

‘THE SOUL OF A NATION’ – ‘ABDALLAH NADIM AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN EGYPT (1845 – 1896)

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Abstract – *The historiography of educational reform in 19th century Egypt is driven largely by modernization approaches in which reformers are cast as ‘liberals’ and ‘westernizers;’ figures outside these paradigms tend to be overlooked. ‘Abdallah Nadim (1845-1896), a nineteenth century social reformer, experimented throughout his life with ‘educating the nation.’ He founded the first Islamic Benevolent Society school in Egypt and authored some of the most widely circulated articles on education and society of his day. In this paper we will review Nadim’s life history, examine the educational terrain of 1890’s Egypt with particular emphasis on girls’ education, and discuss a specific set of articles authored by Nadim on Muslim youth and European education. With his combination of anticolonial, proto-nationalist, conservative Islamic, yet ‘modern’ approach to educational reform, Nadim represents a populist – if neglected figure in Egypt’s educational history.*

Introduction

‘Teachers...are the souls of nations’ (*al-mualimeen...arwah al-ummum*)¹
‘Abdallah Nadim ([6 December 1892] 1994b, 1:368)

Abdallah Nadim (1845-1896), a nineteenth century poet, journalist, revolutionary orator, school director, playwright, and perennial teacher, experimented throughout his life with ways of ‘educating the nation.’ He founded the first Islamic Benevolent Society school in Egypt and authored some of the most widely circulated articles on education and society of his day. Yet Nadim has been largely neglected in the orthodox – or modernization narrative of educational change in Egypt since he does not fit the teleological mold of ‘reformer’ as ‘liberal modernizer’ and ‘westernizer.’²

Unlike some of his more cosmopolitan contemporaries, Nadim was not conversant in a foreign language, never traveled to a non-Muslim country, and exhibited less than progressive attitudes towards girls’ education. Furthermore, he wrote caustic articles in the popular press against the *khawaja* (western foreigner) whom he accused of economically exploiting and morally corrupting Egyptians, Arabs, and Muslims.³ His unrestrained condemnation of the British occupation

landed him in permanent exile from his beloved Egypt in 1893. With his combination of anti-colonial, and, as we will discuss below, radical nationalist, conservative Islamic, yet contemporary approach to educational reform, Nadim hardly fits the modernist mold of reformer. Yet he merits serious scholarly attention for he was a tireless advocate of the spread of ‘new’ or ‘modern’ education among all segments of the population and at the forefront of the most popular political and social movements of his time. In other words, Nadim represents a certain pulse, what in Arabic would be called *ruh* or ‘soul’ of the nation.⁴

In order to locate the major influences on Nadim’s educational thought and action we will review his life history before succinctly examining Egypt’s educational terrain in the 1890’s. Finally, we will turn to a specific set of articles authored by Nadim in 1892 dealing with Muslim youth and European education and discuss how they were used to instruct Muslim girls and boys on their separate roles in forging a society characterized by a strong cultural identity, social harmony and national unity.

The education of a 19th century public intellectual

Throughout his adult life Nadim dedicated himself to public causes and straddled different social milieus. Due to his ability to utilize a variety of media to communicate with diverse audiences that spanned socio-economic, gender and age groups Nadim, who is often portrayed as an Islamic reformer (*salafiyya*), is probably better characterized as a ‘public intellectual.’⁵ As we will discuss below, while many elements of his thinking were indeed influenced by Islam, he also incorporated artistic and intellectual tenets that arrived in Egypt via the Mediterranean by a group of Syrian Christians into his platform of social and political action.

Born the son of a peasant baker in Alexandria in 1845, ‘Abdallah Nadim was groomed from an early age to one day join the ranks of the Muslim scholarly class, the *Ulama*. He received a fairly conventional formal education for someone of his sex and social background; his father, a native of Sharqiya, served as his first Quran teacher before sending him to the local Kuttab where he learned rudimentary reading, writing and Quranic recitation. In 1855, at ten years of age, Nadim transferred to a *madrasa*, a religious high-school at Anwar mosque in Alexandria where he spent five years studying *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), grammar, logic and philology. By 1861 at the age of sixteen, Nadim abandoned formal studies because he found them socially irrelevant and monotonous (Delanoue 1961, 77). He pursued literary endeavors instead, and at the suggestion

of his teacher Sheikh Muhammad al-Ashri, got involved in poetry competitions at local literary salons (Osman 1979, 2).

In need of a profession and income, Nadim took up work in the government-run European telegraph service as a telegraph operator. When he was transferred from his original post in Benha to Cairo at the residence of Khedive Ismail's mother, new educational opportunities opened up to him. He took advantage of being based in Cairo to attend classes at the venerable al-Azhar university but abandoned them before receiving any certificates (*ijaza*, pl. *ijazat*). He criticized the university for being archaic, corrupt, unclean, and in dire need of reform. What troubled him more than the stagnant mnemonic pedagogical methods, the outdated curriculum and the appalling health and sanitation conditions, was the political apathy of both students and teachers. Nadim reproached the Azharites for their lack of social and political involvement since, as the future judges and teachers, it was especially incumbent on them to strive for a high degree of social awareness. Nadim lamented that they lived 'in holes underground inhabited only by others like them in their horrible isolation.' He observed that

'every person working for al-Azhar neglects the world and what's in it. They do not read political or scientific newspapers and do not know anything about the kingdoms of the world. They do not read world geography and have no idea about what is taking place between kingdoms and sects, nor about wars and the [political] situations of nations. They do not master any profession – neither agriculture nor the basics of trade. They do not try to understand inventions they hear about nor do they seek ideas to engage with.'
(Nadim [14 February 1893] 1994b, 2:608)

Like his contemporary Muhammad 'Abduh, Nadim called for the comprehensive reform of al-Azhar. In numerous articles, he proposed that al-Azhar, in keeping with its medieval past as a forerunner of scholarship and learning, (re)incorporate scientific subjects into its curriculum such as math and calculus and add subjects such as mechanics, engineering, civil law, history, ethics and personal hygiene to allow the university to 'correspond to the development of civilization and have a link to generations of the future rather than [just] the present or past' (Nadim in al-Jamie'e 1980, 389). He also proposed higher teacher salaries and more stringent health and sanitation standards. Many of these reforms were eventually implemented with Law 8 for al-Azhar of 1896 after Muhammad 'Abduh became Grand Mufti of Egypt and rector of al-Azhar.

In contrast to the apathy of al-Azhar, the politically engaged study circles of the famed Sayyid Jamal al-Din Afghani (who lived in Egypt from 1871 to 1879)

held far greater appeal to Nadim. Afghani, who propagated novel scientific, religious and oppositional political ideas – at the core of which were resistance to British imperialism – exerted a tremendous influence over Nadim and a group of like-minded young intellectuals and artists (Keddie 1972 and 1983, 19). Afghani called upon his students to launch newspapers and expand schooling for boys and girls since, he argued, education would ultimately prove the most effective means of combating colonialism (Cole 1993, 149).⁶ Afghani also introduced Nadim to the freemasonry movement in Egypt where he would mix with a cross-section of the elite. As Juan Cole points out, Masonic lodges in Egypt ‘provided a venue for the interfacing of Syrian Christian immigrants, Muslim Egyptian notables, and Ottoman-Egyptian notables’ (1993, 53). The young Muslim Masons were from among the most privileged segments of society: they were typically ‘liberals and radicals... [who] sprang from an indigenous rural notable background’ (Cole 1993, 148). Unlike his fellow Masons, Nadim’s social origins were far more humble. Furthermore, while Nadim’s ideas about economic and political independence could be characterized as ‘radical’ or at least radically nationalist, he could hardly be characterized as ‘liberal’ especially when it came to women’s issues (see below).

As for Nadim’s professional life, it was colored by a high degree of instability, partly as a result of his legendary temper. After a quarrel with his supervisor at the telegraph company he was forced to leave Cairo in search of other employment. He secured a position in the rural Delta as teacher of a village head’s (*umda*) children, but his volatile temper got the best of him and he found himself again without work. He worked alternatively in agriculture and then commerce at a haberdashery which doubled as a literary salon for local poets.⁷ Although successful as a literary center it proved unprofitable, and Nadim’s next search for employment led him further in the literary direction as a poetic entertainer.

The government inspector of Lower Egypt, Shahin Pasha King, having heard of Nadim’s linguistic bravado, employed him in 1875 to work in his Tanta home as a colloquial poetic entertainer, or *udabatiyya*, (pl. *udabati*). His main duty was to provide verbal entertainment at the Pasha’s parties and compete with other *udabati* (Taymur 1940, 6). Unlike the more revered and serious man of letters, the *adib*, the *udabati* implies an almost clown-like master of wit and verbal virtuosity akin to the ‘fool’ of the renaissance period. They often dressed in comical clothes and exaggerated their gestures for maximum entertainment and comic effect.⁸ However, with the popularity of more politically minded *udabati* such as Nadim, Ya‘qub Sanu‘ and Bayram al Tunki, the popular art form was raised to a higher level and became a form of legitimate social criticism (Osman 1979, 5).⁹ Performing as an *udabati* allowed Nadim to hone certain oral proficiencies such as quickness of wit and the ability to deliver spontaneous crowd stirring

monologues, skills he would utilize in later roles as revolutionary orator, political journalist, and teacher.

Following his stint in the Delta Nadim returned to Alexandria on Afghani's urgings to collaborate with Adib Ishaq and Salim al-Naqqash on their papers, *Misr* and *al-Tijara*. Prior to their careers in journalism, the two Syrians were involved in the first Syrian theatre troupe to perform in Egypt. They even dared to use female actresses in their plays, a complete anomaly for Egypt at the time. Through his contacts with them, Nadim developed a keen interest in both journalism and theatre which he would put to use in his next national endeavor (Sadgrove 1996, 131 & 145).

In 1879, in a move that would leave a lasting legacy on Egyptian educational and associational life, Nadim founded the first Islamic Benevolent Society in Alexandria (IBSA) for the primary, albeit not sole purpose, of opening the Islamic Benevolent Society School of Alexandria (*Madrasat al-Jamaiyya al-Khayriyya al-Islamiyya bi al-Iskandariyya*). The school's program of studies was loosely modeled on the government school curriculum with the exception that more time was devoted to the Arabic language, Arab and Egyptian history, and Islamic studies (Al-Hadidi 1962, 87). Almost certainly modeled after the Islamic Benevolent Society of Beirut (*Jam'iyat al-Maqasid al-Khayriyah*) (Ciota 1982, 45), IBSA's activities also included a hospital, student hostel, library and fund that provided stipends for widows, and scholarships for orphans and the poor to attend the society's other schools for boys and girls (*al-Asr al-Jadid* in al-Jamie'e, 479-484).¹⁰

Under the guidance of Nadim who taught composition, literature, oratory and drama, the Alexandria school emerged as an engaged arena in the public domain. On July 22, 1879, just three months after the school's opening, Nadim initiated a public weekly oratory seminar. Nadim and his students performed speeches on a range of religious, cultural and political issues, the contents of which were often published on the front pages of newspapers *Misr*, *al-Tijara*, and *al-Asr al-Jadid* (Tawfiq 1954, 49). Among the specific topics discussed were the glorious past of the East, the reasons why western societies began developing faster than eastern societies when human nature is the same (because governments of the West are more liberal whereas in the East they are despotic), and the social advantages of spreading benevolent societies in Egypt (Delanoue 1961, 84). The seminar soon evolved into a Friday party in which famed orators delivered speeches and participated in lively debates that were attended by a cross section of the Egyptian public from orphaned students to the Khedive and his Son Abbas (Amer 1996, 423).

The school's theater troupe also gained renown for its performances at Alexandria's Zizinia theater. Among the troupe's plays were two which were authored and acted in by Nadim, *The Nation and Good Fortune* (*al-watan wa tala'*

tawfiq) and *The Arabs (al-Arab)*. *The Nation and Good Fortune*, which deals with the evils of corruption and injustice and calls for social reform and solidarity among Egyptians, has been cited as one of Egypt's first nationalist plays (Sadgrove 1996, 145-154).

During his tenure at the Alexandria School (1879-1881) and far beyond it, Nadim campaigned for the spread of private, philanthropic initiatives in schooling. He especially appealed to wealthy notables to support such endeavors and chastised those who didn't donate to projects that would serve the country. In an article from 1881 he writes:

'Why don't we cooperate in building schools in a country that has been dominated by ignorance? Why don't we open schools when we know they are the basis on which we build [our society] and they are the most important means by which our children acquire knowledge and proper upbringing?' (Nadim [11 September 1881] 1994, 208).

A number of Islamic and Christian Benevolent Societies were subsequently founded in different parts of the country for the purpose of establishing primary schools.¹¹

His directorship of the Alexandria school was short-lived due to political intrigues with members of the highest echelons of government. After being expelled from IBSA, Nadim transferred his energies into editing his periodical *al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit (Raillery and Reproach)* (1881) which represented a new, populist genre of political satire that only one other writer of the time, Ya'qub Sanu' engaged in.¹² Many of its articles are written in colloquial Arabic in the form of a dialogue between two people representing 'symbols of the average Egyptian' (Marsot 1971, 9).

At the urgings of General Ahmad 'Urabi, the leader of a proto-nationalist social revolution in Egypt, Nadim abandoned *al-Tankit* in 1881 to start *al-Ta'if (The Wanderer)* a fervently Islamic revolutionary tract which portrayed the British in religious terms as 'infidels.' The language and revolutionary fervor reflected in *al-Ta'if* was evidently so vitriolic that Mohamed 'Abduh who was responsible for press censorship at that time, ceased its publication after only one month (Rida in Osman 1979, 48). Nadim also served as the most galvanizing revolutionary orator, sometimes appearing by 'Urabi's side, other times venturing out on his own where he would deliver stirring speeches to rapt audiences in villages, city streets, army barracks, mosques and even wedding parties (Osman 1979, 43-53). Despite the momentum being gained by the Urabists, the revolution was ultimately crushed and led to what would be forty years of British Occupation (1882-1922) and a temporary lull in the press.¹³

Along with other leaders of the 'Urabi revolution Nadim was arrested, but in absentia. Rather than turn himself into the authorities he opted for the life of a fugitive and wandered the countryside in disguise for nine years. The events of the previous years took a physical toll on Nadim. Commenting on his appearance, he observed that he had aged prematurely – or been 'crowned with the whiteness of old-age instead of the color of youth. Looking at me you would say I am 70 years old, but I'm 39' (Nadim in Galal 1997, 142).

On finally being captured in 1891 by a government spy, Nadim was exiled to Jaffa, Palestine. The following year the new Khedive 'Abbas Hilmi II (1892-1914), who had previously worked with Nadim as the General Chairman of the Islamic Benevolent Society in Alexandria, pardoned him on the condition that he not partake in any political activities. Nadim promptly returned to Egypt and with the help of his brother Abdel Fatah who applied for and received a publication license, started the weekly periodical *al-Ustaz* (The Professor) in August 1892. Through *al-Ustaz*, as we will review below, Nadim was able to return to the three public roles at which he excelled: writer, teacher and political orator.

Despite his vow to the Khedive, Nadim was unable to abstain from politics, especially when it came to the British occupation. Among the articles in *al-Ustaz* were 'bitingly satirical articles against the British occupation.' British Consul General Lord Cromer, whose policy in principle was to maintain a non-interventionist stance towards the Egyptian press, eventually demanded Nadim's exile (Goldschmidt 1968, 311). Nadim was sent again to Jaffa and following an unsuccessful attempt to illegally re-enter Egypt through Alexandria, eventually settled in Istanbul. At Afghani's recommendation Sultan Abdülhamid II offered Nadim a position at the Sublime Porte in the Press Bureau as the General Inspector of Publications, but it was short-lived (Keddie 1972, 379). He quickly fell out of favor with the court because of differences with Abu'l Huda al-Sayyadi, the Sultan's Chief Counselor against whom he composed a satirical attack in verse replete with vicious caricature illustrations entitled *Al-Masamir (The Nails)*.¹⁴ Nadim was discharged from his position and except for the camaraderie and financial support of his friend Afghani, found himself alone in Istanbul with no real source of income. In 1896, at fifty-four years of age, Nadim died of complications from tuberculosis. He was buried at the cemetery of the Sublime Porte and at his grave Jamal al-Din Afghani eulogized him with the following words:

'There are people whose memories end with the end of their lives, but this man, on whose grave we now stand, was the wonder of his time. God bless his soul. He was a very Egyptian person. He was a man of principle who gave his soul to his nation (*umatih*) and he died as a martyr for its sake.' (Jamal al-Din Afghani in al-Juindi 1997, 189-190)

Muslim youth and European education

Two major currents run through Nadim's platform of political and social action: the necessity to spread education throughout the Muslim population; and the need to rid the country of foreign domination. Cutting across these two concerns is the issue of Muslim/Egyptian youth and European education. The whole question of what constituted education for the changing times, who should be privy to it, fund, and regulate it, and what its content, method and objectives should be, was hotly debated. Ottoman officials, members of local government, social reformers, Christian missionaries, Muslim clerics, and, from 1882, the British mandate government harbored contesting visions about the sociopolitical and cultural objectives of schooling. While the British mandate government wanted to limit local educational development as a form of political control,¹⁵ Christian missionary groups endeavored to spread schooling as part of their *mission civilatrice*.¹⁶ Indigenous reformers, on the other hand, aspired for Egyptian officials and local notables to exert greater efforts in funding and spreading civil (as opposed to traditional religious) primary schooling as a means of controlling the intellectual development and political socialization of the youth.

To be sure, foreign schools far outnumbered Egyptian government primary civil schools. According to the 1893 statistics from the Ministry of Public Instruction, there were nine Egyptian government primary schools for boys with a total of 2461 students compared to 108 primary schools run by Christian missions with some 7133 students.¹⁷ Muslims students were increasingly being integrated into foreign and Christian missionary schools.¹⁸ The situation for girls was even more dramatic. In 1890 only a single Egyptian government primary school for girls, as-Sayufiyya, existed alongside a total of 95 denominational – mainly Christian – primary schools for girls.¹⁹ Enrollments at as-Sayufiyya were never very high and in the first year reached 298, a large proportion of whom were white slave girls belonging to families in government. That number decreased to 206 by 1880 (Ali 1995, 84-85). The curriculum consisted of Quran, Turkish, drawing, needlework, piano and laundry (Heyworth-Dunne [1939] 1967, 375). A Swiss education advisor in Egypt at that time, Dor Bey, argued that enrollment levels might rise if government schools for girls were limited to elementary education and concentrated on subjects that were suitable for housewives (Ali 1995, 85); for the most part his views circa 1890 were echoed in the Arab press.²⁰

The table below on Primary School Students in Egypt by religion and sex between 1893-94 lists the total number of students in government, foreign, and modernized *kuttab* (pl. *katatib*) schools. As the table indicates, Muslim boys received the highest proportion of primary schooling overall. Most striking about these figures is the extent to which Muslim girls lagged behind other groups in society in terms of the degree to which they received a formal education. Note that

among the total Christian student population 28% were girls, whereas Jewish girls represented an even higher 42% of the overall Jewish student population. Muslim girls, in contrast, constituted only 2% of Muslim students and a mere 1% of the overall student population in Egypt.

TABLE 1: Total primary school students in Egypt by religion and sex: 1893-94²¹

| Religion | Total | % of Group | % of Total |
|------------------|---------|------------|-------------|
| Muslim | 160,690 | | 82% |
| Boys | 157,843 | 98% | 80% |
| Girls | 2847 | 2% | 1% |
| Christian | 32,532 | | 16% |
| Boys | 23,370 | 72% | 12% |
| Girls | 9162 | 28% | 5% |
| Jew | 3368 | | 2% |
| Boys | 1942 | 58% | 1% |
| Girls | 1426 | 42% | 1% |
| Total | 196,590 | | 100% |

It is within a context of extremely low participation of Muslim girls in formal schooling, a government policy which neglected girls' schooling, the dominance of Christian missionary schools, in addition to a British mandate policy that deliberately impeded national educational development, that Nadim wrote about Muslim youth and European education in a series of articles in his enormously popular weekly *al-Ustaz* (*The Professor*).

'Educating the nation' by reaching the masses

Al-Ustaz (1892-3) was marketed as a *Journal of Science, Instruction and Entertainment* ('*ilmiyya, tahdhibiyya, fakahiyya*) (Hartmann 1899, 63). Like its forerunner *al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit*, its circulation surpassed all other daily and weekly publications of the time.²² The titles *al-Ustaz* and a series of articles therein entitled *Madrasat al-Banat* (*Girls' School*) and *Madrasat al-Banin* (*Boys' School*), were deliberately chosen by Nadim the teacher, who recognized the

educational, didactic, and political potential of print-media to influence public opinion. Furthermore, he acknowledged the importance of directly reaching Muslim youth and incorporating them into the nation's cultural, social and political projects.²³

In order to communicate with as wide and diverse an audience as possible, Nadim continued to champion language reform in journalism. As in the past, he wrote in three radically different literary styles that reflected the different educational, professional and social backgrounds of his readers: high, literary Arabic for the educated elite; simple standard Arabic for semi-educated readers; and colloquial Arabic for his unlettered audience (al-Jamie'e 1984, 380). A writer from the period recounts how newspapers were reaching larger audiences of men who would 'gather in the streets in a circle while a half educated man or a schoolboy standing in the center would read to them' (Sharubim 1898, 25 in Osman 1979, 14). Girls and women, however, remained largely outside the 'reading' public.

By using the pure Egyptian vernacular for the articles of the *Girls' School*, Nadim demonstrates his inclusive notion of 'public.' Rarely did literate intellectuals engage in direct communication with illiterate or barely literate rural and urban girls and their mothers. Other male writers concerned with girls' education from that period, such as Qasim Amin (1865-1908) for example, addressed a primarily educated male audience (Amin [1899]1992). Even the women's press in Egypt which was launched in November 1892 with the publication of *al-Fatah (The Young Woman)* (three months after the release of the first issue of *al-Ustaz*) was by and large directed to literate, middle-class urban women (Baron, 1994). Muslim girls constituted an almost invisible social category and were not only ignored by public intellectuals, but direly underrepresented in schools.

The collection of articles below which were written in 1892 can be conceptualized as virtual schools for Egyptian Muslim youth. The articles deal with urgent social issues such as the increasing encroachment of European culture and threats to national culture and identity, changing gender roles, the efficacy of new schooling, the importance of preserving an Islamic identity, and the place of non-Muslims in Egypt's future. There are also a number of articles in this series dealing with the science of hygiene and modern housewifery, however due to a lack of space will unfortunately not be treated here.

The lessons of the *Girls' School* are written entirely in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, whereas the articles of the *Boys' School*, presumably because they are directed to educated boys, are written in the second level, a simple, standard Arabic with occasional colloquial phrases. All the articles of the *Girls' School* and *Boys' School* are set up as conversations between two and sometimes three people

with one person clearly serving as the teacher and the other(s) the student(s). The use of dialogues as a mode of instruction was a common style in the *adab* or Islamic behavior manuals which Nadim was undoubtedly familiar with (Metcalf 1984, 4-11). Due to their rich detail, translations of a selection of the dialogues are provided below. Nadim, a skilled communicator, at times eloquent, often witty, sarcastic, bombastic, paternalistic, and earnest, merits being read in his own words. To read Nadim allows us to discern how he grappled with pressing issues of his day and to experience his rhetorical techniques for swaying public opinion.

The opening article of the *Girls School* (Nadim [1 November 1892] 1994b, 1: 246-251) consists of a conversation between Nafisa, a naïve school girl, and Zakia (which literally means clever or smart), an urban Muslim woman who represents an indigenous voice of reason and moderation. Zakia asks Nafisa about what she learns in school and comments extensively on the edification of each subject to Nafisa's overall moral education. They begin with a discussion of language and it soon becomes clear that while Zakia is in favor of female literacy and the study of the Arabic language, she considers it unnecessary and morally and politically ill-advised for Muslim girls to learn European languages.

Zakia: What did you learn at school today?

Nafisa: I learned [Arabic] reading and writing, French, sewing and piano. I also learned English and foreign dancing.

Zakia: As for [Arabic] writing and reading, these are certainly useful subjects; you can sit and read from the holy book of the Quran or learn about your religion from other books. But English and French, why do you learn those languages? Are you planning to marry a French or English man?

Nafisa: No, that's not it. All the children of important people (*annas al-kubar*) learn French or English because girls marry boys who know these languages and after marriage they can converse together in these foreign languages.

Zakia: But aren't you either going to marry the son of an Arab or the son of a Turk?

Nafisa: Yes.

Zakia: OK then, why don't you learn Arabic or Turkish, the languages we speak with the families of our country? As for the man who foregoes his own language to speak with his wife in French or

English while he's the son of an Arab or Turk, he has little taste. Why would one of our men speak with us, girls of the East, in the languages of the French or English?

Nefisa: That's the way it is now. You don't know what's happening in the world. Some of the girls in the *Sham* (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine) go to foreign language schools and their husbands go to them too.

Zakia: Those are the girls who dress like foreigners and walk on the streets with clothes meant for the house, just like the foreign women. We shouldn't go out without covering ourselves, and we shouldn't go to gatherings at the theater or to parties where there would be men whom we don't know. Why should we and our beloved sisters in the *Sham* learn these foreign languages?

Nefisa: The new civilization, modern life (*Dimin it-tamadun al-jadid*), calls for girls to learn foreign languages.

Zakia: I can see why men would have to learn foreign languages, they have reasons. They need to know what the foreigners are saying, read their books. But why us? Are we girls going to open a shop or meet with foreign consuls? Will we give speeches in the parliament or write in the newspapers? That's nonsense. Instead of teaching girls foreign languages, your school should be teaching you your own language, the ways of your religion, and how to bring up children and take care of the house, not this nonsense about things that aren't useful.

Let's say a woman knew French and her husband didn't. She would leave him in search of someone who knew French so that she could speak use her French and retain what she learned. I swear, people these days don't know what's come over them. They imitate anything they see the foreigner doing without thinking. They want to become foreigners too and completely forget themselves. It's sad.

Nafisa: Let's take the wives of the kings. They know many languages. Would you say this is unnecessary?

Zakia: They're allowed to [learn foreign languages] because the wives of the foreign consuls visit them. They spend holidays and a

lot of time with them. They should learn foreign languages to be able to speak directly with the wives without translators. They're in a situation which compels them to learn these things. As for us, it's just not necessary. Forget it.

Girls' education, as this discussion about foreign languages suggests, should strive to reform the domestic and private sphere and provide future women with tools to be better wives, mothers and Muslims. Foreign languages might not only distract women from their primary domestic responsibilities, but acclimatize them to the habits and tastes of Europeans and potentially lead them to paths of immorality. Note how adultery looms over the woman who speaks English or French. Whereas the knowledge of foreign languages enables men to effectively carry out their public responsibilities, women's knowledge of foreign languages constitutes a form of cultural pollution and potential licentiousness. The 'immoral' theme continues with even more urgency in the following passages dealing foreign music and dance.

Zakia: And tell me, why are you learning dancing? Are you going to dance at a wedding or are you going to a ball where a young man pulls your waist against his thighs and spins you among the other young men who dance with foreign women? It's shameless behavior.

Nafisa: You're probably going to mock me for learning the piano too.

Zakia: The piano? What's that all about?

Nafisa: The piano is a musical instrument which a woman faces and taps at with her fingers.

Zakia: I've heard old people say that if the mare softens the sound of her voice it arouses passion in the stallion. This means that [music] moves passion and if a woman falls in love she's never going to fall in love with her husband because he's in front of her every hour. He is in the hand, and the one in the hand is outside the heart. She's going to fall in love with another man, God forbid! This is going to be scandalous!

The arts of dance and music are ascribed with qualities of passion, shame and scandal. They incite both inter-sex – and inter-national – mingling in a society

where seclusion and veiling of Muslim women was the overwhelmingly norm. Girls are encouraged instead to pursue the less passionate, and more solitary arts of sewing and needlework.

Nafisa: And now you're going to make fun of me for learning sewing and needlework and say, 'Why should one spend time hand sewing a head cover when she can buy it already made for two cents?'

Zakia: On the contrary, I think sewing is a necessity for women. The woman can sew her own as well as her husband's and children's clothes and decorate them with embroidery. She can make a skull cap for her husband, nice pillow cases, a prayer rug, a money bag, curtains, fringe for the bed, a belt, a nice night shirt, handkerchiefs, a pretty bedspread, a cover for the coffee pot. If a woman learns these things she'll spend all her time in her house occupying herself, even if she has servants. If she's lonely she can do her housework and when she finishes, instead of wasting her time sitting at the window and looking at all the good and bad things going on [in the streets], she can do what the children of good, decent families do.

Many girls buy their own jewelry from the money they earn from needlework. It can bring a lot of income. There are a lot of women who help their husbands out through needlework and handicrafts. Their husbands are always the finest and best dressed among the men, always well taken care of. I advise you to do well in sewing and open your eyes to learn what best benefits you. Try to learn needlework.

Needlework and handicrafts fosters exemplary qualities for the ideal type Egyptian Muslim woman: passive, private, industrious, thrifty, family-oriented, clean, and devout. Finally, Zakia raises the issue of religious instruction at school, and by so doing emphasizes that the source of a Muslim woman's morality and behavior should not be derived from the culturally alien and unvirtuous Europeans arts, but from Islam.

Zakia: Do you have a *faqih* (Quran teacher) in your school to teach you about your religion?

Nafisa: We have Shaykh Ibrahim.

Zakia: Have him teach you about your religion, about how to pray, fast, clean yourself when you have your period, how to wash before praying, how God gave man certain rights over women. Let him teach you what is forbidden and accepted in your religion. If a woman doesn't learn her religion she will not have a conscience and she will not have a mind to prevent her from bad things.

Nafisa, persuaded by Zakia's judiciousness, concludes by telling her friend that she is going to inform her father that she will only study reading, sewing, and needlework and will no longer learn French, piano, and foreign dance. We see here how Nadim uses a strategy of influencing the parent through the daughter, rather than the other way around.

These lessons do not deviate from the prevailing attitude of the period regarding how Muslim girls required only a limited education to allow them to fulfill roles of respectable housewives, mothers, wives and Muslims. As numerous scholars who deal with issues of gender, nation, and anticolonial struggles have noted, nationalist leaders often assigned women the responsibility of preserving their native language and cultural identity by relegating them to the private sphere (Ahmed, 1992; Badran, 1995; Chatterjee, 1993). Where Nadim breaks new ground is in his technique of communicating directly with girls in the vernacular, encouraging them to make active choices about the content of their education, and recognizing their agency – or ability – to influence their fathers' decisions regarding their schooling.

Whereas the lessons of the *Girls' School* stress individual morality and the responsibility of girls to preserve their cultural and religious integrity while pursuing a formal education, boys are given the responsibility of building the nation. In particular, the articles of the *Boys' School* address the phenomenon of Christian missionary schools, the threat they pose to Egyptian unity, and the role of Muslim boys in ensuring national social harmony (Nadim [6 December 1892]1994b, 1: 364-369; Nadim [13 December 1892] 1994, 1:391-395).

In the following passages Hafez, a practicing Muslim and politically informed young man (a.k.a. Nadim), cautions Kamal, a Muslim boy who attends a foreign Christian school, of the harmful consequences that could befall him and all of society if he continues to attend a foreign school. Hafez conjectures that foreign schools aspire to convert students to the Christian sects of the Europeans and eventually split the country in a classic colonial strategy of 'divide and rule'. Boys, he cautions, should conserve their cultural and religious heritage and maintain a sense of both Muslim identity and Egyptian unity.

Hafez: What school do you go to?

Kamal: A foreign school. They teach Muslims, Christians and Jews the Christian faith. They make us pray like them before lessons.

Hafez: Why don't you tell your father about this?

Kamal: I told him and he asked me what I say in this prayer and I told him I'm talking about our father in heaven. But he didn't do anything. A lot of classmates are Muslim and all their parents are unaware of this religion issue. Many Muslims are brought up in these schools and do not perform any of the Islamic rites. They don't pray, fast, or wash correctly. They do not even distinguish between *Halal* (acceptable things and behavior in Islam) and *Haram* (those things which Islam forbids).

Hafez: Oh God forbid! People only see these foreign schools as nice buildings and furniture, expensive equipment, low tuition fees and free food and drink for their children. I wonder if [Egyptians] know the reasons behind these schools. They have nothing in common with our language or religious faith. These [European] countries have many people in need schooling, [worse off] even then us. Don't [Egyptians] see through this trick to convert our students from our faith to theirs? Your father's and other parents' lack of awareness is so strange. I think the main reason your parents send you to this school is to learn foreign languages. Why don't our rich people open schools that teach the Arabic language and Islam in addition to foreign languages? This would prevent [Egyptian] students from converting.

Hafez provides Kamel with instructions on how to perform wudu', the ritual cleansing before Islamic prayers to fill in an important religious gap in his friend's education. He then suggests that perhaps one advantage of foreign schools is that they provide Egyptian Christians with religious instruction. To his chagrin, however, he finds out that the Christian students are at the same disadvantage as the Muslims, for they are being educated in the beliefs and practices of a denomination different from their own:

Hafez: You told me you learned a Christian prayer at your school. I'll bet your [Christian] friend, Shenouda, is happy with this religious education because at last he found someone to teach him his religion.

Kamal: Shenouda is Orthodox, but the teachers have taken him to the Protestant faith. Nakhla was Protestant but was taken by the Jesuits.

Hafez calls for religious tolerance and cautions all Egyptians from succumbing to the 'divide and rule' strategy of their European educators/dominators.

Hafez: Every nation is so zealous for its faith and every sect is zealous for itself. You have to maintain your faith and inform your father about what's going on at school and how they teach you another faith. You also have to tell Shenouda to tell his father. Muslims [who attend these schools] will become Christian from a very young age and re-educating them in old age will never work. Fathers should know what is happening. If they don't, a Copt will convert from the sect of his father to that of the foreigners. The foreigners divide the sect [of the Copts] that has been united for centuries. You shouldn't allow this to happen...

Kamal: Why should I [as a Muslim], be concerned if my Christian friends disagree and divide?

Hafez: The Copts are Christians, but they are also your fellow compatriots (*watanak*) and you'll be happy if they are united because this will protect you from failure...Their unity is necessary for you; it maintains good relations and [national] harmony. If [divisions] appear among them, Shenouda might be upset if you visit Nakhla (a Protestant), and *vice versa*. If you abandon both friends, you will cause further separation between the two sects... Foreigners will be happy with their separation because they aim at causing disunity in Eastern societies. You have to maintain national unity and bring Muslims, Christians and Jews together. You should all behave rationally and not cause discord in the country.

Nadim, the ultimate teacher, directly inserts himself into the conversation to reiterate to Hafez – the symbol of all Muslim boys, that he should respect non-Muslim Egyptians and strive for inter-sectarian national harmony.

Nadim: Societies provide the basis for social harmony. Different sects and races have to abide by the law and make use of the achievements of others. The East in general, and Egypt in

particular, is full of people who belong to different races... You have to treat people as if they know about civil rights and are keen to maintain [civic] aspects of the nation in tact... Do not refrain from advising your brothers all that you learned from me and your teachers. You will thus become a teacher yourself and educate those who are unable to join a school or those who [live in] fear. Urge them with your knowledge and manners to join you in pursuing education.

Ultimately it is incumbent upon young educated, enlightened Muslim men, the nation's teachers, to provide the conditions that will allow for social harmony and national unity.

Conclusion

Educational reform in the nineteenth century intersected with struggles for political and economic autonomy from the British, national identity building, and uses of novel technologies to forge a public sphere. Like other reformers of the period, Nadim utilized old and new platforms and technologies including the school, the theatre, the orator's podium, the mosque, the *adab* manual/newspaper to propagate his ideas concerning educational, political, economic and social reform to the public, or more accurately, multiple publics. Indeed Nadim demonstrated a rare ability to communicate with audiences that spanned socio-economic, gender and age groups. Whether states-people, revolutionaries, peasants, mothers, or, of particular concern to us here, Muslim youth, Nadim spoke directly to his audiences in a language they could understand. Always the teacher, Nadim provided Egyptians with a moral, institutional, scientific, political and religious framework for coping with changing and contentious times.

Ultimately, Nadim deems education the panacea for society's ills, and teachers the champions of a better society that would ideally be characterized by inter-sectarian social harmony, liberation from European domination, and national unity. Yet Nadim's idealized Egyptian society had its own inequitable social hierarchy in which non-Muslim men were ultimately subordinate to their Muslim counterparts and Muslim women were restricted to the private domain. Despite his involvement in progressive literary and political movements of the 1870s, Nadim's views by the 1890s – in large part as a response to the British occupation – took on a quality of culturally conservative, yet politically radical Islamic nationalism. Nadim most valorized those young Muslim men who emerged from different strata throughout Egyptian society and devoted their lives to

learning and teaching, to articulating and communicating a new social vision to the public. For teachers, in Nadim's universe, were ultimately the 'souls' of the nation and as a logical extension the school, in its myriad manifestations, was its heart.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Arabic are my own. I would like to thank Muhammad al-Sharkawi for his help in reading and translating the Arabic materials; however I have made all final edits and take responsibility for any possible errors. Much appreciation goes to Abd al-Munim al-Jamie'e for generously sharing his resources, time and expertise with me, and also to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback. A final thanks goes to Peter Gran who is responsible for introducing me to my new friend—and sometimes foe, ' Abdallah Nadim.
2. A number of important works dealing with Egyptian education in English, including works on women, do not treat Nadim as a serious player in 19th century educational politics (Ahmed 1992; Badran 1995; Heyworth-Dunne [1939] 1967; Hyde 1978; Mitchell 1988; Radwan 1951; Starrett 1998; Steppat 1968). Figures such as Rifa'a al Tahtawi and Ali Mubarak who studied in Europe and were strong advocates of educational borrowing have received far more attention in the English literature. Mohammad Abudh, Nadim's colleague in the reform and anticolonial movements, became a part of the political establishment later in life and somewhat of a darling of the English. By the 1890s, when Nadim was fervently writing his way into political exile, 'Abduh was developing close relations with the British, particularly Lord Cromer, the British consul general in Egypt and securing his career in Egypt (Hourani 1983, 135).
3. For a discussion of the foreigner, or *khawaja* in Nadim's writings, see Osman (1979, 103-108).
4. I do not mean to mislead the reader into erroneously thinking that Nadim has not been an object of serious study; he has. He appears most prominently in the Egyptian nationalist literature of the post 1952 period and a number of books and articles in Arabic are devoted to him, as are a limited number of works in French and English. (See, for example, Amin 1949; Hadidi 1962; al-Guindi 1997; al-Jamie'e 1980; Tawfiq 1954; Osman 1979; Delanoue 1961-2). It is Nadim's contribution in the domain of educational reform specifically that has been underdeveloped in the scholarly literature—specifically the English literature.
5. Henry Giroux, a leading critical educationist, describes the public intellectual as someone who is able to communicate 'to a diverse range of audiences from a number of public arenas...[and] move between academic institutions and other public spheres in which knowledge, values, and social identities are produced' (1997, 263-264).
6. Afghani's circle of young male protégés included Muhammad 'Abduh, Talat Harb, political satirist Ya 'qub Sanu', and the Christian Syrian playwrights and publishers Adib Ishaq and Salim al-Naqqash.
7. Egyptian historian Ahmed Amin notes that during this period it was common for boutiques and small shops to serve as schools of literature (Amin 1949, 207-208).
8. I would like to thank Dr. Mustafa Badawi from St. Antony's College, University of Oxford, for his insights about *udabati* in Egyptian cultural life.

9. For more on the *udabatiyya* see Fahmi (1964).
10. I was unfortunately unable to find any detailed information on the society's *kuttab*s for girls, although several sources mention that they did exist.
11. Between 1879 and 1881, the years of Nadim's campaign in support of Benevolent Societies, two other branches of the Alexandria School were opened in Damietta and Cairo. The Islamic Benevolent Society in Damanhour opened a school in June 1881, in Mansoura the society for vocational and technical education opened in July 1881, in Mit Ghur the Islamic benevolent society opened, in Alexandria the Firm Bond Benevolent Society (*al- 'rwa al-withqy*) established a night school in 1892, and in Cairo the Nile School was inaugurated in 1893 (Nadim [3 July 1881] 1994a, 5). There were also societies specifically for girls education such as the Islamic Society for the Education of Girls established in 1892 (Badran 1995, 49). The best known of all Islamic Benevolent Societies was the Islamic Benevolent Society of Cairo known as *al-Maqasid* established in 1892 and founded by Mohammed 'Abduh. Its illustrious board included Muhammed Talat Harb, Saad Zahglul, Muhammed Farid, Omar and Ahmed Lutfi, Ahmed Hishmat and Hassan Assem (Amer 1996, 425). Donations for this society were forthcoming from the Islamic, Christian and Jewish communities as well as people from all social strata (Amer 1996, 439). Their schools were located throughout Egypt in Cairo, Alexandria, Tanta, Beni Mazar, Asyout, Mahala, and Port Said (Ahmed 1960, 39-40).
12. For an excellent study of Ya'qub Sanu' see Gendzier (1966).
13. See Cole (1993) on the role of the British in thwarting the 'Urabi revolution.
14. More than 100 years after being written, *Al-Masamir* is still clouded in controversy. In 1999 Egyptian historian Abd al-Munim al-Jamie'e from Cairo University's Fayoum campus, used the book in a history course. An Islamist student complained to the president of Cairo University Farouq Ismail that the book, and subsequently the class, was promoting licentious, immoral values. The president concurred with the student's view and brought al-Jamie'e before the university's disciplinary committee. The case became highly politicized, with many intellectuals supporting al-Jamie'e and the cause of academic freedom. Al-Jamie'e eventually won the case and continues to teach courses on 'Abdallah Nadim (personal interview with al-Jamie'e Sept. 13, 1999 Cairo).
15. See Starrett (1998, 30-61) on British educational policy in Egypt during the mandate years.
16. In a statement issued by Christian missionary women at the First Missionary Conference of 1906, the following was read: '[We call for] an army of those with love in their hearts to seek and save the lost. And, with the willingness to take up this burden, so long neglected, for the salvation of Mohammedan women...' (First Missionary Conference, 1906:21).
17. Christian missions from France, Austria, England, Germany, United States and Italy were active in establishing schools.
18. In 1878 there was a 111% increase in the number of Muslim students who attended foreign schools, from 747 to 1850 pupils (Heyworth-Dunne 1968, 423, 443-455) and by the early twentieth century the number of Muslims at Christian schools increased many times over. The Mission of the United Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, more than any other single mission, made prodigious efforts in establishing schools and attracting native Egyptians to them. By 1906 the American Mission oversaw some 171 schools with a total of 15,451 students, 3115 (20%) of whom were Muslim (Watson 1907, 278).
19. Whereas primary boys' schools had been operating since 1837, it wasn't until 1873 that the first government school for Muslim girls, as-Sayufiyya School, opened under the patronage of Ismael

Pasha's wife Cheshmat Hanum (Heyworth-Dunne [1939] 1967, 375). In 1832 the School of Midwives was established for female students as part of the modernizing reforms for the military. Although not a primary school, in 1894 it was the only other government school for girls aside from as-Sayufiyya and had a paltry enrollment of twelve students (Ministère de l'Instruction Publique 1894). See Khaled Fahmy (1998) for more on the origins of the School of Midwives within a context of modernity and medicine in nineteenth-century Egypt.

20. Only in the more progressive Masonic press (*al-Lata'if*), and only in a limited number of articles, did writers advocate women's education not only to enable them to become better mothers and wives, but to provide them with personal fulfillment and opportunities to participate in society (Cannon 1985, 476).
21. These statistics were compiled by the author from records of the Egyptian Ministère de l'Instruction Publique of 1894. I would like to thank Madame Jehan at the Ministry of Education archive for her assistance.
22. Nadim reports in *al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit* (13 June 1881, 18) that 3000 copies of its first issue were distributed (in Osman 1979, 14) and he reports in *al-Ustaz* that 1500 copies of the first issue of that paper were printed, and all but 11 were sold (Delanoue 1961, 96) and 2840 were printed altogether (Nadim. [13 June 1893] 1994, 2:1029).
23. A year later Nadim's protégé Mustafa Kamel also used the metaphor of the school to name his nationalist, anti-British periodical *al-Madrasa* (The School) (e.May 1893). A British press watcher at the end of the 19th Century notes—rather unfavorably—the commonalities between the two Egyptians who were close political allies and friends. He wrote: 'Both men are possessed with a glowing hatred against the 'English Tyrants.' Their motto is: 'Egypt for the Egyptians.' Both are unquestionably clever, and their vociferous appeals had a great influence over the already much excited Moslems of Egypt' (Hartmann 1899, 22).

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