Zaynab Fawwāz's Feminist Locutions

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Abstract

Lebanese-Egyptian Zaynab Fawwāz (ca. 1850-1914) was an unusual presence in 1890s Egypt: an immigrant from Shīrī south Lebanon, without major family support, she created an intellectual place for herself in the Cairo press, generating a forthright voice on women's needs as distinct from "the nation's." Like most Arabophone writers on "the Woman Question," Fawwāz addressed girls' education, but she focused less on domestic training than on work and income, gender-defined dependency, and exploitation. She highlighted gender-prejudiced uses of religious knowledge to further masculine privilege. Framing her arguments within terms of engagement defined by Islamic *sharī'ah*, she appropriated and redefined keywords for an indigenous feminism. She repurposed the Islamic-Arabic genre of biographical writing for feminist-inflected history writing. I consider how Fawwāz deployed terminology and genre to contest patriarchal readings of Islamic practice sustained by assumptions of masculinist authority. Fawwāz's writings remind us that secularism was never inherent in Arabophone feminist theorizing, nor were the earliest Arab feminisms Western derivatives. Historical assemblages shaped by Islamic (and Christian) worldviews yielded creative syntheses that were firmly indigenous.

Keywords

feminism – biography – Egypt – gender – *sharī'ah* – *hijāb* – 1890s

When Zaynab Fawwāz introduced her in-progress biographical dictionary project—a compendium of world women's lives through recorded history—to readers of the Beirut newspaper *Lisān al-ḥāl* in March 1892, she addressed Arab women, asking them to send her their biographies. But educated women in

many parts of the world would have understood the resonances of Fawwāz's request. The letter announced a massive project which would have been recognizable to what she called the "excellent" women of the West to whom Fawwāz referred, praising those women's visibility in the public eye—globally—and contrasting it, critically, with a dearth of published writing on Arab and Muslim women's histories.

Across the world, from North America to China, biographical dictionaries of notable women were part of first-wave feminisms' so-called recovery of women's history. Fawwāz was explicit about the political aims of such a compilation; 'bringing recognition and illuminating the multiple excellences of women, especially eastern women.... bringing these histories from nothingness into existence, so that I could easily demonstrate some of [women's] rights and virtues'.¹ Fawwāz's biographical dictionary would be her most famous work, but it was only one facet of an amazing body of writing, published from 1892 to 1906. Her career shows us a feminism that looks familiar in some ways, but quite different in others. It is familiar and different if we think historically—feminism in the 1890s versus now—but also if we think synchronically about different nineteenth-century feminisms across the world. One aim of my research on Fawwāz and the debates in which she participated has been to challenge assumptions of time-lag, to think about the coeval production of feminism and of debates on gender in different sites across the nineteenth-century world, and about how gender-activist discourses accented each other. Another is to trace local and individual specificities.

Zaynab Fawwāz (ca. 1850–1914) was an unusual presence in the 1890s Cairo intellectual scene not just because she was female, or because even among writing women at the time she had a distinct voice, but also because she was an immigrant from predominantly Shīʿi south Lebanon. Informally educated and without major family connections, Fawwāz established herself as a forthright and confrontational voice for rethinking the gendered stratification of opportunity in Egypt, in other Muslim-majority societies, and—if only by implication—worldwide.

After briefly introducing her life and works and their fit in the larger discursive arc of her era, I draw on Fawwāz's biographical dictionary² and a few

1 "Al-Durr al-manthūr fī ṭabaqāt rabbāt al-khudūr, bi-qalam ḥadrat al-kātibah al-fāḍilah al-sayyidah Zaynab 'Alī Fawwāz fī Miṣr," *Lisān al-ḥāl* 16.1390 (15 March 1892), 4. All translations are my own.

2 Zaynab bint 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn ibn 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ḥasan ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Fawwāz al-Āmilī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī ṭabaqāt rabbāt al-khudūr* (Bulāq/Miṣr: al-Maṭba'ah al-Kubrā al-Āmiriyyah, 1312 AH).

of her many essays³ to propose how she articulated a feminist view within an Islamic vocabulary and sensibility—a political as much as a faith-based choice. This essay is a reflection rather than a research article. Selective and intended to be suggestive rather than comprehensive, taking its cues from a few keywords, it is based upon, and partly recapitulates, my deeper and broader analysis of Fawwāz's oeuvre in two monographs and several essays.⁴ Rather than canvassing that oeuvre thematically or politically, through selected examples I highlight Fawwāz's rhetorical presence (which of course is politically resonant), wherein a canny use of Islamic vocabulary frames a worldly outlook, reminding us of the cosmopolitan multivocality of Arab-Ottoman elites—even in the case of someone who did not have a formal education and did not read or speak any language other than Arabic. Worldliness emerges in unexpected spaces. Fawwāz's biographical dictionary was one such worldly space, and her newspaper essays were another. A feminism grounded in a faith-based perspective and a sense of (broadly) indigenous history and heritage is also a home from which to welcome the perspectival abundance of women's narrated experiences as templates for learning and struggle, whether realistically emulatable or spectacularly exemplary in their vivid renderings of what I have called elsewhere patriarchal trauma. Fawwāz's feminism was both indigenous in its grounding and outlook, and synthetic and worldly in its source base.

- 3 Most are republished in Zaynab Fawwāz, *al-Rasā'il al-zaynabiyyah* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Mutawassiṭah, n.d. [1905]). Most studies of Fawwāz have focused primarily on her biography with brief or broad-brush encapsulations of her writings. I recognize these earlier contributions—and the few more recent studies—fully in my publications (see note 4 below). For a thematic comparison of her essays with those of Malak Ḥifnī Naṣīf (Bāḥithat al-Bādiyah), see Susanne Bräckelmann, 'Wir sind die Hälfte der Welte!' *Zaynab Fawwāz (1860-1914) und Malak Ḥifnī Naṣīf (1886-1918)—zwei Publizistinnen der frühen ägyptischen Frauenbewegung* (Beirut: Orient-Institut der DMG [Ser. Beirut Texte und Studien 95], 2004).
- 4 Marilyn Booth, *Classes of Ladies of Cloistered Spaces: Writing Feminist History in Fin-de-siècle Egypt* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015); *Feminist Thinking in Fin-de-siècle Egypt: The Career and Communities of Zaynab Fawwaz (d. 1914)* (The Career and Communities of Zaynab Fawwaz: Feminist Thinking in Fin-de-siècle Egypt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021)); "Peripheral Visions: Translational Polemics and Feminist Arguments in Colonial Egypt," in *Edinburgh Companion to the Postcolonial Middle East*, ed. Anna Ball and Karim Mattar (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 183-212; "Jeanne d'Arc, Arab hero? Warrior Women, Gender Confusion, and Feminine Political Authority in the Age of High Colonialism," in *Women Warriors and National Heroes: Global Perspectives*, ed. Boyd Cothran, Joan Judge, and Adrian Shubert (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 149-177; "Locating Women's Autobiographical Writing in Colonial Egypt," in "Women's Autobiography in South Asia and the Middle East," ed. Marilyn Booth, special issue, *Journal of Women's History* 25.2 (2013), 36-60. I also discussed Fawwāz as biographer in *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

A Life

Much about Fawwāz's own history remains speculative, including her birth date, which matters because the range of dates mentioned (1845-60) spans nearly a generation. Choosing from among these dates means potentially placing her as a young adult at importantly distinct political moments, not to mention positioning her very differently in terms of salient personal relationships with individuals whose birth dates we do know. Be that as it may, born in or near the market town of Tibnīn in the Jabal 'Amil region of southern Lebanon, her early life unrolled in a milieu where Shī'ī scholarship flourished, although under Ottoman sovereignty, the Shī'ah were not a doctrinally or materially privileged community. Of her family we know little. Circumstances suggest they had some intellectual resources and a respectable Shī'ī genealogy that garnered them eminent local contacts. Young Zaynab lived for a time in the compound of the local emir or feudal ruler, likely as a servitor-companion to his literate and literary spouse, Fāṭimah bint al-As'ad, from whom Zaynab is said to have gotten her earliest literary training.

The timing or circumstances of Fawwāz's move from her natal home to Egypt are also subject to competing narratives. Once there, she lived with her lawyer brother. She came in contact with the Turkish-Egyptian writer and newspaper publisher Ḥasan Ḥusnī al-Ṭuwayrānī, likely because he noticed her earliest published essays in the Egyptian nationalist daily *al-Mu'ayyad*. He came to hear of her biographical-dictionary project in progress, advertising it in his Cairo newspaper *al-Nīl*. Fawwāz's byline soon began to appear there; she published at least twenty essays in *al-Nīl*, from June 1892 to January 1894.⁵

In 1893 Fawwāz's playscript, *al-Hawā wa l-wafā'* (Passion and Fidelity), was published, one of the first Arabic-language plays authored by a woman, though there is no indication that it was ever performed on stage. Her biographical dictionary was published 1894-6. Her novels came out in 1899 and 1905, and her collected essays soon thereafter.⁶ She died in early 1914 in Cairo. Thus, her life spanned an intense period of reform and infrastructure building in the Ottoman world, including in Egypt. Her adulthood coincided with the British occupation of Egypt in 1881-82, and the heavy-handed British imperial

5 This was a majority of the essays she published over the very productive period between April 1892 and January 1894. Her complicated publishing history, as well as the competing narratives of her life history, are addressed in Booth, *Feminist Thinking*.

6 For an overview of her works see Marilyn Booth, "Zaynab Fawwāz al-Āmili," in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography 1850-1950*, ed. Roger Allen (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 93-98. On the biographical dictionary's publication history, see Booth, *Classes*, 31-34. For publication histories and contextual analyses of the other works, see Booth, *Feminist Thinking*.

presence that followed. She lived through the beginnings of a vocal if not yet organized nationalist resistance in the 1890s and the attempts by Egypt's young Khedive from 1892, 'Abbās Ḥilmī II, to maneuver between the power centers of Istanbul and London. Fawwāz died a few months before the outbreak of World War I, and thus she did not live to see the postwar movements for national autonomy in Egypt and across the Ottoman Empire. Like those of her peers, her writings looked cautiously "Westward" while rejecting colonialist prescriptions for Egypt's and the Ottoman Empire's futures.

Discursive Currents

The decade in which Fawwāz emerged as a public voice—the 1890s—in addition to being a politically difficult one, fell within a longer period known at the time (and ever since) as *al-nahḍah*, variously translated as "awakening" or "renaissance" but more literally and appropriately as "getting to one's feet." Across the Ottoman Empire, this comprised a knowledge movement of intellectual and ruling elites. It entailed building a cultural infrastructure materially and intellectually: schools, printing presses, libraries, and intellectual societies.

The *nahḍah* has been conventionally explained as the product of Arabs' and other Ottoman subjects' encounter with western European societies after a period of "stagnation"—a narrative that *nahḍah*-era writers themselves propagated. Twentieth-century historians saw the *nahḍah* either as a heroic story of nation-building (what is often called a westernization narrative) or—with the postcolonial turn—as a tragic tale of Middle Eastern elites, already objects of European knowledge-power, becoming subject(ed) to it as seduced subjects (a narrative of what are understood as modernizing elites mimicking and being duped by "the West"). Copious recent work recognizes that the intellectual scene, and the material conditions that gave rise to it, were more varied and complex than those narratives suggest, and that it was full of tensions, cross-currents, and paradoxes both gestured to and unspoken.⁷ In some ways, Fawwāz's oeuvre exemplifies the varied, complex, and tension-ridden discourse of the *nahḍah* as well as both its outward-looking aspect and its intensely historical, genre-rich, recuperative aspect. Fawwāz's writings challenge imaginaries of the *nahḍah* as a polarized discursive field comprising "secular" and "faith-based" camps, or tradition-focused versus future-focused perspectives.

7 There has been a veritable explosion of scholarship on the *nahḍah*; this is not the place to attempt an exhaustive list.

A key tension that animated print discourse at the time—and long before lawyer Qāsim Amīn's famous 1899 work *Tahrīr al-mar'a* (Emancipation of women)—concerned questions of gender: of what one's assigned gender meant for one's possibilities in life, alongside other life-shaping aspects of how, where, and as whom one came into the human world. Issues of gender roles and rights were absolutely central to the *nahḍah*, and deep philosophical divisions undergirded the practical issues at the center of the debate. What status ought women to occupy in society? And according to whom? If you began to educate girls, would they begin to see things differently? What were women's rights? What did all of this mean for men? (It is important to recognize that these debates were about shifting notions of masculinity as well as of femininity. The discourse was strongly focused on "Woman" as a marked category, a collective body on which work had to be done, yet just as strongly but more silently on "Man" as a less vocalized and less obviously targeted gender category.) More specifically, what did it mean for patriarchal arrangements in the family and the society? Were such arrangements sanctified by God and Nature? How could one espouse notions of freedom and self-making and yet deny those *nahḍawī* values to females? The gender question, indeed, was absolutely central to the *nahḍah*, and questions of selfhood, autonomy and discipline were often played out in gendered terms. Newspapers and books were full of exhortations to "service to the nation": for women, that was supposed to mean embracing learned domesticity. What a successful modern nation needed, writer after writer exclaimed, were girls who would be the modest, thrifty, well-trained, stay-at-home mothers of the future. This was all very similar to what was being said throughout Europe—as writers in Cairo and Beirut knew well, quoting their Jules Simon and their Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.

From the 1860s into the new century, various genres of published writing in Arabic hosted debates about how the already-changing gender arrangements and understandings should intersect with the demands of building a modern state and educating a polity to support it. Much of this debate occurred in the press. Although newspapers and magazines had existed for some time, the 1890s was the decade that saw a proliferation of daily newspapers in Egypt, each strongly or loosely associated with a political perspective on the national future. Newspapers were multi-generic, publishing serialized novels, occasional poetry, and opinion pieces side-by-side with international news, legal notices, and provincial reports. The comparatively few women publishing before World War I concentrated on essays, fiction (some of it translated), biography, and poetry. When, in November 1892, the first Arabic-language journal for women as authors and readers was founded in Alexandria, women—including

Fawwāz—were already contributing to magazines and newspapers in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire.⁸

As has been repeatedly recognized, a large proportion of women writing for publication at the time (at least under their own names) were from Ottoman-Arab families of Christian heritage, often immigrants to Egypt and graduates of Christian-missionary schools founded by European or North American missions, from families engaged in education, journalism and publishing. As noted, Fawwāz's background and terms of reference were Islamic and to some extent Shī'ī, but distinctions should not be overdrawn. She was one in a cross-confessional group of women who contributed to and were the "agents" or "correspondents" for that first women's magazine, *al-Fatāt* (1892-94). (Most were Syrian Christian Arabs, but one was a Syrian Jewish Arab and another was Fawwāz.) Fawwāz's intellectual and political distinctiveness are more evident in her social analysis than in her faith grounding—a social analysis likely shaped in part by life circumstances themselves marked by economic and social insecurity. But her faith grounding as well as her training did undergird her choices of genre, language and approach. These writerly choices were not only wholly in accord with her cultural formation; they also are congruent with a discernible political perspective, responsive to European imperialist

8 Within the wealth of scholarship on the press in the *nahḍah*, and on the press and gender debates, mention should be made particularly of Ami Ayalon, *The Arabic Print Revolution: Cultural Production and Mass Readership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Marilyn Booth, "Woman in Islam: Men and the 'Women's Press' in Turn-of-the-century Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33.2 (2001), 171-201; Byron D. Cannon, "Nineteenth-century Arabic Writings on Women and Society: The Interim Role of the Masonic Press in Cairo (*al-Lata'if*, 1885-1895)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17 (1985): 463-484; Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Elizabeth M. Holt, "Narrative and the Reading Public in 1870s Beirut," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 40 (2009), 37-70; Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, eds., *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Stephen Sheehi, "Arabic Literary-Scientific Journals: Precedence for Globalization and the Creation of Modernity," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 25.2 (2005): 438-48; Hoda A. Yousef, *Composing Egypt: Reading, Writing, and the Emergence of a Modern Nation 1870-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Fruma Zachs and Sharon Halevi, *Gendering Culture in Greater Syria: Intellectuals and Ideology in the Late Ottoman Period* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015); Fruma Zachs and Sharon Halevi, "From *Difā' al-Nisā'* to *Mas'alat al-Nisā'* in Greater Syria: Readers and Writers Debate Women and their Rights, 1858-1900," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41 (2009), 615-633. And I remain deeply indebted to Filīb di Ṭarrāzī, *Tārīkh al-ṣiḥāfah al-'arabiyyah*, 4 vols. (Beirut: al-Maṭba'a al-Adabiyyah, 1913). Pts 1-3 (Beirut: al-Matba'a al-Adabiyyah, 1913-14), Pt. 4 (Beirut: al-Matba'a al-Amrikāniyya, 1933).

political and economic activities across the region, particularly as time went on. Hers was a perspective inflected by loyalty to the Ottoman Empire as the ultimate political authority and seat of the caliphate, and also by trans-local Muslim solidarity in what appeared to be a world increasingly hostile to Muslims *qua* Muslims.

And yet, her stance on the politics of gender in an Ottoman and Egyptian context, at least until ca. 1900, reached beyond the dominant concerns of the Arab-Ottoman elite as voiced in mainstream publications. Fawwāz hailed neither from the Egyptian or Ottoman Sunnī elite, nor from any of the Ottoman Arab Christian intellectual clans important to the era's intellectual infrastructure, although she became part of this heterogeneous intellectual elite. Perhaps this quasi-outsider status was an advantage. Hers was a voice that evidently did not see women's agendas as necessarily coterminous with the demands of an aspirationally-modern nation, or as focused on elites. Like most 1890s Arabic-speaking commentators on the Woman Question—a few of them female, fewer still female and Muslim—Fawwāz debated the ideal venues, contexts, and contents of girls' education, and argued for the importance of their sustained schooling. Unlike most others, she did not advocate girls' schooling as focused solely on skills needed for middle-class homemaking and child-raising. Rather, she emphasized the value of an education that would give girls and women the knowledge and confidence to contest their own oppression. She focused on issues of work, income, and gender-defined dependency. Her political stance was perhaps an outcome, at least partly, of her own non-elite background and her relative economic and social vulnerability throughout her life, even as she maintained a middling-strata existence through dependence on a brother and, later in life and briefly, a husband. But I do not wish to index Fawwāz's politics to her life experience; if that was a factor, her rhetoric displayed a synthesis of faith-based principles with deeply sympathetic analyses of gendered economic and social inequalities and misogynist tactics.⁹

Fawwāz attacked the patriarchal exploitation of religious knowledge that, as she argued, kept females in a psychologically subordinate position, and she did so from within an Islamic lexicon and with references to a Qur'an-based vision of justice and equality. This critique of patriarchal attitudes and practices was at the heart of her appraisal of the marriage institution. As an overarching

9 I use the term "misogyny/ous" in the sense that Kate Manne has recently and brilliantly elaborated it, as the policing arm of a patriarchal ideology that involves practices from the subtly disapproving to the coercive. Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018; London: Penguin Books, 2019). It is evident in Fawwāz's essays that she understood this.

theme, what threads through all of her writings is the mutually-constituted relationship between modes of female mobility and vocality; feminine intellectual self-realization and self-reliance; and women's right to have a say in the governance of their societies as well as their bodies and selves. Equally, her writings uphold the importance of understanding "women" as historically constituted and differentiated subjects.

Fawwāz wrote across genres but consistently within the terms of engagement defined by Islamic *sharī'ah* as realized in daily life practices and as formed and understood within historical narratives of the Muslim *ummah* (community). Though she could (and did) also respond to the European-provenant 'scientific' discourse that many elite Arab men (as well as their peers in Europe) were deploying against the frightening specter of women's demands for greater participation and authority in society, Fawwāz spoke most often—overtly and deliberately—as a female Muslim believer interrogating the intellectual legacy of her belief community. Framing her plots and her arguments from such a perspective, Fawwāz took up theologically resonant keywords with multiple significations and uses, and deployed them for an indigenous and practical feminism: for example, *sunnah* (path, as defined by the Prophet's example), *fard* (religious obligation), and *haqq* (right and due). If these terms could be used, and were used, with religiously neutral connotations, her pointed uses of them suggest that she was not simply drawing on an idiomatic, secularized lexicon.

The deployment of these religiously-resonant keywords was accompanied and buttressed by a studied use of genre. Fawwāz repurposed older genres and modes of writing for new uses, notably the disputation structure of *munāẓarah* and the premodern Islamic-Arabic genre of *ṭabaqāt* (biographical notices compiled in biographical dictionaries). She appropriated the *ṭabaqāt* genre's historic respectability for feminist-inflected history writing. Fawwāz's writings—her perspective, her language, the genres she used—remind us that however we might define it, secularism was never foundational to Arab feminist theorizing (whatever its purchase might have been later on). Nor can the emerging Arab feminisms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries be dismissed as Western derivatives, though they were attacked on those grounds then, and have been ever since. Rather, Arab feminisms were particular historical assemblages and perspectives shaped by Islamic (and Jewish and Christian) worldviews and that yielded creative syntheses that were firmly indigenous.

At the same time, intellectuals such as Fawwāz *did* attend closely to public events and articulations of gender politics elsewhere. For instance, and unapologetically, Fawwāz drew on suffrage debates (and defeats) sustained by

her contemporaries in Britain as she formulated her views on a local politics of gender.¹⁰ She attacked the Orientalist discourse of French policymakers, making this a target of local women's activism. Even so, her confrontations with male writers through *munāẓarah*—debate, “public” in the sense that it was published—did not occur on the grounds of “religion.” Instead, she engaged them on the grounds of these male writers' interests, which she was not averse to dismissing as partial, self-interested, hypocritical, and more interested in maintaining masculine authority at any cost than in the national-moral universe they purported to uphold. She contested commentators who positioned girls' education, women's work, and recalibrated marriage arrangements as strictly functionalist elements of the local modernities they advocated. These adversaries did not tend to articulate such changes as important to women's own self-realization, a view captured in the preface to a school text-cum-etiquette manual published in 1899, 'Alī Fikrī's *Ādāb al-fatāt* (Etiquette for girls): “The educated girl is a thing of pride to her family, a help to her spouse, a treasure-house of benefits, an exemplar of good behavior and refinement to her children.”¹¹

Fawwāz also drew on common, cross-societal tropes of the time. The European-Enlightenment discourse of world history as diffusion, as a stadial process that extended over time to ever-broader spaces of human habitation and sociality, structured the writings of many nineteenth-century feminists and other commentators on gender across the world. Of course, as a Eurocentric discourse, stadial history could not but be seen critically by those it positioned at the imagined receiving end of European imperialisms, such as Fawwāz and her peers in Egypt. Yet these writers utilized stadial history's political potential to foreground a differently positioned narrative. Like her peers, Fawwāz localized and modified stadial historiography by clearing a space for earlier Arab-Islamic intellectual and scientific accomplishments, reminding her readers that if Europe was now at the pinnacle, credit was due to earlier Islamic scholarship and *adab*.

Indeed, in one late essay, Fawwāz told readers bluntly that Europe's ascendancy was due to Europeans' enjoyment, ever since the Crusades, of *ijtihād*, *tawhīd*, and *jam' al-kalimah*, to the contrary of “Eastern” societies. The implication was that Europeans had “borrowed”—or appropriated—those pillars

10 Booth, “Peripheral Visions.”

11 'Alī Fikrī, *Ādāb al-fatāt*, 2nd printing, (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Ādāb, 1899), 4. Versions of this book were published through 1937. On this type of literature, see for example, Marilyn Booth, “‘Go Directly Home with Decorum’: Conduct Books for Egypt's Young, c.1911,” in, *Arabic Humanities, Islamic Thought: Essays in Honor of Everett K. Rowson*, ed. Joseph E. Lowry and Shawkat M. Toorawa (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 393-415.

of Islamic strength: striving based on learned inquiry, adherence to a monotheistic faith, and a unified community outlook and belief. Furthermore, it implies that these borrowed strengths had allowed European societies to surge forward in the international competition for societal primacy.¹²

These words were certainly in strong circulation at the turn of the century (more than they had been a decade before), for instance, in the first two volumes of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā's *al-Manār* (established in 1898). Moreover, the terms *tawḥīd* and *al-jāmi'ah* were deployed "secularly" to suggest communal unity and cohesion or solidarity, despite the overarching doctrinal purchase of the former term, signifying a theology of monotheism. In the first two volumes of *al-Manār*—thus, nearly two years before Fawwāz's essay appeared—the concept of *al-jāmi'ah* was consistently invoked, as a unity of collective purpose or outlook, and *jāmi'at al-kalimah* or *ittiḥād al-kalimah*, or parallel verb-noun pairs, appeared often to suggest this commonality of purpose and its articulation.¹³ These were juxtaposed, typically, with the notion of *tafarruq* or *tafrīq*, meaning fragmentation or the act of fragmenting something; these were often explained as the results of European intervention, whether that intervention be political, educational (through schools and missionary activity), or enacted by encouraging certain consumer habits and lifeways, or encouraging negative attitudes to Islam amongst Arab youth. Some of these articles were Muḥammad 'Abduh's, reproduced from the earlier journal, the official *al-Waqā'ī' al-miṣriyyah*, which he had edited at the time. *Tawḥīd* was used not only to signify a unity of belief—and a belief in a monotheistic god—but also in concert with other binding practices: unity of moral compass, of laws, of

12 [Zaynab Fawwāz], "Al-Madāris wa-l-dīn aw al-dīn wa-l-madāris" [the schools vis-à-vis the religion; or, the religion vis-à-vis the schools], *al-Liwā'* (9 Shawwāl 1317 [10 February 1900]); Fawwāz, *al-Rasā'il*, 195-198. This was likely published under the pseudonym "Sā'ibā" (I have not been able to access this issue of *al-Liwā'*). I discuss this essay and the context in Booth, *Feminist Thinking*, chapter 8.

13 "Istilāḥāt kuttāb al-ʿaṣr: al-ta'aṣṣub," *al-Manār* 1.3 (1 March 1898), 66-67; "Al-Madāris al-waṭaniyyah fī al-diyār al-miṣriyyah," *al-Manār* 1.15 (9 Ṣafar 1316), 256-63; "Al-Juyūsh al-gharbiyyah al-ma'nawīyyah fī al-futūḥāt al-sharqiyya," *al-Manār* 1.17 (23 Ṣafar 1316), 299-308; "Muqtaṭafat min al-jarā'id: tarbiyat al-banāt," *al-Manār* 1.23 (5 Rabī' II 1316), 436-437 (from *Miṣbāḥ al-sharq*); "Al-Gharb al-aqṣā: hal yumkin istirjā' majd al-sharq bi-quwwat al-Islām," *al-Manār* 1.40 (10 Sha'bān 1316), 794-801 (This is a letter sent to *al-Mu'ayyad*, signed N. al-Fuwaykī, from Tangier on 6 December, with a long response from *al-Manār*); "Al-Ittiḥād," "by one of the Azhar's shaykhs," *al-Manār* 2.4 (1 April 1899), 49-51; M. ' M., "Al-Isḥāḥ al-islāmī," *al-Manār* 2.5 (8 April 1899), 65-72 (including *al-Manār*'s response). Articles compare "our" fragmentation to "their" strong will, and link the latter to imperial acts that work to fragment and corrupt colonized societies. Most of volume one gives AH dates only; when the CE date is also provided I give that for ease of reference.

language.¹⁴ *Al-Manār* tended to contrast its vision of an ideal collective, as focused on fealty to the Ottoman community (and exhortations for unity amongst the “four independent Islamic polities”, the Ottoman, Afghanistan, Iran, and Morocco) with a negative view of Europe’s separate nationalisms.

While these terms were used on occasion, separately, to refer to unity of purpose or action in Europe,¹⁵ I have not seen them grouped precisely in the way Fawwāz used them, to describe European histories. Fawwāz’s language, echoing the critique of fragmentation, seemed counter to the view noted above, in suggesting an historical unity familiarized in the terms of Islamic discourse. I have not found this language used to the same purpose in *al-Manār* or in any other periodical, although it is possible, of course, that it did appear elsewhere. *Al-Manār* did not avoid mention of the historical sources of Europe’s power: indeed, Rashīd Riḍā was a strong believer in historical narrative as a mode of teaching. But he did not employ these terms precisely in this manner.

Whether, by deploying these Islamically saturated terms, Fawwāz meant to propose “Europe” as an equally vital faith community to that of the Islamic *ummah*, or whether she was mapping these Islamically salient terms to suggest a universal grid for social cohesion and political strength, is unstated; to propose this as either/or itself seems inappropriate, while the primacy of the Islamic *ummah* as model seems inescapable. In the context of her worldly perspective, was not the point to remind her Arabophone audience (perhaps with others looking over their readerly shoulders), that the Ottoman and Egyptian polities had internal legacies of strength on which to draw, but the ruling elites had forgotten, ignored, or squandered them? Although similar points were made by many, her claim seems bold in its terminological choices. It is probably significant that she used this terminology only in a late essay, one of a number of writings in which she expressed bitter impatience with a national leadership, coupled with a sense of betrayal concerning the promises of a “Western-led” modernity. This was precisely the time at which Rashīd Riḍā remarked that a concern with Islam was suddenly saturating the press.

At an earlier stage, Fawwāz had addressed the historical opportunity-cum-minefield of stadial history by posing the narrated lives of Arab and Muslim women through history as a neglected but politically productive focus of attention. In other words, women’s lived experiences as preserved—or retold—by other biographers and chroniclers, and repackaged by Fawwāz, were

14 “Al-Ta’aṣṣub,” *al-Manār* 1.26 (26 Rabīʿ II 1316), 483-493; “Al-Isḫāḥ al-dīnī: al-muqṭaraḥ ‘alā maqam al-khilāfah al-islāmiyyah,” *al-Manār* 1.39 (3 Shaʿbān 1316), 764-771.

15 “Al-ʿtibār bi-mā huwa jā: al-ḥarb wa-l-tahdhīb,” *al-Manār* 1.10 (4 Muḥarram 1316), 165-169; “Al-Ta’aṣṣub,” *al-Manār* 1.26 (26 Rabīʿ II 1316), 483-493.

themselves a challenge to a Eurocentric stadial history that would efface their historical existence. Fawwāz drew on biography both in her biographical dictionary and in her essays. Although, announcing her project in *Lisān al-ḥāi*, Fawwāz said she wanted to highlight “Eastern” women (and she did), she also narrated Other women—particularly European women—as agents within historical conditions that were distinct, but that yet paralleled the conditions of restraint and possibility in which Arab or Muslim women had made their lives, and in which those lives had been narrated for later audiences. Concomitantly, Fawwāz posed Europeans as achievers of accomplishments that were distinct, and yet were also parallel to those of Arab and Muslim women through history, and despite obstacles both distinct and parallel. In other words: sameness in difference. And so, she staged her European biographical subjects as available but partial models for her Arabophone readers.

Legacy Genres and Their Gendered Uses

Pearls scattered in times and places: Classes of ladies of cloistered spaces. The title Fawwāz chose for her 552-page large-folio biographical dictionary, comprising 453 biographies, nodded to Islamic history and literary-scholarly tradition through its use of rhyming prose, its metaphorical conceits exploiting ready idioms, and the generic marker *ṭabaqāt*, “layers” or “generations” or “classes.” Fawwāz took advantage of the high respectability and religio-cultural functions of the Arabic-Islamic biographical tradition, which had first emerged at least as early as the eleventh century CE as an aid in evaluating the probity of oral transmitters of *ḥadīth* (narratives of the Prophet’s acts and words, all-important as guides for believers and interpretative aides to understanding the Qur’an). Biographical dictionaries also kept alive the personalities of the Prophet’s family, immediate community, and spiritual heirs. The cultural tasks of *ṭabaqāt* literature proliferated. Through the centuries, biographical dictionaries preserved the memory and legacies of later Muslim elites and professional groups, from jurists to scholars to poets.

With her volume, Fawwāz turned the genre inside-out: women, who had been a minority of subjects (and all Muslim or pre-Islamic period Arab) in pre-nineteenth-century dictionaries compiled by male scholars, were her sole focus.¹⁶ A greater innovation was her expansion of the remit of *ṭabaqāt* to include subjects from outside the Islamic *ummah* and the multi-faith Arab

16 A couple of decades before, a biographical dictionary of Muslim and Turkish women authored by Mehmet Zihni had appeared in Turkish, and was translated into Persian but

and Ottoman fold. Locally, she included Arab contemporaries and as we have seen, she took the bold step—a political act—of advertising in a major daily newspaper, calling on women to send her their biographical information, in a milieu where public mention of individual women's names still remained for many a social taboo. The outcome of these choices was important: for the first time in Arabic, this volume constructed a quasi-global, transcultural, historically expansive mapping of renowned (and not always “morally exemplary”) females.¹⁷ The *center* of this map—the populous majority—was occupied by Mediterranean and west Asian subjects, from pre-Islamic Arabophone women and ancient women associated with the other Abrahamic faiths, and a few ancient mythical figures, to Muslim, later Arab, and Ottoman. Europeans and others formed the peripheries. “Of the 453 *Pearls*, 312 are Arab or Muslim.... ‘Western’ women—as slippery a category as any—come in at 74 entries depending on how one counts.”¹⁸

Fawwāz not only used the venerable *ṭabaqāt* genre label in her title; she chose a titular metaphor that was one in a set of “pearl” metaphors (strung, hidden, scattered) which premodern Arab male poets and prose (*adab*) writers had used in their book titles. After all, “pearls” (the collective noun *al-durr*) signified polished belletristic perfection. For Fawwāz, it was a feminine metaphor that encompassed women's shared conditions complicatedly and ambiguously: not only shining but also hidden away; precious yet scattered or isolated; the mark of perfected artistic production but also of rarity; each unique, yet all alike. As a metaphor it figured both individuality and solidarity, transnationally and locally.

Among her *Pearls*, a few of Fawwāz's European subjects are partially “localized” in that they are made to inhabit conceptual and terminological space—and gendered social categories or labels—associated with the volume's Muslim/Arab/Ottoman majority. As already suggested, European “others” are compared to Arab/Muslim subjects and are described through epithets and themes familiar in Arabic and Islamic discourse. Italian singer Adelina Patti (1843-1919), the darling of European royalty in her heyday, is compared in her skill at singing to *jawārī* of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphal courts, and this bond creates a complex, trans-regional notion of feminine *adab* and vocality.¹⁹

never into Arabic as far as I know; Fawwāz used it at least slightly as a source; see Booth, *Classes*, especially 134-8.

17 Maryam Nahhās Nawfal had worked on a dictionary, which was never published in full—agonizingly, the manuscript appears to have been lost—and so for readers, Fawwāz's was “the first.” See Booth, *Classes*, 41-42.

18 Booth, *Classes*, 90.

19 Booth, *Classes*, 91.

French Empress Eugénie (1826-1920; empress 1853-70 as consort of Napoleon III), is portrayed epithetically with terms common to many biographical subjects in Fawwāz's compendium, including many premodern Arab subjects. Unusually, Eugénie's reception, famously, in Egypt, is narrated through the use of terminology associated with Islamic duty, as Fawwāz describes Eugénie's effect upon French subjects and then implicitly on Egyptians when she visited Cairo for the Suez Canal opening in 1869.

With her God-given goodness and sweet ways, fine upbringing, adroit grace, delicate elegance, and wit, she rose in her husband's era to a status the seven heavens would envy.... She presided over a table that gathered the rulers of the earth. All of them took respecting her as though it were the *sunnah*, and extolling her excellence as though it were *fard*. Remember, when she came to Egypt the year the Suez Canal was celebrated, Egypt's dearly beloved [Khedive] was at her service and many emirs of East and West fell into line in her retinue.²⁰

Through epithetic description and the striking usage of *sunnah* (way or path, specifically one marked out by the Prophet's words, deeds, and example) and *fard* (duty, and jurisprudentially, stipulated religious duty), the figure of Eugénie is enfolded in a local set of values and practices. (The use of *saj'* also localizes the portrait, perhaps.) Yet, this is complicated by the agential structure—or is it perhaps a bit tongue in cheek? It is world leaders (not necessarily in Egypt) who seem to be marked by quasi-sacred duty. The local populace, and “emirs” with the Khedive at their head, merely “fall into line.” In the context of European imperial outreach—specifically, the construction of the Suez Canal which consumed state income and was one factor in Egypt's bankruptcy, British-French Dual Control, and eventually Britain's invasion and occupation of the country—what is the purchase of *sunnah* or *fard*, as marking obligatory obeisance but not explicitly from local actors? As a female subject of biography, Eugénie as an emblem (if not possessor) of imperial political power hails Arabophone (and Turcophone) subjects in Egypt to

20 Fawwāz, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 72; Booth, *Classes*, 15. Arabic quotations are reproduced from this edition exactly, with grammatical and typographical infelicities intact.

ولما أودعها الله من الحسن واللفظ وحسن التربية مع الكياسة والرفقة والظرف رقت في عصر زوجها مقاما تحسدها عليه السبع الطباق... تصدرت في مائدة جمعت ملوك الأرض وكلهم يحسب احترامها كالسنة وتعظيمها كالفرص وحسبك انها لما أتت مصر عام عم الاحتفال بفتح خليج السويس كان عزيز مصر في خدمتها ولفيف من أمراء الشرق والغرب في عداد حاشيتها...

acknowledge—or celebrate—her “excellence” (or to be won over by her attractively “sweet ways”). But does the wording not suggest that the imperial center has been able to impose its hegemony so widely and so thoroughly that for some on the world stage (and not just locally), obeisance is now seen as a religiously appropriate (or religiously mandated) response? The text goes on to note that the Ottoman Sultan received her in Istanbul. It is only in France that she is associated with another “Islamic” term: “When war broke out between the French and the Germans, the Emperor established her as a *khalifah* on the throne, to keep watch over his affairs” while he went to battle. This is not a term commonly used in her volume.²¹

In the early 1890s, when Fawwāz was compiling her work, she, like many others, articulated a sense of positive if highly cautious and carefully delineated openness to some European engagement, though not to political control. I do not see her portrayal of Eugénie as one determined by the history of imperial engagement in Egypt; indeed, the play of terminology here seems to cannily disperse terms of indigenous recognition onto a wider political stage, and to suggest something other than a simple response to European encroachment. Not only were Fawwāz’s commitments, at this point, different from those of the masculine political elite. The text itself suggests ambiguity, as terminology associated with Islamic obligation names the “worldly” duty of leaders elsewhere. (Recall also that Eugénie was French rather than British. Thus, on another level, perhaps her image would remind readers of an imperial power that many in Egypt, such as rising nationalist hero Muṣṭafā Kāmil, whom Fawwāz would strongly support, hoped would counter Britain’s grip on Egypt, hopes that would gradually wane and be ultimately dashed by the 1904 Entente between London and Paris.)

Thus, Fawwāz’s language places European subjects within an Arabic-Islamic rhetorical frame, but not without complications and equivocations. Labels and terms invoke historically-attested categories and hierarchies, notions of community and faith-based practice, and yet sometimes (as here) these very usages—in the context of their publication and first audience and given an ongoing history of imperial encounter—lend themselves to ambiguous

21 وأذ ذك نار الحرب بين الفرنسيين والالمان أقامها الامبراطور خليفة له على العرش تنظر في أمره

It does appear elsewhere occasionally, as in the history of Isabella II of Spain (75). Eugénie’s biography ends on a curious note: devastated after her son’s death, Eugénie tried to find patience in her tribulations, “but this was as distant from her as the al-Aqṣā Mosque is from the Masjid al-Harām” in Mecca (73). As is true of so many entries, the source for this one is unnamed and I have been unable to trace it. The diction, therefore, may not have been her invention. But readers would have encountered it as such. On Fawwāz’s use of sources, Booth, *Classes*, chaps. 4-5.

readings. The use of such pointedly Islamic language is somewhat unusual in the collection (and therefore all the more interesting, as it shapes the narrative of Eugénie's royal "progress"). More common is a shared fund of epithets, familiar from premodern Arabic *adab* collections and biographical dictionaries, which frame portraits of subjects from diverse cultural-linguistic contexts. Yet, perhaps paradoxically, Fawwāz's choices of epithetic descriptors also link her project to the transcultural genre of female exemplary biography, known in English as the Women Worthies tradition. But Fawwāz's biographies turn the scopic tables: the Arab/ic reader gazes upon the Western persona/object framed through terms of articulation possessed by the Arabic-speaking subject. Biographical persona/object and reading subject are brought into proximity, rather than remaining at the binarizing distance characteristic of Orientalist discourse on "Woman," which constructed an unbridgeable gulf between a European Us and an Oriental Them through figuring the allegedly different "treatment of women" in each constructed category. In this sense, Fawwāz challenged the notion of a stadial history—even as she used it—by showing European, Arab, Turkish, and Indian women as coeval, as equally accomplished historical peers in every sense.²²

As the narration of a subject such as Eugénie interleaved an Arabo-Islamic rhetorical framework with an image of colonial encounter, subjects drawn from the era of Islam's founding offered alternative models to the gendered construction of social relations as they had been experienced by her first readers, a structure that occasionally yielded explicit critique. The stadial inserted itself, via a comparison of premodern Arab social usages with contemporary European ones. Ending her entry on 'Ā'ishah bint Ṭalḥah—granddaughter of Abū Bakr, and a woman renowned (or notorious) for her unabashed enjoyment and display of her appearance, her lively sociability, and a rather imperious way of conducting herself—Fawwāz reproduced a conversation in praise of 'Ā'ishah that the speaker (Muṣ'ab ibn Zubayr, who became her second husband) tells the listener to tell others. "It appears from this narrative," Fawwāz remarked, "that their disposition [*ṭibā'ihim*] in that era was like that of the Westerners in this age of ours with regards to women—and not like our men, who are afraid to make apparent the slightest excellence in women, out of jealous regard on their behalf; and then they assert that this is the greater honour."²³

22 The classic reference on coevalness, which I have found deeply inspiring, is Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002 [1983]). In "Peripheral Visions," I have more to say about Fawwāz's "coevalizing" rhetoric.

23 Fawwāz, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 291.

This tactic is a rather blunt instrument of comparison. More commonly, Fawwāz constructs implicit comparisons between European biographical persona/object and Arabophone writer and reader by maintaining an emphasis (throughout the volume) on women's visibility and vocality—often, their visibility *through* vocality—and their public action, in tension with prevailing social expectations, as a shared condition of female experience. This is strikingly true of profiles of women from the early Muslim *ummah* and of European women. Consider Fawwāz's biography of 'Elisabeth of Bohemia' (Elisabeth Stuart, 1596-1662, daughter of James VI of Scotland and I of England). Fawwāz narrates Elisabeth's early life and marriage—mentioning the cost of the wedding and amount of the dower (such were the preoccupations of the 1890s Egyptian press)—before launching into a more detailed narrative of her political trajectory.

When the rebels of Bohemia offered rule to him [her husband Frederick v Elector Palatine] in 1619, she pressed him to respond affirmatively to this. She said to him: If you fear becoming a king, then why did you marry the daughter of a king? Then she entered Prague and seated herself on the ruler's throne in all splendor and pomp. But her reign did not last long, because the [German] Emperor's troops advanced into Frederick's original domain [the Palatinate] and attacked and raided Bohemia as well. After the Battle of Prague in 1620, the situation forced both Frederick and his wife, the Queen, to flee.²⁴

This biography echoes many portraits of premodern Arab and/or Muslim subjects in that the female biographical subject is the predominant (here, the only) speaking subject and is the subject of the action. This is particularly marked as the biography diverges from the historical record. In this case, it was actually Frederick who became King—for one winter, 1619-20—and so Elisabeth was queen as his consort. Yet Fawwāz's narrative—and we do not know the source for it—emphasizes Elisabeth as not only the agent of this brief ascendancy but in fact its possessor, describing her as queen-ruler rather than as queen-consort; the text does not even mention Frederick assuming the

24 ولما عرض عليه عصاة بوهيميا سنة ستة 1619 أن يملك عليهم ألحت عليه باجابتهم الى ذلك وقالت له ان كنت تخشى أن تصير ملكا فلماذا تزوجت ابنة ملك ثم دخلت براغ وجلست على تخت الملك بأبهة غير أن مدة ملكها لم تطل لأن الجنود الامبراطورية تقدمت الى أملاك فردريك الأصلية وأغارت على بوهيميا أيضا وبعد موقعة براغ سنة 1620 اضطر الأمر كلا من فردريك وزوجته الملكة الفرار ... Fawwāz, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 51.

throne. Furthermore, one strand of commentary on the Bohemian Rebellion and the onset of the Thirty Years' War (which was said to be 'later Catholic propaganda' and espoused by Friedrich Schiller) blamed Frederick's decision to assume the kingship on Elisabeth's wish to become a queen. But Fawwāz's biography turns the assumption of kingship (whatever Frederick's motives were) into *Elisabeth's* desire to *rule* and her active work to do so. It is Elisabeth (not "they") who enters Prague and mounts the throne, having tried to prod her husband into action. The text does not mention competing narratives or diverse actors and motives.

Fawwāz describes Frederick's coronation as hers, not his. The narrative agency is hers. As the sole speaking subject, she fulfils the epithetic description of so many subjects in this volume: *masmū'at al-kalimah*, "she whose word is heard." This biography does not use Islamically tinged vocabulary but the fact that it frames Elisabeth as an active ruler telling her husband what to do parallels the narrative trajectory of many of the volume's biographies of Muslim women, who are described as in positions of power on their own and/or as vocal counsellors to men who are seen to direct the action, and the narrative. Such women—"whose word is heard" or "executed" or the like—include a fearsome array of individuals: Āmina bint Abbān ibn Kulayb, contemporary of the Prophet Muhammad's grandfather and *grande dame* of the Umayyad clan; "Baffo the Pure," whom Fawwāz narrates as a Venetian captive and Ottoman *jāriyah* who became a powerful Sultan consort and "executed her own word"; Urduja Khatun, Uzbek consort; Umm Mūsā al-Hāshimiyyah; Umm Nadbah, defined as wife of Badr ibn Ḥudhayfah; Turkan Khatun consort of Sultan Malikshah; Ḥadqah, *qahramānah* in the household of al-Malik al-Nāṣir ibn Qalāwūn; Rābi'ah ibnat al-Shaykh Abī Bakr al-Najjārī; Zulaykhah spouse of Potiphar; Subay'ah ibnat 'Abd Shams ibn 'Abd Manāf; Ṭūlbāy al-Nāṣiriyyah consort of al-Malik al-Nāṣir ibn Muḥammad Qalā'ūn; Maska, who ran that household; Mayyah bint 'Utbah; al-Nawwār bint 'Ayun ibn Ṣaṣ'a'ah, whom the poet al-Farazdaq, her cousin and guardian, married against her will and wishes, which she was not shy about protesting.²⁵ Many others, not described with this epithet, enact directive vocality in and through their own (reported) words, from St. Olga of Kiev to Zaynab bint 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib speaking truth to power after her brother Ḥusayn's death.²⁶ Obedience to a woman's "word," however,

25 Fawwāz, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 17, 69, 23, 63, 64, 106, 164, 201, 222, 238, 277, 512, 515, 525. "Baffo" refers to Cecilia Baffo Veniero, possibly the birth name of the powerful Nurbanu Sultan, consort of Selim II and mother of Murad III; Fawwāz gets this wrong, defining her as Murad III's consort. On al-Nawwār's particular vocality, 527-8.

26 Fawwāz, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 71-72, 234-235. See also discussion of Alid and later Shī'ī women portrayed as boldly vocal critics of the early Umayyads, in Booth, *Classes*, 102-112.

is not seen as a uniformly positive good: witness the case of Ḥabābah *jāriyat* Yazīd ibn ‘Abd al-Malik: “He devoted his nights and his days to her, leaving the reins of his world [ly affairs] and his faith in her hands. She removed whom-ever she wished and appointed whomever she wished, and kept him from fast-ing and prayers: his situation became well-known, and his mention, odious.”²⁷

The text quoted earlier portrays Elisabeth’s and Frederick’s marriage as one of great affection: in general in *Pearls scattered*, marriages construed as particularly happy ones are those portrayed as matches between partners equal in authority, learning, and action; mutual respect characterizes them, in a horizontal relationship that subdues (if it does not subvert) patriarchal hierarchy.²⁸ These sketches tend not to privilege women’s reproductive and mothering roles, although they are not ignored, either. In the final third of her brief biography, Elisabeth’s flight to The Hague and then England is narrated, along with mention of her eldest son and her youngest daughter, “grandmother of the present English ruling house.” Her husband features only in his death.²⁹

Could this dual emphasis—on women as individual agents (highlighted, of course, by the very genre of biographical notice) and as strong partners, whose reproductive roles are given less prominent in the narrative—be in part an implicitly critical response to the gradual formation of the elite ideal of “companionate marriage” that was coming into vogue in Egypt and elsewhere in the late nineteenth century? This vision of family organization emphasized mutual affection and cooperation, but did not dismantle the gender hierarchy within the family. It continued to emphasize the reproductive role as women’s primary task and interest, and to foreground men’s needs for things such as affective care, everyday maintenance, and disciplined progeny. It was part of the same discourse that conscribed girls’ education to maternal training.³⁰

27 Fawwāz, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 161.

وانقطع اليها ليله ونهاره تاركا بين أيديها أزمة دينه ودينه فكانت تعزل من تشاء وتولى من تشاء وتحول بينه وبين الصوم والصلاة حتى اشتهر أمره وساء ذكره

28 But it should be noted that a number of subjects are also described as “among women obedient to their husbands.” See for example the entry on Shawkār Qāḍin, Fawwāz, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 257.

29 Fawwāz, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 51. Some biographies do focus on mother-child relationships, particularly on mothers’ counsel to their children, as in her entry on Asmā’ bint Abī Bakr (33–34). And Fawwāz’s selection of material was of course not necessarily selective but rather dependant on what she could find. But a reader might perceive certain emphases as more marked than others. Booth, *Classes*, chaps. 4–5.

30 On the elaboration of this modern construct of marriage by nineteenth-century intellectuals and legal scholars, see Kenneth M. Cuno, *Modernizing Marriage: Family, Ideology and Law in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Egypt* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse

Thus, through a range of strategies, Fawwāz centered an Arab and/or Muslim “we,” while also constructing European “Others” via familiar terms, those of indigenous recognition, working within the synthesizing discourse of the *nahḍah* while not necessarily privileging the preoccupations of a largely male intelligentsia focused on a masculine-centered social vision of nation and family. By indigenous recognition, I do not mean an outlook trained only on local sources, objects, or histories, but rather an outward-gazing perspective hospitable to other experiences but rooted in a centered collective self and responding to local issues; or, to put it differently, an outlook that enfolded cultural and historical difference into a vision governed by local commitments.

This meant that Fawwāz displayed eminent women as powerful while also narrating them as tragic victims—again, as exemplars of a shared condition of feminine experience across historical, geographical, and cultural landscapes. This has political implications, and it strongly pushed against an Orientalist notion of “Muslim women” or even (more homogenously imagined) “Eastern women” as unique victims of seclusionary practices.³¹ For Fawwāz, it was not only Muslim or Arab or Ottoman women who were in the “classes of ladies of cloistered spaces” of which her title speaks. *Rabbat al-khidr* (pl. *rabbāt al-khudūr*) refers to inhabitants of *al-khidr*: the sheltered, set-apart space of female existence that Orientalist observers in or from Europe deplored repeatedly as a marker of a timeless “backwardness” which they attributed to an undifferentiated and overdetermined “Islam.” If *rabbat al-khidr* was a common idiom denoting “respectable” women (implying a status that would make seclusion possible), Fawwāz re-introduced the term’s semantic fullness, but with an inference of situational irony. While her focus is on visibly active personalities, often overcoming feminine-coded restraints, she also shows forced invisibility as a shared condition—while making it clear that social or political invisibility is not necessarily a matter of seclusion or “veiling” in any sense. Showing through her individual biographies just how variable were the spatial movements, cultural visibilities, vocal participations, and publicly salient

University Press, 2015). Also important are Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805-1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Hanan Kholoussy, *For Better, For Worse: The Marriage Crisis that Made Modern Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

- 31 In a sense, then, although probably unwittingly, Fawwāz’s strategies paralleled some British feminists’ use of “harem imagery” as pertinent to gendered expectations and practices in their own society. A number of scholars have elaborated on this; see for example Diane Robinson-Dunn, *The Harem, Slavery and British Imperial Culture: Anglo-Muslim Relations in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), especially chap. 4.

activities of Muslim women, she simultaneously offered examples of European or North American women who suffered for leading public lives, against their own society's gender-coded expectations for women's silence, acquiescence, and civic-political invisibility—precisely the terms in which Orientalist clichés articulated “Muslim women” as a category. Such is the gist, for instance, of Fawwāz's entry on American feminist Victoria Woodhull, as well as that of other famous examples such as Jeanne d'Arc.³² That such women were viewed with disapprobation in their own societies was an argument that some in Egypt (e.g., Muṣṭafā Kāmil³³) used as evidence in arguing *against* women's greater access to public space and wider presence in public life. But that was not Fawwāz's brief. (It should also be noted that this volume is anything but a prim-grim “good girl” compendium: many a narrative here is replete with romance, intrigue, destructive jealousy, greed for power or property, revenge, grisly murder, poor judgment, arrogance, and so forth—only some of which is implicitly ascribed to patriarchal perfidy. It's a racier read than most novels of the time, which pundits loved to decry as dangerously suggestive to young female readers in particular.)

In sum, for every woman secluded or sequestered, many others—whether from Cairo or London, Mecca or Paris—appeared in life narratives that made ironic mockery of the notion of women as secluded or hidden, or the motionless pearl fixed within the shell. The public vocality upon which Fawwāz insisted for herself is evident not only in portraits of proactive female rulers who prevail over man-made catastrophes, but is also loudly reiterated in her array of writers and scholars spanning the nineteenth century, from Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova (Russia, 1743-1810) to Ann Radcliffe (England, 1764-1823), Maria Edgeworth (Anglo-Irish, 1768-1849), Qurrat al-'Ayn (Persia, 1814-52), Olympe Audouard (France, 1832-90), Victoria Woodhull (USA, 1838-1927), 'A'ishah Taymūr (Egypt, 1840-1902), Fāṭimah Aliye (Ottoman Turkey, 1862-1936), and others. Another sort of vocality emerges through the many poets whose work appears in the volume: there is no dearth here of outspoken

32 Fawwāz, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 446-448; 122-124. On the Woodhull entry, Booth, *Classes*, 120-123; translated, 334-336. On the Jeanne d'Arc entry, Booth, *May Her Likes*, chap. 6; Booth, 'Jeanne d'Arc'. In a very different sense, the entry on Byzantine consort Theodora may be read as raising similar issues, though it ends with recognition of her voice: “The era of King [sic] Justinian was peaceful due to this woman's advice and her fine views” (122).

33 I am grateful to Hussein Omar for suggesting this example.

Arabophone female poets, from pre-Islamic times to the near-present of the book's composition.³⁴

If the titular trope of *rabbāt al-khudūr*—the mistresses of seclusion—ironically characterized Fawwāz's selection and presentation of subjects, it also gestured to a long history of patriarchal control of the spaces and voices of its subjects. In the preface to *Pearls scattered*, Fawwāz spoke of her own trials in attempting biographical research: "this path required following difficult routes hard on any wayfarer, especially one like me, in *ḥijāb* [seclusion] and face-veiled [*mutanaqqaba*], barred from forceful vigor [*man'ah*] by the *niqāb*."³⁵ But the "apologetic" tone of this disclaimer is cannily belied, for it serves as her justification for relying on a massive array of sources, which she goes on to list; clearly, no barriers kept her from her research.³⁶ Although Fawwāz made no explicit links between her own situation, as "barred from forceful vigor," and those of her subjects, surely the echo was not lost on readers. The book was testimony that lived seclusion was not, in the end, silence; the "forceful vigor" of her portraits, exuding women's speech and actions, carried home the point.

The Scrim of *Ḥijāb*

Biography, of course, is not synonymous with historical narrative as we think of it nor as pre-twentieth-century Arabophone chroniclers constructed it. And yet, in my work on Fawwāz's biographical dictionary, I have argued for resituating it. Beyond the genre and politics of exemplary biography, it enters the realm of feminist history as an explicitly political approach to narratives of human experience, a deeply contextual assessment of gender assignment as one factor among others that define one's possibilities and limitations along hierarchical lines.³⁷ To be sure, Fawwāz's volume is a fragmented, disaggregative world history of women, but I argue for its feminist engagement partly *because* of its emphasis on the "scattered," isolated, or secluded (from public

34 Some of these and other examples of visibility through vocality are noted in Booth, *Classes*, especially chaps. 2-3.

35 ولما كانت هذه الطريقة صعبة المسالك تعصر على كل سالك خصوصاً على من كانت مثلي ذات حجاب ومتنقة من المنعة بالنقاب

Fawwāz, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 6.

36 There were barriers, however: I find it interesting that in *Classes* she uses sources that had been published in Egypt, and was not able—perhaps—to access those still available only to individuals who could, for instance, consult manuscripts in mosque libraries.

37 This is what I have elsewhere called "the first glimmer of Arab and Muslim feminist historiography." Booth, *Classes*, 3.

space and public discourse) terms of women's interactions in and with their milieus, in tandem with the aggregative and comparative function of the biographies' repeated epithets, terminologies and themes.

Within this indigenous rewriting of world lives, Fawwāz marshaled terms resonant in Arabic-Islamic historical discourse to highlight women's historical agency—for example, and as already mentioned, the epithet *masmū'at al-kalimah*, “she whose word is heard” (and by implication, acted on), an appellation expressing respect, signifying influence, and—in some contexts—suggesting more or less autonomous power. It is a double-edged epithet, deployable as a marker of patriarchally appropriate behavior (the woman as helpmeet) but also as a signifier of independent views and action—such as those of Elisabeth of Bohemia—which Fawwāz's language emphasizes. Similarly so for the term *ḥijāb* and the related form *ihṭijāb*, signifying the complex of gender-segregation practices, from domestic seclusion and the policing of gender-mixing in public spaces, to face-veiling and the use of closed carriages (all of which were arguably as much about maintaining class boundaries as gendered ones).³⁸ In her preface, Fawwāz uses the term *ḥijāb* self-referentially, to suggest the difficulty of accomplishing a scholarly project such as this volume when in/under *ḥijāb*. In the biographies themselves, *ḥijāb* more often signals a tactical exploitation of societal expectations for gendered concealment, with women using such expectations to women's advantage.

Fawwāz's canny uses of local histories and terms of reference also structure her novels, play, and essays. If, in the biographical dictionary, epithetic idioms (*masmū'at al-kalimah*, *rabbāt al-khudūr*) and keywords used as descriptors (*sunnah*, *tarbiyah*, *ḥijāb*, *tadbīr*) take on semantic fullness, often through ironic deployment, in her essays such descriptors assume further metaphoric resonance. At the same time, conceptual or abstract terms common to late-nineteenth-century Arabic reformist discourse acquire gendered concreteness and, in the context, feminist suggestion.

The rhetoric of Fawwāz's first published essay, the title of which translates as “Felicity does not result from material plenitude” (April 1892), is seemingly simple. But the progression and figural elements of her argument carry layers of resonance. Her line of reasoning emerges through rhetorical patterning and not simply through programmatic content.

38 Of course, there has been a semantic shift over the past century: *ḥijāb* in Fawwāz's context was not what is now called *ḥijāb*, that is, a Muslimah's choice to cover her hair and neck as an act of piety. Then, it could and did include what we now call *niqāb*, and also comprised spatial gender-segregation practices.

A long period of time passed when the door [or: gate] of felicity was always bolted in front of [any] woman from amongst us—we eastern women. [This woman] knew herself only as a tool in a man's hands, which he steered and directed according to his desires, all the while reproaching her and treating her severely by making her *ḥijāb* ever heavier and coarser, shutting the doors of education to her and not letting her leave home, and prohibiting her from attending non-private non-familial women's gatherings, to the extent that she would imagine these deeds as grave offenses (*mūbiqāt*) which, if followed, would mean she was violating the system of her honor (*niẓām sharafihā*) and the law of her protection [that is, respectability] (*nāmūs siyānatihā*).³⁹

In this essay, *ḥijāb* moves from referencing a social practice within women's everyday lives, to describing a disciplinary practice imposed by individual men, to labeling an attitude to gender relations and a power hierarchy within the family. *Hijāb* and related forms (*ḥujub*), marking the restrictive exercise of men's prerogative, becomes metaphorically “the thick curtains” or “veils” that Fawwāz opposes to “the light of knowledge”:

And now those thick veils have lifted, praise be to God, the rays of the sun of the East have shone out from behind them, our age has returned to progress and reform, and the lights of knowledge and success have pierced all the way to the courtyards [of homes].⁴⁰

Fawwāz's imagery and verbs (*inqasha'*, to be lifted or dispersed or broken up; *sha'a*, to beam or diffuse or shine) also intimate “veils” as “clouds” that must be dispelled, while the reference to “courtyards” suggests that knowledge-acquisition has penetrated the walls of gendered seclusion. The dispersal or lifting off of such veils/clouds—which (crucially) are not the veils of women's

39 مضى زمان والمرأة منا نحن الشرقيات مغلق أمامها باب السعادة لا تعرف نفسها إلا آلة بيد الرجل يسيرها أني صار ويديرها كيف شاء ويشدد عليها التكثير بإغلاق الحجاب وسد أبواب التعليم وعدة الخروج من المنزل وبحرمانها من حضور المحافل النسائية العمة الى حد أنه كان يخجل لها أن تلك الأفعال من الموبقات لو أتبعها نخلت بنظام شرفها وناموس صيانتها

Zaynab Fawwāz, “Laysat al-sa'adah bi-kathrat al-māl,” *al-Mu'ayyad* 3.667 (10 April 1892), 1.

40 وأما الآن فقد انقشعت تلك الحجب الكثيفة والحمد لله وسطعت أشعة شمس الشرق من ورائها وعاد عصرنا للتقدم والإصلاح واثبتت في عرصاتها أنوار المعارف والنجاح

attire but rather the veils of men's blindness—attends the history of Arab women's emergence into formal education. Like Fawwāz's use of *ḥijāb* in the preface to her biographical dictionary, this might remind readers that *ḥijāb* was not only a variable social practice; it was also a complex idiom or concept that writers attached to an array of significations, from the gendered to the mystical, the latter especially when coupled with the metaphor of light. (There is also the possibility that Fawwāz's use of it, as a Shī'ī, can be linked to the Shī'ī practice of *taqiyyah*, dissimulation, with its obvious link to "covering," but this is speculative.)

The language of light-as-knowledge and knowledge-as-light, as common as it was amongst reformist writers at the time, echoed Qur'anic imagery, embedding the symbol of the flame or the lamp as spiritual and knowledge-based enlightenment. Other writers used light imagery more in the sense of "universal" Enlightenment under the historical banner of European experience. Light—enlightenment—was a trope used widely at the time to underpin an insistence on learning as the key to individual and collective vigor. But not everyone posed it against *ḥijāb* as a metaphor for heaviness, darkness, or ignorance. *Ḥijāb* also signals the imagery of the *ḥarīm* that Fawwāz draws on in this article, and it may be that her complex deployment of *ḥijāb*/darkness/light is meant both as a response to and a rejection of European Orientalist understandings that yoked together *ḥarīm*, women, veiling, ignorance, and "backwardness" as overdetermined and mutually reinforcing elements of a closed system. Finally, her use of terms such as *mūbiqāt*, *nizām sharaḥihā*, and *nāmūs shiyānatiḥā* signals the weight of formalized customary expectations backed up in everyday discourse by religiously-tinged terminology, although (as the overarching tone of heavy sarcasm in this essay conveys) the author does not regard such expectations as sanctioned by the Qur'ān or Prophet's *sunnah*.

The diction through which Fawwāz characterizes gendered segregation and women's invisibility comprises a pointed rhetorical rejoinder to a series of male commentators who were insisting on extreme segregation's religious provenance, as well as its "naturalness" and social and moral necessity. They were doing so in response both to urban girls' and women's expanding occupation of non-domestic semi-public and public spaces (as Fawwāz notes, school-girls and women had formed their own venues and gatherings) and in response to certain reformers' calls for some relaxation of gender-separation practices. Reacting to this, a discourse of danger and contagion centered on women in public urban spaces grew increasingly strident in the rapidly changing urban scene of the late nineteenth century. Defenders of *ḥijāb* raised the specter of women pouring onto the streets and into bars. Fawwāz, in contrast, slammed men's making of *ḥijāb* "thicker" or "coarser" or "harsher" (*ighlāz al-ḥijāb*) as a

tactics of fear and a power ploy, her choice of verbal noun suggesting both material intensification and moral-psychological intimidation.⁴¹

It is not religious doctrine or practice that Fawwāz excoriates in this essay: the target is husbands' ability to sow psychological trauma and dependency in wives, through extreme forms of deprivation, by exploiting religious dicta to keep women in a state of false consciousness, and by insisting on *ṭā'ah* (utter obedience) rather than *idh'ān* (voluntary compliance), terms that Fawwāz juxtaposes. She detaches the former from a set of religiously sanctioned gender-relational practices and replaces it with a more agential, if still highly circumspect, alternative.

Using terms associated with Islamic norms, Fawwāz suggests here and elsewhere that exploiting religious belief constitutes harm first to women and second to society as a whole: in addition to gender-segregation practices, she cites as an example the designation of extreme forms of the maintenance-obedience relationship as fundamental to the notion of marriage spelled out in the Qur'ān.⁴² It is not the transgression of assumed religious norms that men fear, she suggests drily. Rather, they fear women's access to knowledge of the world and their awareness of what is due to them as human beings.

The argument the husbands make ... is that if a woman were to learn what society's true essence is, and the conditions various classes of people inhabit, she would become—so they claim—malcontent with her life, detesting the rule of her despotic husband. Her knowledge and learning would compel her to split apart the rod of obedience, abandon the noose of slavery, and go out into the arena of freedom.⁴³

41 There are some specific ways in which her diction responds to particular polemics of the time, though that is beyond my scope here. Two examples are provided by men's writing, specifically on the themes of jealousy and seclusion, in works I have discussed: Marilyn Booth, "Before Qasim Amin: Writing Women's History in 1890s Egypt," in *The Long 1890s in Egypt: Colonial Quiescence, Subterranean Resistance*, ed. Marilyn Booth and Anthony Gorman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 365-398; Marilyn Booth, "Liberal Thought and the 'Problem' of Women," in *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahḍah*, ed. Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 187-213.

42 Cuno, *Modernizing Marriage*. The term "maintenance-obedience relationship" is Nadia Sonneveld's; see Cuno, *Modernizing*, 3, 80-90. Nadia Sonneveld, *Khul' Divorce in Egypt: Public Debates, Judicial Practices, and Everyday Life* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2012).

43 وجة الأزواج في ذلك أنها لو علمت المرأة كنه الهيئة الاجتماعية وأحوال طبقات الناس فإنها تصير على زعمهم غير راضية بعيشها كارهة بحكم زوجها الجائر فيوجهها العلم والتعلم إلى أن تشق عصا الطاعة وتخرج من ربة العبودية إلى ميدان الحرية

Throughout her essays, Fawwāz plots knowledge acquisition, especially knowledge of history, as paired with freedom (*al-ḥurriyyah*), equality (*al-musāwāh*), and a concept of women's rights that is based on (but expands from) the legal notion of "what is due to a woman in marriage" (complicatedly, *ḥaqq al-zawjah* or *ḥaqq al-mar'ah* becomes *ḥuqūq al-nisā'*, the rights of women). It is against these concepts that she sets *ḥijāb* as a metaphor for the blindness or darkness of ignorance. Again, the *ḥijāb* of ignorance governs men's treatment of women, and their "fear" that women—no longer ignorant—will seek "the arena of freedom." It is men who are under this *ḥijāb*—and it is not a pretty picture.

Elsewhere, in essays concerning girls' education and women's habitudes, Fawwāz does note that *ḥijāb* is a socially sedimented practice to which women are accustomed and which does not preclude education or intellectual pursuits:

True, we Muslim women are inside *ḥijāb* but even so, no obstacle prevents us from working; otherwise, the doors of hope would be shut before us. To the contrary, we are wholly within and part of human society: even if we are [only] half of the world, still, nothing is remote from us, nothing escapes us of what the other half does in his assembly rooms and gatherings ...⁴⁴

Similarly, in a letter to an American interlocutor, published locally (and thus aimed at two audiences), she remarks *ḥijāb*'s customary presence—in the sense of face-veiling—as neither prescribed nor uniform, noting that religious scholars differ on its status. At the same time, she does not yoke her use of "freedom" (with its connotations of respectability and relatedly, its antagonism to "enslavement") to a requisite "visibility" other than that of the right to publish one's speech. Yet the metaphorical uses to which she puts *ḥijāb* give emphasis to its figural, idiomatic weight *in opposition to* ideals of knowledge-seeking and sociality, as well as to its valence as a marker of men's insistence on physical and spatial control of females in opposition to the 'freedom' to be oneself.

44 نعم وإن كن نحن النساء المسلمات من داخل الحجاب إلا أنه لا مانع يحول بيننا وبين العمل إلا
أوصدت دوننا أبواب العمل بل نحت كأننا في كامل المجتمع الإنساني وإن كن نصف العالم إلا
أنه لا يعزب عنا شيء مما يجريه النصف الآخر في منتدياته ومجتمعاته

Zaynab Fawwāz, "Wujūb al-naḥḍah al-'ilmiyyah li-l-mar'ah al-sharqiyyah" (The imperative of a knowledge-based advancement [or awakening] for eastern women), *al-Nil* 1.213 (25 September 1892), 3. For more on this essay see Booth, *Classes*, 281–284.

In her second published essay, Fawwāz poses the veil of ignorance against *sharī'ah* as the guide (*murshid*) for those who seek freedom and equality. *Sharī'ah*, she makes clear, constitutes the necessary basis for justice, the guarantor of individual rights. Her argument might seem beholden to European-provenant notions of the liberal autonomous individual, which so often assumed the prerogatives of the economically secure masculine subject. Fawwāz's essay displays a particularly clear utilization of what we can label *nahḍah* discourse (and the stadial-history view): a diction of progress, of enlightenment through the spread of education, and of education through the spread of printed material. It is a progressivist view which surfaced in the writings of many nineteenth-century Arab intellectuals, and entailed a complex dialogue with concepts, texts and technologies associated with western Europe. The perspective was standard, but not uncontested. Yet Fawwāz enframes her argument solidly within *sharī'ah* as a deeply-located human *trait*, almost an instinctive one. *Sharī'ah*, she observes in the essay published in *al-Liwā'* referred to above, is the source of *al-tamaddun*, progress, a *nahḍah* keyword: thus, *sharī'ah* becomes the justification for girls' education.⁴⁵ Like many of her peers, Fawwāz performatively named girls' schooling as a widely-shared value across societies; but in this essay, at least, the worldly is again articulated in the terms of Islamic values, rooted in the very sources of the faith. (Fawwāz's views were cautiously more expansive than were those of many others, in terms of what girls should study and how long they should stay at school. And, as noted earlier, she was not unaware or uncritical of how *sharī'ah* could be invoked in support of antithetical views.)

As rooted as her arguments are in Islamically-defined understandings of the believer in the world, this is also a worldly vision as much as a 'local' one. It borrows from everywhere. As Fawwāz reviews the emergence of social institutions in Egypt and across the Ottoman Empire (she notes the judicial system, schools for both genders, and newspapers as fundamental formers of an *ummah* or nation), her example of the Islamic *fard* (obligation) to seek knowledge is the French writer Olympe Audouard—who had recently been in Egypt—followed by other examples, comprising medieval and early-modern Muslim female scholar-writers. (She was either working on her biographical dictionary, or had recently completed it, as these essays were appearing.) Again, *hijāb* appears in its dual signification—as both 'barrier' and an inconsequential, permeable veil that does not hinder action in or awareness of the world. *Hijāb* as concrete practice and as metaphorical barrier also becomes the pivot for a strong declaration of ability and intent. She says: "even if there is a great distance between

45 A more detailed discussion can be found in Booth, *Feminist Thinking*, chap. 7.

us and the women of the West when it comes to *ḥijāb* and *man'ah*, and we are far away from mixing with men on the basis of what the *shar'* rules, yet there is no *ḥijāb* between us and the study of the branches of scholarly knowledge or the acquisition of information".⁴⁶ Recall that Fawwāz uses the term *man'ah* in her preface to refer to her own (stymied) active work or vigor; here, the sense hovers between that meaning and the basic root meaning of prevention or hindering; what is connoted is "inaccessibility" due to being "protected" or "barred" (from public space). Vigor and restraint: the dialectic of women's lives, aspiration and will curbed by patriarchal arrangements. Meanwhile, in her metaphoric use of *ḥijāb*, Fawwāz uncouples the word from its associations with feminine-coded practices; in her concrete use of the term, with respect to women's lives (as in many of her portrayals in *al-Durr al-manthur*), she uncouples it from Orientalist assumptions of a necessary chain of causality: covering/seclusion as necessarily responsible for ignorance or passivity. Naming men's willful ignorance instead, *ḥijāb* may deter but it cannot silence women's public articulations.

Fawwāz, of course, was not the only writer using the term *ḥijāb* metaphorically. The verbal phrase *kashf al-ḥijāb* (to pull away or lift the veil to reveal or expose what is "beneath") was an ordinary idiomatic usage found throughout the 1890s press. Its sense of active disclosure may have seemed particularly useful to reformist intellectuals keen to articulate new social visions.⁴⁷ But Fawwāz's deployment of *ḥijāb* was gender-sensitive when that idiom ordinarily was not: her use of the term as both naming the condition of elite women's lives and signifying masculine blindness and arbitrary authority—and thence, societal stumbling-blocks to the good society and women's participation therein—made her usage of it a markedly gender-political act. Likewise, the imagery of light and darkness, insight and blindness, was ubiquitous in public commentary. It was multiply useful in its Qur'anic associations, its obvious relevance to discourses of enlightenment, and its fit with stadial-history narratives of progressive modernization. That her contemporaries' writings were saturated with such images perhaps gave Fawwāz's expressive choices *more* purchase, given her pointed deployments of these lexical items. Her layered rhetoric on women, sociality, visibility and aspiration—set explicitly within a Muslim and experientially female worldview—heighted the

46 Zaynab Fawwāz, "Taḡaddum al-mar'ah" (Women's forward movement), *al-Mu'ayyad* 3. 686 (9 May 1892), 2.

47 *Al-Manar* uses this imagery to signify ignorance, but not in the gendered way Fawwāz often used it. See, e.g., "Al-Madāris al-waṭaniyyah fī l-diyār al-miṣriyyah," *al-Manār* 1: 15 (9 Ṣafar 1316): 256-63; "Inna fī dhālika la-dhikrā li-man kāna lahu qalb aw alqā al-sam' wa-huwa shahīd," *al-Manār* 2: 1 (11 March 1899): 3-11. Reprinted from *al-'Urwah al-wuthqā*.

meaning-making possibilities of her intersecting metaphoric and concrete usages of *ḥijāb*, and of light/darkness, in conjunction with her deployment of concepts whose meanings were shifting according to a realigned discursive politics of gender (terms such as *ḥurriyyah*, *musāwāh*, *ḥaqq/ḥuqūq*). Her reworking of the *ṭabaqāt* genre must be read in tandem with the conceptual work that her essays accomplished. Within this articulated play of genre expectations, concrete and abstract imagery, and shifting usages of Islamically associated terminology, concepts like “equality” and “freedom,” as well as an evolving concept of “women’s rights” (from “what is due in marriage” to a notion of public and political rights), emerge as an Islamically-inflected and trans-societal conceptual space that women are to inhabit as intellectually vocal and visible political subjects.

As this essay only begins to suggest, Fawwāz utilized genre, terminology, and “local” histories to contest patriarchal readings of Islam as a belief system and as a communal narrative—and to articulate and then to challenge prevailing assumptions of masculinist authority that sustained such patriarchal readings. Much as feminist scholars are doing today, she subjected *naqlī* (transmitted) sources to *ʿaqlī* (reasoned, intellectual) query, and not just implicitly. She insisted on women’s experiential knowledge as a source of right practice. She was also highly critical of the state of women’s and girls’ knowledge of Islamic teachings and religious history, for their ignorance allowed the use of misapplied religious precepts against their interests.

Fawwāz’s writings challenge later scholarly approaches to Arab gender politics that have become trapped within polemical contraries, whether they be east/west, christianist/islamist/secularist, liberal/conservative, or modernist/traditionalist binaries. Deep readings of nineteenth-century textual exchanges reveal such binaries to be contingent rhetorical categories that writers deployed polemically, as they struggled to assess what seemed to be fast-changing cultural economies. Meaningful in that context (although tempered by individual writers’ shifting rhetoric across genres, audiences and time), such discursive binaries cannot stand in as analytic-descriptive grids to usefully categorize or explain individual thinkers’ outlooks for later historians, whether it concerns the politics of gender and spatiality in a colonial site, or other aspects of aspirational and experienced modernity. Fawwāz’s deployments of terminology and exempla suggest a vision that was both fiercely local and provocatively intercultural, a voice we would do well to heed.