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ARTICLE

Sex, Sovereignty, and the Biological in the Interwar Arab East

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This article frames the history of anticolonialism in the Arab world as a history of gender, sex, and power. By thinking with early twentieth-century Arab intellectuals, it revises the assumption that the heterosexual body enters into politics primarily as a site of regulation and control. Europeans justified colonialism in the Arab East by arguing that Arabs were like children who needed tutelage before self-rule. Arab writers contested these temporal assumptions through their own theories of human development. Some figured childrearing as a form of temporal engineering through which Arab women would control human and civilizational growth. Others, like cosmopolitan Arab nationalist Fu'ad Sarruf, advocated an anticolonial nationalism that tied the temporality of rupture and event to the sexual development of the male body. These responses by Arab intellectuals to assumptions of colonial belatedness show how the biological body entered anticolonial politics as an active agent of political transformation.

Introduction

In August 1920, French high commissioner Henri Gouraud announced the creation of the new state of Greater Lebanon and welcomed the Lebanese to France's colonial family, a unit that ominously included the French imperial troops deployed on the streets of Beirut.¹ "France," Gouraud declared, "has always found pleasure ... to see marching by her side her adopted children like her own children. Who could believe that Moroccans and Senegalese, after having spilled their blood for four years on the battlefield, would sacrifice again, if France were not a true mother to them?"² His words implied that the Lebanese were joining France's adopted Moroccan and Senegalese children, with all the violent responsibilities this entailed. The division between "adopted" and biological children, meanwhile, reinforced the racialized hierarchies that fractured long-standing French colonial metaphors of familial intimacy.³

¹Note on transliteration: all translations from the Arabic are by the author unless otherwise indicated. I have used simplified transliteration (only 'ayn and hamza) for people's names and the titles of books, journals, and journal articles. For direct quotations from texts, I have transliterated according to the guidelines provided by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

²Quoted in Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York, 2000), 40.

³The power of such metaphors dates to the mid-nineteenth century, when "'family romances' depicting Mount Lebanon as a distant relation of France came to serve as precedents, pretexts, and props for French

Between 1920 and 1943, French officials justified their Mandatory power by arguing that the Lebanese were like children who needed French parental guidance to progress through linear stages of growth in preparation for self-rule.⁴ This rhetoric was familiar across the Mandates created in the Arab East after World War I and in Egypt, where the British continued to meddle in politics long after the advent of Egyptian independence in 1922.⁵ The logic of tutelage invoked by Europeans to justify their presence in the Arab East was most famously enshrined in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, which identified the region's residents as "peoples *not yet able* to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world."⁶ This claim, and the ongoing semicolonial rule it authorized, outraged those who had participated in experiments in Ottoman parliamentary governance before the war and called urgently for full self-determination in its wake. But the League decreed that sovereignty in Arab lands was best "entrusted to advanced nations" who could oversee residents' "well-being and development."⁷ Thinkers and writers in the interwar Arab East thus found themselves in a specific version of what Dipesh Chakrabarty famously called "the waiting room of history"—a state of "not yet" characterized not by aimless waiting but by European-controlled progress up a civilizational ladder whose rungs were defined by European example.⁸

What did Arabs do in the waiting room of history? Influential answers to this question have highlighted how Middle Easterners adopted the temporal framework of progress, embarking on projects of "defensive developmentalism" towards civilizational advancement without challenging developmentalism's linear terms.⁹ Others have explained how residues of older temporal cultures and the unpredictable outcomes of imperialism and technological transformation created "countertempos" that accompanied the emergence of modern temporal regimes.¹⁰ This essay shifts focus from how inhabitants of Arab lands experienced the

involvement." Andrew Arsan, "'There Is, in the Heart of Asia, an Entirely French Population': France, Mount Lebanon, and the Workings of Affective Empire in the Mediterranean, 1830–1920," in Patricia M. E. Lorcin and Todd Shepard, eds. *French Mediterraneans: Transnational and Imperial Histories* (Lincoln, 2016), 76–100, at 80.

⁴Taylor Long, "Political Parenting in Colonial Lebanon," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 4/2 (2011), 257–81, at 266.

⁵The Arab East (the *Mashriq*) refers to today's Egypt, Sudan, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Israel, and the Arabian peninsula. This article focuses on Cairo, Beirut, and Alexandria, centers of print production in the region.

⁶The Avalon Project, "The Covenant of the League of Nations, Article 22," https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp#art22 (accessed 29 March 2021), italics mine.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2007), 8. Jacob has diagnosed this temporal hierarchy as constitutive of colonial modernity itself. Wilson Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Chapel Hill, 2011), 5.

⁹James Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History* (New York, 2015), 70. For a related discussion of historicism and progress in Egypt see Yoav Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley, 2009), 28–31.

¹⁰Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time: 1870–1950* (Cambridge, 2015), 2; On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley, 2013), 5, on Beirut, 120–48; Avner Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca: Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Chicago, 2015), 8.

complexities of modern time to show instead how they *theorized* temporal multiplicity for their own political moment. In what follows, we see how writers working in Arabic in the heyday of linear, developmental time—the Mandate period—turned to the sexed body to rethink the temporal frameworks of imperialism and universal history, calling into question the very terms of the belatedness used to justify their subjugation. By identifying the heterosexual body as a site of political transformation, these thinkers forged an insurgent anticolonial biopolitics that challenges contemporary understandings of the straight body as a site of discipline and capture, and of the biological more generally as politically inert.

Queer times, straight bodies

This essay brings recent work on the history of temporal consciousness and queer theories of temporality into conversation with Arab writers of the interwar period who directly confronted the foreclosed horizons offered by the ideology of progress (what would later be called “modernization”) in colonial contexts. Doing so helps us to appreciate the political significance of the recent turn towards multiplicity in the history of temporality. Responding to Reinhart Koselleck and François Hartog, historians have begun to emphasize that there has never been just one kind of temporal consciousness or “regime of history”: people in the past have always thought about how time worked in various ways.¹¹ The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were no exception. As Helge Jordheim has argued, “during its entire existence ... the regime of temporality identified as ‘modern’ has been challenged by other times, other temporalities, slower, faster, with other rhythms, other successions of events, other narratives, and so on.”¹² Historical events, actions, and processes, Jordheim reminds us, “do not take place in one time and one time only, but belong to different temporal regimes.”¹³

The Arab thinkers considered in this article likewise insisted that the apparently unified time of development could be made to offer multiple nonlinear possibilities. For them, however, this was no academic matter: they insisted on the multiplicity of time in order to imagine processes of political becoming that could suddenly interrupt both the reign of Mandate powers and the justification for their presence in the first place, i.e. the conditions of presumed inadequacy captured by the temporal metaphor of being “behind.” Existing scholarship has highlighted the difficulties that modern Arab intellectuals, from Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897) to Sati’ al-Husari (d. 1968) to Jurj Tarabishi (d. 2016), faced in thinking beyond the powerful developmental logic of modernization.¹⁴ These thinkers are understood to have

¹¹Helge Jordheim, “Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization,” *History and Theory* 53/4 (2014), 498–518, at 502; A. Fryxell, “Time and the Modern: Current Trends in the History of Modern Temporalities,” *Past & Present* 243/1 (2019), 285–298, at 286, 290.

¹²Jordheim suggestively returns to Herder to remark that “the existence of a plurality of times is linked to the existence of a plurality of life forms.” Jordheim, “Introduction,” 512.

¹³*Ibid.*, 513.

¹⁴On al-Afghani see Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago, 2007), 14. Massad also argues that Tarabishi, “like the thinkers he criticizes,” “is unable to exit from a colonial evolutionary schema whose origins is [sic] primitive infantilism, disease, and backwardness and whose telos is adulthood, health, and progress.” *Ibid.*, 20. Pursley describes the “shared temporal imaginary of British and Iraqi mandate

brought “colonial evolutionary schemas” of modernization and progress into the time of anticolonialism and decolonization, limiting the radical potential of their moments with commitments to development inherited from colonial modernity. This scholarship recognizes important continuities between the temporal politics used to justify colonialism and the ways some anti- and postcolonial elites sought to shape the lives and daily practices of unruly subalterns to “synch up” with the temporalities of progress and development.¹⁵

This article, however, sheds light on a different strain of temporal thought in Arabic in the interwar period. It explores the work of Arab thinkers who theorized a nonlinear, anticolonial biopolitics by proposing that within the growing human body—a metaphor for linear development in the hands of Mandate officials and nationalist elites alike—lay the spontaneous, mysterious potential to interrupt the temporal schemas that marked Arabs as endlessly “behind.” Like developmentalism, however, these nonlinear temporalities *also* worked to affirm heterosexual binaries and to anchor unstable bodies in reassuring “natural” frames.¹⁶ Queer and insurgent times, in other words, forged straight bodies: as the time of revolutionary event became associated with young men, women became agents of linear (if also unstable and mysterious) development.

While recent work on the history of temporality has shown that temporal consciousness must be framed in the plural, it has been less attuned to how categories of embodied difference—such as race and gender—have meant that people experienced time differently within particular synchronic moments. Both Arab thinkers of the interwar period and contemporary queer theorists, by contrast, argue that time and the human body are mutually constitutive. If our experiences of bodies shape how we experience time, in other words, temporal regimes also shape how we experience bodies. Rather than naturalizing a single, unified body as an a priori basis for a universal temporal consciousness, as Koselleck once did by positing an intuitive understanding of “the blink of an eye,” reading Arab thinkers and the growing literature on queer temporalities together shows how bodies themselves

officials” such as Satī al-Husari, according to which “Iraq was moving towards phased independence through delimited stages of development,” although they disagreed over the pace. Sara Pursley, *Familiar Futures: Time, Selfhood, and Sovereignty in Iraq* (Stanford, 2019), 57. Jacob makes a similar argument about Egyptian writer Qasim Amin, whose attempts to “make a claim on progress” inaugurated an Egyptian nationalist time. Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*, 59–62.

¹⁵On Iraq see Pursley, *Familiar Futures*, 31–3. Importantly, not all Iraqi nationalists were of the developmentalist school: rebellious Shi’i scholars advocated for immediate independence—before being deported for holding Iranian passports. *Ibid.*, 62–5.

¹⁶Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 161–90, has argued that (Western) discourses of progress, development, and liberation naturalized binary sexuality (homo/hetero) in the postcolonial Middle East. Writing on Qajar Iran, Najmabadi shows how “the heteronormalization of eros and sex became a condition of ‘achieving modernity.’” Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley, 2005), 3. On Iraq, Pursley argues that “the increasing moralization of both education and masculinity [through the military] was not just about producing strong bodies for the nation, but about producing heteronormative citizens.” Likewise, for pragmatist Iraqi educators in the 1930s, “national uniformity would be produced through the difference of sex.” Pursley, *Familiar Futures*, 76, 92; see also 99–105, 123–6. Jacob takes a more ambivalent stance, arguing that while sex “was a normalizing conduit in the reforming of Egyptian masculinity and femininity to align with modernity,” its discursive manifestations “stood [both] for and against normative sexuality.” Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*, 180.

cohere through processes and strategies of temporalization.¹⁷ Doing so also reminds us that the nexus between bodies and times has been a key site for reproducing and subverting power—and thus for political contestation—in the era of anticolonialism and development as in the present day.¹⁸

Recognizing this, the Arab theorists considered in this article addressed time and bodies together, arguing for the political potential of the straight body in a particular anticolonial frame. In the interwar period, heteronormative nationalisms, biopolitical state-building projects, and colonial logics of development pushed bodies and sex to the forefront of linear visions of progress and civilization in many locations around the globe. In this context, Arab thinkers turned to the human body, particularly the child and adolescent body, to develop other ways of thinking about development and time. Both queer theorists and historians of sexuality in Middle Eastern contexts have focused on how nonheterosexual bodies and forms of life destabilize the workings of power.¹⁹ Scholars working on straight bodies, meanwhile, often focus on the body as a site of discipline and capture by modern biopolitical and temporal regimes.²⁰ The writers featured in this essay, by contrast, identified the heterosexual body as a site for the *disruption* of colonial temporality, legitimacy, and power, contesting Mandate-era arguments that naturalized colonial development and Arab belatedness by modelling them on the “normal” growth of the heterosexual body. In so doing, Arab thinkers theorized biological life itself as a central domain of political transformation, charting ways of thinking that can enrich contemporary debates about the political potential of the body.

Following the publication of Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* in English in 1978, analyses of modern power have often approached the biological body as a site of discipline and regulation.²¹ Foucault himself famously defined modern sovereignty as a matter of biopower—a form of power that turns on the

¹⁷As Freeman writes, “the naked flesh is bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation.” Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC, 2010), 3. Reinhart Koselleck, “Time and History,” in Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner et al. (Stanford, 2002), 100–14, at 103.

¹⁸For Freeman, “manipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and regimes, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time” for individuals and populations. Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.

¹⁹Freeman notes that “discussions of queer time continue to centre on forms of sexual practice that are queer in the sense that they are non-heteronormative.” *Ibid.*, 11. On the Middle East see Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*; Massad, *Desiring Arabs*.

²⁰Kenneth Cuno, *Modernizing Marriage: Family, Ideology, and Law in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Egypt* (New York, 2015); Hanan Kholoussy, *For Better, for Worse: The Marriage Crisis That Made Modern Egypt* (Stanford, 2010); Liat Kozma, “‘We, the Sexologists ...’: Arabic Medical Writing on Sexuality, 1879–1943,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22/3 (2013), 426–45. Sara Pursley and Omnia El Shakry have shown how nationalist elites and experts in Iraq and Egypt respectively in the 1930s and 1940s linked heterosexuality to a temporality of “controlled acceleration,” a tool to harness the “peril and promise” of male adolescence for the linear, elite-dominated process of nationalist development. Pursley, *Familiar Futures*, 57; Omnia El Shakry, “Youth as Peril and Promise: The Emergence of Adolescent Psychology in Postwar Egypt,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43/4 (2011), 591–610, at 594.

²¹Analyses that go beyond this framing include, inter alia, Judith Butler, “Bodies and Power Revisited,” in Dianna Taylor and Karen Vintges, eds., *Feminism and the Final Foucault* (Champaign, 2004), 183–96; Dagmar Herzog, “Hubris and Hypocrisy, Incitement and Disavowal: Sexuality and German Fascism,”

management of living bodies rather than on the sovereign right to kill. “For millennia,” Foucault wrote, “man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence *as a living being* in question.”²² But, as Catherine Malabou has recently observed, if biopower is indeed a political formation with the management of the “living being” at its center, then the domain of the biological itself—the living being—long received surprisingly little critical attention.²³ This tendency meant that the “entry of life into politics” was “unilateral, nondialectical, unreciprocated,” as the biological was “deprived of the right to respond and appear[ed] to flow simply into the mold of power.”²⁴ Like Malabou, other thinkers associated with new materialism have begun to engage recent discoveries in biology, neuroscience, and other life sciences to reconsider understandings of the body as politically inert, indicating a shift in discourse about the biological away from the Foucauldian paradigm.²⁵ The challenge they confront is how to “track the complex circuits at work whereby discursive and material forms are inextricable yet irreducible”—what Malabou poignantly describes as the challenge of thinking the biological and symbolic aspects of life together as “one life, and one life only.”²⁶

This idea—that there is “one life, and one life only,” or that the body itself may have a politics—is precisely the argumentative approach that interwar Arab anticolonial intellectuals adopted, albeit drawing on a different canon of authoritative knowledge. The world of science that enlivened Arab thought on the biological in the interwar period included works on human, childhood, and species development by the likes of Charles Darwin, G. Stanley Hall, Johann Pestalozzi, and, by the 1930s, Sigmund Freud.²⁷ Arab intellectuals probed the aporias and uncertainties of such theories to conjure multiple temporalities for anticolonialism. Their work shows how discourses around child and adolescent bodies in the interwar period did not merely “flow into the mold of power”—colonial-internationalist,

Journal of the History of Sexuality 11/1 (2002), 3–21; Carolyn Dean, “The Productive Hypothesis: Foucault, Gender, and the History of Sexuality,” *History and Theory* 33/3 (1994), 271–96.

²²Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1978), 143, italics mine. Quoted in Catherine Malabou, “One Life Only: Biological Resistance, Political Resistance,” trans. Carolyn Shread, *Critical Inquiry* (2020), https://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/one_life_only/ (accessed 21 March 2021).

²³On the difficulty of “thinking about matter” see Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, “Introducing the New Materialisms,” in Coole and Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC, 2010), 1–46, at 1–3. On *zoē* or biological life as the “poor half” of life see Rosi Braidotti, “The Politics of ‘Life Itself’ and New Ways of Dying,” in *ibid.*, 201–20, at 207.

²⁴Malabou, “One Life Only.”

²⁵See also Braidotti, “The Politics of ‘Life Itself’”; Coole, “The Inertia of Matter and the Generativity of Flesh,” in Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*, 92–115; Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, 2006). An earlier feminist intervention refusing to separate the social and the natural-scientific aspects of bodies is Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Indiana, 1994).

²⁶Coole and Frost, “Introducing the New Materialisms,” 27; Malabou, “One Life Only.” Thinking the body as at once discursive and material is also a *temporal* challenge, i.e. how to think the materiality of bodies simultaneously with their contexts, without identifying either the material body or its social construction as “before.”

²⁷Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic* (Chicago, 2013); Omnia El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt* (Princeton, 2017).

reformist–nationalist, or otherwise.²⁸ Instead, the child and adolescent body *also* occasioned pleats, interruptions, and queer failures of both colonial and nationalist development politics and biopolitical agendas.²⁹ The bodies of children and youth served, then, not only as “instantiations of standardization of (secular, universal, progressive) time,” but also as sites to generate alternative temporalities.³⁰ Following Arab writers in thinking about time and the body thus suggests that all bodies—even straight bodies—do more than “flow into the mold of power,” and that all times—especially the powerful modern temporality of development, progress, and historicism—should be thought of in the plural.

The following sections draw on the Arabic women’s press in the interwar period (1918–39) to show how writers brought the biological body to the center of anti-colonial thought. Many, like Beirut editor Julia Dimashqiyya, argued that women’s proper care of the child’s growing body could serve as a kind of temporal engineering. Through proper childrearing (*tarbiya*), Arab mothers would master the uncertainties of growth to raise a sovereign generation in a linear, predictable, top-down manner, not dissimilar in temporal terms to the Mandate rhetoric of colonial parenting. The key difference was that Arab women, rather than French men, would manage the process, govern its temporality, and determine its success. At the same time, writers also used discussions of child genius, illness, and the mysteries of biological growth to suggest that development might take strange and nonlinear paths.

By contrast, cosmopolitan Arab nationalist Fu’ad Sarruf, writing in 1922–3, contested the theory of biological development circulating in the women’s press by tying the living body to the possibility of a sovereign future untethered from the colonial past. His account of the sexual development of the male adolescent modelled a pleated time, in which the contours of a desired future were already known but the mechanisms of arrival remained spontaneous, inevitable, and involuntary.³¹ In so doing, he located the root of revolution in the insurgent male body, rather than in the coherent, agential, male mind. His anticolonial nationalism rooted a temporality of rupture and event in the sexual development of the male adolescent, harnessing an eroticism around the figure of the male youth that had older referents

²⁸Pande, by contrast, highlights how body and family were “folded in” to the linear time of nationalism and colonialism, and how sexual normativity, built around age as well as gender, stabilized and naturalized the “homogenous, empty time” of modernity and nationalism. Ishita Pande, *Sex, Law, and the Politics of Age: Child Marriage in India, 1891–1937* (Cambridge, 2020), 10–11, 16–17, 20.

²⁹As Halberstam writes, “failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent.” Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC, 2011), 88. Afsaneh Najmabadi likewise argues that the apparent “naturalness [of sex] also provides possibilities for developmental failure, in which a host of sex–gender nonconformities are rendered diseased abnormalities.” Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Genus of Sex or the Sexing of Jins,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45/2 (2013), 211–31, at 211.

³⁰Pande, *Sex, Law, and the Politics of Age*, 27.

³¹Drawing on Serres, Nead has argued for a “pleated” or “crumpled” time that “draw[s] together past, present and future into constant and unexpected relations,” to show that modernity—in London as in Beirut—was not a grand, coherent process but a “configuration of diverse and unresolved historical processes.” Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, 2005), 5, 8. See also Michel Serres, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, trans. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor, 1995).

in the Islamicate world for the purposes of an anticolonial time and confirming the adolescent male as the subject of anticolonial revolution.

Both of these responses by Arab intellectuals to the problem of colonial belatedness offer ways to think with the unity of life as a material-symbolic category—Malabou’s “one life, and one life only.” In a move rhetorically similar to today’s new materialists, Sarruf and his interlocutors argued that changes in biological life could produce transformations in the space of the political. While Sarruf argued that young men could become agents of anticolonial rupture, others tasked women with managing a linear temporality of development centered on the yet-ungendered body of the child. Both temporal frameworks were fractured and unstable, but politically urgent nonetheless. Overall, this analysis shows how anticolonial political horizons in the interwar Arab East came to depend on, and invoke, sexed bodies and gendered times.

Mothers of a sovereign tomorrow: *tarbiya* as temporal engineering

The bodies that became central to nationalism, state building, and colonialism around the globe in the interwar period were increasingly marked by new categories of age.³² The 1920s, as Ishita Pande has argued, saw the global rise of concepts of “childhood” and “youth” as universal, biologically anchored categories, newly standardized phases of life inspiring special protection, political attention, and regulation from both the League of Nations and local reformers in India and elsewhere.³³ Boundary struggles over age were also struggles over sexuality. Reformers of many stripes advocated for a childhood innocent of sex, and so sex came to define the boundary between childhood and adulthood for the modern world.³⁴ Anxieties about children and youth, in turn, forged the new categories—hetero- and homosexuality among them—that structured the emerging science of sexuality.³⁵ Adolescence, the ultimate stage of transition in both age and sex identified by G. Stanley Hall, often served as a “technology of civilization and progress, and of white, male, bourgeois supremacy” by linking assumptions about age, race, and sexuality.³⁶ Bodies, sex, and time were tied intimately together.

In the Middle East, debates about protecting innocent children, in line with Romantic ideals of childhood, vied with anxieties about children as sources of danger and disorder.³⁷ Meanwhile, children became central to maintaining cultural authenticity under colonialism, as well as to building national communities for

³²Fisher shows how age structured “modern articulations of sexuality” and sexual science. Kate Fisher, “The Age of Attraction: Age, Gender and the History of Modern Male Homosexuality,” *Gender & History* 31/2 (2019), 266–83, at 267.

³³Pande, *Sex, Law, and the Politics of Age*, 75.

³⁴Beth Bailey, “The Vexed History of Children and Sex,” in Paula Fass, ed. *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World* (New York, 2012), 191–210, at 191, 197, 199.

³⁵Fisher argues that concerns about childhood vulnerability, “youth corruption,” and the “erotics of age” led sexologists to define homosexuality as consensual relations between adult men, rejecting “affirmative framings of age-differentiated relationships” and “recast[ing] same-sex desire as driven by the gender of the partner and not their youth.” Fisher, “The Age of Attraction,” 269; 271.

³⁶Nancy Lesko, *Act Your Age! A Cultural Construction of Adolescence* (New York, 2012), 35.

³⁷Heidi Morrison, *Childhood and Colonial Modernity in Egypt* (New York, 2015), 5, 14; Nazan Maksudyan, *Orphans and Destitute Children in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Syracuse, 2014), 84.

future independence.³⁸ In this context, Arab writers agreed that managing children and childhood was central to all possible futures: raising a child, they argued, was like “etching in stone” (*al-naqsh ‘ala al-ḥajar*).³⁹ What was learned in childhood could never be erased, and the child became the foundation for all that was to come. This notion laid the groundwork for the child body to become central to envisioning a sovereign future. The importance of childhood and youth to technologies of power, moreover, befitted a global moment—the 1920s—in which the child became the “pivot on which the biopolitics of the population met the anatomo-politics of the nation” in many locations around the world.⁴⁰

Starting in the late nineteenth century, writers in the Arabic women’s press turned to the body of the child to debate questions about temporality. This turn coincided with the rise of the body of the child to the forefront of global concerns about what historian Carolyn Steedman has termed “the mystery of growth.”⁴¹ Steedman shows how English scientists and intellectuals at the *fin de siècle* came to understand growth as a predictable process of development from the smallest unit—the cell—to larger and more complex structures. What they couldn’t understand was how growth was regulated: why it *stopped* before it became monstrous. In Cairo and Beirut, too, writers turned to the figure of the child to explore concerns about growth and the biological body.⁴² In Arabic, however, discussions of childhood and growth were always-already tied to urgent questions about colonial development. In other words, Arab writers had to contend with questions not only about how growth worked, but also about how to harness growth in order to “catch up” with the West. For some, discussions of upbringing (*tarbiya*) normalized a controllable, developmental time through the body of the child: upbringing became a way for Arabs to advance up what one writer felicitously termed the “stairway of modern civilization.”⁴³ Others, however, raised difficult, untimely questions about child genius, illness, and the mysteries of biological growth that disrupted the linear temporality of child development.

Debates about upbringing were particularly vibrant in the women’s press because Arab intellectuals and pedagogues had, since the 1860s, identified child-rearing as women’s work.⁴⁴ This was part of a larger debate about women and their roles in society that, as Toufoul Abou-Hodeib describes, “carv[ed] out a larger place for women in public life” by placing the woman “at the center of domestic life

³⁸Morrison, *Childhood and Colonial Modernity*, 25, 45–7.

³⁹This phrase appeared in Azhari Shaykh Husayn al-Marsafi’s 1881 work of social theory, *Risalat al-Kalim al-Thaman*, and titled a series of science primers published by Cornelius van Dyck, American-born professor at Beirut’s Syrian Protestant College, in 1886.

⁴⁰Pande, *Sex, Law, and the Politics of Age*, 78.

⁴¹Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780–1930* (Cambridge, 1995), 59–62.

⁴²Thus the time of childrearing, like the broader discourse of domesticity of which it was a part, remained “open to contestation.” Toufoul Abou-Hodeib, *A Taste for Home: The Modern Middle Class in Ottoman Beirut* (Stanford, 2017), 30.

⁴³Bulus al-Khuli, “Bi al-Tarbiya,” *al-Mar’a al-Jadida* 1/10 (1921), 202–4, at 202.

⁴⁴Omnia El Shakry, “Schooled Mothers and Structured Play: Child Rearing in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt,” in Lila Abu-Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton, 1998), 126–70; Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Crafting an Educated Housewife,” in *ibid.*, 91–125, esp. 91–5.

as manager, mother, and wife” and tying the domestic space of the home to broader debates about progress, modernity, class, and consumption.⁴⁵ Debates about proper childrearing reached across empire and sect, bringing Christian, Jewish, and Muslim writers together in a print community that stretched from Cairo and Alexandria to Beirut and beyond.⁴⁶ Because women’s journals were often subscription-based, they sought to appeal to reader–consumers who had funds to purchase.⁴⁷ Writers and readers shared the concerns of a modernizing middle class, such as hygiene, companionate marriage, and women’s education.⁴⁸ The estimated readership for one of the smaller Cairene women’s journals at the turn of the century hovered at around 1,100 copies (for roughly 60,000 literate women in Egypt); in Beirut between 1918 and 1933, thirteen women’s journals vied for readers among the city’s 16,000 literate women.⁴⁹ Overall, the print community in Syria and Lebanon in 1930 numbered between 250,000 and 500,000, or 5–10 percent of the total population.⁵⁰ In Egypt, official literacy rates tripled between 1897 and 1927, from 8 to 23 per cent of men and 0.2 to nearly 5 per cent for women.⁵¹ Official literacy rates probably substantially undercounted the number of people engaged in broader literacy practices.⁵² A single journal copy might have been read and heard by multiple people in literary salons, women’s clubs, girls’ schools, and private homes.⁵³

As writers in the Arabic press explored the mysteries of growth through the figure of the child, they linked women’s work as childrearsers to two major temporal contradictions of colonial development. The first contradiction was conceptual: while linear growth was the easiest to understand and perhaps to control, it also threatened to relegate Arabs to a perpetual state of being “behind.”⁵⁴ If all nations were progressing up the “stairway of modern civilization” at the same rate, in other words, how could the Arab world ever “catch up” with the West?⁵⁵ The second contradiction was more concrete: while Mandate powers encouraged subject populations to embrace “progress” along lines defined by European example, in practice those same powers pursued policies that seemed to work against, not towards, sovereignty for Arab peoples, for example by ignoring calls—voiced as loudly in the women’s press as elsewhere—for national public education.⁵⁶

⁴⁵Abou-Hodeib, *A Taste For Home*, 5. See also Najmabadi, “Crafting an Educated Housewife,” 108.

⁴⁶While Syrian Christian women dominated the women’s press to 1907, Egyptian and Muslim women became more frequent participants in later decades. Beth Baron, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven, 1994), 35.

⁴⁷Baron, *Women’s Awakening*, 93.

⁴⁸Abou-Hodeib, *A Taste For Home*, 5–7.

⁴⁹Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 213–14; Baron, *Women’s Awakening*, 91–3.

⁵⁰Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 212–13.

⁵¹Hoda Yousef, *Composing Egypt: Reading, Writing, and the Emergence of a Modern Nation, 1870–1930* (Stanford, 2016), 43–6.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Baron, *Women’s Awakening*, 68.

⁵⁴Abou-Hodeib shows how the home was “cultivated as a sphere where a sense of control [could] be maintained,” even as it was integrated into uneven networks of global commodity exchange. Abou-Hodeib, *A Taste for Home*, 33, 37.

⁵⁵al-Khuli, “Bi al-Tarbiya,” 202.

⁵⁶Pursley, *Familiar Futures*, 57; Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 96–7; Nadya Sbaiti, “Lessons in History: Education and the Formation of National Society in Beirut, Lebanon, 1920–1960s” (unpublished Ph.D.

Their desires for a system of national public schools thwarted by French and British opposition, as well as by the recalcitrance of local elites, writers in the interwar Arabic women's press actively engaged the temporal contradictions of semicolonial rule through discussions of childrearing in the home. Many described how women could harness the power of linear, predictable, and controllable growth through the proper raising of children.⁵⁷ Authors explicitly identified good childrearing as a practical means to gradually transform a people deemed "backward" by European standards into one worthy of self-rule.⁵⁸ In 1921, for example, Bulus al-Khuli, a graduate of the Syrian Protestant College active in Syrian nationalist politics, wrote in Beirut women's journal *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* (The New Woman) that when "people wonder how we are to progress on the stairway of modern civilization [*fī ma'āraj al-madaniyya al-ḥadītha*]," they should look to childrearing (*al-tarbiya*) for an answer.⁵⁹ Al-Khuli's conviction echoed beyond the new boundaries of Greater Lebanon. In 1932, curator of the Egyptian National Library 'Ali Fikri wrote in *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* (The Women's Awakening), the Cairo-based journal of Islamic activist Labiba Ahmad, that Egypt had "not yet joined those [advanced and civilized] countries in elevating the bases of scientific childrearing and [realizing] the principles of true uplift."⁶⁰ Bad childrearing, in other words, was what relegated Arabs to the time of "not yet"; the transformation of the future into a "horizon of planning" also made women responsible for the success, or failure, of developmental time.⁶¹

Because childrearing advice in the Arabic press was largely directed at women, women became the idealized agents of regular, predictable, top-down change modelled on the body of the child. A new genre emerged that made the child's growing body a metonym for an understanding of time that worked through regular, normalized, and universal "stages": the advice column broken up by month or year. Authors of such articles told women how and when to feed a newborn, how to wash and swaddle him, and how to ensure the healthfulness of milk. In so doing, they identified the key milestones of "normal" childhood growth and arrayed them in a linear progression ruthlessly standardized by the markers of homogeneous, empty time: days of the week, weeks of the year, and years of age. One such column in the Alexandria-based *al-Sayyidat wa-l-Banat* (Ladies and Girls), the project of Tripoli-born Greek Orthodox writer Rosa Antun, for example, declared under the heading "Month Seven" that a child's weight "should exceed sixteen English ounces," and he should sleep exactly two-thirds of the time.⁶² Articles

thesis, Georgetown University, 2008), 238–9; Misako Ikeda, "Toward the Democratization of Public Education," in Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J. Johnson, and Barak A. Salmoni, eds., *Re-envisioning Egypt: 1919–1952* (Cairo, 2005), 218–48.

⁵⁷This interpretation differs from Pursley's observation that domestic space and the conjugal family in interwar Iraq served as "particularly productive of the modern experience of timelessness" central to capitalism and the nation state. Pursley, *Familial Futures*, 10.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁹al-Khuli, "Bi al-Tarbiya," 202.

⁶⁰'Ali Fikri, "al-Din wa-l-Akhlaq: al-Ghaya min al-Tarbiya," *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* 11/11 (1933), 362–3, at 363.

⁶¹On the future as a "horizon of planning" see Koselleck, "Time and History," 119.

⁶²'al-Atfal wa Tarbiyatuhum al-Jasadiyya: al-Shahr al-Sab'a," *al-Sayyidat wa-l-Banat* 1/6 (1903), 174–5, at 174.

like this one imposed regular norms and standards on uneven and often discrepant experiences of childhood growth. They arrayed exact quantities (weight, sleep) and particular qualities (the development of imaginary fears, new attachments, interest in the outside world) in linear time by organizing them according to standard increments of age.

This genre remained a staple in the women's press through the interwar period, serving to order and normalize in text a process that, in life, embodied uncertainties and unexpected outcomes. One article published in *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* in 1928 reported the findings of an American doctor about what kids should have "achieved" in terms of mental development in each month of life. "By the end of the first month," it declared, "the child should recognize his mother's face, and put his hand in his mouth ... by month nine, he should be able to sit up, unassisted."⁶³ These monthly markers, still familiar to many twenty-first-century parents, harnessed the child's growing body to a linear, developmental time in which all bodies proceeded at roughly the same pace along a path that women could predict and control.

Aspirations towards normal and governable growth, however, also produced new opportunities to make mistakes. While most of the *tarbiya* articles were addressed explicitly to women, one 1922 article recast the genre of year-by-year advice by addressing both parents in the voice of an imaginary child. "A Child's Advice, Addressed to His Parents" adopted the linear, age-segregated form to predict the most likely mistakes parents might make in each year of the child's life. "In year one," it read, "a tight swaddle can weaken my power"; in year two, "cleanliness strengthens and empowers my body of tomorrow, so wash me once a day."⁶⁴ It is notable that a (presumably) adult writer took on the voice of a child to discipline and school caregivers and to make independent demands: this vision of agential childhood pointed to the complexities of parental authority in the new, child-centered world. And although most childrearing advice in the women's press was directed rhetorically towards women, this article's address to both parents perhaps sought to appeal to male journal readers who would relay childrearing advice to their wives. And it suggests that even as these columns gave parents, especially women, advice about how to normalize and control growth, they also occasioned judgment about what childrearing were doing wrong. As a tool for managing growth in the colonial context, then, the temporality of childrearing combined hope and confidence with deep, and often gendered, uncertainty about parents' abilities to achieve expected outcomes.⁶⁵ As Beth Freeman has argued for a different context, a "queer reading of time of the middle-class household" thus reveals not a state of timelessness or "pure temporal plenitude," but a temporality of constant fragility and monstrosity sheltering within the inexorable "undertow of forward time."⁶⁶

⁶³"Maqyas Dhaka' al-Tifl," *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* 14/1 (1928), 17.

⁶⁴"Wasaya Tifl," *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* 2/8 (1922), 137–8. This kind of temporal ordering also accompanied discourses about time and efficiency in household work. Sherene Seikaly, *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford, 2016), 67–72.

⁶⁵As Holt has noted, uncertainty was a resonant temporality in the nineteenth-century Levant, where new forms of production, debt, and speculation meant to bring prosperity had quickly become "legible as empire" and extraction. Elizabeth Holt, *Fictitious Capital: Silk, Cotton, and the Rise of the Arabic Novel* (New York, 2017), 21.

⁶⁶Freeman, *Time Binds*, 40.

The fragile time of uncertainty and mistake, however, was not the only counter-tempo that fractured the temporality of linear development modelled on the child body. Writers introduced other counter-tempo by highlighting the mysteries of biological growth in a variety of contexts, from the household to the fields. While the growth debate would reach its apex in discussions of childrearing, similar concerns animated discussions of many living bodies, not just human ones. In 1925, Jurj 'Arqtanji, writing in *al-Mar'a al-Jadida*, warned readers about the dangers of drinking milk. He revealed that milk was one of the foodstuffs most likely to harbor microbes, dangerous organisms that “breed and reproduce with a strange speed ... spreading through the air and becoming hundreds, thousands, millions.”⁶⁷ Microbes were dangerous and curious because they did not obey linear processes of growth. Instead, they grew in uncontrollable and unpredictable ways, transforming a simple household staple into a threat.⁶⁸

Amina Khuri, another contributor to *al-Mar'a al-Jadida*, raised similar concerns in her long-running series for children, “Samir al-Sighar.” She introduced the question of exponential growth by beginning one installment of her series with a simple question in a fictional child’s voice: “where does fruit come from?”⁶⁹ In answer, Khuri first assured her readers that they knew how growth worked: “if we plant a seed in the earth,” she remarked, everyone knows that “it will grow into a big tree.” She followed this comforting prediction, however, with a more confounding claim. “When we plant one pound [*raṭl*] of tomato seeds,” she wrote, “it will yield a hundred *qanṭār* of tomatoes, each of which will produce another hundred seeds. And each [seed] contains within it hundreds of seeds more.”⁷⁰ Khuri thus linked the predictable development from seed to tree to an exponential form of growth that was harder to conceptualize. How did one pound of seeds produce one hundred *qanṭār* of tomatoes? And how many more tomatoes would those hundred seeds in each tomato produce? A reader, especially a child reader, might easily be overwhelmed. In the end, Khuri could offer only a very enigmatic response to the child’s original query—where does fruit come from, or, in other words, how does growth begin? Fruit, Khuri answered, comes from “the astonishing power of the plant or tree” (*quwwat al-shajara aw al-nabāt al-mudhisha*). Even the exponential mathematics of horticultural reproduction could not fully answer a child’s simple question about how growth worked and how one could expect it to proceed.

While seeds and microbes modelled disturbing forms of exponential rather than linear growth, the mystery and anxiety of development reached a peak in discussions about child bodies. Interwar women’s journals featured articles about unusual children—child geniuses—who embodied not linear growth but untimely forms of “precocious or too-rapid development.”⁷¹ In 1925, for example, the Cairo-based women’s journal *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* (The Egyptian Woman), edited by Coptic

⁶⁷Jurj 'Arqtanji, “al-Laban: al-Halib,” *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* 5/7 (1925), 290–91, at 290.

⁶⁸Arqtanji, an Alexandria-based writer, also authored at least two stand-alone works on child health and nutrition: *Fawa'id fi Taghdiyat al-Atfal* (Alexandria, 1913) and *Durr al-Aqwal li-Wiqayat al-Atfal* (Alexandria, 1917).

⁶⁹Amina Khuri, “Samir al-Sighar: Min Ayna Taji al-Athmar?,” *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* 3/8 (1923), 286.

⁷⁰Ibid. A *raṭl* was twelve to sixteen ounces, and a *qanṭār* was roughly a hundred pounds.

⁷¹On precocity as a “developmental pathology” see Pursley, *Familiar Futures*, 22.

Christian writer Balsam ‘Abd al-Malik, published a piece recounting the story of a Miss Phyllis Mawkat, a young Scottish lass who played the piano better than anyone in the world. Mawkat, the article emphasized, had “astonished a group of artists with her “uncanny ability” (*maqdaratihā al-‘ajība*) to memorize any piece of music placed before her—unusual for such a young age.⁷² In London, meanwhile, thirteen-year-old Tom Edward was reported to have published a book of philosophy and literature that “dazzled” scholars.⁷³ News items like these identified exceptional children who appeared to exist outside the realm of predictable development; while they were presented to readers in positive terms, their stories also undermined assumptions that mothers could ensure “normal” human growth. Just as nobody knew exactly where fruit came from, or how to figure out why microbes multiplied so rapidly in a glass of milk, nobody could explain why Tom Edward could write a philosophical masterpiece at the age of thirteen. The mystery of growth endured. Discussions of child precocity and genius thus queered the predictable hierarchies of age that undergirded gender regimes, linear time, and international order across the interwar world.⁷⁴

Other writers in the women’s press turned to discussions of illness and maldevelopment, rather than to genius, to fracture the developmental time of childrearing from within. The threat of childhood disease, from syphilis to diphtheria to colic to paralysis, loomed over the childrearing project presented in the women’s press.⁷⁵ These diseases had myriad causes, from the vagaries of nature and infection to particular and deadly parental mistakes. Many theorists of upbringing presented new practices of scientific householding and childrearing as ways of fending off illness and protecting normal childhood growth. In 1911, editor of women’s journal *Fatat al-Sharq* (Young Woman of the East) Labiba Hashim gave a lecture from the stage of the newly established Egyptian University in Cairo on the popular subject of “physical upbringing” (*tarbiya jasadiyya*). She explained that improper upbringing could have terrible consequences for the growing child, even causing illness and maldevelopment. “The small child,” Hashim argued, “needs food sufficient for growth more than the adult”; that food, moreover, had to be easy to digest and delivered at ordered intervals throughout the day.⁷⁶ Mothers who fed their children too much or too little or at unregulated times, or provided sweets, bread, or other nutritionally deficient foods, would damage children’s stomachs and digestive systems and cause fevers.⁷⁷ These forms of physical damage, in turn, would “inhibit the child’s growth.”⁷⁸ Thus maternal practice could undermine as well as facilitate the embodied process of childhood development. These omnipresent discussions of bad upbringing, illness, and their harmful effects on the growing child body

⁷²“Nubugh al-Atfal,” *al-Mar’a al-Misriyya* 6/3 (1925), 115–16, at 115. Similar articles on exceptional children appeared in *al-Nahda al-Nisa’iyya*, e.g. “Bab al-Tufula wa-l-Umuma,” 14/1 (1929), 27–9; “Bab al-Tufula wa-l-Umuma: al-Tifla al-Nabigha,” 14/3 (1936), 104.

⁷³“Nubugh al-Atfal.”

⁷⁴Pande, *Sex, Law, and the Politics of Age*.

⁷⁵“Al-Daftaria ‘Aynd al-Atfal,” *al-Nahda al-Nisa’iyya* 1/3 (1921), 79–81, at 79; “Bad Amrad al-Atfal,” *al-Nahda al-Nisa’iyya* 16/3 (1938), 105–6, at 105.

⁷⁶Labiba Hashim, *Kitab fi al-Tarbiya* (Cairo, 1911), 43–4.

⁷⁷Hashim, *Kitab fi al-Tarbiya*, 44.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 45.

rendered the time of maternal childrearing fragile and uncertain, always hovering on the brink of failure.

Some articles even considered the phenomenon of retardation. One 1938 piece in *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* summarized a 1937 book by University of London psychology professor Dr Cyril Burt, entitled *The Backward Child*. The book, the article reported admiringly, brought thorough research methods to address the problem of the “delinquent” child (*al-tifl al-āthim*); that is, “the child who has congenital anomalies or weakness [*shadhūdh aw ḍaʿf khalqī*].”⁷⁹ The word “delinquent” was given in English in the text followed by an Arabic definition, suggesting that this author viewed the term as a potential neologism for Arab readers. The phrase the author suggested as a translation for “delinquent,” *al-tifl al-āthim*, captured two meanings of “delinquent” also present in English—both backwards or behind, and also morally suspect or corrupt.⁸⁰ The clarifying phrase likewise linked physical to moral deficiencies: the word “anomalies” (*shadhūdh*), in the singular, can mean deviant or inferior of character, and the word for congenital, *khalqī*, is the adjectival form of *khalq*, which in the plural invokes the long tradition of Islamic ethical thought, *akhlāq*. An important way to address these deficiencies, the article averred, was for government educators to reform the home, teaching childrearing to “apply the correct rules of upbringing, offering these children a form of education that would make them into citizens.”⁸¹ By tying an emerging European science of child delinquency and retardation to an older discourse about ethical selfhood, the review of Burt’s book expanded both the stakes and the demands of childrearing, a matter now requiring “the cooperation of science, medicine, ethics, and law.”⁸² Furthermore, by introducing the problem of “delinquency,” in all its conceptual fullness, as a potential challenge for childrearing, articles like this one introduced new potential wrinkles in developmental time.

As writers in the Arabic press tied the temporality of linear growth (replete with countertempos) to practices of feminized *tarbiya* or upbringing, they proposed a form of anticolonial thought that rooted resistance to the Mandate in the body of the child and the work of mothers in the home. As colonial and elite authorities underfunded the public schooling of Egyptian and Lebanese children—the institutional foundations for forging an educated society capable of self-rule—women working in Arab homes took charge of child development and civilizational progress for themselves.⁸³ Writers theorized proper childrearing, performed by women, as a form of temporal engineering through which middle-class mothers could marshal linear time to harness the mystery of growth, wresting the management of political becoming away from French overlords and rooting it instead in the middle-class home and the work of the Arab mother. Writers in the women’s press, in other words, recognized that they had been put in the waiting room of history, and redefined the autochthonous management of biological life as a path to political sovereignty, albeit one that was never guaranteed. In so doing, however,

⁷⁹“Al-Tifl al-Muta’akakhir,” *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* 16/3 (1938), 103–4.

⁸⁰The root *athama* means to sin or err.

⁸¹“Al-Tifl al-Muta’akakhir,” 104.

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³Sbaiti, “Lessons in History,” 16–17 and Ch. 2; on Egypt see Ikeda, “Toward the Democratization of Public Education.”

they also tied anticolonial political subjectivity itself to gendered constructions of time grounded in biological difference: while women were tasked with managing a linear, determinist temporality of development centered on the body of the child, the bodies of young men—as we will soon see—became sites of anticolonial rupture.

Fu'ad Sarruf and the eventfulness of biological life

In 1923, Fu'ad Sarruf published *Tahdhib al-Nafs* (The Cultivation of the Self/Soul), a slightly revised book-length version of a series of articles on childrearing he had published months earlier in *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* under the title “Durus fi al-Tarbiya” (Lessons in Childrearing). Like his interlocutors in the women’s press, Sarruf argued that harnessing biological growth was a central problem for anyone hoping to escape the Mandate’s hollow time of “infinite deferral.”⁸⁴ As Sarruf himself expressed it, “the life of the child before and after birth is a concise history of the growth of the human race [*namū al-bashar*]”: as the child grew, so too would the people.⁸⁵ In *Tahdhib al-Nafs*, Sarruf used emergent theories of human growth and sexual maturation to undermine the developmentalist temporality used to justify Mandate governance. He did so by juxtaposing the time of child development—a feminized, linear process theoretically amenable to prediction and control—with the time of sexual maturity (*al-bulugh*), which Sarruf identified as a dramatic point of biological, temporal, and political rupture. He discussed sexual maturity in depth only for the male body, where the maturation of sexual organs and instincts would open a “new age” in which young men would gain access to new political capacities and to a nonlinear temporality of growth.

In what follows, I read Sarruf’s account of male adolescence as a discontinuous crumpling of time rather than a linear process of development: a form of “pleated time” similar to that illuminated by Michel Serres.⁸⁶ If you take a handkerchief and spread it out to iron it, Serres suggests, “you can see in it certain fixed distances and proximities,” but if you “take the handkerchief and crumple it ... two distant points suddenly are close, even superimposed.”⁸⁷ Embodied male adolescence, for Sarruf, occasioned just such a crumpling, which suddenly and irrevocably brought the “infinite deferral” of colonialism to touch the eventful time of anticolonial resistance and becoming. In contrast to other Arab theorists of adolescence in the interwar period, who saw it as “the most dangerous” stage of human development, Sarruf insisted that adolescence in the male body suddenly enlivened the positive capacities necessary for sovereignty and self-rule.⁸⁸ This theory of male adolescence as a site of temporal crumpling between colonial and sovereign time harnessed an older eroticism around the figure of the male youth for a new anticolonial biopolitics.

⁸⁴The phrase is Pursley’s; see Pursley, *Familiar Futures*, 57.

⁸⁵Fu’ad Sarruf, *Tahdhib al-Nafs* (Cairo, 1923), 5. Although it is sublimated in favor of male adolescence in Sarruf’s piece, birth might also have constituted a (feminized) moment of rupture.

⁸⁶This pleated time differed from the nonlinear temporality of return/reform, *islāh*, emphasized in Islamic reformist works on childrearing. El Shakry, “Schooled Mothers and Structured Play,” 150–6.

⁸⁷Serres, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, 60–61.

⁸⁸Al-Jumard, “Tilmidhat wa-Talamidh al-Madaris al-Thanawiyya,” *al-Mu’allim al-Jadid*, 1954, 69. Cited in Pursley, *Familiar Futures*, 116.

The question of the male adolescent body and its relationship to social order has a specific historical trajectory in the Islamicate world.⁸⁹ Scholars have demonstrated how male-gendered and androgenous adolescents served as objects of adult male desire in premodern Islamicate contexts.⁹⁰ The rise of imperial and nationalist state-building projects and the intensification of European imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century precipitated a new regime of sex and desire built around the heterosexual, reproductive couple.⁹¹ Changes to elite householding and inheritance strategies, the emergence of a transnational middle class and an early women's movement invested in ideals of companionate marriage, and the intensification of encounters with colonial officials obsessed with Arab homes and families brought the nuclear family and heterosexual couple to the center of late nineteenth-century discussions about the ordering of collective life.⁹² Thinkers and writers also began to embrace a biopolitical logic that venerated reproduction and generation. As one article published by Greek Orthodox writer and editor Alexandra Avierino's Alexandria-based journal *al-Anis al-Jalis* (The Intimate Companion) put it, "a wealth of offspring is a wealth of wealth" (*kathrat al-nasl hiya nafs kathrat al-ghinā*).⁹³ This logic helped to make heterosexual desire a focal point for nationalist, feminist, and reformist efforts. In the early decades of the twentieth century, nationalist movements in the Arab world began to figure male citizens of the nation as "brothers" to replace older, vertically oriented systems of political power figured through patriarchy.⁹⁴ To uphold this fraternal ideal, early nationalists normalized heterosexual desire and sublimated the erotic potential of older traditions of same-sex love between men.⁹⁵ By identifying the male adolescent body as the site of revolutionary potential, Sarruf directed these older structures of same-sex desire towards a new object: sovereignty.

The power of male adolescence as a site of anticolonial resignification would only have been heightened by American and European attentions, both critical and desirous, to men's same-sex practices in the Middle East.⁹⁶ Sarruf, who was fluent in English and a graduate of the Syrian Protestant College (SPC, renamed the

⁸⁹Hodgson uses "Islamicate" to encompass social and cultural formations "associated historically" with Islam but not reducible to Islam as a religion. Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1 (Chicago, 1974), 59.

⁹⁰Mehmet Kalpaklı and Walter Andrews, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham, NC, 2005), 55; Khaled El-Rouayheb, "The Love of Boys in Arabic Poetry of the Early Ottoman Period, 1500–1800," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 8/1 (2005), 3–22, at 3.

⁹¹Najmabadi, "Genus of Sex," 212. A rich body of work treats heterosexuality indirectly through studies of women, marriage, and family. See inter alia Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley, 2007); Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805–1923* (Berkeley, 2005).

⁹²Cuno, *Modernizing Marriage*; Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton, 1995); Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation*.

⁹³Alexandra Avierino, "al-Hila 'ala al-Nasl," *al-Anis al-Jalis* 9/4 (1906), 112. On later population discourse see Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, 2007), 145–64.

⁹⁴Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 36. See also Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1992), Ch. 3.

⁹⁵Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, esp. Chs. 1–2; Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, esp. Ch. 4.

⁹⁶Joseph Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (New York, 2014), xxi.

American University of Beirut in 1920), would have been well aware of American administrators' concerns about same-sex love in the mission context. The SPC, his alma mater, had long identified male sexuality as a locus of deviance and social decay. Indeed, the SPC had been working to police students' sex lives since its founding in 1866. As one of the first institutions in Greater Syria to board male students away from their families in large numbers, the SPC's faculty minutes are replete with accounts of students being reprimanded, suspended, or expelled for potential sexual misconduct.⁹⁷ Students were forbidden to leave the grounds at night without permission, although some disobeyed in order to visit bars and brothels in the city center; others were disciplined for obscene talk or being caught with dirty pictures.⁹⁸ In 1903, when the SPC moved to establish separate dormitories for older and younger boys, administrators remarked somewhat cryptically that "there is a reluctance in this country, amounting in most cases to an absolute refusal, to allow small boys to associate with young men. The reason for this is a good one but one that can hardly be understood by the Western mind."⁹⁹ It seems plausible that the "reason" in question, apparently so difficult to understand and yet so evidently arresting to the "Western mind," was administrators' suspicions about sexual liaisons between older and younger male students.

Sarruf, who finished his BA at the SPC in 1918, would also have been aware of the heightened anxieties around sex and sexuality that flourished in Beirut during World War I. Inhabitants of the city and nearby Mount Lebanon interpreted the social breakdown that accompanied the famine, depopulation, and extreme violence of World War I as a breakdown in gender, family, and sexual norms—what historian Elizabeth Thompson aptly termed a "crisis of paternity."¹⁰⁰ Wartime conditions also led to concerns about venereal disease among men displaced by war or conscripted to the Ottoman army.¹⁰¹ When Sarruf became headmaster at a mission school after the war, the problem of policing his students' sexual behavior would have become his personal responsibility. Sarruf would thus have been intimately aware of the potential for adolescent male sexuality to serve as a destructive and destabilizing force, even as he joined a rising global class of reformers working to reframe sex as a healthy and natural part of biological life—as long as it stayed within the realm of heterosexual reproduction.¹⁰²

Sarruf's 1923 publication of *Tahdhib al-Nafs* marked an early intervention in the formal study of child and sexual development in Arabic. By the 1940s, the work of theorizing adolescence and human sexual development would become the province of experts who derived authority by hybridizing older traditions of virtue ethics and

⁹⁷Norbert Sholz, "Foreign Education and Indigenous Reaction in Late Ottoman Lebanon: Students and Teachers at the SPC in Beirut" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Georgetown University, 1997), 149.

⁹⁸Sholz, "Foreign Education," 143, 150.

⁹⁹Ibid., 150.

¹⁰⁰Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 19, 25.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 84; see also Stefan Hock, "To Bring about a 'Moral of Renewal': The Deportation of Sex Workers in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 28/3 (2019), 457–82; Seçil Yilmaz, "Love in the Time of Syphilis: Medicine and Sex in the Ottoman Empire, 1860–1922" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Graduate Center at the City University of New York, 2017).

¹⁰²Kozma, "We, the Sexologists," 430–31. For an earlier shift in this direction outside the domain of governmentality and biopolitics suggested by Foucault see Najmabadi, "Genus of Sex," 212.

Sufi training of the soul with new medical knowledge and foundational texts in the emerging discipline of psychology, such as the work of Sigmund Freud.¹⁰³ This hybrid form ran, in Arabic, under the old Aristotelian conceptual banner of *'ilm al-nafs*, which could be translated as either “the science of the self” or “the knowledge of the soul.”¹⁰⁴ As Sara Pursley has argued, psychology became a particularly important field for debating development in the later interwar period because psychological diagnoses of deviance and precocity allowed individual development to diverge, in certain cases, from species development.¹⁰⁵ But unlike later Arab theorists of psychology such as Yusuf Murad and Mustafa Ziywar, both of whom received formal training in France, Sarruf’s authority did not stem from internationally recognized academic credentials or expertise, but from his work as a translator, educator, and science popularizer in the Arab East.¹⁰⁶

Sarruf was a well-known figure in Arabic publishing in the interwar period.¹⁰⁷ In 1922, he moved from Beirut to Cairo to become assistant editor of the premier literary-scientific digest, *al-Muqtataf* (The Digest), founded by his uncle Ya’qub Sarruf and fellow SPC graduate Faris Nimr. Like many intellectuals of his generation, Sarruf engaged anglophone thinkers closely, navigating a transnational, multilinguistic space. As Omnia El Shakry has argued, it is not enough to view thinkers like Sarruf as “bad copies” of American or European writers.¹⁰⁸ Fluent in English, Fu’ad approached modern knowledge as a shared patrimony between East and West, one which could only be enriched through the ongoing translation into Arabic of new discoveries from Europe and the United States.¹⁰⁹ He did not seem to worry that his engagement with anglophone intellectuals made him somehow less “Arab,” or less committed to a sovereign, independent Lebanon.

Sarruf drew on readings of texts on child development from Europe and the United States to theorize the biological as an active force that could pleat the linear temporality of progress so central to Mandate rhetoric and elite nationalism alike in the interwar period. A short bibliography at the end of *Tahdhib al-Nafs* listed as sources Luther Allan Weigle’s *The Pupil and the Teacher* (1911); William James’ *The Principles of Psychology* (1890); the London-based revue *My Magazine* (1922); and a somewhat enigmatic entry for “Cole’s *Moral Education*,” possibly a reference to George Coe’s October 1912 article in the *Journal of Religious*

¹⁰³On the medicalization of sex education see Kozma, “We, the Sexologists”; and Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*, 167–79.

¹⁰⁴On encounters between psychology and Islam see El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud*; and Stefania Pandolfo, *Knot of the Soul: Madness, Psychoanalysis, Islam* (Chicago, 2018). This analysis also suggests that the “discovery of adolescence” as a discrete, prolonged stage of life may have happened earlier in Lebanon than in Egypt and Iraq, where it rose to the fore in the 1930s and 1940s. El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud*, 79; Pursley, *Familiar Futures*, 107.

¹⁰⁵Pursley, *Familiar Futures*, 22.

¹⁰⁶Yusuf Murad received a doctorate in psychology from the Sorbonne; Murad’s colleague, Mustafa Ziywar, trained in “philosophy, psychology, and medicine in France in the 1930s.” El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud*, 23.

¹⁰⁷He later became vice president of the American University of Beirut (1952–70) and a board member at UNESCO.

¹⁰⁸El Shakry, “Schooled Mothers and Structured Play,” 157.

¹⁰⁹Jörg Matthias Determann, *Space Science and the Arab World: Astronauts, Observatories and Nationalism in the Middle East* (London, 2018), 62.

Education, “Moral Education in the Sunday School.”¹¹⁰ Of these, Weigle’s text appears to have provided particularly substantial inspiration.¹¹¹ Sarruf followed Weigle in dividing the stages of child and adolescent development according to major mental, spiritual, and physiological changes, rather than by standard markers of months and years. Like Weigle, too, Sarruf divided human growth into early, middle, and late childhood and early and late adolescence.

Sarruf joined colonial officials as well as other writers on childrearing in the Arabic press in identifying the body of the child as a space for ordered, processual growth. In the middle stage of childhood, for example, Sarruf advised teachers to introduce new ideas through familiar phrases, because the child, like any human being, “cannot grasp the new without finding a relationship to something he already knows, just as we cannot grasp the future without studying the past.” Indeed, Sarruf asked rhetorically, “What is history but an ordered chain of episodes [*ḥalaqāt*] that links what is to come with what has come before?”¹¹² In this stage, the rearer was also to introduce the child to key lessons (*asrār*) that he could understand, so he would be prepared for “the next step on the stairway to scientific progress [*al-taqaddam al-‘ilmi*] and in the stages of intellectual development [*marātib al-nushū al-fikri*].”¹¹³ The regimented time of the “ordered chain of episodes” and “the stairway to scientific progress,” however, was precisely the temporality that adolescence would interrupt.

The ordered time of childhood foreshadowed its own undoing: for Sarruf, childhood was a phase marked first and foremost by what had “not yet” developed. Sarruf prefaced each observation of what children could not yet do with the phrase, “in this stage” (*fi hatha al-dawr*), suggesting that coming stages might inaugurate other capacities. In the first stage of childhood, for example, he explained how children “cannot distinguish between living and nonliving, or between different kinds of living things,” nor could they tell the difference between “fables and established truths.”¹¹⁴ A small child, *not yet* able to make key determinations between “truth and imagination,” might treat a rock as a living being.¹¹⁵ Early-stage children were also, in Sarruf’s telling, selfish creatures, *not yet* moved by concern for others. “The child in this stage,” he remarked, “sees himself as the center of the world, and he can’t be moved by graciousness, compassion, or love of the other.”¹¹⁶ Overall, Sarruf characterized children as sites of lack—marked by the absence of capacities not yet developed—as well as sites of future becoming.

¹¹⁰Coe is cited in Luther A. Weigle, *The Pupil and the Teacher* (New York, 1911), 22.

¹¹¹Luther A. Weigle (1880–1975) was an influential figure in early twentieth-century Christian education. A Yale Divinity School graduate and professor of Christian nurture, he was known for his ecumenism. The Lutheran Board of Publications commissioned *The Pupil and the Teacher* as a Sunday school textbook. B. W. Kathan, “Six Protestant Pioneers of Religious Education: Liberal, Moderate, Conservative,” *Religious Education* 73 (1978), 138–50; Luther A. Weigle and Richard Daniel Weigle, *The Glory Days: From the Life of Luther Allan Weigle* (Friendship Press, 1976).

¹¹²Sarruf, *Tahdhib al-Nafs*, 16.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 14.

The third stage of childhood brought the child to the brink of sexual maturity, and the temporal landscape of child development began to transform. As adolescence loomed on the horizon, Sarruf began to highlight children's positive capacities and characteristics alongside what they could not yet do. Children in this stage, for example, would develop a spirit (*rūḥ*) of courage, audacity, and love of adventure; they would acquire a sense of independence and self-reliance; and new social instincts would inspire them to respect rules and the force of public opinion (*al-ra'i al-'amm*).¹¹⁷ Although this subtle transition from lack to capacity had clear political implications, it was rooted in biological transformation. In this stage, Sarruf averred, "sexual instincts begin to appear; with this, the child's health begins to improve, the power to fend off sickness rises, new movements strengthen, and the child becomes more active."¹¹⁸ The arrival of adolescence inaugurated a time of biological, political, and social becoming, but tied the new space of political sociality to the emergence of "sexual instincts," which as we will see, separated boys and girls.

Standing on the cusp of adolescence, the child also gained access to a new kind of temporal existence: he began to embody the potential for unpredictable outcomes, i.e. for the future to diverge from the past. The youth, in Sarruf's words, became "completely different in all respects from what he was in the first years of his life, or what he will become in the near future."¹¹⁹ With this promise of "complete difference," Sarruf began to overturn a key premise of the linear, gradual time of child development—that what came later was always linked to what had come before in an ordered and predictable way. The promise and prison of linear time began to break down. Absolute newness was now possible. The potential for temporal rupture, however, also brought with it a new emphasis on gender difference. In the third stage of childhood, Sarruf began to divide the category of "child" (*walad/awlād*, a grammatically masculine term often used to refer to both boys and girls) into "boys" (*sibyān*) and "girls" (*fatāt*).¹²⁰ In fact, "the appearance of sexual characteristics," he wrote, "requires the separation of boys from girls by the rule of nature [*bi ḥukm al-tabī'a*]."¹²¹ Binary gender difference, too, became a form of both prison and promise. On one hand, the rule of "nature" determined women's physiological and psychological incapacities, as they proved "unable to join boys in various activities requiring strength, bravery, and fearlessness."¹²² On the other hand, "nature" meant that boys would not "incline towards the games of girls,"

¹¹⁷Ibid., 21–22.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 21.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 21, italics mine. Weigle writes, "There is a world of difference between twelve and thirteen in the mind of boys and girls." Weigle, *The Pupil and the Teacher*, 47.

¹²⁰Ayubi and Wadud have argued for the importance of context and authorial intent in interpreting masculine and masculine plural forms in Arabic. These forms can serve as defaults meant to include both men and women, but can also be read in certain contexts as specifically signifying male subjects. As Ayubi writes, the grammatical use of the masculine default "raises a problem of method in Muslim feminist hermeneutics: how to distinguish general prescriptions in religious texts from exclusively male ones." In my view, this methodological problem extends to secular Arabic texts as well. Zahra Ayubi, *Gendered Morality: Classical Islamic Ethics of the Self, Family, and Society* (New York, 2019), 73; Amina Wadud, *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York, 1999), xii–xiv.

¹²¹Sarruf, *Tahdhib al-Nafs*, 22.

¹²²Ibid., 22.

leaving girls to follow their own “natural” desires while boys took to fishing, hunting, and swimming.¹²³ Depending on one’s point of view, this naturalized separation of genders might represent either limitation or opportunity.

The third-stage child, however, still shared with his younger contemporaries one last vestige of lack, with important implications for political capacity: he had not yet fully learned how to respect the “will of the majority” (*raʿi al-akthariyya*). This capability would ultimately equip the boy to “emerge into the school of the great world, where he will see democracy guiding associations, councils, and governments.”¹²⁴ Sarruf explicitly linked this final stage of childhood development directly to questions of political status in semicolonial times. “The peoples of the East,” he argued, were like the third-stage child in that they had “*not yet learned*” how to be governed by majority rule, and thus they “remained this way, not welcoming to the representative democratic rule [*al-ḥukm al-niyābī al-dimuqrātī*] that we pursue.”¹²⁵ Luckily, the well-trodden path of biological development meant that the next chapter of *Tahdhib al-Nafs* would naturally and inexorably plunge the child, and by extension the “peoples of the East,” into the stage of adolescence and the possibility of total transformation.

The arrival of sexual maturity in adolescence inaugurated broader processes of political and ethical becoming rooted in changes in the biological body. “The growth of sexual instincts” (*al-gharāʾiz al-tanāssuliyya*), Sarruf explained, “is the true root of every change and upheaval [*inqilāb*] that happens in the stage of adolescence.”¹²⁶ These changes on the level of sex and the body had enormous implications for every other realm of life: while the process of maturation was first “completed in the realm of bodily power, its effects extend[ed] to mental and psychological power.”¹²⁷ The biological body, in other words, came first.

Adolescence also transformed the body from a site of leisure to one of labor. Childhood, for Sarruf, was best governed as a domain of pleasure and play. This stage, Sarruf declared, was “a period of preparation, which enlivens a person’s various psychological powers to undertake great works in the future.”¹²⁸ Play would teach key skills for later labors, by “quickening the mind, regulating the self, making deduction more precise and rapid, and [instilling] respect for others.”¹²⁹ Ultimately, these lessons would stay with the child throughout the great embodied transitions to come. “We must teach the child,” Sarruf declared, “not to consider the transition from childhood to young adulthood [*al-shabāb*] solely a transition from play to work, but [to see] that there is pleasure and joy in work, as there is in play,”

¹²³Ibid., 22.

¹²⁴Ibid., 22.

¹²⁵Ibid., 22, italics mine.

¹²⁶Ibid., 35. Weigle writes, “The development of sexual instincts underlies every other change at adolescence.” Weigle, *The Pupil and the Teacher*, 51. On the concept of *gharīza* as resonating between modern psychological and older Islamic–ethical traditions, see El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud*, 65–6. On the reproductive connotations of *tanāsul* in twentieth-century Persian writing on sex see Najmabadi, “Genus of Sex,” 218–19.

¹²⁷Sarruf, *Tahdhib al-Nafs*, 29.

¹²⁸Ibid., 9.

¹²⁹Ibid., 9.

thus preparing the child to take pleasure in work as an adult.¹³⁰ At adolescence, children would begin to crave work, making it difficult to keep in school the boys who felt “an inner impulse [*dāf dākhili*] towards work and earning a living.”¹³¹ “Work,” Sarruf concluded, “is noble, and respect for work is even more so—so let parents cultivate this noble, holy spirit in their growing children.”¹³² These discussions of adolescence as a stage that turned the body of the male youth towards labor normalized the laboring masculine body, in unspoken contrast to the spectral alternatives foreshadowed by articles about childhood illness, genius, and retardation—the deformed, the weak, the lazy, and the ill.

As adolescence turned the male body towards labor, it also turned it towards heterosexual love, amplifying the gender differences Sarruf introduced in late childhood. Gender difference, too, was rooted in the biological. Sarruf explained that girls’ bodies matured earlier than boys, girls gained proportionally less height and weight, and girls’ physiological growth stopped earlier. While Sarruf recounted the embodied transformations of adolescence for both boys and girls, his analysis of the political and psychological effects of adolescence specified only the male adolescent—*al-shāb*—as its subject. In young men, he argued, adolescence inaugurated a host of positive capabilities with political significance: to cooperate, to seek out work to make a living, and to submit to what was right (*al-ḥaqq*).¹³³ In this, Sarruf’s optimism differed from those of better-known theorists of adolescence like Sigmund Freud, Margaret Mead, and G. Stanley Hall, for whom adolescence was seen as “a problem that needed to be solved.”¹³⁴ Sexual maturity perfected man’s social instincts, allowing him to develop a sense of justice, sacrifice, and generosity that, unlike the selfishness and *amour propre* (*al-anāniyya wa ḥubb al-dhāt*) of childhood, would enable him to practice discernment and good judgment (*al-tamyīz wa-l-ḥukm*).¹³⁵ Most importantly in a semicolonial context, the young man attained a feeling of “independence and self-reliance [*al-istiqlāl wa-l-ʿitimād ʿala al-nafs*] different from that experienced in the third stage of childhood”: the adolescent sought independence because he “realize[d] that he has a right to participate in give-and-take with humankind.”¹³⁶ Adolescent boys, in other words, suddenly became everything they had “not yet” been as younger children. But Sarruf’s text identified only the male adolescent as the site of these new political capabilities, many of which matched the demands of the quest for sovereignty in

¹³⁰Ibid., 9–10.

¹³¹Ibid., 32.

¹³²Ibid. Many writers in *al-Marʿa al-Jadida* and across the women’s press likewise argued for the nobility and sanctity of labor (*amal*).

¹³³On the trope of sacrifice in Egyptian nationalist masculinity see Yaseen Noorani, *Culture and Hegemony in the Colonial Middle East* (New York, 2010).

¹³⁴Kent Baxter, *The Modern Age: Turn-of-the-Century American Culture and the Invention of Adolescence* (Tuscaloosa, 2008), 46, 69. As Bederman observes for Hall in particular, “adolescence, as a theoretical construct, provided him with a way to come to terms with anxieties about sexuality that plagued many men at the turn of the century. How could a man be the virile and passionate pioneer of his race but not waste this vital energy through sin and decadence?” Gail Bederman, *Madness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States* (Chicago, 1996), 81, quoted in Baxter, *The Modern Age*, 70.

¹³⁵Sarruf, *Tahdhib al-Nafs*, 35.

¹³⁶Ibid.

the interwar Arab East. In so doing, he cemented the idea that the social and political collectivity that could fend off colonial control would be structured by biologized, binary gender difference and heterosexual desire.

In addition to political capacity, the second thing that changed for male adolescents was the temporality of change itself. Unlike the linear time of child development, Sarruf's male adolescent time was insurgent, unpredictable, and replete with the potential for total transformation and complete rupture with the past. Sarruf described the stage of adolescence as defying any stable temporal logic, proving "very difficult to delimit in time."¹³⁷ He went on to remark that adolescence represented "the opening of a new age," so momentous that it could be termed a "new birth."¹³⁸ With these temporal claims, Sarruf emphasized the potential for male adolescence to pleat the linear time of childhood development, suddenly inaugurating a "new age" of sovereign potential, while still linking the stage back to the familiar temporality of reproduction through the metaphor of birth.

This "new age" of social solidarity, independence, and eventful potential came at a price: the normalization of naturalized gender difference and the rise of gender complementarity as apparent biological fact.¹³⁹ We saw how the appearance of sexual maturity on the horizon for the third-stage child brought with it "the separation of boys from girls by the rule of nature."¹⁴⁰ This separation expanded in the first stage of adolescence, when boys and girls would demonstrate a "mutual repulsion not present in the last stage of childhood."¹⁴¹ By adolescence's end, however, boys and girls would start to "draw together" on new and different terms, through simple love affairs and companionate pairings.¹⁴² If sexual maturity brought new capacities for rupture, independence, and democracy for men, it also brought the realization—by both sexes—that nothing "is holier than the emotion [of sexual love], which leads people to establish a home and raise a family."¹⁴³ As sexual maturation in the body enabled men to pleat a new age of brotherly democracy and independence over the "not-yet" time of childhood, it also established heterosexual attraction and reproduction as rooted in biology.¹⁴⁴

Sarruf clarified for readers in Beirut the political implications of this pleated time and the insurgent male adolescent subject it enabled. In 1922, when his essays were first published in *al-Mar'a al-Jadida*, the wartime hopes of many Beirutis for independence and democratic governance under an Arab king had just been cruelly

¹³⁷Ibid., 29.

¹³⁸Ibid. Weigle writes, "it has well become a new birth." Weigle, *The Pupil and the Teacher*, 47. This phrase originally belonged to Stanley Hall. Baxter, *The Modern Age*, 50.

¹³⁹As Najmabadi has shown for Iran, the heterosexualization of eros was a hallmark of the experience of modernity. Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, 97.

¹⁴⁰Sarruf, *Tahdhib al-Nafs*, 22.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 36.

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Ibid., 45. Sarruf translated Weigle's phrase "love between the sexes" as *al-hubb al-jinsi*; see Weigle, *The Pupil and the Teacher*, 63. In Persian, the modern concept of *jins* came in the twentieth century to unite psychobiological explanations for binary sex difference, on one hand, and gender roles, on the other, even as it continued to invoke older meanings of "type" or "genus." Najmabadi, "Genus of Sex," 213.

¹⁴⁴As Najmabadi argues, the modernist disavowal of homoerotic desire at once "marked homosociality as empty of homoeroticism [and thus] ... provided same-sex practices a homosocially masqueraded home." Najmabadi, "Genus of Sex," 212.

dashed in favor of a French Mandate justified by the idea that the Lebanese were “not yet” ready to rule themselves. To elucidate the political stakes of his argument, Sarruf noted that it was adolescent male youths (*al-shabbān*) who performed “the great deeds of history”: Napoleon was only twenty-four when he “astonished the world at the siege of Toulon,” while Lafayette “sailed to aid the English colonies in their rebellion [*thawra*] against the English (1776)” at nineteen.¹⁴⁵ While both of these examples were drawn verbatim from Weigle’s *The Pupil and the Teacher*, they carried a specific connotation in the Lebanese context.¹⁴⁶ Instead of harking back to a glorious national history of political revolt located safely in the past, as they might have for Weigle’s early twentieth-century American readers, these examples reached across the water to construct a trans-temporal and trans-imperial link between male adolescence and the potential for political rupture, even revolution. This would have been a potent suggestion for readers living under colonial administration.

Later Arab nationalist thinkers like Sati’ al-Husari (d. 1968) and ‘Ali al-Wardi (d. 1995) in Iraq would follow Sarruf in identifying adolescence as “the stage of revolution.”¹⁴⁷ For them, writing in a country which had already received independence from its Mandate power (in 1932) and come under nationalist rule, this link was something to worry about and to control through the same developmental logics invoked by colonial predecessors. Al-Husari, for example, countered the extreme parsimony of the British-led educational agenda in Iraq by “insist[ing] that Iraqi subjects must be *made worthy* of sovereignty” through education and development; al-Wardi, for his part, advanced the idea that national development depended on “block[ing] psychological deviances” that could interrupt the healthy, progressive stages of nationalist growth.¹⁴⁸ While al-Husari and al-Wardi sought to coopt a colonial temporal order to maintain elite hegemony in an early postcolonial state, Sarruf—writing long before independence—sought to pleat colonial temporality through its own embodied logic. He cast the link between adolescence, sexual development, and revolution as an opportunity, not a liability, displaying none of the “ambivalence about the relationship between youth and insurgency” entertained by later nationalist leaders.¹⁴⁹ Like these later theorists of sovereignty and sex, however, Sarruf too cast heteronormativity and biological sex difference as guarantors of stability in a changing temporal and political order. Between Beirut in 1922 and Iraq in the 1930s and 1940s, then, what changed was not the link between adolescence and political upheaval, but the normative assessment of it—the eventful potential of male youth went from being an object of hope to an object of fear. What remained, however, was the assumption that a heteronormative sexual order would undergird a political order designed and imagined by men, revolution-ary or nationalist–progressivist alike.

¹⁴⁵Sarruf, *Tahdhib al-Nafs*, 41.

¹⁴⁶Weigle, *The Pupil and the Teacher*, 58. Sarruf, quoting Weigle, subsequently listed the precocious achievements of Byron, Shelley, Pascale, Savonarola, Leibnitz, Schilling, Michaelangelo, and Spurgeon. The only figures cited by Weigle but not cited by Sarruf were Peter Cooper and René Descartes.

¹⁴⁷Pursley, *Familiar Futures*, 106.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 123, italics mine.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 126.

Conclusion: the gender of revolt

By theorizing anticolonial time as a capacity rooted in the biological body, Sarruf linked male sexual maturity and heterosexual desire to insurgent politics. These links accompanied the rise of the male youth as the preeminent subject of political action in Egypt and Lebanon until the 1950s.¹⁵⁰ In Egypt, where Sarruf based his career from 1923, young men anchored the revolutionary organizing and street politics of the 1919 revolution and proved central to mass politics and new political movements throughout the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁵¹ In interwar Lebanon, male youth became central to political contestations between rival visions of the nation. The rise of popular politics in Lebanon relied on youth organizations that were “collectively grassroots, urban-based, and dominated by middle-class young men, although the class, gender, and geographic components of these groups would change by the 1940s to 1950s.”¹⁵² Paramilitary groups like the Najjada (established in 1937) and the Kata’ib (or Phalange, established in 1936) shared with Italian and German fascist contemporaries the “conviction that youth organization represented an ideal means to national revival after defeat.”¹⁵³ In 1937, contested elections brought Sunni and Maronite youth, many associated with the Najjada and the Kata’ib, to fight in the streets of Beirut, leading to a declaration that the parliament must be independent from both the Maronite patriarch—an established political power in Lebanon—and from male youth groups and scouting troops, whose political power was waxing in 1930s Lebanon, across the region and beyond.¹⁵⁴ These groups “adopted ... the fetishisms of male physical strength that were associated with fascism,” and marginalized women.¹⁵⁵

Sarruf’s argument about the adolescent male body as the site of temporal and political potential shows how young men became the preeminent subjects of political action in Arab thought as well as in the streets of Beirut and elsewhere in the interwar period. Thinking with Sarruf and his contemporaries in the Arabic women’s press about time and anticolonial biopolitics also reveals the gendered contours of anticolonial nationalism in the Arab world. As boys matured into revolutionary youth, girls and women were directed instead towards childrearing as anticolonial praxis. Conceptualizing the relationships between time, sex, and power forged in the Arabic women’s press reveals that these two experiences were mutually constitutive: feminized childrearing promised to govern political change in top-down and predictable ways, while the bodies of male adolescents took on enormous insurgent potential. Arabic writing on child development linked women’s political labor to a linear, progressive time controlled from the colony

¹⁵⁰By the 1950s in Iraq, nationalist writers were worried about both “boys and girls” (*fatayat wa fityan*) as potential agents of disruption, leading them to “re-orient female education around moral character development.” Pursley, *Familiar Futures*, 116.

¹⁵¹Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*, 95–107.

¹⁵²Dylan Baun, *Winning Lebanon: Youth Politics, Populism, and the Production of Sectarian Violence, 1920–1958* (New York, 2020), 9.

¹⁵³Jennifer Dueck, *The Claims of Culture at Empire’s End: Syria and Lebanon under French Rule* (London, 2010), 204.

¹⁵⁴On Egypt see Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford, 2010), esp. Ch. 7; Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*, 92–124.

¹⁵⁵Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 195; on fascism and masculinity see also Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*, 141.

rather than from the metropole, while young adult men embodied a temporality of rupture and event. This suggests that the history of anticolonialism should be understood as a history of gender, sex, and power, even when women appear to be absent from the barracks and the streets. It also shows how thinking through biological and political life as inextricable and co-constitutive forces—as “one life, and one life only”—once opened multiple paths towards a sovereign political future.

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