policies in religious discourses which considered it incumbent upon Muslims to be charitable to the poor, while they condemned begging and other similar manifestations. Mine Ener argues that although the state utilised the police to control the movement of the poor and remove them

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<sup>527</sup> 'Imad Hilal, *al-Baghaya fi Misr*, p.203.

<sup>528</sup> Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt 1215-1517* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000) pp. 69-100, 134-168.

from the public space, however, it continued to provide poor relief services for those "deserving care" in state run shelters for the poor and the ill.<sup>529</sup>

The *Takiyyat Tulun* shelter, an example of charitable efforts in the reign of Muhammad 'Ali's successors, touched on the lives of poor women. The shelter was open for mothers who came either to give birth or with the children seeking the state's financial support. These mothers could have been widows, separated or divorced, or unwed women who escaped from their families out of fear.<sup>530</sup> It is also proven from governmental records that healthy young women were rarely admitted into shelters and they were deemed undeserving of state care, even if they had no relatives to care for them.<sup>531</sup>

Despite the British criticism of the Egyptian state for failing to provide adequate care to the poor, the British invested only minimally into funding education, health and social service. They looked to the private sector, just as Western missionaries, local elites, heads of local religious communities to provide welfare services, while they only provided subsidies.<sup>532</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Egyptian elites invested in charity projects such as protecting children, which confirmed their images as the vanguard of society. This involvement was depicted as an indicator of Egypt's

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<sup>529</sup> Mine Ener, "Religious Prerogatives and Policing the Poor in Two Ottoman Contexts" *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol.35, No.3, Poverty and Charity: Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Winter 2005), pp.501-511.

<sup>530</sup> Beth Baron, "Orphans and Abandoned Children in Modern Egypt," *Interpreting Welfare and Relief in the Middle East*, ed. Nefissa Naguib (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp.13-34.

<sup>531</sup> On the *Takiyyat Tulun*, please check, Mine Ener, *Managing Egypt's poor and the Politics of Benevolence, 1800-1952* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp.49-75.

<sup>532</sup> Beth Baron, "Orphans and Abandoned Children," pp. 13-34.

ability to be civilised such as Western countries.<sup>533</sup> For the Egyptian upper classes, philanthropic activities allowed them to create a space for themselves in Egyptian society. The underlying belief of their philanthropic activities that these elites undertook were not only religious but religious. They thought of Egypt's poor as essential member of the nation and they aimed at turning them into productive citizens.<sup>534</sup>

The philanthropic activities in the first three decades of the twentieth centuries revolved around the children vulnerability such as child labour, street children, improving public hygiene and education.<sup>535</sup> None of the early twentieth century charitable projects touched prostitution directly. Nonetheless, upper class women extended their charitable efforts to other women and girls. Their philanthropic projects focused on vocational training, and helping girls find work in viable trades. They also advocated the expansion of literacy amongst women and the improvement of healthcare and infant mortality.<sup>536</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the 1930's and the 1940's, the debates on abolishing prostitution not only persisted but intensified. In 1932, the Egyptian government formed a committee to examine the issue of prostitution. After conducting a series of opinion polls, the committee concluded that licensed prostitution was not desirable in Egypt and thus had to be abolished, and that secret prostitution

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<sup>533</sup> Mine Ener, *Managing Egypt's Poor*, p.99.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid*, p.100.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid*, p.112.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid*, p.124.



still spreads in Egypt despite licensing prostitution and warned that the fears from the spread of secret prostitution should not be an obstacle against banning laws that license prostitutes. The Egyptian newspapers such as al-Mokatam, al-Ahram and others participated in this controversy over prostitution laws encouraging the government to take more serious steps to abolish licensed prostitution, and enforce more strict punishments against prostitutes and pimps. The newspapers' arguments stressed Egypt's dignity in front of tourists, the rights of families to live in respectable neighbourhoods as the basis of their arguments against licensing prostitution. Such arguments, previously employed by Abu al-'Aynayn, were popular amongst the readers but they failed to take into account the prostitutes and their future. The Egyptian government, however, ignored the committee's recommendations and the intellectuals' demands. In 1949, however, the Egyptian government decreed to "close down whorehouses, not to provide any new licenses for whorehouses, and impose punishments, ranging from six months to three years of imprisonments, for anyone who disobeyed these laws."<sup>537</sup> The 1949 law was the first Egyptian law that openly considered prostitution a crime. Although the law seemed to have been a long awaited decision, the decree came suddenly without any proper research or preparation and thus, no stipulations were made to guard these prostitutes or find them an alternative way of living.

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<sup>537</sup> Muhammad Musa, *Mukafahat al-di'arah, sharh al-qanun raqim 68 li sanat 1951 bishan mukafahat al-di'arah* (Cairo: Matb'at Istandard, 1951).

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the impact of the shift in the medical understanding of the sex differences between male and female bodies on the construction of gender and sexuality between 1800-1928. It focused particularly on female sexuality. It started by exploring how scholars in medieval Muslim societies understood and analysed Greek authorities' opinions on the differences between males and females and their mutual contributions to the process of reproduction. The study argued that medieval Islamic thought presented complex and divergent interpretations of sex differences that reflected and contributed to the social and cultural constructs of gender. Medieval Interpretations of sex differences implicitly or explicitly emphasised the inferiority of the female body and mind. Nonetheless, the plurality and complexity of discourses about sex differences and the acceptance of the flexibility of barriers between the sexes made it difficult to assume that the biological knowledge about sex differences formed a unitary ideological foundation for a system of gender hierarchy.

The nineteenth-century, as this research demonstrated brought important changes to the medical and biological interpretations of sex differences. Based on the analysis of the works of three Egyptian doctors, this study showed that Egyptian doctors projected women as physically and mentally inferiority of women. Although women were not perceived as innately frigid, they were encouraged to suppress their sexual desires to remain healthy. The ideas of Egyptian doctors were adopted or negotiated with by intellectuals, nationalists, feminists and religious scholars.

Despite the existence of different discourses on gender and sexuality in the period under study, the research focused on religious, moral and intellectual discursive literature, reflecting bourgeois ideas that gained hegemony as "reformist" discourses in a "modern" Egypt. In these discourses, intellectuals and religious scholars aimed at reconstructing the Egyptians' behaviour through reforming not only their domestic values but also their sexuality. In the third chapter of this study, using sources such as books and journals, explained how medicine and science became a cornerstone of debates on gender equality and sexuality. In this chapter, it is demonstrated how male and female intellectuals, religious scholars and even the emerging bourgeois class set the guidelines for the ideal of the new Egyptian woman using scientific and medical ideas about women's body and sexualities. In the process these public discourses popularised the medical ideas about male/female sexualities projecting men as sexually aggressive, whilst depicting women as morally superior. It is on the basis of this image of the chaste Egyptian woman that public discourses specified the ideal role of the modern Egyptian woman and her social behaviour.

The fourth chapter shifts attention from medicine and science and its role in formulating knowledge about sexuality. It analyses the fatwas of three muftis whose fatwas spanned from the mid nineteenth century to the third decade of the twentieth century. The study brought into light the diversity of religious opinions on sex differences. The study also demonstrate how religious scholars' established their fatwas in Islamic law yet they could also negotiate or adopt medical or scientific theories in support of their ideas.

The last chapter of this thesis examines the figure of the prostitute, the woman who failed to fit into the ideal image of the Egyptian woman drawn by

discursive literature. The prostitute represented a challenge to the medico-legal discourse that encouraged women to suppress their sexual desire. Public discourses victimised the prostitute and projected her as a victim of men's rampant sexuality. The study showed that how campaigners against prostitutes, state laws and social policies failed to address the roots of the problem of prostitution. It is shown that although women were depicted as victims, they alone were subject to the state's punishment.

Although the study aimed at presenting a comprehensive overview of sexuality in scientific, religious, legal and intellectual discourses, there are several areas that need further study. The research examined the nineteenth century, which is a period that witnessed immense transformation of cultural understandings of sexuality. One of these important changes, as this study emphasised, was the shift in the natures of male and female sexualities. Women turned from voracious sexual creatures to passionless creatures with no sexual interests. The medical attitude towards men's sexuality was more complex. By assuming that men naturally have no control over their sexual desires, men's sexuality was liberated to an extent. Nonetheless, medical authorities encouraged men to invest their sexual energies only in penetrative heterosexual discourse. Masturbation and homosexuality were medically unacceptable activities. In this study, I tried to highlight how religious and medical authorities pointed to problems such as homosexuality and non-reproductive sexual activities. More research could be produced on such an important topic. One of the main problems facing future researchers on the topic of homosexuality in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is the lack of sources. Influenced by Victorian cultural ideals, Egyptian intellectuals rarely discuss topics such as homosexuality. Alternatively, however, sources

such as court records could become a gold mine for information on any future study of homosexuality.

This research also focused on a specific set of discourses which was representative of the bourgeois classes and which gained hegemony in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The discursive thought examined in this study was propagated amongst the upper and middle classes through mediums such as the printed press. Nonetheless, the study admits the presence of alternative discourses on sexuality, the examination of which could provide more insight into the sexual history of nineteenth century. For example, the study focuses only on the writings of orthodox religious scholars whilst it excluded Sufis. Despite the fact that Sufism came under harsh attacks from modernist and reformist religious scholars, Sufi turuk were still very popular throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. Thus, their ideas are worthy of further research. Another interesting area of study are the discourses on male and female sexuality in the more popular type of mass media such as the tabloids and caricatures. In fact, these sources seemed to have projected a different view of the Egyptian family. Finally, pre-modern Islamic heritage must be examined as an important source of knowledge on sexuality in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The revival of the heritage through the publication of prophetic medicine manuals and the writings of major Muslim physicians seemed to continue to challenge the authority of professional doctors to the present day.

To sum up, the research on sex and sexuality is developing both in scope and in approach. In the last two decades works on this topic have increased exponentially, nonetheless historiography of sexuality in the Middle

East has not yet matured. Future studies could hold more promising hopes for further insightful views of Islamic history.

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