



Lisa Pollard. *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805-1923.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. xv + 287 pp. ISBN 978-0-520-24023-0; ISBN 978-0-520-24022-3.



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All in the Family: Reconceptualizing Modernity in Colonial Egypt

Historians of modern Egypt, and indeed all scholars interested in the intersection of modernity, the family, and bourgeois nationalism will find this book to be intellectually stimulating and thought-provoking. Pollard, an Associate Professor of History at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington, uses a variety of published and unpublished sources to demonstrate how notions of family and gender shaped the nature of modernity, British colonial rule, and Egyptian nationalism from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Specifically, Pollard examines the period from Mohammad 'Ali (r. 1805-49) to the 1919 Revolution in order to "illustrate the ways in which familial images and tropes were circulated between Egyptians and the British and how family politics came to signify so much more than its intended justification for colonial subjugation" (p. 11). As Pollard skillfully demonstrates throughout her book, competing definitions of familial-political metaphors and bourgeois "Egyptian-ness" during this time period brought together the Ottoman-Egyptian elite, British officials, and Arabophone Egyptian nationalists in their mutual quest to create a modern, progressive Egyptian nation. The semi-independent state that emerged in 1923 from these mul-

tifaceted efforts was built upon a half-century of political debate, discussion, and reform, which ultimately privileged the domestic activities of nationalist, middle-class Egyptians.

Based on archival and published sources from Cairo, London, Oxford, and Philadelphia, *Nurturing the Nation* is divided into six chapters that intersperse well-argued theoretical analysis with nuanced historical examples. In the introduction, Pollard departs from conventional political histories of colonial Egypt by asserting that the domestic realm was the central arena through which Egyptians forged a new relationship with the modern Egyptian nation-state. In a concise and convincing manner, she claims that "domestic debates, familial activities, and connubial relations formed a basic framework through which abstract concepts such as nation and, along with it, loyalty and citizenship were imagined, articulated, and debated by Egyptians from the inception of the modern Egyptian nation-state in the early nineteenth century" (p. 8). After examining the domestic nature of Mohammad 'Ali's state-sponsored ethnographies and student missions in chapter 1, chapter 2 proceeds to discuss the

influence tourism and travelogues had on the European construction of an Egyptian national landscape. Pollard posits that the activities of the home were central to dialogues between Egyptians and Europeans, arguing that travel-writing projects and the Orientalist imagery of European tourists formed part of a broader effort to link Egyptian modernity with bourgeois household arrangements and political structures. Chapter 3 explores the gendered nature of British colonial rule in Egypt, providing a new reading of the British invasion and occupation of Egypt that emphasizes familial politics as a “central ingredient” to the construction of a “veiled” British protectorate (p. 75). Chapters 4 through 6 employ a host of rich and layered examples from Egyptian textbooks, curricula, and the Arabic press to reveal how political contests between the British and the rising Egyptian middle class led to the rejection of paternal, colonial rule in the 1919 Revolution and the rise of domestic virtues, morals, and behaviors that were solidly bourgeois and “modern” in nature. In her conclusion, Pollard contends that nationalist arguments about the domestic realm and the importance of keeping Egyptian women in the home helped to solidify the bourgeois project of a modern, reformed family in the wake of the 1919 Revolution.

As the scope of Pollard’s work suggests, she is largely successful in supplying ample evidence for the importance of familial politics in the creation of the modern Egyptian state. Many of the examples in this book demonstrate how the seemingly divergent agendas of British colonial administrators and middle-class Egyptian nationalists were part of a larger venture that enabled both sides to conceive of a modern Egyptian nation that was reformed and domesticated. Pollard poignantly illustrates the remarkable similarities and continuities that existed between colonial British officials and Egyptian elites, most notably in the period preceding the 1919 Revolution when debates about the “new woman” in the Egyptian press helped to establish “the building blocks of a new political order that further generations of men would enjoy” (p. 161). Persuasive examples from the 1919 Revolution also show how anti-British images of Egypt were integral to heated discussions about a modern and “progressive” Egyptian nation. As Pollard demonstrates, middle-class Egyptian nationalists played a critical role in the creation of a new and bourgeois domestic realm, successfully building upon debates about Egyptian modernity that circulated from the era of Muhammad ‘Ali. By the early twentieth century, these debates culminated in images of a gendered, feminine “Mother Egypt” that provided Egyptians of all classes

with a “common heritage, a common lineage, and a common connection to the struggle of ousting the British” (p. 196). This gendered portrait of early-twentieth-century Egyptian nationalism before and after the 1919 Revolution is both convincing and long overdue.

While *Nurturing the Nation* is admirable in terms of its theoretical and historical scope, the discussion of the political actors depicted in this work are somewhat limited by the nature of the author’s sources. While Pollard makes effective use of the Ahd Isma’il, Muhafiz Abdin, and Majlis al-Wuzara’ collections in the Egyptian National Archives, a more systematic use of the other materials housed there (such as the court registers of Majlis al-Ahkam) could have provided this excellent book with an even more nuanced analysis of the familial agents and institutions that gave rise to the modern Egyptian state. Given the difficulties of access to the collections housed in the Egyptian National Archives, it is understandable why Pollard instead chose to plumb the private papers of foreign missionaries and colonial administrators located in Philadelphia, Oxford, and London, as well as the published Arabic periodicals located in the Egyptian National Library. Unfortunately, by relying on these sources, as well as canonical works by Rifa’a Rafi’ al-Tahtawi, Qasim Amin and Lord Cromer, students of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Egyptian history are again treated to an interpretation of modern Egypt that focuses heavily on the literate elite. In all fairness, this work is explicitly interested in exploring the cultural and political ramifications of Egypt’s project of modernity and how it was conceived among a select group of elite and middle-class actors. To be sure, British colonial officials, middle-class Egyptian nationalists, and Ottoman-Egyptian rulers such as Muhammad ‘Ali are integral to understanding the rise and maintenance of paternal, bourgeois nationalism. However, the absence of other equally important members of Egyptian society such as the non-literate *fellahin* leads one to wonder how the dynamic familial politics that Pollard aptly describes played themselves out in subaltern circles.

Questions of class aside, Pollard has nevertheless produced a much-needed work on the domestic and political intersections that characterized the Egyptian regime which existed from 1805-1923. *Nurturing the Nation* is a timely and welcome addition to the field of gender and colonial/post-colonial studies that makes effective use of its sources, blending impressive analysis with cogent and probing insights. Providing fresh interpretations about the rise of the nineteenth-century Egyptian state, the gendered politics of the British occupation, and the thor-

oughly bourgeois nature of early Egyptian nationalism, the greatest strength of this book lies in its insistence that Egyptian modernity is inseparable from the familial politics that birthed it. The theoretical sophistication of this book not only makes it a landmark in studies of modern Egyptian history, but also an important historical work for scholars interested in the comparative aspects of gendered modernities and familial nationalism.

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