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The Other Legacy of Qasim Amin: The View from 1908

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Abstract

In Egyptian popular history and culture, Qasim Amin is often referred to the “father of feminism” or the “liberator of women.” However, this was not always the case. Upon his death in 1908, a different legacy emerged in many early eulogies, speeches, biographical sketches, and commemorations of Amin’s life. In this early framing of Amin’s legacy, his two most famous books were celebrated in ways that minimized the “woman question” while highlighting other aspects of his reforms and work. This allowed Amin’s 1908 contemporaries to overlook the divisiveness of his earlier positions in favor of a new sort of fraternal solidarity—one that served the interests of certain political and intellectual male elites. For many of these writers—with a few notable exceptions—Amin was a quintessential reformer and thinker whose interest in the status of women was important insofar as it spoke to the ethos of his intellectual and political projects, not what it could do for women.

Keywords: eulogy; biography; commemoration; Egyptian feminism; Nahda; memory

In April of 1908, Qasim Amin (b. 1863) passed away at the untimely age of forty-four.¹ In eulogizing Amin, one prominent writer, Labiba Hashim, praised him and his work in tones that would become familiar to observers over the next century. Hashim, herself an experienced journalist in the burgeoning women’s press, highlighted the aspect of Amin’s legacy she most admired: mainly his activism on behalf of women.² In this telling, Amin’s major accomplishment was the publication of his two most famous books: *Tahrir al-Mar’a* (The Liberation of Women) in 1899 and *al-Mar’a al-Jadida* (The New Woman), published the following year. Both were widely read at the turn of the twentieth century and sparked a frenzied public debate about the role of women in Egyptian society.³ Hashim’s admiring tribute credited Amin for waging “a fierce battle in pursuit of women’s liberation, from captivity toward freedom.”⁴ And while she included some basic biographical information about his life, Hashim framed most of her remembrance around the challenges women continued

¹ There is some dispute about the year of Amin’s birth, with some sources reporting 1865. However, the more accepted date is December 1863.

² Hashim had already written for *Anis al-Jalis* and started the journal *Fatat al-Sharq* in 1906. The latter would remain in publication for another three decades. For more about the women’s press of this era, see Beth Baron, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

³ For reproductions of the first editions of these works, see Qasim Amin, *Turath Qasim Amin*, ed. ‘Abd al-Mun’im Muhammad Sa’id (Cairo: Matba’at Dar al-Kutub wa-l-Watha’iq al-Qawmiyya, 2008).

⁴ “Ruz’ Watani,” *Fatat al-Sharq* 2, no. 8 (May 15, 1908): 309. As with many of the eulogies cited here, there was no author byline on this article. However, given that Hashim was the editor and primary writer of the journal, it is safe to assume that she wrote this piece.

to face, acknowledging that Amin died before his hopes had been realized and that there was still much to accomplish.⁵ She also did not shy away from addressing what made Amin's books controversial at the time of their publication: his call to the ending of the face-veiling and seclusion of middle- and upper-class women.⁶ Hashim's sincere hope was that other men would continue this fight against the tradition of seclusion; Amin, after all, had shown them the path "to achieve the height of glory and perfection."⁷ She ended her eulogy with quotes from *al-Mar'a al-Jadida*—a way to memorialize the writer Amin was with the words he wrote.⁸

That Amin would be remembered as such a champion of women is perhaps not surprising. To this day, in popular histories and culture, Amin's name is nearly synonymous with the early push for women's rights, and it is not uncommon to hear him referred to as the "father of Egyptian feminism" in English or as *muḥarrir al-mar'a* (liberator of women) in Arabic.⁹ However, researchers have been justifiably skeptical about the driving impetus of Amin's proposals for Egyptian women.¹⁰ As a result, scholars have made important strides over the last several decades in contextualizing Amin's contributions and bringing to the fore other activists and writers—many of whom were women—who advocated for changes to their societies.¹¹ In light of these reassessments, Amin has become a less prominent, if more contested figure in the history of Egyptian feminist movements.¹² Even though he is still the "liberator of women" in the popular Arabic press, among academics he is almost never referred to as the "father of Egyptian feminism" without qualification.¹³

However, Amin's position as the progenitor of a proto-Egyptian feminism was not self-evident in the years after his books were published, nor even upon his death in 1908. It turns out that Hashim's depiction of Amin, while familiar today, was atypical in its own day. From a close examination of the period after Amin's death, a more complicated picture emerges of his status as a champion of women's activism or as the man who freed women of their social restraints. In many early profiles of Amin, the potential impact of his work on women is noticeably absent.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 310–11.

⁶ Like other writers, she used the term *taḥajjub*, or *ḥijāb*, which during this period referred to the face-veil as well as "the whole system of secluding women." Beth Baron, "Unveiling in Early Twentieth Century Egypt: Practical and Symbolic Considerations," *Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 3 (1989): 370.

⁷ "Ruz' Watani," *Fatat al-Sharq*, 309, also 311–12.

⁸ She described these quotes as "some lines from his breathes [*aṣṭur min nafathātih*] that we have copied from his book." *Ibid.*, 312.

⁹ Commemorations of him are ubiquitous. One example of Qasim Amin as liberator in the Egyptian press is Fahmi, "Qasim Amin: Muḥarrir al-Mar'a al-Ladhi Sabaq 'Asrihi," *Ruz al-Yusuf*, no. 3974 (8 August 2004): 78–79. Marilyn Booth has gathered some of the academic references in "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, 393n1.

¹⁰ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), chapter 8; Juan R. I. Cole, "Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 4 (1981): 387–407; Kenneth M. Cuno, *Modernizing Marriage: Family, Ideology, and Law in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Egypt* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 83–85, 105–115; Murad Idris, "Colonial Hesitation, Appropriation, and Citation: Qāsim Amīn, Empire, and Saying 'No,'" in *Colonial Exchanges: Political Theory and the Agency of the Colonized*, ed. Burke A. Hendrix and Deborah Baumgold (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 180–216; Yaseen Noorani, *Culture and Hegemony in the Colonial Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), chapter 4.

¹¹ The reevaluation of this period has resulted in many important interventions, too many to fully cite here. Among them: Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Marilyn Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); and Mervat F. Hatem, *Literature, Gender, and Nation-Building in Nineteenth-Century Egypt: The Life and Works of 'A'isha Taymur* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹² See, for instance, Baron, *The Women's Awakening*, 4–5.

¹³ Marilyn Booth, "Woman in Islam: Men and the 'Women's Press' in Turn-of-the-20th-Century Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 2 (2001): 174. For example, Leila Ahmed memorably suggested Amin was a "son of Cromer and colonialism" for his adoption of British discourses and critiques of Egyptian society. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 162–63. For another reading, see Idris, "Colonial Hesitation," 182–84.

Rather, in the earliest stages of Amin's legacy, most male supporters of Amin sought to cast him as one of them—first and foremost as a writer, thinker, and reformer with a broad social agenda. Within this framing of his legacy, Amin's two most famous books were evidence of his intellectual prowess and commitment to national reform, not necessarily a call to an actionable agenda on behalf of women. In fact, as we shall see, both *Tahrir al-Mar'a* and *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* were overshadowed in these remembrances in favor of his work on the Egyptian University and a less well-known (at least today), posthumously published book entitled *Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin* (Aphorisms of Qasim Amin).

Ultimately, this other image of Amin served the interests of certain male elites on both intellectual and political fronts. Broadly, the idea of Amin as a quintessential writer and thinker tracked the concerns of many who were heavily involved in the intellectual and linguistic renaissance that has become known as the Arabic Nahda. For these intellectuals—who ascribed to diverse ideological leanings—Amin's biography provided an invaluable articulation of their core reformist commitments. Meanwhile, for political figures associated with Amin, his life provided a useful exemplar for the type of political activism they believed was necessary for Egypt's advancement. This recalibration of Amin's legacy allowed his eulogists to highlight his literary style, his varied intellectual pursuits, and his approach to social reform above all else. When (and if) eulogists did consider the "woman question" (*qadiyyat al-mar'a*), most were quick to declare Amin's activism a "victory," by focusing on the least controversial of his proposed reforms: the education of women. Among these writers, interest in the reform of women's status was a marker of the stature of a man as a reformer and thinker because of what it said about the ethos of his intellectual and political projects, not what it could do for women.

This alternative legacy is part of larger historical trends. Historians have long noted that the "woman question" was a vehicle to articulate, among other things, ideas about modernity, colonialism, class concerns, masculinity, and social reform (of the family and beyond).¹⁴ In other words, reforming women's social roles was seldom about women themselves. To say this is no great revelation. However, what interests me here is how this inversion was so thoroughly accepted even then: there was little illusion among Amin's contemporary Egyptian audiences that his work was about women's liberation.¹⁵ Most of these early eulogists were, from the onset, consciously focused on the various other reformist projects that Amin could represent, rather than the cause for which he would eventually become most famous.

To examine this early legacy, this article will focus on Arabic-prose eulogies, commemorations, speeches, and biographical sketches that appeared in newspapers and journals after Amin's death in 1908 (Fig. 1).¹⁶ The publications surveyed here reflect a subset of the diverse

¹⁴ Cole, "Feminism, Class, and Islam"; Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, chapter 8; Booth, "Woman in Islam"; Cuno, *Modernizing Marriage*; Booth, "Before Qasim Amin"; Ellen Anne McLarney, *Soft Force: Women in Egypt's Islamic Awakening* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), chapter 2; Ellen McLarney, "Reviving Qasim Amin, Redeeming Women's Liberation," in *Arabic Thought against the Authoritarian Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Present*, ed. Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Regarding masculinity, see Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). In addition, both Hoda Elsadda and Marilyn Booth make the case that, for this period, although the issue of a "man question" was not explicitly articulated in the same way as the "woman question," it was nevertheless a subtext to much of the discussion around gender and social reform. Hoda Elsadda, "Imaging the 'New Man': Gender and Nation in Arab Literary Narratives in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 3, no. 2 (2007): 35; Booth, "Woman in Islam," 174.

¹⁵ Although here I am focusing on the reaction in Egypt, the reception of his work across the Muslim world would be a fascinating study. For example, Amin's *Liberation of Women* was translated into Ottoman Turkish and as early as 1900 it was being partially translated and adapted into Farsi. Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 100–102.

¹⁶ For this study, I focus on full-length articles and biographical sketches and not shorter notices/obituaries or the letters and poems of condolences/commemoration that readers sent into daily newspapers. Also, it should be

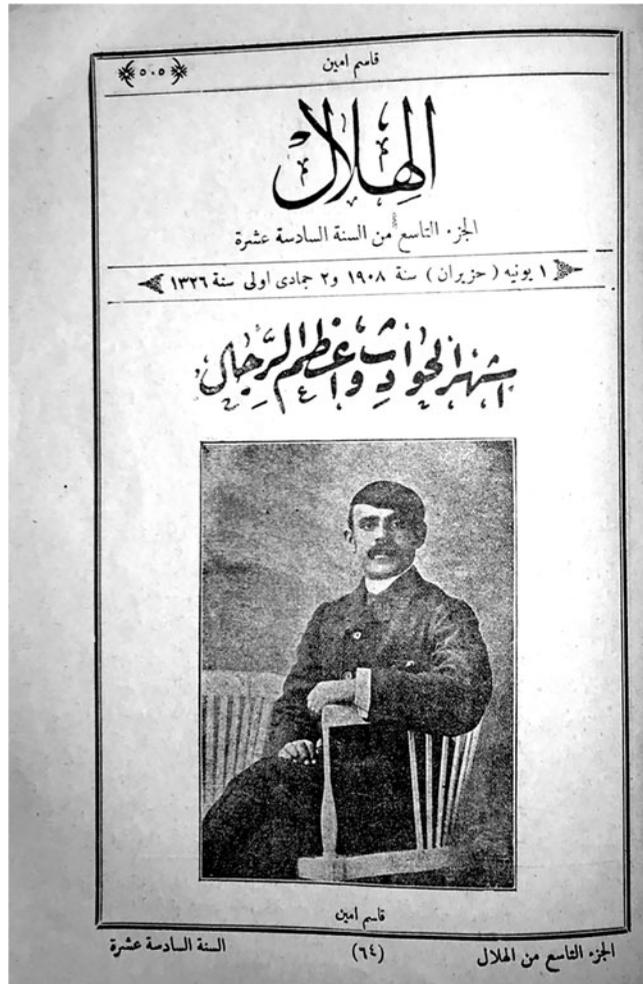


Figure 1. *Al-Hilal's* cover page on Qasim Amin, June 1, 1908.

Egyptian press of the time: the major dailies *al-Ahram* (The Pyramids), *al-Jarida* (The Newspaper), *al-Liwa'* (The Banner), *al-Mu'ayyad* (The Supporter), and *al-Muqattam* (The Mokattam), as well as the two famous monthly literary journals, *al-Muqtataf* (The Collection) and *al-Hilal* (The Crescent), and the leading Islamic reformist publication, Muhammad Rashid Rida's *al-Manar* (The Lighthouse). I have also drawn on relatively lower-circulation periodicals, such as *al-Jami'a* (The Gatherer), *Majallat Sarkis* (Sarkis Journal), and *al-Muhit* (The Ocean), which published full articles on Amin upon his death. Women were also actively publishing and writing during this period, albeit in different tones than used by most of their male contemporaries. Figures such as Malak Hifni Nasif commented on Amin and his ideas, and both Labiba Hashim's *Fatat al-Sharq* (The Young Woman of the East) and the newly established *al-Jins al-Latif* (The Gentle Sex, 1908–25) by Malaka Sa'ud eulogized Amin at length.

noted that this is not an exhaustive sweep of the entire Egyptian press landscape of 1908. For example, beyond the publications surveyed here, several others offered heartfelt notices acknowledging Amin's death. Rami 'Ata Siddiq reproduced several of these in his introduction "Qasim Amin wa-Kalimat al-Tanwir," in *Kalimat li-Qasim Amin* (Cairo: Majlis al-A'la li-l-Thaqafa, 2009), 23–40. On using and reading obituaries from this period, see also Hussein A. H. Omar, "Snatched by Destiny's Hand: Obituaries and the Making of Class in Modern Egypt," *History Compass* 15, no. 6 (2017).

This focus on published eulogies, funeral commemorations, and speeches does have its limitations. Quite simply, they represent views of those who admired Amin enough to memorialize his life, often in the most effusive ways possible. After all, as Salah Hassan has noted, “eulogies and written tributes more generally affirm the importance of the deceased, asserting the continuing relevance of their lives even in death. But, beyond praising the individual who is the subject of the tribute, eulogies are also about the author, whose bond with and commitment to the deceased is confirmed by the text.”¹⁷ In much the same way, the eulogists examined here were self-selecting; they were sympathetic by design. But, even as they articulated a supposedly exemplary life and legacy, what they privileged and what they ignored reflect the priorities of their particular 1908 worldview. Put simply, if somewhat redundantly, how they chose to praise Amin gives us a sense of what they thought was praiseworthy. In most cases, this was his personal characteristics and status as a social thinker and reformer, and not his potential impact on the lives of Egyptian women. Given that Amin’s previous stances were not universally accepted, one can easily imagine how another source base—one not based in elite literary circles—could produce a thoroughly different narrative about the same man. It is worth acknowledging the particularity of this myth building from the outset and examining it on its own terms: as an expression of *one* alternative to the legacy that would later predominate.

Qasim Amin and His Work

Qasim Amin’s lifetime spanned a period of significant political and social change in Egypt.¹⁸ The year Amin was born, 1863, Isma‘il Pasha (r. 1863–79) took the reins of the country as the fifth ruler in the dynasty established by Mehmet Ali Pasha earlier in the century. By 1881, when Amin was studying in France to complete his law training, the Egyptian state, after years of crushing debts, was under the fiscal control of its European creditors. The Egypt that Amin returned to in 1885 was contending with a British occupation and experiencing the increased stirrings of nationalist and anti-colonial movements that would only accelerate in the early twentieth century as the British presence began to weigh on social, economic, and civic life.

During this period, the Nahda also fueled a flood of translations and new publications as well as a revival of classical Arabic literature. Educated men and women began reassessing the nature of Arab society and the classical and Islamic heritage, while contemplating new visions of modernity and reform particularly in light of growing colonial impositions and nationalist movements.¹⁹ They added to their rich Arabic canon new European literature on positivism, cultural evolution, education, political freedom, and even the role of national cultures in the success or failure of a society.²⁰ Amin made his own contributions to this heady political milieu by writing articles for the daily paper *al-Mu‘ayyad* on various social issues and publishing a book refuting the anti-Egyptian and anti-Muslim views of a prominent European visitor.²¹

¹⁷ Salah D. Hassan, “Passing Away: Despair, Eulogies, and Millennial Palestine,” *Biography* 36, no. 1 (2013): 36.

¹⁸ For more of Amin’s biography, see Mary Flounders Arnett, “Qāsim Amin and the Beginnings of the Feminist Movement in Egypt” (PhD diss., Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1965).

¹⁹ For an exploration of the Nahda as an epistemological consequence of and reaction to the larger structural changes occurring during this period, see Stephen Sheehi, “Towards a Critical Theory of *Al-Nahḍah*: Epistemology, Ideology and Capital,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43, no. 2–3 (2012): 269–98. See also Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004).

²⁰ For example, see Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); and Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

²¹ The articles initially appeared between 1895 and 1898 under a pen name and were published anonymously as a book in 1898 under the title *Asbab wa-Nata’ij wa-Akhlaq wa-Mawa’iz*. See Amin, *Turath Qasim Amin*, 125–212. Meanwhile, Amin’s 1894 French work, *Les Égyptiens: réponse à M. le duc d’Harcourt*, was a response to *L’Égypte et les*

In this environment, the contours of what become known as the “woman question” began to take shape. By the time the Nahda was in full swing in the late nineteenth century, the role of women in Egyptian society was being debated in various journals and newspapers, among leading female writers, and in the women’s press.²²

In *Tahrir al-Mar’a*, Amin elaborated on these already circulating ideas, explicitly linking the progress of a given society to the status of its women. In what Kenneth Cuno has called the “family ideology” of the era, Amin echoed the sentiment that women were the bedrock of the Egyptian family, the reform of which was necessary for the nation.²³ On this front Amin saw much to improve: he critiqued the lack of women’s education, marriage and divorce practices, and the veiling and seclusion of upper-class women. He also took a rather dim view of Egyptian women in their present circumstances, critiquing their roles as mothers and wives. Although many of his proposals had been broached in other forums, a confluence of factors seems to have made Amin’s work unusually contentious.²⁴ Here was a book dedicated to the “woman question,” written by a Muslim man, who was a distinguished judge and who was well known to the intellectuals of his day.²⁵ Amin’s book did receive some favorable reviews from journals such as Jurji Zaydan’s *al-Hilal* and Alexandra Avierino’s *Anis al-Jalis*, and there was no shortage of commentators willing to defend him on one point or another.²⁶ But on the other side, several prominent men, among them Tal’at Harb, Muhammad Farid Wajdi, and Shaykh Bulaqi of al-Azhar, took to the press to assail his ideas, particularly on the issue of face-veiling/seclusion (*hijāb*).²⁷ For some of these opponents, his views represented a dangerous abdication to European influence and, for others, a willful misreading of Islamic texts.²⁸ Regardless, critics seemed to agree that Amin’s ideas were an existential threat to Egyptian culture and religion.

Amin was undeterred by the maelstrom and, a year later, published *al-Mar’a al-Jadida*, in part as a rebuttal to his detractors, but also as an amplification of his argument that Muslim societies had to follow the path laid out by Europe if they wished to succeed. According to one observer, the debate over his works ran hot for a year or two, before burning itself out.²⁹ Amin then turned his attention to other issues, mainly the establishment of Egypt’s first university.

In terms of writing, after his famous foray into the spotlight, he seems to have confined most of his energies to a private journal, or notebook, of “thoughts.” This collection consisted of aphorisms on various social and political issues and ranged from art and religion to love and redemption; some were short and succinct, others were longer expositions or stories.³⁰ On the whole, most of the entries were Amin’s personal, and often caustic, musings on Egyptian life and society. If there were any thematic threads to this collection, they would

Égyptiens (1893), by Charles François Marie, then the Duke of Harcourt, who had traveled in Egypt and, in classic Orientalist fashion, published his critique of Egyptians and their national character, martial capabilities, and cultural practices, including the treatment of women. See Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*, 59–62; and Idris, “Colonial Hesitation,” 184–86.

²² See Booth, “Before Qasim Amin.”

²³ Cuno, *Modernizing Marriage*, 83–85, 105–15.

²⁴ Booth, “Before Qasim Amin”; Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 16–19.

²⁵ Booth, “Woman in Islam,” 178.

²⁶ “*Tahrir al-Mar’a*,” *Anis al-Jalis* 2, no. 11 (November 30, 1899): 406–11; “*Tarbiyat al-Mar’a*,” *al-Hilal* 7 (June 15, 1899): 542–52; Arnett, “Qāsim Amīn and the Beginnings of the Feminist Movement in Egypt,” 103–6.

²⁷ Several of these were later published as books: Muhammad Bulaqi, *al-Jalis al-Anis: fi al-Tahdhir ‘amma fi Tahrir al-Mar’a min al-Talbis* (Cairo: Matba’at al-Ma’arif al-Ahliyya, 1899); Tal’at Harb, *Tarbiyat al-Mar’a wa-l-Hijab* (Cairo: Matba’at al-Taraqqi, 1899).

²⁸ Juan Cole suggests that these responses also had a class dimension, with lower middle-class men seeking to challenge the new, Westernizing upper-middle elite, as represented by Amin. Cole, “Feminism, Class, and Islam.”

²⁹ “Qasim Bey Amin: Nasir al-Mar’a al-Muslima wa-l-Da’i ila Islah al-‘A’ila,” *al-Hilal* 16, no. 9 (1 June 1908): 514.

³⁰ Qasim Bey Amin, *Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin* (Cairo: Matba’at al-Jarida, 1908). For a translation, see Mary Flounders Arnett, “Aphorisms by Qasim Amin,” in “Qāsim Amīn and the Beginnings of the Feminist Movement in Egypt.” A full reproduction of the Arabic original edition can also be found in Amin, *Turath Qasim Amin*, 622–84.

be the hypocrisy of so-called educated society and the idea of political and intellectual freedom. Meanwhile, only a handful of aphorisms echoed stances from his books, mainly pointing out the injustice of Egyptian divorce traditions.³¹ Rather, women, as well as men, appeared as caricatures in his morality tales. These aphorisms in some ways echoed his earlier depictions of Egyptian women: women who veiled but still provocatively dressed, or who made a scene during funerals, or who could (ideally) serve as objects of beauty and happiness in a marriage. His experience in the public eye also seems to have left its mark. The vicissitudes of public opinion and the necessity that writers speak their mind were recurring topics. It is perhaps ironic that after he had stayed out of the literary limelight for so long, it was this work, as we shall see, that played a major role in the crafting of Amin's early legacy.

The Politics of Eulogizing Amin

The biographical genre has long been a productive space for writers to rearticulate values and ideals. Biographical sketches (*tarājim*) have been a mainstay of the Islamic tradition, almost since its inception. Likewise, eulogies and poetic panegyrics were the regular subject of poets and writers alike. By the late nineteenth century, biographical sketches of eminent men and women were regularly featured in journals and newspapers. For their audiences, biographies of prominent men and women served myriad purposes as exemplars—some in deeply gendered, allegorical, and/or symbolic terms.³²

In this regard, Amin's legacy became a constructive space within which to articulate an explicitly modern ideal, particularly for the intellectual and writing classes. In the spirit of the Nahda, Amin was viewed as the quintessential intellectual figure: a man who was concerned with reform and society—women included—but whose legacy spoke to more fundamental concerns, or at least those deemed more fundamental to the mostly male readership of the day. In eulogies he was most frequently referred to as a thinker (*mufakkir*), a reformer (*muṣliḥ*), a writer (*kātib*), as well as a patriot (*waṭanī*). For example, the Coptic landowner and political activist Akhnukh Fanus eulogized Amin as a thinker-reformer (*muṣliḥan mufakkiran*).³³ Muhammad Rashid Rida counted Amin among the well-known social reformers of his time (*min al-muṣliḥīn al-ijtimā'īyyīn*) in addition to being a deep thinker and effective writer.³⁴ A letter from the Higher School's Club described Amin as "one of the geniuses undertaking the intellectual renaissance (*al-nahḍa al-'ilmīyya*) and working to spread social and civilizational principles."³⁵ *Al-Mu'ayyad*, under its founding editor Shaykh 'Ali Yusuf, also grieved Amin's death as a national loss, citing Amin as "among the greatest fighters for reforming the social body" (*min akbar al-mujāhidīn fī iṣlāḥ al-hay'a al-ijtimā'īyya*).³⁶ On the whole, Amin was seen as an example of modern thinking, writing, and activism on behalf of his country and people—more so than on behalf of women specifically.

Those most closely invested in reshaping Amin's legacy also had a political incentive. The year 1908 was a politically sensitive moment. The British occupation had suffered a political and moral blow with the events and aftermath of the Dinshaway incident in 1906 and the

³¹ Amin, *Kalimat*, 36–37; Arnett, "Aphorisms," #67–69.

³² Yoav Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 14, chapter 6. On female biographies, particularly by Zaynab Fawwaz, see Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied*.

³³ Quoted in "Ta'bin Qasim Amin," *al-Jarida*, May 11, 1908.

³⁴ "Musab Misr bi-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Manar* 11, no. 3 (May 1, 1908): 229.

³⁵ "Nadi al-Madaris al-'Ulya," *al-Jarida*, May 14, 1908.

³⁶ "Tashyī' Janaza li-Maghfur lahu Faqid al-Watan wa-l-'ilm Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Mu'ayyad*, 23 April 1908. Yusuf was a supporter of the palace and a prominent Muslim and Egyptian publisher at a time when many publications were led by Syrian/Lebanese Christians. *Al-Mu'ayyad* is often cast as a religiously conservative and pan-Islamic paper, but it covered the death of Amin (a writer they had once published) and his funeral commemorations closely. For more on Yusuf and his political leanings, see "Yusuf, Shaykh 'Ali (1863 – 25 October 1913)," in Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr., *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 230–31.

subsequent retirement of Lord Cromer as high commissioner.³⁷ The international economic crisis of 1907 also did not help matters, hitting the Egyptian economy hard over the next few years.

Meanwhile, nationalist party politics was coming into its own. The famous nationalist leader Mustafa Kamil had led on a largely populist and anti-British platform. His Hizb al-Watani (Nationalist Party), formally founded in 1907, was strident in its demands for constitutional representation and full independence from the British. Another group—to which Amin belonged—had coalesced in 1907 into the Umma (People’s) Party. They shared many of the same goals as Kamil’s group for a constitutional government, but drew more heavily on intellectuals and economic elites (e.g., landowners and rural notables). The Umma Party also tended to be more interested in European-style reforms and ideas, more tolerant of the British presence, and more secular in outlook.³⁸ On occasion, these political differences were on display in the coverage of Amin’s death as rival newspapers (and the parties/factions they supported) attempted to score rhetorical or political points.³⁹

Yet, despite these differences, newspapers across the political spectrum cast Amin as a writer and thinker worthy of note, irrespective of his previous positions. This is probably most stark in the case of the Watani Party paper, *al-Liwa’*, in 1908, under its editor Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Jawish. The paper had not been reluctant to criticize Amin in ways small and large in the past.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the unsigned April obituary contained unqualified praise for Amin’s recent work on the university project and framed the 1899/1900 controversy this way:

He wrote two books in Arabic, *Tahrir al-Mar’a* and *al-Mar’a al-Jadida*, that summarized his opinions on this serious matter. There was a lot of talk about them in the clubs and newspapers discussed them for many days, among them *al-Liwa’*. It is what made him become known for [his] strength of example, quickness of mind, and rare integrity and other characteristics that gave him a high place in the hearts of those who knew him . . . in addition to the soundness of his thought, his steadfastness on his opinions, and other assets that only come together in great men.⁴¹

The significance of these books, while not minimized, was redirected toward the greatness of their author, not the cause they purportedly championed.

³⁷ The incident was a conflagration between British colonial officers who were pigeon hunting and the locals of Dinshaway. After two British officers were wounded and one later died from heatstroke, the British authorities decided to make an example of the village: thirty-two villagers were found guilty of murder, four of whom were executed. The trial became a rallying cry for the growing anti-colonial, nationalist movement.

³⁸ Walid Kazzuha, “The Jaridah-Ummah Group and Egyptian Politics,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 13, no. 3 (1977): 373–85; Israel Gershoni, “The Evolution of National Culture in Modern Egypt: Intellectual Formation and Social Diffusion, 1892–1945,” *Poetics Today* 13, no. 2 (1992): 325–50; Siddiq, “Qasim Amin wa-Kalimat al-Tanwir,” 49–53. Siddiq makes the case that Amin was an intellectual who was particularly well suited for the Umma Party and its outlook.

³⁹ For example, this was on display when it came to a dust-up surrounding the speech of Ibrahim al-Hilbawi (discussed below) who was the prosecuting lawyer in the infamous Dinshaway trial. Although reprinted in several papers, the speech was not actually delivered at the scheduled commemoration. *Al-Jarida* cast this as a misunderstanding. *Al-Liwa’* interpreted it as a rejection of al-Hilbawi by organizers and an audience who would not have tolerated listening to “the lawyer of Dinshaway” while commemorating someone like Amin. “Khutbat al-Ustadh Hilbawi Bey,” *al-Jarida*, June 8, 1908; “Haflat Ta’bin,” *al-Liwa’*, June 7, 1908. For more on al-Hilbawi, see “Al-Hilbawi, Ibrahim (1858 – 20 December 1940),” in Goldschmidt, *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt*, 78.

⁴⁰ *Al-Liwa’* had published several rebuttals of *Tahrir al-Mar’a* and *al-Mar’a al-Jadida*. More recently, it had taken an admittedly small issue with a line in a speech Amin gave on the university, wherein he said, “true patriotism speaks little.” *Al-Liwa’* editors countered that speeches were quite important to motivate people to do patriotic acts. This quibbling might have had more to do with the Watani Party’s concerns about the direction of the university committee more broadly. Donald M. Reid, *Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 29; “Khutbat Qasim Bey Amin,” *al-Liwa’*, 19 April 1908.

⁴¹ “Inna li-l-Lahi wa-Inna ilayhi Raji’un,” *al-Liwa’*, 22 April 1908.

Given this environment, many eulogists pointedly avoided excerpting from his two most famous books. Of the eulogies surveyed here, only those published by Labiba Hashim and Jurji Zaydan included extended quotes from *Tahrir al-Mar'a* or *al-Mar'a al-Jadida*.⁴² The pro-British newspaper *al-Muqattam* was the only publication to take the occasion of Amin's death to republish a long section from *al-Mar'a al-Jadida*, which drew from the chapter entitled "al-Tarbiya wa-l-Hijab" (Upbringing and Seclusion).⁴³ However, even in doing so, *al-Muqattam's* editors may have wanted to soften the hard edges of the debate on women: the reprint renamed the chapter "al-Tarbiya wa-l-Ta'lim" (Upbringing and Education) and excised the chapter's opening paragraph, which contained a direct criticism of seclusion. In service of their political leanings, the editors *did* keep Amin's blistering critique of the political, social, and scientific underdevelopment of Islamic civilizations, particularly in comparison with the achievements of the West.⁴⁴

Yet, *al-Muqattam* aside, on the whole, there seemed to be an attempt to reconcile Amin's previous positions with the nationalist ethos of the moment. This was perhaps most notable in *al-Jarida*, the party organ for Amin's own Umma Party, and in the writings of its editor, Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid. In the days after Amin's death, two front-page articles were published on Amin and, although neither article included a byline, the first-person accounts they contain make it clear that Lutfi al-Sayyid was the author. Like others, Lutfi al-Sayyid focused on Amin's drive to understand Egypt's problems, philosophical stances, and character, as well as his advocacy for the reform of women and the Egyptian family.⁴⁵ But more so than other publications, these articles also directly sought to address critiques of Amin on two fronts: his religious faith and his patriotism. In this telling, Amin was as much a defender of religion as of social reforms and science. As evidence, Lutfi al-Sayyid cited Amin's personal principles and his 1894 defense of Egyptian and Islamic practices, particularly regarding women, in *Les Égyptiens: réponse à M. le duc d'Harcourt*.⁴⁶ In addition, Lutfi al-Sayyid affirmed that Amin's ideas about women had ultimately been in service of the Egyptian family, the reform of which was the first stepping-stone to the freedom and independence of the nation as a whole.⁴⁷ And while some (unnamed) people claimed that Amin's ideas about women were English in origin and aided the British occupation, Amin had only ever wished to improve Egyptian society.⁴⁸ Lutfi al-Sayyid also recounted a personal conversation with Amin in which the latter recognized the growing nationalist feeling as the "hope for the future" and ultimate path to independence.⁴⁹ Unlike some disinterested older elites and scholars, Amin was cast as a man of conviction who used his pen in service of his patriotic and religious convictions, as much as his social reformist ones.⁵⁰

Al-Jarida was not the only publication that sought to cast Amin in this light. Several publications seeking to appeal to educated, patriotic audiences chose to focus on nationalist/reformist projects, such as the new university, and Amin's intellectual spirit more than what had been Amin's divisive advocacy on behalf of women.

⁴² "Ruz' Watani," *Fatat al-Sharq*; "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Hilal*.

⁴³ "Al-Tarbiya wa-l-Ta'lim," *al-Muqattam*, 22 May 221908. This mostly corresponds with the first half of the chapter. Amin, *Turath Qasim Amin*, 548–77.

⁴⁴ As we shall see, most publications tried to soften these critiques with aphorisms such as those cited below.

⁴⁵ "Qasim Bey Amin: al-Qudwa al-Hasana 1," *al-Jarida*, 25 April 1908; "Qasim Bey Amin: al-Qudwa al-Hasana 2," *al-Jarida*, 26 April 1908.

⁴⁶ "Qasim Bey Amin: al-Qudwa al-Hasana 2," *al-Jarida*. This line of defense also appears in *al-Manar*, *al-Liwa'*, and other publications.

⁴⁷ "Qasim Bey Amin: al-Qudwa al-Hasana 1," *al-Jarida*.

⁴⁸ "Qasim Bey Amin: al-Qudwa al-Hasana 2," *al-Jarida*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Lutfi al-Sayyid seems to also make a generational appeal here, casting Amin as an established intellectual who nevertheless understood the nationalist fervor of the youth and who was a worthy exemplar for this new cohort.

The University Man

The idea for the first university-level institution in Egypt was already circulating when, in 1906, a committee was formed to begin in earnest to raise private funds for the endeavor.⁵¹ Amin was a founding member and served as secretary and vice president and eventually headed the committee. He was an active spokesperson of the project and worked to solicit donations. By early 1908, the university committee was in full swing in preparation for the much-anticipated opening and was making regular headlines with plans and rhetoric connecting the intellectual project of the university to the nationalist aspirations of the day. Amin's last visits and speeches were on behalf of the university, which opened its doors in December 1908—eight months after his death.

Amin's last formal public speech, just one week before his death, laid out the vision for an Egyptian university in both nationalistic and intellectual terms. It was covered widely by the major daily papers.⁵² Two leading journals, *al-Muqtataf* and *al-Jami'a*, quoted from it at length in their eulogies.⁵³ The overriding premise of the speech was that the university would be a place of inquiry and be deeply committed to "knowledge for knowledge's sake."⁵⁴ Unlike the older and well-established professional schools in Egypt, this new university would focus on subjects such as history, literature, and philosophy. Its students, these "sons of Egypt," would be the "leaders of public opinion . . . guiding [Egypt] to success and leading to her progress."⁵⁵ Amin celebrated those he considered at the pinnacle of Egyptian reformist projects: the intellectual elites who would drive the much-needed revival of the future nation. It should be noted that women, as potential attendees or beneficiaries of the university, were not mentioned by Amin or the commentators on his speech.⁵⁶ It was not only a project for Egypt's intellectual future, but it was also a future that was tacitly gendered as male.

Amin's contribution to the university project was also a major theme at the public commemoration of his life held on June 5, 1908, in Cairo.⁵⁷ The event was hosted by Prince Ahmad Fu'ad, who had been tapped as the royal representative and president of the university, and the first speaker was Ahmad Zaki, secretary of the university committee and adjunct secretary to the Egyptian cabinet.⁵⁸ Zaki's eulogy painted Amin as a man dedicated to "guiding the community to the principles of true progress" (*irshād al-umma ilā 'awāmil*

⁵¹ Reid, *Cairo University*, 22–27.

⁵² The speech was originally delivered on April 15, 1908, in Munifiyya and appeared in the April 16 issue of *al-Mu'ayyad*, the April 18 issues of *al-Muqattam* and *al-Jarida*, and the April 19 issue of *al-Liwa'*. The version of this speech that appears in the collected works compiled by 'Imara is missing some of the key passages. Qasim Amin, *Qasim Amin: al-A'mal al-Kamila*, ed. Muhammad 'Imara, 5th ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2008), 309–10.

⁵³ "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muqtataf* 33, no. 6 (1 June 1908): 459–63; "Sawt Sarikh fi Rubu' al-Sharq," *al-Jami'a*, 6, no. 5 (June 1908): 121–25.

⁵⁴ "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muqtataf*, 461; "Khutbat Hadrat Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Mu'ayyad*, 16 April 1908; "Khutbat Hadrat Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muqattam*, 18 April 1908.

⁵⁵ "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muqtataf*, 461; "Sawt Sarikh," *al-Jami'a*, 123, "Khutbat Hadrat Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Mu'ayyad*; "Khutbat Hadrat Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muqattam*. This same notion was reflected in one of the aphorisms cited below which appeared in *Majallat Sarkis. Amin, Kalimat*, 50; Arnett, "Aphorisms," #87.

⁵⁶ This is ironic because, early on, the Egyptian University did have a formal "women's section" (1909–12). The section seems to have consisted primarily of various lecture series for, and occasionally by, women. The section was closed in 1912 due to opposition from male students and some in the press. Reid, *Cairo University*, 51–56; Baron, *The Women's Awakening*, 132.

⁵⁷ *Al-Jarida* dedicated the first five pages of its June 6, 1908, issue to the five speeches and four poems that had been prepared for the event. Here I will cite from *al-Jarida*, although these same speeches also appeared in *al-Mu'ayyad* over the June 6, 7, and 8 issues. Other publications covered the events/speeches to varying degrees.

⁵⁸ Both men played instrumental roles in selecting the lineup for that day: Zaki had solicited the eulogies ahead of time and Fu'ad read through and approved each one. The solicitations of eulogies appeared in "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Jarida*, 28 May 1908, and "Ta'bin Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Jarida*, 1 June 1908. After the event, the role Fu'ad played was explained in "Khutbat al-Ustadh Hilbawi Bey," *al-Jarida*, 8 June 1908. For more on the royal family's influence at this stage of the university project, see Reid, *Cairo University*, 28–31.

al-irtiqāʾ al-ṣaḥīḥ), primarily through his work on behalf of the university.⁵⁹ Amin had worked tirelessly to raise money, despite the economic difficulties of the times, and had brought together the interested parties to make the university a near reality. This was portrayed as a moment of unity in service of a true nationalist project, with Amin at its forefront. Personifying the university, Zaki said the university wishes “mercy on its first martyr in its service and it hopes that it will live up to its mission—that is, forming countless men who will fill the hole that has appeared with the death of Qasim Amin.”⁶⁰ Similarly, other eulogists that day portrayed Amin’s dedication the university project as an extension of his commitment to the Egyptian people.⁶¹

In contrast with Hashim’s eulogy, these oral commemorations tended to elide or minimize Amin’s writing on the “woman question.” For example, of the five speeches prepared for the June 5 event in Cairo, only one mentioned *Tahrir al-Marʿa* and *al-Marʿa al-Jadida* at any length.⁶² The rest focused on Amin’s university work, personal character, writing ability, and juridical work. Of course, eulogists were clearly well acquainted with the events of 1899 and 1900, and many recounted the uproar his books caused. However, Amin’s legacy was about many things, well beyond the objective of female empowerment.

Scholar, Thinker, and Writer

Rather than his potentially divisive positions on the “woman question,” eulogists soon had something else to focus on: the newly uncovered aphorisms that were published under the title *Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin*. Upon Amin’s death, Lutfi al-Sayyid asked Saʿd Zaghlul to procure from the family a copy of the journal Amin had used to note down his thoughts. With the help of another of Amin’s acquaintances, ʿAtif Barakat, *al-Jarida*’s press published a small book of 103 aphorisms exactly one month after Amin’s death, on May 21.⁶³ To publicize the booklet, the press not only sent out copies to other newspapers and journals, but also advertised and published excerpts from the book in the daily paper (Fig. 2).⁶⁴ The excerpts chosen by *al-Jarida* spoke to Amin’s views on religion, science, and morality, as well as his commentary on the literary and intellectual classes of the time. Demonstrating a canny understanding of public interest in this new work, all fifteen of the aphorisms *al-Jarida* selected would appear in at least one other publication over the next few months. Also, foreshadowing the minimization of the “woman question,” none of the excerpts mentioned women at all. It was this alternative legacy that *al-Jarida*’s editors cited as proof that Amin was among “the great thinkers” (*kibār al-mufakkirīn*) of his time.⁶⁵ What had served as a sort of personal journal was now published as a window into the inner workings of a true reformer, intellectual, and servant of the nation.

It made an impression. Between May and June 1908, three journals published eulogies that featured the aphorisms prominently and two speeches at the June 5 event quoted from them.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, once the book became available, *al-Muʿayyad* published excerpts of fifteen aphorisms over two days and *al-Muqattam* provided a shorter excerpt

⁵⁹ Ahmad Zaki, “Kalima li-Ahmad Zaki Bey,” *al-Jarida*, 6 June 1908.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ ʿAbdallah Abaza, “Kalima li-Hadrat ʿAbdallah Bey Abaza,” *al-Jarida*, 6 June 1908; Khalil Matran, “Kalimat Khalil Afandi Matran,” *al-Jarida*, 6 June 1908; Dawud ʿAmmun, “Kalimat Dawud Bey ʿAmmun,” *al-Jarida*, 6 June 1908.

⁶² This speech by Dawud ʿAmmun will be discussed below. The other scheduled speakers for the event were Ahmad Zaki, Lutfi al-Sayyid, ʿAbdallah Abaza, and Ibrahim al-Hilbawi. Saʿd Zaghlul also spoke, but the text of his speech was not recorded in the papers.

⁶³ Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, “Dhikra Qasim Bey Amin,” *al-Muqtataf*, no. 1 (1 July 1917): 46; Siddiq, “Qasim Bey Amin wa-Kalimat al-Tanwir,” 45.

⁶⁴ “Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin,” *al-Jarida*, 21 May 1908; “Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin,” *al-Jarida*, 23 May 1908. Short advertisements for the book started appearing on June 2 in the back pages.

⁶⁵ “Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin,” *al-Jarida*, 21 May 1908.

⁶⁶ In addition to the publications discussed here, according to Siddiq, the paper *Misr* (by Tadrus Shanuda al-Manqabadi) published two articles that included excerpts of the *Kalimat* on May 27 and June 2, 1908.



Figure 2. Advertisement for the *Kalimat* in *al-Jarida*, June 2, 1908.

of five.⁶⁷ Even *al-Liwa'*, which had a more subdued coverage of Amin's death, praised the *Kalimat* as "proof of the merit of the deceased and the clarity of his vision."⁶⁸ In total, fifty-eight of Amin's aphorisms were quoted in eight different publications.⁶⁹ Most aphorisms were cited only once or twice, but eighteen appeared three or more times.⁷⁰ One of the most oft-quoted aphorisms seemed to hint at a détente that many of these eulogists sought; it began: "The fanaticism of the people of religion and the arrogance of the people of science is the source of the apparent conflict between religion and science. It is not correct that there is a true difference between them, now or in the future."⁷¹ Amin then went on to give each side its due—science for its drive toward discovery, and religion for its understanding of the unknowable. This conciliatory tone struck a chord with six different publications.⁷²

⁶⁷ "Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Mu'ayyad*, 21 May 1908; "Min Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Mu'ayyad*, 24 May 1908, 5; "Akhbar Mahaliyya," *al-Muqattam*, 26 May 1908.

⁶⁸ "Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Liwa'*, 23 May 1908. This short notice indicated that the newspaper was considering publishing examples of these aphorisms. It is unclear if that happened.

⁶⁹ These publications were *al-Ahram*, *al-Hilal*, *al-Jarida*, *Majallat Sarkis*, *al-Manar*, *al-Mu'ayyad*, *al-Muhit*, and *al-Muqattam*. Although I hesitate to draw a conclusion based on a small sample of two, it is perhaps worth noting that, as far as I can tell, neither of the female-led publications, *Fatat al-Sharq* or *al-Jins al-Latif*, took note of the publication of the *Kalimat*.

⁷⁰ These were Arnett, "Aphorisms," #1, 3–8, 13, 16–19, 22, 25, 26, 38, 44, and 52; Amin, *Kalimat*, 3–11, 13–14, 18, 22, 26–27.

⁷¹ Amin, *Kalimat*, 4–5; Arnett, "Aphorisms," #8. The English translations used here have been adapted from Arnett's work.

"تعصب أهل الدين وغرور أهل العلم هما منشأ الخلاف الظاهر بين الدين والعلم. وليس بصحيح أن يوجد بينهما خلاف حقيقي لا في الحال ولا في المستقبل ما دام موضوع العلم هو معرفة الحقائق المؤسسة على الاستقراء. فمهما كثرت معارف الانسان لا تملأ كل فكره – بعد كل اكتشاف يتحققه العلم يبحث عن اكتشاف آخر وفي نهاية كل مسألة يحلها تظهر مسألة جديدة تطالبه بحلها. الآن وغدا يشتغل عقل الانسان بالعلم أي بمعرفة الحوادث الثابتة ولا يمنع ذلك من التفكير في المجهول الذي يحيط بها من كل طرف. هذا المجهول الذي كان ويكون بعد الذي لا قرار له ولا حد لا في الزمان ولا في المكان هو دائرة اختصاص الدين."

⁷² Cited in "Akhbar Mahaliyya," *al-Muqattam*; "Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Jarida*, May 21, 1908; "Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Manar* 11, no. 4 (May 30, 1908): 306; "Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Mu'ayyad*; "Qasim

Several journals also used the *Kalimat* directly in their eulogies of Amin as a way to highlight the qualities and aspects of his legacy they most admired. For example, 'Iwad Wasif's monthly journal, *al-Muhit*, began by praising Amin as a true patriot and reformer (*al-muṣliḥ al-ḥaqīqī, al-waṭanī al-ḥaqīqī*) who was attacked for his two famous books because of his audacious questioning of tradition.⁷³ Then, as the eulogy turned to Amin's character and judicial work, quotes from the *Kalimat* were used to explicate Amin's views on forgiveness and the purpose of moral education. The author ended the eulogy by claiming that Amin's thoughts on science, religion, freedom, true love, and the Arabic language were all proof that his death was "a true loss felt by those who know the value of true men [*al-rijāl al-ḥaqīqiyyīn*]."⁷⁴ The journal then provided a reprint of the first thirty-four aphorisms from the book.

Meanwhile, *al-Ahram*, which did not publish a full-length feature article upon the death of the author of *Tahrir al-Mar'a*, decided to do so when it received a copy of the *Kalimat*.⁷⁵ The unsigned article sidestepped Amin's previous works saying that "whether he was correct or not," Amin's opinions were well known and "we will not look at that teaching as a whole, nor will we offer to speak about it."⁷⁶ Rather, the article chose to feature Amin's "ideas for reforming many of the issues facing the community [*umma*] and its morals," using his musings in the *Kalimat* as a framework. According to *al-Ahram*, the *Kalimat* spoke to audiences who were "searching for the thinking man, like Qasim Amin, who has perceptive vision."⁷⁷ In its excerpts from the book, *al-Ahram* focused on a theme dear to many of the writers of this period: writers themselves.⁷⁸ The article quoted a widely cited aphorism highlighting Amin's critique of the status quo: "In Egypt, everyone who knows how to read and write is called worthy; if he studied something of science, he becomes a distinguished scholar; and if he excels in some cleverness or displays it, he is counted a genius."⁷⁹ Amin's remedy for this mediocrity was also cited: "The writer who loves his art publishes his thoughts as they are. He publishes the whole truth, no more, no less. And he does not accept to alter it, or change it, or back down from even one letter."⁸⁰ In particular, the notion of asserting the truth in opposition to popular opinion was seen as a sign of a courageous writer. It seems that writers themselves were partial to the idea that they, at their most noble, could serve as reformers and fierce truth-tellers.

With less commentary, but a clear subtext of social critique, the June issue of the monthly *Majallat Sarkis* simply prefaced a selection of twenty-nine aphorisms with the following: "The best of what can be read and memorized, that it may be a lesson for the current generation in Egypt."⁸¹ Salim Sarkis, the editor, had a long history of publishing, often clashing with

Amin," *al-Hilal*, 515; "Qasim Bey Amin: Faqid al-Qada' wa-l-'Ilm wa-l-Wataniyya al-Haqiqiyya," *al-Muhit* 6, no. 5 (May 1, 1908): 197.

⁷³ Although the May issue was dated May 1, 1908, it clearly must have appeared later in the month after the May 21 publication of the *Kalimat*. "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muhit*, 194.

⁷⁴ "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muhit*, 196.

⁷⁵ Earlier in 1908, upon the death of Mustafa Kamil (albeit a more well-known figure), the paper ran a full article on him the next day. In contrast, Amin's death and funeral were reported on the back pages of local events in the April 22 and 23 issues of *al-Ahram*.

⁷⁶ "Qasim Amin," *al-Ahram*, May 22, 1908.

⁷⁷ "Qasim Amin," *al-Ahram*.

⁷⁸ In particular, a series of aphorisms on Arabic, writing, and language reform were oft cited in these articles. Amin, *Kalimat*, 11–14; Arnett, "Aphorisms," #22–26.

⁷⁹ Amin, *Kalimat*, 3–4; Arnett, "Aphorisms," #6. Cited in "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Ahram*; "Akhbar Mahaliyya," *al-Muqattam*; "Faqid Misr wa Atharahu al-Qalamiyya," *Majallat Sarkis* 4, no. 3–4 (1 June 1908): 89; "Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Jarida*; "Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Mu'ayyad*; and "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muhit*, 197.

"في مصر كل من يعرف القراءة والكتابة يسمى فاضلاً فإذا درس شيئاً من العلم صار عالماً مفضلاً فإذا امتاز ببعض الحق واطهره عذ من النوايح."

⁸⁰ Amin, *Kalimat*, 8; Arnett, "Aphorisms," #16. Cited in "Qasim Amin," *al-Ahram*; "Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Jarida*; "Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Manar*, 306; "Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Mu'ayyad*; and "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muhit*, 199.

"الكاتب المحب لفنه ينشر أفكاره كما هي. ينشر الحقيقة منزهة عن الزيادة والنقصان لا يقبل أن يبدل فيها أو يغير منها أو يتنازل عن حرف."

⁸¹ "Faqid Misr," *Majallat Sarkis*, 89.

government officials on issues of free speech and press freedom, before he started his name-sake journal in 1905.⁸² When reprinting Amin's *Kalimat*, Sarkis included sayings on true friendship, one on divorce, and several praising the increased patriotism of recent years. He also reprinted nearly all the aphorisms that dealt with publishing, Arabic language reform, and the idea of freedom of thought.⁸³ For example, Sarkis quoted Amin's words: "Real freedom requires expressing every opinion, spreading every school of thought, and promoting every idea."⁸⁴ The dream of a freer intellectual climate required men who could rise to the occasion. And while Amin held out hope for the intellectual output of the new university, he also had this scathing critique of the status quo:

In Egypt, there is not a complete scholar of all human knowledge nor one who specializes in a branch of learning and understands it completely. There is not among us a philosopher of general fame nor a writer of great repute like those that lead public opinion in the other nations, guiding them to prosperity and progress. Without them, in their place, a nation only has ignorant councilors and conniving politicians. The unvarnished truth is that all of Egypt's freedom, order, and justice exists and continues to exist only because of the work of foreigners and despite her own people.⁸⁵

The lesson Sarkis wanted to impart was that the writers, thinkers, and reformers of his era could do much to nurture and achieve true freedom and progress. For both Amin and Sarkis, it was the intellectuals who could lead the way.

Even eulogies that did not directly use the *Kalimat* echoed themes that put writing and intellectualism at the fore. The well-established journal *al-Muqtataf* opened its unsigned remembrance of Amin with a long meditation on "the true measure of men" (*qadr al-rijāl al-ḥaqīqī*) and "the intrinsic value that expresses itself in their writing and their teachings" and whether it could stand the test of time.⁸⁶ "If a person has published written words," it concluded, "then it is the measure of his esteem. It by itself will be a guarantee of his everlasting memory if it is deserving of timelessness."⁸⁷ More than one writer noted that Amin's style—and how he deployed it—contributed to his capacity to reach the hearts and minds of his audience. The prominent lawyer Ibrahim al-Hilbawi noted that Amin's ability to express his thoughts to the public in clear Arabic was exceptional among a generation of students who went to government schools (at a time when Arabic language instruction was weak) and then did most of their advanced education in Europe.⁸⁸ Even Muhammad Rashid Rida, writing in his journal, *al-Manar*, found Amin's words "effective and powerfully appealing, making him among the best Arabic writers, despite his sparse study of its arts."⁸⁹ This was high praise from Rashid Rida, who was a Muslim religious scholar by training. For

⁸² Donald J. Cioeta, "Ottoman Censorship in Lebanon and Syria, 1876–1908," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, no. 2 (1979): 176–78.

⁸³ Amin, *Kalimat*, 11–14; Arnett, "Aphorisms," #22–26. Cited in "Faqid Misr," *Majallat Sarkis*, 89–91; and "Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Jarida*.

⁸⁴ Amin, *Kalimat*, 3; Arnett, "Aphorisms," #1. Cited in "Faqid Misr," *Majallat Sarkis*, 89; "Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Mu'ayyad*; and "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muhit*, 196.

"الحرية الحقيقية تحتمل ابداء كل رأي ونشر كل مذهب وترويج كل فكر."

⁸⁵ Unlike most of the aphorisms I have analyzed here, this one only appeared in *Majallat Sarkis*. Amin, *Kalimat*, 50; Arnett, "Aphorisms," #87. Cited in "Faqid Misr," *Majallat Sarkis*, 95–96.

"ليس في مصر عالم محيط بجميع العلم الإنساني وليس بيننا من اقتص بفرع مخصوص في العلم ووقف نفسه على الامام بجميع ما يتعلق به ولم يظهر منا فيلسوف اكتسب شهرة عامة ولا كاتب ذاع صيته أمثال هؤلاء هم قادة الرأي العام عند الأمم الأخرى والمرشدون إلى طرق نجاحها والمديرون لحركة تقدمها فإذا عدتهم أمة حل محلهم الناصحون الجاهلون والسياسيون المشعوذون – والحقيقة المجردة عن الأوهام والاعراض أن كل ما وجد في مصر من الحرية والنظام والعدل لم يوجد ولم يستمر الا بعمل الأجنبي وعلى رغم أهلها."

⁸⁶ "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muqtataf*, 457.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 458.

⁸⁸ Ibrahim al-Hilbawi, "Kalima li-Hadrat Ibrahim Bey al-Hilbawi," *al-Jarida*, 6 June 1908, 5.

⁸⁹ "Musab Misr," *al-Manar*, 227.

these writers, writing was not simply a mode of communication: it was the way a man made a mark on the world.

For those interested in the intellectual projects of the era, how Amin came to his ideas was also central to his biography. Here, they found in Amin the example of an innovative thinker who, unlike many other authors of the day, did not simply copy or regurgitate other people's ideas.⁹⁰ However, the exact contours of what was "rational" and "independent" depended on the ideological leanings of the journalists themselves. For example, Jurji Zaydan saw in Amin an exemplar of freedom of thought (*hurriyyat al-fikr*), defined by Zaydan as an inquiry that was dispassionately in pursuit of the truth—free from the burden of tradition and habit.⁹¹ Rashid Rida praised Amin's "independence of thought, quality of opinion, purity of mind, and expansiveness of imagination" among other qualities.⁹² For Rashid Rida, as a religious reformer, Amin was a philosopher who was able to reimagine possibilities for Muslim societies.⁹³ Others saw in Amin's thinking a more radical shift. Farah Antun, the proprietor of *al-Jami'a* and a staunch secularist, read Amin's works as a complete repudiation of the old Islamic civilization in favor of the "true civilization" (*al-madaniyya al-ḥaqīqiyya*) of the modern world.⁹⁴ In Antun's reading, Amin had clearly elevated scientific and social ideals over religious ones and, in doing so, demonstrated that the path forward was paved by science and rationality.⁹⁵ Regardless of how Amin was perceived—as a moral philosopher or secular social scientist—the originality of his thought represented a new kind of intellectual for a new world.

A focus on Amin's intellectual and literary feats overshadowed even the most vigorous defenses of Amin's earlier proposals for reforming the status of women. For example, eulogizing his friend of fifteen years and fellow lawyer, Hasan Murad sought to bolster Amin's argument that reforming women—and by extension the Egyptian family—was necessary for modern society.⁹⁶ But just as the role of women was important insofar as it served the society, so too was the role of the writer. Murad could scarcely separate the mission from the man; Amin's reforming impulses proved he was a philosopher and thinker of the highest order. His books, while notable for their diagnosis of Egyptian society, were "evidence of his noble ideology and proof of his high station in writing and rhetoric." After all, according to Murad, Amin believed that it was the duty of writers to "think and speak freely on every subject that can benefit the society in which he lives."⁹⁷ Amin was just such a writer.

These emphases—on moral courage, independence of thought, and an elite literary ethos—contrast with many issues in the *Kalimat* that were not as widely quoted or commented upon. For example, Amin's reflections on romantic love and the occasional reference to his time in Paris—musings that provided fodder for future biographies—seemed to hold little interest to this 1908 audience. Furthermore, of the few aphorisms that dealt with

⁹⁰ More than one eulogist referred to his "independence of thought" (*istiqlāl al-fikr*). Abaza, "Kalima," *al-Jarida*; "Musab Misr," *al-Manar*, 226. See also "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muqtataf*, 459; and "Qasim Amin," *al-Hilal*, 509. Amin's own aphorisms on the concept of original ideas were also widely quoted in eulogies: Amin, *Kalimat*, 14, 15, 18; Arnett, "Aphorisms," #26, 28, 38. Cited in "Akhbar Mahaliyya," *al-Muqattam*; "Faqid Misr," *Majallat Sarkis*, 91, 92; "Kalimat li-Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Jarida*, 23 May 1908; "Qasim Amin," *al-Ahram*; "Qasim Amin," *al-Hilal*, 515; and "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muhit*, 202, 203.

⁹¹ "Qasim Amin," *al-Hilal*, 509–510. The entry on Amin that later appeared in Zaydan's biographical dictionary, *Tarajim Mashahir al-Sharq*, was essentially a reprint of the 1908 eulogy. Jurji Zaydan, *Tarajim Mashahir al-Sharq fi al-Qarn al-Tasi' 'Ashar*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Cairo: Matba'at al-Hilal, 1922), 310–19.

⁹² "Musab Misr," *al-Manar*, 226.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 226, 228.

⁹⁴ "Sawt Sarikh," *al-Jami'a*, 120.

⁹⁵ This was an important theme in Antun's thinking and writing. See Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, 149–58.

⁹⁶ Hasan Murad, "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Mu'ayyad*, April 26, 1908. According to the introduction to the article, this was a translation of a eulogy that had appeared in French in another publication.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

injustice toward women, chiefly regarding divorce, almost none were cited in these eulogies.⁹⁸

The “Woman Question” and Women

The “woman question” was certainly on the mind of writers of this period—the daily papers actively published competing articles on the proper role of women in Egyptian and/or Muslim society, face-veiling, and the like. Yet, when it came to Amin, the one issue related to women that drew the consistent attention of his eulogists was that of education. Unlike seclusion, veiling, and divorce and marriage practices, all of which were controversial in 1899, the value of female education had gained substantial ground by 1908.⁹⁹ It was also a notion that worked well with the kind of intellectual and political ideal being developed as Amin’s legacy: here was a daring, independent, and intelligent man. He needed an equally intelligent woman at his side (if not quite as independent or daring). In particular, references to Amin’s dedication to the upbringing (*tarbiya*) or refinement (*tahdhib*) or enlightening (*tanwīr*) of women, and by extension families, were a way for eulogists to acknowledge his ideas without directly addressing the more controversial issues in his two books on women.¹⁰⁰ Zaydan noted that at least “there was a desire among people to educate their girls and open new schools for that purpose.”¹⁰¹ Others shared Amin’s hope for “a happy time when Eastern women would be educated and become like the upright women of the West in terms of education and upbringing.”¹⁰² To this end, several eulogies cited Amin’s final public words on the day he died. He had visited a local club and welcomed a group of female European students, and he expressed his wish that one day Muslim women would be able to attend such a gathering side by side with their male counterparts.¹⁰³

The June 5 eulogy delivered by the Lebanese Maronite lawyer Dawud ‘Ammun directly spoke to the issue of education as a moral and civilizational imperative. Echoing other eulogists, ‘Ammun asserted the centrality of female education to social reform, mostly by way of the formative role mothers could play in raising the morals and education of their children and, thereby, society as a whole.¹⁰⁴ For ‘Ammun, Amin’s two books on women were evidence of Amin’s patriotism and reformist spirit. In fact, ‘Ammun’s speech was the only one that day to directly suggest that Amin had sought to “liberate women in opposition to public opinion in Egypt and the rest of the Islamic countries.”¹⁰⁵ But here, too, it was not about women. For ‘Ammun, women’s education was important insofar as it could serve the “social body”

⁹⁸ Among the articles surveyed here, only one was cited in “Faqid Misr,” *Majallat Sarkis*, 93. It read: “For us, marriage is a man possessing a woman for a day, a month, a year, or several years and it ends at the man’s will. There is no difference between this and an unlawful relationship as long as a man can show his wife the door and tell her, ‘Get out.’” Amin, *Kalimat*, 37; Arnett, “Aphorisms,” #69.

”الزواج عندنا حيازة رجل لامرأة يوماً أو شهراً أو سنة أو عدة سنين حيازة تنتهي بمجرد إرادة الرجل ولا فرق بينها وبين الحيازة غير الشرعية ما جاز للرجل أن يدفع زوجته الى الباب ويقول لها أخرجي.”

⁹⁹ Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing and Liberating Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005). Despite the ongoing and active debate about exactly what could/should be included in girls’ education, the general sense was that education was good for girls and women.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Hilbawi, “Kalima,” *al-Jarida*; Abaza, “Kalima,” *al-Jarida*; “Musab Misr,” *al-Manar*, 226. Although these terms were sometimes used interchangeably with education (*ta’lim*), they each carried a different valence and connotation. For example, reformers of the era debated between the value of formal schooling and simply “raising” girls with the proper morals and attentiveness to their duties. See Hoda A. Yousef, *Composing Egypt: Reading, Writing, and the Emergence of a Modern Nation, 1870–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 53–54.

¹⁰¹ “Qasim Amin,” *al-Hilal*, 514.

¹⁰² “Qasim Bey Amin,” *al-Muqtataf*, 459.

¹⁰³ “Musab Misr,” *al-Manar*, 226; “Sawt Sarikh,” *al-Jami’a*, 120; “Qasim Bey Amin,” *al-Muhit*, 194.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Ammun, “Kalimat Dawud Bey ‘Ammun,” 4.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* Some of the poems did make passing reference to this role. For example, a poem delivered by ‘Abd al-Hamid Hamdihad a line about how Amin had “championed” (*naṣartahunnā*) Muslim women who had been oppressed. ‘Abd al-Hamid Hamdi, “Marthiyyat ‘Abd al-Hamid Afandi Hamdi,” *al-Jarida*, 6 June 1908.

(*al-hay'a al-ijtimā'iyya*). As was the case with other eulogies, the potential impacts of Amin's work on the lives of women was largely absent.

The male writers who came closest to addressing Amin's influence on the lives of women were Zaydan and Lutfi al-Sayyid, although with markedly different conclusions. Lutfi al-Sayyid's eulogy of Amin contained a rather laudatory vision of the last decade of reforms.¹⁰⁶ Women had been freed from their prisons due to Amin's two books: they had newfound equality between themselves and their husbands in their domestic lives, and their fathers were eager to educate them.¹⁰⁷ In fact, women owed a debt of gratitude to their liberator (*muḥarririhinna*), Qasim Amin.¹⁰⁸ In return, women were supposed to fulfill their duty to their community (*umma*)—presumably by strengthening the Egyptian family, the core foundation of society. This focus on education and the family was consistent with readings of Amin's work that were neutered of more controversial issues.

Zaydan was equally admiring but more sanguine about the results. Unlike others who broadly proclaimed Amin "a candid voice that rang out throughout the East" (*ṣawt ṣārikh fī rubū' al-sharq*), Zaydan called him more specifically "the champion of the Muslim woman and the evangelist of family reform" (*naṣīr al-mar'a al-Muslima wa-l-dā'ī ilā iṣlāḥ al-ā'ila*).¹⁰⁹ In his assessment of these reforms, Zaydan included a detailed account of Amin's arguments about veiling and seclusion, polygamy, and divorce. Zaydan also directly evoked "emancipatory" rhetoric by saying that Amin saw the enslavement of women and "took it upon himself to free her," although Amin did not expect to see results in his own lifetime.¹¹⁰ In actuality, Zaydan painted a rather bleak picture of the immediate aftermath of the 1899 controversy: only a few people publicly defended Amin and, after a year or two, interest in his ideas waned. The only aftereffect seems to have been the increased interest in girls' schooling and education. Zaydan expected that it would take years for people to digest Amin's ideas, but he did predict that women would one day look back on Amin with appreciation, and his name would be "etched in lights" upon the social history of the East.¹¹¹

Zaydan's somewhat prophetic vision of Amin's future place in some feminist circles was also foreshadowed in one final eulogy, this one penned by a woman. In July 1908, Malaka Sa'd started a journal entitled *al-Jins al-Latif*.¹¹² Her second issue (in August) led with an article addressed "To the Spirit of Our Dearly Deceased: Qasim Amin."¹¹³ She began by thanking Amin for his work in fighting to free Egyptian women from their bonds and prisons of ignorance. She then gave an assessment, not of Amin's work, but of Egyptian men. It was not pretty. They sought their own improvement, but not that of women; they believed women were created to serve men as housekeepers and slaves; they did not realize that women were the ones who would raise the next generation, for good or for ill. Furthermore, unlike many male eulogists, who painted a rosy educational picture, she called Egyptians to task for their *lack* of dedication to educating women: "The Egyptian man firmly

¹⁰⁶ "Qasim Bey Amin: al-Qudwa al-Hasana 1," *al-Jarida*.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* There was indeed increased activity in terms of girls' schooling during this period. However, these efforts reached very few Egyptians: in 1915, only an estimated 6 percent of girls were receiving formal education. That number was 24 to 29 percent for boys. Indeed, lack of public education, for both boys and girls, was a point of contention between the nationalist parties and the British-controlled Ministry of Education during this period. For more, see Yousef, *Composing Egypt*, 18–19, 79–83, 147–55. Meanwhile, Lutfi al-Sayyid suggested Amin had only "temporarily" stepped away from this issue to pursue the university project because the Ministry of Education and people in general had been so diligent in opening girls' schools. "Qasim Bey Amin: al-Qudwa al-Hasana 2," *al-Jarida*.

¹⁰⁸ "Qasim Bey Amin: al-Qudwa al-Hasana 1," *al-Jarida*.

¹⁰⁹ These were the titles of *al-Jami'a*'s and *al-Hilal*'s eulogies, respectively. This focus on the Egyptian home and families was a common theme in discussions about Amin's reforms. See, for example, "Musab Misr," *al-Manar*, 226; and "Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muqtataf*, 458.

¹¹⁰ "Qasim Amin," *al-Hilal*, 511.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 514.

¹¹² For more on Sa'd's views, see Baron, *The Women's Awakening*, 109–10. Reprints of the journal can be found in Abir Hasan, ed., *al-Jins al-Latif* (Cairo: al-ʿArabi li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawziʿ, 2001).

¹¹³ "Ila Ruh Faqidina al-ʿAziz," *al-Jins al-Latif* 1, no. 2 (August 1908): 34–46.

believes that if a woman is educated, she is corrupted. . . . Just look at how many of today's men call for the necessity of not educating women."¹¹⁴ Echoing Labiba Hashim, Sa'd evoked Amin's life, not as a theoretical ideal, but rather as a call to further action: "O noble men, have you understood the value of the beloved deceased and lived up to your duty toward him?" As she concluded her remembrance, Sa'd addressed women whom she saw as too complacent and unwilling to help those "who are fighting for your freedom." In a stance that presaged the strategies female activists would adopt over the next few decades, Sa'd urged women to take a lesson from the nationalist movement by working for independence and by "running behind men in the path to freedom."¹¹⁵

Even in their admiration, not all female writers were so unflinchingly positive about Amin's suggestions for women. One writer of this period, Malak Hifni Nasif (d. 1918), did not eulogize Amin directly but did use the occasion of his death to recommend that Egypt start a national cemetery to honor men who had worked to improve the nation. In Amin's case, she hoped that he would one day be recognized by the Egyptian masses as someone who "fought for social progress and promoting the situation of women."¹¹⁶ As an educator and prolific writer herself, Nasif agreed with the overall notion of female empowerment and education and was particularly attuned to the injustices of Egyptian marriage practices. However, she was less impressed with the suggestion that women should unveil, writing in an article soon after Amin's death: "We do not follow the opinion of a person who commands us to veil, nor the opinion of the one who tells us to unveil based on what one person wrote or the other said."¹¹⁷ Rather, she advocated, "give women the best education, raise them well, teach the new generation, and correct your own morals so the *umma* becomes better behaved. Then, leave women to choose what is best for them and for the good of the *umma*."¹¹⁸ Here again, the impetus was on men to improve themselves for the sake of society. So, while Amin's death was a way for some of his male contemporaries to celebrate an example of a modern reformer and writer—for Sa'd and Nasif, as with Hashim—it was an opportunity to call for a more active and concrete reformist platform on behalf of women. For these women, Amin's legacy was about them.

Conclusion

Speaking to a group of students from the Egyptian University in 1917, Lutfi al-Sayyid was pleased to report that although Amin had bravely faced a barrage of criticism some eighteen years earlier, the essential truth of his ideas had spread: "Today we know of no man in the country who opposes the education of women."¹¹⁹ The battle had been won, apparently. Another admirer of Amin, Muhammad Haykal, echoed this strain of self-congratulatory thinking more than a decade later.¹²⁰ In his 1929 biographical sketch of Amin, Haykal imagined that if Amin were alive he would be amazed by the "feminist awakening" (*al-nahḍa al-nisawiyya*) of the day, the relative freedoms women enjoyed, and the legal reforms that

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 35.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 36.

¹¹⁶ Nasif wrote under the pen name "Searcher in the Desert." Bahitha bi-l-Badiyya, "Iqtirah Bina' Madfan Wahid li-'Uzama' Misr," *al-Jarida*, 10 June 1908.

¹¹⁷ Malak Hifni Nasif, *al-Nisa'iyyat: Majmu'at Maqalat Nushirat fi al-Jarida fi Mawdu' al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* (Cairo: Multaqa al-Mar'a wa-l-Dhakira, 1998), 61. This originally appeared in the article "al-Hijab am al-Sufur," *al-Jarida*, 13 June 1908.

¹¹⁸ Nasif, *al-Nisa'iyyat*, 64.

¹¹⁹ The talk was given on April 20, 1917, and republished in two issues of *al-Muqtataf*: Lutfi al-Sayyid, "Dhikra Qasim Bey Amin," *al-Muqtataf*, no. 1 (1 July 1917): 45–50; Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, "Dhikra Qasim Bey Amin [Continued]," *al-Muqtataf*, no. 2 (1 August 1917): 156–62. This quote is from Lutfi al-Sayyid, "Dhikra Qasim Bey Amin [Continued]," 161.

¹²⁰ In 1929, Haykal included Amin in his *Tarajim Misriyya wa-Gharbiyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1980). Haykal initially wrote a series on Amin for the February 25, March 3, April 14, and May 19, 1916, issues of *al-Sufur*. These were later reprinted in Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *Fi Awqat al-Faragh*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1968).

had not yet (but surely would) come to pass.¹²¹ Haykal then announced the logical conclusion of Amin's legacy: had Amin lived until 1929, he undoubtedly would have left "the field of 'the woman' and her liberation to run its natural course. And he would turn his thoughts to other important fields of social reform that Egypt today is in dire need of."¹²² The message was clear: Amin had demonstrated the power of intellectual inquiry, reformist zeal, and impassioned writing.¹²³ As a result, essential reforms to the status of women in Egyptian society had come to pass. It was time to move on to other pressing social needs. Of course, activists, including those who founded the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923, had other ideas: suffrage, education, and reforms to child custody, marriage, and divorce law were all on their agenda, and would be for many decades.¹²⁴

The early construction of Amin's life shows us several things. First, looking at the reception of his work in the 1908 moment, we see that many were happy to use Amin's legacy to advance political and/or social agendas quite apart from the "woman question." To those interested in commemorating his life, he could be cast as a secular social reformer, a nationalist fighter, or a religious defender, depending of the ideological or political leanings of the eulogist. Yet, despite these differences, the figure of Amin—as a brave thinker, fearless critic, and persuasive reformer—allowed for a kind of fraternal solidarity after the divisive days of 1899 and 1900.¹²⁵ He embodied a reformist ethos so many of his contemporaries saw as indispensable for the future of Egypt. Insofar as it served these aims, the relatively uncontroversial idea of women's education was easy to laud. It could be easily folded into the various reformist and nationalistic projects of a socially conscious, intellectual, patriotic male elite—certainly, more so than contentious notions about women's social freedoms more broadly.

The view from 1908 also suggests the degree to which Amin's legacy has always been curated. Commentators and writers, newspaper men and women, and the organizers of scripted commemorations shaped Amin's legacy as they saw fit. For a few sympathetic male writers and several female writers, Amin was a model of the kind of helper and fighter needed for women's rights to truly progress. Yet, notably absent is the moniker that would eventually become synonymous with him. Amin was occasionally a champion (*naṣīr*) of women or someone who sought to liberate women, but rarely, if ever, the "liberator of women." Over the next century, this legacy would morph several more times in the pages of biographies, textbooks, newspapers, and journals and through conferences, more commemorations, and even a TV miniseries. But nothing about this 1908 moment suggested that the designation of the "father of Egyptian feminism" or the "liberator of women" was predetermined. For a time, Qasim Amin was neither.

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¹²¹ Haykal, *Tarajim Misriyya wa-Gharbiyya*, 144. While parts of this biographical sketch are loosely based on the *al-Sufur* articles from 1916, this introductory section was clearly a remark on the situation in 1929.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 144–45.

¹²³ Lutfi al-Sayyid's and Haykal's biographies retained many of the dominant themes from the 1908 eulogies, with a focus on Amin's reformist ethos and privileging the *Kalimat* over his earlier books as a window into his writing, thinking, and moral character.

¹²⁴ See Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*.

¹²⁵ My gratitude to the anonymous reviewer who described this moment as one of "fraternal solidarity."