Masking Islamist politics: pseudo-authenticity and producing *al-Marʾa al-Muslima*
in Zaynab al-Ghazālī's writings in the twentieth century

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Abstract

This study is an inquiry into the work of Zaynab al-Ghazālī that pays close attention to her construction of a self-history and her discourse on women and gender within an Islamist perspective. It suggests that al-Ghazālī's propositions cannot be fully understood without reference to her political framework, the centrality of Islamist politics and Islamic statehood to her raison d'etre, and the political zeitgeist of the time. I use Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon's notion of producing the Muslim woman to guide my analysis of al-Ghazālī's conception of women and gender roles. This thesis draws on various primary sources, such as Zaynab al-Ghazālī's *Ayyām min Ḥayātī,* and *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima wa-al-Dāʿiyya Zaynab al-Ghazālī*, in addition to other secondary sources that discuss political Islam, women and gender in Egypt, and the broader women's movement.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine minutieusement l'œuvre de Zaynab al-Ghazālī, en se concentrant spécifiquement sur sa construction d'une auto-histoire et son discours sur les femmes et les rôles de genre dans une perspective islamiste. Elle avance que pour comprendre pleinement les idées d'al-Ghazālī, il est essentiel de les situer dans leur contexte politique, notamment l'importance centrale de la politique islamiste et de l'idée d'un État islamique pour sa philosophie, ainsi que l'esprit politique de son époque. J'utilise le concept de Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon sur la production de la femme musulmane pour orienter mon analyse des perspectives d'al-Ghazālī sur les femmes et les rôles de genre. Cette recherche s'appuie sur diverses sources primaires, comme les écrits de Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *'Ayyām min Ḥayātī'* et *'Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima wa-al-Dāʿiyya Zaynab al-Ghazālī'*, ainsi que sur d'autres sources secondaires qui abordent l'islam politique, les questions de genre et de femmes en Égypte, et le mouvement féministe plus large.

Abbreviations

EFU   Egyptian Feminist Union

RCC   Revolutionary Command Council

SMW   Society of Muslim Women

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The completion of this thesis marks the culmination of a three-year journey that began and ends with a sense of abruptness. While unquestionably challenging, it has ultimately been an enriching experience. However, none of it would have been possible without my family and friends, who inspired me and showed me unwavering love and support.

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دايماً متجمعين وزايدين دايماً مش ناقصين...

Introduction

A few weeks after submitting my thesis proposal for this study, I was at the American University in Cairo, where I audited a higher-level course on the "marriage crisis" in modern Egypt. A multitude of interesting ideas were raised for discussion on the nature of marriage in Egyptian society. Debates on who should be financially responsible for the marriage, the politics of officiating marriage and registering it with the state bureaucracy, and the different proposals articulated by twentieth century reformers to remedy a perceived "marriage crisis" were among the most interesting exchanges. Yet, one particular discussion stood out for me, as it resembled some of the concepts I had become familiar with in reading Zaynab al-Ghazālī's work in general. A quick debate on women's roles in matrimony and the personal status laws governing Muslim marriages in Egypt swiftly transpired into an elaborate argument between students. Some vehemently expressed their opinions that women should overcome the "conventional" roles that limit them to housework and childrearing, while others defended these roles and cited their cultural, social, and religious significance.

Students that agreed with maintaining women's "conventional" roles presented an intriguing rationale, one that I have similarly identified in al-Ghazālī's work. Despite their awareness and critical attitudes regarding a variety of different social and cultural forces that give currency to women's domestic roles, their argument allowed for significantly less room for disagreement when they evoked religion. The ideas they articulated associated women's domestic roles with a "natural" division of labor that is ratified in Islamic frameworks and, therefore, is not easily subverted. Although students from the opposing camp expressed their frustration of this concept, they were reluctant to explicitly scrutinize it. Conversely, the

exchange was more visibly dialectical when they critiqued socio-cultural forces that shaped women's roles in marriage.

Seeing this discussion unfold showcased the authority of religious discourse. Evidently, students were prompted to acquiesce when religious arguments were being used as justification. This could have been the case for multiple reasons. Some might have seen that they lacked the technical knowledge to critique these ideas, while others may have felt uneasy in challenging "religious" concepts or suggesting that they were problematic or unjust. Overall, those who eagerly attacked the socio-cultural trends that oblige women to undertake domestic work were obviously unwilling to sustain a similar critique of seemingly "religious" trends that bore the same outcomes.

Discourses seeking to religiously substantiate arguments that underscore women's domestic roles are by no means novel. As Marion Holmes Katz, professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies, showed in *Wives and Work: Islamic Law and Ethics Before Modernity,* there is a historical precedent for the application of religious discourse to further women's performance of household tasks.[1] Nevertheless, these discursive trends have remained connected, in most cases, to sociomoral traditions and needs, and have been seldom postulated as religious obligations. As Holmes Katz contends, many jurists have argued that wives are not obliged to perform housework according to Islamic law, despite the many layers and nuances of this debate.[2]

This evident gap between Islamic law and sociomoral traditions remains a site for contentious positions on this debate. It was during this classroom discussion that I realized the

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[1] Marion Holmes Katz, *Wives and Work: Islamic Law and Ethics Before Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 196-200.
[2] Ibid.

connection between the students' responses and the work of Zaynab al-Ghazālī, who wrote extensively on this issue. In reading al-Ghazālī's work, I observed a trend where she appropriates religious arguments to deter women away from pursuing employment, encouraging their embrace of housework. These gender roles were reinforced by al-Ghazālī as the application of a "natural" division of labor within Islamic frameworks. While it is increasingly doubtful that the opinions articulated by students in favor of "conventional" gender roles were specifically informed by al-Ghazālī's work, the similarity would seem to suggest that these gender models are still somewhat prevalent in certain circles.

The somewhat ambiguous arguments put forth by al-Ghazālī to demarcate normative gender roles through the use of religious language embodies a predicament that motivates this inquiry. It entails the popularization of ambivalent perspectives, furthering the assumption that Islam imposes a definitive restriction on women's pursuit of public employment and perpetuates their adherence to domestic roles. Conflating politicized socio-cultural opinions with religious rulings to assign a greater emphasis on women's domestic roles represents a highly problematic concept, as was evident in the students' attitudes discussed above. While this study does not negate the possibility for women's domestic roles to be empowering in certain contexts, nor does it hold them as problematic in an absolute sense. It does, however, contest the supposition of these roles as an authoritative religious obligation, as assigning them conclusive religious authority accords them an elevated status that might place them beyond critique and scrutiny on some level. Indeed, this study acknowledges the plethora of forces intertwined in this discussion and the expanding cleavages between theory and practice. Nonetheless, it is increasingly imperative to appropriately contextualize these concepts as theoretical markers that drive political groups in specific contexts as opposed to a manifestation of religious laws.

The question thus becomes about the driving force for the popularization of these ideas in the work of Zaynab al-Ghazālī. In this thesis, I argue that it is the demands posed by the socio-political program of the Muslim Brotherhood, often referred to as Islamism or modern Islamic statehood, that shape al-Ghazālī's ideology and determine her discussion of a broad set of topics through her work. As such, I consistently contend that Islamist politics and the supremacy of the Muslim Brotherhood's political project embodies the strongest influences on how al-Ghazālī views women's gender roles. My insistence to focus my inquiry on al-Ghazālī was prompted by the consistent reference to her work as a genuine intersection of Islam and "feminism." As such, my aim is to show the variety of underlying forces that drift her concerns away from women and closer to politics. I hold that Zaynab al-Ghazālī's work cannot be understood independently from her political inclinations and her devotion to the Islamist movement.

I support my argument in this thesis over three chapters. The first chapter contextualizes the Islamist movement in Egypt by looking at its ideological roots, starting from *al-Nahḍa* (renaissance) and the concepts proposed by early reformers and Islamic modernists. It also underlines the conception of the Muslim Brotherhood and its role as a sociopolitical group in Egypt before its eventual restriction under Nasser's regime (1954–1970). Significantly, this chapter also briefly underlines the importance of Sayyid Qutb's (1906–1966) work to the Islamist movement and to Zaynab al-Ghazālī.[3]

Chapter 2 narrows the discussion to al-Ghazalī. In this chapter I delineate the early life of al-Ghazālī, as this is an underrepresented segment of her character in academia. I show her early

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[3] Sayyid Qutb was a Muslim Brotherhood ideologue who wrote extensively on ideas such as *ḥakimiyya and Jahiliyya*. He was one of the Brotherhood members that was imprisoned in 1954, and was later convicted of trying to overthrow the Nasserite regime and executed in 1966. See Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and the Pharaoh* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 38-68.

dispositions and her engagement with the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) during her early years. To contextualize her involvement with the EFU, I give a brief history of women's movements in Egypt.[4] Furthermore, in this chapter I point out the dearth of sources covering al-Ghazālī's life, which has resulted in a monopoly over the telling of her own narrative. I argue that this has aided al-Ghazālī in constructing a self-history that feeds her socio-political agenda and turns her narrative into a political tool.

The third and final chapter builds on the themes discussed in chapters 1 and 2. In this chapter, I focus on al-Ghazālī's writings that discuss women, marriage, and the family. I use these writings to suggest the fundamental tenets furthering the production of the Muslim woman in Islamist ideology, which I call the Islamist thesis on women and gender. These principles were largely built on religious arguments and provoked a sense of pseudo-authenticity. To structure my argument, I use the framework proposed by Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon in *Production of the Muslim Woman: Negotiating Text, History and Ideology*.[5] I argue that al-Ghazālī's production of the Muslim woman through the Islamist thesis on women and gender is entwined with non-religious forces and has its roots in modern global discourse prevalent around the turn of the twentieth century. As such, I underline the sociopolitical objectives that the Islamist thesis furthers, and question whether or not Zaynab al-Ghazālī could indeed be identified as a womanist.

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[4] The Egyptian Feminist Union was one of the first Egyptian organizations to call for women's rights. It was established on 6 March 1923 by Huda Shaʿrāwī (1879 – 1947). See Nikki R. R. Keddie, *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 89-95.
[5] Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman: Negotiating Text, History and Ideology* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).

Chapter 1

Tracing Islamic Modernism: A History of Islamism in Egypt (1850–1970)

Zaynab al-Ghazālī made a career out of discussing women and gender within the realm of political Islam. Her discursive expression on this subject obfuscated the lines between religion and politics and claimed authority in religious textual source. This chapter examines the historical context in which Ghazālī's (1917–2005) religious, political, and militant identity developed. Al-Ghazālī constantly evoked a sense of authenticity and Islamic revival by citing religious sources, which allowed her to formulate her ideas with greater legitimacy. Yet, reading and commentating on religious textual sources is not a positivistic endeavor, in that it is subject to considerable forces that are variable based on time and place (in addition to other factors). This study proposes that al-Ghazālī and her ideas constitute historical objects of analysis, and that her discourse is a product of historical processes. This proposition is inspired by Edward Said's analysis of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* in*,* in which he discussed the personal aspects of his seminal work, Orientalism. Said posited that humans might be seen as an outcome of the historical process, which embeds within them endless non-inventoried traces.[6] While for Said this meant that a critic must 'know thyself', an assertion that I wholeheartedly agree and struggle with, for me it is also a reminder to acknowledge the compounding effects of history. It creates an emphasis on the importance of meticulously historicizing figures and ideas as a method of probing the effects of the historical forces in play. By historicizing al-Ghazālī in terms of the socio-political and religious context in which she wrote, it is possible to trace the various influences that had a significant effect on her ideology.

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[6] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 25-6.

Since al-Ghazālī's discourse traversed religion, politics, and gender, I perceive the starting point of this exploration to be the Islamic modernist movement.[7] Islamic modernism aptly supplied the theoretical basis for the two organized movements that shaped al-Ghazālī's personal perspective. These movements are the Islamist movement and the women's movement. I primarily focus in this chapter on the Islamist movement, while the women's movement will be discussed in more depth in chapter 2. There are several objectives for this chapter: First, I outline the central tenets of Islamic modernism and the different approaches and notions adopted by the early reformers of *al-Nahḍa*. These reformers, namely Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838–1897), Mohammad ʿAbduh (1849–1905), and Mohammad Rashīd Riḍa (1865–1935), were credited with popularizing the tradition of Islamic modernism in Egypt.[8] Their works and ideas are widely considered as the basis for the intellectual aspect of Islamic modernism. Second, this chapter aims to locate the roots of the Islamist movement within the frameworks of Islamic modernism. I show, therefore, how the founding logic of the Islamist movement resides within the sphere of Islamic modernism by discussing the significance of Islamic modernist notions to the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood in the early twentieth century.[9] Although the Muslim Brotherhood was not the only Islamist organization influenced by *al-Nahḍa* in Egypt, it remains the most noteworthy and relevant in relation to Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Egypt.

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[7] I use the term Islamic modernism to describe the intellectual movement that started in the mid-nineteenth-century in the Muslim World which aimed to reform Islam according to modern western values. See Charles Kurzman, "Modernism," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, eds. Gerhard Bowering, Patricia Crone, Wadad Kadi, Devin J. Stewart, Muhammad Qasim Zaman & Mahan Mirza (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[8] *Al-Nahḍa* was an intellectual movement that started in the nineteenth century and was proposed as an Islamic Renaissance. Its primary aim was to reconcile Islam with modernity. Beside the reformers mentioned above, the movement was also associated with work of Rifāʿa al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801–1873) and Khayr al-Dīn (1820–1890). See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798 – 1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 34-193, 222-245.

[9] The Muslim Brotherhood, also referred to as the Society of Muslim Brothers, is an Islamist political movement that was established by Hasan al-Banna in 1928. Its ideology is inspired by Muhammad ʿAbduh and Muhammad Rashīd Riḍa. See Malika Zeghal, "Muslim Brotherhood," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*.

Thereafter, this chapter will examine the early history of the Muslim Brotherhood and its peculiarly shifting position in Egyptian society and politics in the first half of the twentieth century. This period of the Brotherhood's history is significant because al-Ghazālī joined the organization during this era. As such, I also discuss al-Ghazālī's membership from her own perspective. From there, I show the connection between the Brotherhood and the 1952 Free Officer movement that overthrew the monarchy in Egypt, in addition to the Brotherhood's persecution under the Nasserite regime (1954–1970).[10] This persecution and the prison experience, shared among many Brotherhood members, precipitated a surge of radicalism. It was the works and ideologies of Sayyid Qutb that motivated the Brotherhood's adoption of militancy and the construction of a new theoretical and practical framework that amplified radicalism. Qutb's work generally shaped the philosophy of the Brotherhood starting in the early 1960s, but, more importantly, it provided many references to the work of Zaynab al-Ghazālī (see chapter 2).

By deconstructing the intellectual forces that influenced al-Ghazālī, I locate the different paradigms that have left a trace in fashioning her subjectivities. I postulate that for al-Ghazālī's ideas to be fully understood, they must first be placed within their sociopolitical and religious context. As I show more extensively in chapters 2 and 3, al-Ghazālī's work contains residues of many prominent discourses of the early twentieth century. I postulate that this era of Egyptian socio-politics, with its diverse conditions and vast capacity for socio-political and religious change, must be seen as a fundamental force that affected al-Ghazālī's trajectories. Similarly, the onset of the 1952 coup d'etat and the Nasserite regime's restriction on independent activism

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[10] The 1952 movement was a military coup led by a group of officers who called themselves the Free Officers. They mobilized to force King Farūq (1920–1965) to abdicate on the 26th of July 1952. Among the officers was Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970), who became president of Egypt between 1954 and 1970. See William L. Cleveland & Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 301-8.

represented a considerable factor in influencing al-Ghazālī's (and the Brotherhood's) recourse to militancy.

Modernizing Islam: *Al-Nahḍa* and Jamal al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838–1897)

Any history of Islamism will be incomplete without a survey of the so-called *Nahḍa*. This was an intellectual movement originating in the nineteenth century that was concerned with modernizing and reforming Islam. It was prompted to internalize the importance of modernization through the notion of moral, spiritual, material, and technological decay. The articulation of reform as a response to decay is a reoccurring trope in Islamic tradition. For example, the contentious thirteenth century Ḥanbalī scholar, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), composed his (in)famous orthodox treatises in response to what he identified as religious decay and decadence. His writings reflected a deep concern over foreign *bidaʿ* (singular: *bidʿa* i.e., dangerous innovation) permeating into Islam and precipitating an uncontrollable wave of religious and consequently societal collapse.[11] Beyond the thirteenth century, decay and reform remained significant for many Muslim scholars and thinkers who were dedicated to rationalizing the reasons behind stagnation in Muslim societies. In the eighteenth century, a nascent surge of Islamic critique along similar lines proliferated. The critique formulated would later serve as the theoretical root of *al-Nahḍa* and the subsequent Islamist movement. There were two main approaches taken by Muslim clerics in explaining the decay:

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[11] Ibn Taymiyya was an Islamic jurist and judge belonging to the Ḥanbalī school of Islamic jurisprudence. He is known for his contentious views towards saint veneration and what he considered doctrinal, ritual, or monistic deviations by Sufis. His work emphasized the idea of the righteous forebears (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) and served as a reference to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb and the Wahhābī movement. See Henri Laoust, "Ibn Taymiyya," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition,* P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), http://dx.doi.org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3388.; Tariq al-Jamil, "Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī: Shiʿi Polemics and the Struggle for Religious Authority in Medieval Islam," in *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times,* eds. Youssef Rapoport & Shahab Ahmed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 232-3, and Khaled El-Rouayheb, "From Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d.1566) to Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d.1899): Changing Views of Ibn Taymiyya among non-Ḥanbalī Sunni Scholars," in *Ibn Taymiyya and his Times,* eds. Youssef Rapoport & Shahab Ahmed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 310.

The first was adopted by revivalists like Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792) and Shah Walī Allah (1703–1762), and viewed spiritual decadence as a local condition.[12] This perspective saw decline as a concept related to the collective Muslim self. Conversely, an external event motivated the second perception of decay: The Napoleonic occupation of Egypt during the end of the eighteenth century alerted Muslims to their status vis-à-vis the Western other.[13] The wide cleavages that separated Europe's technological progress and military superiority from the umma hastened Muslim thinkers to underline their backwardness in this regard.[14] Although the European encounter resulted in a material struggle to cope with Western hegemony and exploitation, on the spiritual side, some Muslims believed it to be the product of religious deterioration. For Muslims, their technological and economic inferiority compared to the West was considered a religious forewarning since it went against their belief of a divine plan for Muslim eminence.[15] Commentators who adopted this approach expressed their ideas for reform with a conscious awareness of European superiority, suggesting the assumption of the same factors that facilitated Western technological advancement in Muslim societies. Simultaneously, they questioned the reasons why Muslims could not achieve these advancements independently.

The thought that Muslim societies were generally inferior to the West was a significant idea that defined the trajectory of Islamic modernism through the nineteenth and early twentieth

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[12] Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb was the founder of the Wahhābī movement in Najd and the Arabian Peninsula. He was inspired by the work of Ibn Taymiyya and advocated for the destruction of tombs and shrines and the literal adherence to traditional Islamic law and scriptural authorities. He sought to reform Islam by rejecting all innovation i.e., *bidaʿ*. See Cole M. Bunzel, *Wahhābism: The History of a Militant Islamic Movement* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2023), 1-19. Shah Walī Allah was an Indian theologian and reformer. He advocated for the return to the Quran and Ḥadīth as the principal source of religion. He broke consensus on translating the Quran and translated it to Persian to protect the laypeople from heretics, philosophers, and Hindus. Walī Allah's approach to Islamic law revolved around combining different aspects from different schools. See Fitzroy Morrissey, *A Short History of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 169-171.

[13] Ibid., 174.

[14] Umma is an Arabic term that means collective or community. It references *ummat al-Islam,* meaning the people of Islam or Muslims in general. It is commonly used in discourse on Pan-Islamism.

[15] Fitzroy Morrissey, *A Short History of Islamic Thought*, 175.

centuries. As I discuss below, several Islamic modernists attempted to negotiate the reinterpretation of Islam in light of modern Western frameworks. Their approach in doing so revolved around embracing modern technology and intellect with the assumption that Islam is a comprehensive belief system that naturally complements modernity. They argued Muslims transmitted much of the foundational knowledge for modern science and technology to Europe during the Middle Ages, making it a scientific and rational religion.[16] Consequently, Islam inherently possesses the tools for progress. Yet, the status of contemporary Muslims would seem to suggest that there were forces at play that were hindering progression. Islamic modernists deemed the performance of so-called non-rational practices as the underlying force withholding modernity. As such, they claimed Muslims were lulled into a dangerous longstanding tradition of emulation and Sufi mysticism that led them to abandon the rational tenets of Islam.[17] To reverse the harm caused by these fatalistic traditions, they argued that Muslims needed to reclaim Islam's rational spirit, marginalizing medieval Islamic institutions and traditions in favor of modern rationalism.[18]

The work of Jamal al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muhammad ʿAbduh, and Muhammad Rashīd Riḍa established the tradition of Islamic modernism in Egypt. The ideas of al-Afghānī solidified this ideology before it was embraced and built upon by his disciples, mainly ʿAbduh and Riḍa. Al-Afghānī's origins were much debated. He claimed to be an Afghan—as his name suggests—and a descendant of the Prophet. However, his enemies contested this identity by asserting his Persian lineage and maintaining that he belonged to the Shiʿī sect of Islam. During his youth, he

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[16] Ibid., 175-6.
[17] Sufism or Ṭaṣawwuf refers to the Islamic mystical tradition in which Sufis try to achieve a relationship with God through asceticism, divine love, and service. See L. Massington *et al.*, "Taṣawwuf," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), http://dx.doi.org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1188.
[18] Fitzroy Morrissey, *A Short History of Islamic Though*, 176.

received a traditional Islamic education that particularly focused on the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā (980–1037).[19] Later in his life, al-Afghānī Studied Western sciences and mathematics during the time he spent in India.[20] His reformative framework could be seen as a reflection of his education, since it exhibits an effort to combine different intellectual traditions. His intentions to express Islamic knowledge within the paradigm of modern rationalism speaks to the plurality of his experience in varied education systems. However, as we will see below, al-Afghānī's approach in reconciling these knowledge systems was disproportionate.

Al-Afghānī maintained that the reasons behind European dominance needed to be studied and applied in the Muslim context in order to restore Islam's former prominence.[21] By looking to the West for reference, he demoted non-rational expressions of faith like Sufism or Islamic mysticism. He held that Sufis stagnated Muslim minds and truncated their attempts to adopt Western-style modernization.[22] Moreover, he believed that there was a single path through which Muslims could become modern that revolved around capturing the rational spirit of Islam and utilizing it as a tool for reform.[23] Al-Afghānī's views were shaped by the prevalent discourse on modernization in the West during the nineteenth century. The dialectics al-Afghānī engaged in with Western scholars to prove Islam's compatibility with progress and reason further attests to these influences. He opted to substantiate Islam's complementarity with modern frameworks in order to bring about social change, viewing Islam as a civilization rather than just a belief

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[19] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798 – 1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 108. Ibn Sīnā was a philosopher and physician during the Islamic golden age in the tenth and eleventh century. He has many contributions in both fields but most significant is his philosophical argument for the existence of God. Ibn Sīnā also attempted to close the gap separating theology and philosophy. See Amelie Marie Goichon, "Ibn Sīnā," in in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), http://dx.doi.org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0342.
[20] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798—1939*, 108.
[21] Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defense, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2016), 68.
[22] Ibid., 70-72.
[23] Fitzroy Morrissey, *A Short History of Islamic Though*, 181.

system. Al-Afghānī's understanding of civilization here was inspired by the work of Francois Pierre Guizot (1787–1874), who proposed civilization as the foremost historical notion dictating how all other notions should be perceived and criticized.[24] Guizot described a civilization as the active progressive will of people to force change in the areas of social and individual development.[25]

The effects of Western discourse on al-Afghānī can be seen to a greater extent in his dialectic with Ernest Renan (1823–1892).[26] Here, al-Afghānī apologetically defends Islam by appealing to European intellectual frameworks. Renan attacked Islam (and Christianity) by claiming it was only valid in one specific domain, the formulation of a moral ideal. In claiming to possess wider truth and placing restrictions on the human mind, Islam had overstepped its domain, Renan asserted, and needed to be restricted. Only reason could monopolize human action, since it has the potential for achieving perfection and civilization, he added.[27] By accepting Renan's proposal on the need to limit the influence of religion, al-Afghānī was suggesting that Islam, being younger than Christianity, still needed to undergo its version of the protestant reformation.[28] As al-Afghānī argued in *al-Radd ʿAla al-Ẓahiriyyīn* (*The Refutation of the Materialists*), Islam is well-suited to modernity given that its monotheism is a coherent doctrine that embellishes human rational intellect. It is a tolerant religion, since status is solely determined based on virtue and intellect.[29] To further reiterate the validity of Islam within the

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[24] Francois Pierre Guizot was a French historian and statesman who wrote extensively on the idea of civilizations as a historical topic of study. See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939,* 114-9.

[25] Ibid., 114-5.

[26] Ernest Renan was a French philologist, historian, and biblical scholar. He advocated for many theories on the supremacy of the white man and the racial science of the enlightenment. He also wrote on religion and the origins of Christianity. See Ernest Renan, *What is a Nation? And Other Political Writings*, trans. and ed. M.F.N Giglioli (New York: Colombia University Press, 2018), XIII-XXXIX.

[27] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939*, 122.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Fitzroy Morrissey, *A Short History of Islamic Thought*, 183.

framework of Western rationalism, al-Afghānī postulated that divine knowledge is not

exclusively monopolized by prophets. There are two mechanisms for the acquisition of divine

knowledge, he suggested, prophecy and philosophy. In this regard, he proposed that what God

revealed to Prophet Muhammad is comparable to the knowledge acquired by philosophers who

exercise reason. Such a controversial statement was popularly rejected by al-Afghānī's critics,

who accused him of eroding the true essence of Islam.[30] Supplementing his commitment to

reason, al-Afghānī strongly advocated for Islamic unity (Pan-Islamism) as an important

precursor to modernization.[31] Pan-Islamism was a pivotal notion that pervaded much of his

work. He vehemently antagonized political factions and ruling dynasties, in the belief that these

political entities were responsible for fragmenting the umma, and claimed that Muslims were not

obliged to obey them as long as they were not actively attempting to unify the umma.*[32]*

Muhammad ʿAbduh: The Pioneer of Islamic Modernism in Egypt

Al-Afghānī's time in Egypt and his acquaintance with influential religious and political

figures did not significantly affect the spread of Islamic modernism there, it was his student and

close disciple Muhammad ʿAbduh who was responsible for this. Their first interaction in this

capacity occurred after al-Afghānī intellectually adopted a group of young men, including

ʿAbduh, and shared with them his ideas on true Islam, Pan-Islamism, and the need to undercut

European penetration.[33] Al-Afghānī indeed became a powerful influence on ʿAbduh. According

to intellectual historian Fitzroy Morrisey, al-Afghānī taught ʿAbduh critical reading and

introduced him to the principles of philosophical theology and modern science. By 1876, ʿAbduh

had become well-versed in al-Afghānī's discourse and strongly resonated with his ideas. He

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[30] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939*, 123.
[31] Ibid., 115.
[32] Ibid., 116.
[33] Ibid., 109.

firmly believed that modern science held the key to Western progress and advocated for studying

European history to uncover the determining factors of Western modernity.[34] A few years later,

ʿAbduh articulated his own ideas within the framework of the Islamic modernism he had

adopted. He saw Islam as being different to other religions in that it promoted engagement with

its authoritative scripture, the Quran, through rational intellect, problematizing the unquestioned

acquiescence to spiritual knowledge in other religions.[35] ʿAbduh believed that decay in Muslim

societies was the result of minimizing the use of rational intellect and resorting to *taqlīd*

(imitation)*.* By blindly imitating traditions, Muslims were accepting dangerous religious

deviations and suspending rational thought. Among the deviations ʿAbduh identified was

attributing sanctity to non-sacred figures or practices; he also saw the religious importance

ascribed to social details and regulations of early Islamic society as another form of *taqlīd.* For

some imitators, these social practices were given the same importance and religious significance

as the core principles of faith.[36] Although ʿAbduh adapted and expanded on al-Afghānī's ideas,

he also contested some of his mentor's claims. He disagreed with al-Afghānī's controversial

proposal aligning philosophers and prophets. Unlike al-Afghānī, ʿAbduh maintained that human

intellect is not absolute, and that some religious matters are unquestionably beyond the capacity

of human reason to endure or to be questioned by people. These matters are reserved for prophets

to mediate, since they possess true divine knowledge. For ʿAbduh, topics such as divine essence,

God's attributes, and the form of religious rituals were not up for debate.[37]

Muhammad Abduh's legacy within the Islamic modernist tradition is contested by

different commentators. For some, the reform he advocated was misplaced since it intellectually

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[34] Fitzroy Morrissey, *A Short History of Islamic Thought*, 184.
[35] Ibid., 185.
[36] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939*, 150.
[37] Fitzroy Morrissey, *A Short History of Islamic Thought*, 185-6.

entrenched radical readings of Islam, most notably Salafism and Wahhābīsm.[38] This perception is reinforced by the significance ʿAbduh attributed to *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (the righteous forebears) as a historical role model for Muslims and an embodiment of the authentic ethos of Islam.[39] However, historian Oliver Scharbrodt argues that describing ʿAbduh's contribution as "Salafism" is inaccurate and blurs the lines between his reformative framework and radical strands of Salafism more consistent with the Wahhābī Movement.[40] In Scharbrodt's opinion, ʿAbduh's ideology represented a critical juncture in modern Islamic thought that had the potential to mitigate the challenges posed by modernity. By insisting on the need for *ijtihād* (independent reasoning or legal inference) to overcome Muslim stagnation, ʿAbduh was seeking to locate a rendition of modernity that was not based on emulation of a European model. This approach prioritized engaging with modernity through Islamic knowledge traditions and intellectual resources to maintain Islam's multiplicity in the modern world. The success of this model was linked to the reasoning of individual religious scholars and their ability to reinterpret primary sources in order to address and resolve modern problems. The traditional compendium of juristic precedents achieved via *ijtihād,* thus, becomes one element accounted for in the broader process of independent reasoning rather than a medieval yardstick blindly utilized by traditionalists.[41] ʿAbduh evoked the intellectual culture of ambiguity in his work, a pre-modern Islamic concept that attenuated contradictions and inconsistencies between schools of Islamic jurisprudence and

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[38] Salafism is a fundamentalist view of Islam that holds the early Muslim community of the Prophet and his followers as an ideal model to be followed. This view was shaped by the juristic work of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, and in the eighteenth-century Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb. See Cole M. Bunzel, *Wahhābīsm: The History of a Militant Islamic Movement*, 7.

[39] Oliver Scharbrodt, *Muhammad ʿAbduh: Modern Islam and the Culture of Ambiguity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 176.

[40] Ibid., 177.

[41] Ibid., 173, 201-2.

theology and constructed intellectual frameworks to navigate them.[42] ʿAbduh built on this concept by employing a conciliatory attitude toward plurality in Islamic thought and utilizing it as a tool to address modern challenges that Muslims encountered. Emphasizing the inherent multiplicity of Islam's intellectual tradition thus became a useful means of approaching Islamic reform instead of grounds for fragmentation of the umma. The downside of this approach was ʿAbduh's inability to address all the possible ambiguities that had arisen from Muslims' modern conditions by the time of his death in 1905, and therefore his legacy was scattered between his disciples.[43] He aspired to establish an institution that combined the use of Islamic knowledge and modern sciences, but his vision never materialized. His multi-volume Quranic commentary was also left incomplete.[44] Following his death, his student Muhammad Rashīd Riḍa took on the mantle of Islamic modernism, although Riḍa's worldview contradicted that of his teacher in multiple ways.

Muhammad Rashīd Riḍa and the Reconstruction of ʿAbduh's Legacy, (1905–1935)

The incomplete legacy of Muhammad ʿAbduh is evident in the ideological diversity of his disciples. A sharp contrast defines the various ideological positions adopted by his students, reflecting the ambiguity in his work. This new generation of Islamic modernists, who were introduced to the field through ʿAbduh's tutelage, postulated oppositional readings of Islam in comparison to one another. The avant-garde ideas proposed by thinkers like Qāsim Amīn (1863–1908) and Ali Abdel Raziq (1888–1966) on the reformulation of gender and politics,

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[42] Ibid., 8. For an in-depth discussion on the culture of ambiguity see the cited source. Also see Thomas Bauer, *The Culture of Ambiguity: An Alternative History of Islam* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2021), 1-74.
[43] Ibid., 204.
[44] Ibid.

respectively, were in contrast to the conservatism advocated by Muhammad Rashīd Riḍa.[45] In his

widely-debated books *Taḥrīr al-Marʾa* (1899) (The Liberation of Women) and *al-Marʾa al-*

Jadīda (1900) (The New Woman), Qāsim Amīn argued Muslims must return to Islamic teachings

to elevate the status of women and bring about social reform. His reasoning built on ʿAbduh's

ideas, which viewed the status of women as an outcome of failing to adhere to Islamic teachings.

Moreover, he believed that by not upholding the high-status Islam has secured for women,

Muslims had deviated from their religion.[46] On the political front, Ali Abdel Raziq was one of

the early religious scholars to assert that Islam is strictly a religious belief system not a system

for governance. In Abdel Raziq's perspective, the political program prescribed by Medieval

Islam is not an essential characteristic of the religion, rendering the Caliphal institution as an

unnecessary structure. He believed Islam is naturally apolitical, and that Muslims should be free

to adopt diverse political regimes that complement their various dispositions.[47] This perspective

differed from Riḍa's attempts to consolidate religious conservatism through an emphasis on

modern rationalism. Riḍa's interpretation of ʿAbduh's legacy led him to ascribe a new meaning

to *al-salaf al-ṣaliḥ,* as I discuss below.

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[45] Qāsim Amīn was an Egyptian judge and a student of Muhammad ʿAbduh. He was a nationalist who advocated for national reform through the status of women. He is considered by some as the father of Egyptian feminism. However, scholars like Malek Abisaab, Rula Jurdi Abisaab, and Leila Ahmed contest this perspective by underlining other factors that need to be considered, like the influence of British colonialism on his ideas, in order to properly understand Amīn's work. See Malek Abisaab & Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "A Century after Qasim Amin: Fictive Kinship and Historical Uses of 'Tahrir al-Marʾa'," *Al-Jadid*, vol.6, no.3 (Fall 2000): 8-11, and Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 160-165. For a translated version of Amīn's books, see Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women and the New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian* Feminism, trans. by Samiha Sidhom (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000). Ali Abdel Raziq was an Egyptian jurist and Islamic scholar who debated the role of religion in politics and society. For Abdel Raziq's seminal work see, Ali Abdel Raziq, *al-Islām wa Usūl al-Ḥukm* (Islam and the Foundations of Political Power) (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī, 2012).
[46] Fitzroy Morrissey, *A Short History of Islamic Thought*, 189-191.
[47] Ibid., 191-2.

Although ʿAbduh's reformative legacy built upon the plurality emanating from the culture of ambiguity, it became largely synonymous with the work of Riḍa as opposed to any of his other students. The dynamics that led to this perception are complicated and beyond the scope of this study. However, it is important to note that Riḍa's direct and indirect alignment with political and religious forces contributed to the reception of both his legacy and that of ʿAbduh. Riḍa's work gained currency within the Wahhābī movement (which Riḍa viewed favorably and was allied with) and the Islamist movement, which promoted its popularity. These movements served as a continuum for Riḍa's work by insisting that it outweighed other Islamic modernist opinions. The authority imputed to Riḍa through these movements shaped mainstream perceptions of him, and furthered the notion that he was the sole heir of ʿAbduh. Such a dynamic does not only skew our understanding of Riḍa, but simultaneously implicates ʿAbduh by perpetuating the assumption that he was a proponent of Salafism, which Scharbrodt contests, and deemphasizes the culture of ambiguity which defined his works.

Having said this, it is important to note that Riḍa subscribed to the reformist framework of ʿAbduh to a significant degree until his death in 1905. After ʿAbduh's death, Riḍa's swiftly exhibited a deeper emphasis on conservative readings of Islam and a lack of leniency in religious matters. The ideas that separated Riḍa from ʿAbduh are closer to what we identify today as Salafism. Among the specificities distinguishing Riḍa was his idealization of Ibn Taymiyya, the thirteenth century Ḥanbalī jurist briefly discussed above. Drawing on him for inspiration, Riḍa firmly dismissed the intellectual tradition of theologians, grammarians, imitative jurists, Sufis, zealous sects, and legal schools. He claimed that these groups belonged to the same current, despite the particularities differentiating each of them, and that they were responsible for

distracting the umma from the true meaning of the Quran.[48] To accomplish reform, Riḍa asserted that these traditions needed to be replaced by the customs of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*. Nevertheless, Riḍa's understanding of the term, and implementation of it, involved a literal adoption of Salafī practices and institutions, which differed from ʿAbduh's interpretation. Where ʿAbduh idealized the *ijtihad* of *al-salaf al-ṣalih* and took their example as an embodiment of the ethos he wished to employ to realize a unique form of modernity, Riḍa was more pragmatic in maintaining that the lived experience of *al-salaf* is what should be replicated. Riḍa expressed different views to his teacher on gender roles and women's access to public space. In many respects, his approach contrasts with that of Qāsim Amīn and seems to have represented an early reference to the framework adopted by Zaynab al-Ghazālī and other Islamists who discussed gender. In his book *Nidaʾ ila al-Jins al-Latīf* (A Call to the Gentle Sex), Riḍa defended polygamy and the man's unilateral authority to initiate divorce. He contended that women are obliged to be obedient and submissive to their husbands and cannot travel unaccompanied.[49]

To complement his approach on intellectual and religious reform, Riḍa also emphasized the political component of Islam to a greater degree, in contrast to the position of ʿAbduh. He postulated a political framework targeting the modernization of the Caliphal ruling system. Against the backdrop of a deteriorating and ultimately disintegrating Ottoman Empire, he proposed key theses to anchor his version of the Caliphate and reinstate it in accordance with modernity. His approach was eclectic, as it capitalized on various classical authorities and theories that aligned with his objective. All in all, Riḍa was determined to emphasize the correlation between Islam as a political system and modernity while respecting its authoritative

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[48] Ibid., 189.
[49] Ibid., 190-1. Although Riḍa's ideas seem to differ from Amīn, they were some overlaps as I discuss in chapter 3.

scriptures.[50] For his project to materialize, it still needed to be adopted by a ruling faction in the

Muslim world, which left him in search of an ally. When Sharīf Ḥusayn (1854–1931), the ruler

of Hijāz, rejected an alliance with Riḍa, he organically positioned him closer to his Saudi

rivals.[51] The house of Ibn Saud rivaled the Hashemites for political control over the Hijaz and

Mecca (in addition to the rest of modern-day Saudi Arabia), and Riḍa was determined to make

the most out of this competition. An alliance with the Saudis was more realistic, since Riḍa

already agreed with the premises of the Wahhābī revival in Arabia that the Saudis adopted.[52]

From *al-Nahḍa* to Political Islam: The Creation of the Muslim Brotherhood, (1928–1949)

Polemics questioning the limits of Islamic modernism in the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries typically occurred among religious scholars from al-Azhar, or between

members of the ʿulama. This was often the case because religious scholars dominated the field of

legal and educational reform within the scope of Islam (both of which were central topics for the

Islamic modernist movement), as it largely took place within their institutions and under their

supervision.[53] The educated middle-class urban audience of this discourse readily followed its

trajectory through periodicals like Rashīd Riḍa's al-Manār.[54] However, the reshaping of the

Egyptian secular state in the early twentieth century introduced new political realities that altered

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[50] Kosugi Yasushi, "Al-Manār Revisited: the "'Lighthouse' of the Islamic Revival," in *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World*, eds. Stephane Dudoignon, Komatsu Hisao & Kosugi Yasushi (London: Routledge, 2006), 21-2.

[51] Sharīf Hussein was appointed as the Ottoman ruler of Hijaz in 1908. He cooperated with the British during WWI, and in return was promised to be the King of a united Arab Kingdom. This promise never came to fruition, and he was defeated by the Saudis in 1924 and lost control of Hijaz and Mecca. See William L. Cleavland & Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 157-163, 231-2.

[52] Umar Ryad, *Islamic Reformism and Christianity*: *Critical Reading of the Works of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā* and his Associates, (1898 – 1935) (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 8.

[53] Kosugi Yasushi, "Al-Manār Revisited," 24. The ʿulama is an Arabic term meaning religious scholars and jurists (singular ʿālim). Al-Azhār is the oldest and one of the most important juristic educational Islamic institutions in Egypt. It was established under the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt in 970 C.E. See J. Jomier, "al-Azhar," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), http://dx.doi.org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0076.

[54] Al-Manār was the primary publication that Mohammad Rashīd Riḍa used to propagate his ideas on Islamic modernism and reform. It was regularly published between 1898 and 1935. See Kosugi Yasushi, "Al-Manār Revisited, 3-39.

the development of Islamic modernism. Henceforth, religious legal and educational reform was no longer the purview of religious scholars, as it was monopolized by the state. By institutionalizing education and law, the state eroded the religious and political clout of the ʿulama and al-Azhar, since reform in these domains became only accessible via the state bureaucracy. Conversely, this shift empowered middle-class urban bureaucrats and government workers who oversaw the institutionalization of this reformative framework. Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, was a member of this cohort, as he was an employee of the state.[55] However, irrespective of this political change, al-Banna remained a significant admirer of Riḍa and his work. He was a regular attendee of the sermons and lectures of Rashīd Riḍa, and was also an avid reader of al-Manār.[56] Al-Banna's idealization of Riḍa's work was evident in his determination to oversee the publishing of al-Manār after Riḍa's death in 1935. Although he was unable to publish more than one volume, al-Banna propagated Riḍa's beliefs through the Muslim Brotherhood's journal later on.[57] The combination of these factors suggest that Riḍa's work considerably influenced al-Banna's reformative awareness and the articulation of his ideology.

Al-Banna worked as a teacher in the Canal town of Ismaʿiliyya, which sharpened his awareness of the imperial exploitation of Egypt. Ismaʿiliyya was one of the locations where the British military presence coincided with the foreign economic exploitation of Egypt, exemplified in the Suez Canal Company. The company was a symbol of imperial economic hegemony over Egypt and similarly reflected the military domination of the British, who sought to secure the operation of the Suez Canal. In Ismaʿiliyya, as in other Canal cities, the status of foreign

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[55] Kosugi Yasushi, "Al-Manār Revisited," 24.
[56] Umar Ryad, *Islamic Reformism and Christianity*, 9.
[57] Kosugi Yasushi, "Al-Manār Revisited," 26.

nationals compared to Egyptians exacerbated al-Banna's unease. The dilapidated neighborhoods housing Egyptian workers were in stark contrast to the luxurious residences of Europeans, and engendered a sense of dissent in al-Banna.[58] Motivated by his observations and influenced by his religious upbringing and the trajectories of Islamic modernism, al-Banna was convinced that the ability to break free from imperialism and institute socio-political reform resided in religious frameworks. In March 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood was conceived following a discussion between al-Banna and a group of Egyptian laborers who worked in British military camps. They discussed the denigrated position of Arabs and Muslims in their countries under foreign authority and agreed to come up with a practical framework that targeted the welfare of Muslims and the restoration of Islam's eminence.[59]

During its formative period, the Muslim Brotherhood attracted a significant following. The first ten years of the Brotherhood's existence were essential to solidifying its ideological tenets. The organization's worldview was premised on,

> Islam as a total system, complete unto itself, and the final arbiter of life in all its categories; an Islam formulated from and based on its two primary sources, the revelation of the Qurʾan and the wisdom of the Prophet in the Sunna; and an Islam applicable to all times and places.[60]

Al-Banna's vision for the implementation of this worldview was comprehensive, and as such he described the movement as "a Salafiyya message, a Sunni way, a Sufi truth, a political organization, an athletic group, a cultural-education union, an economic company and a social idea."[61] His description embodies the depth of the Brotherhood's scope of operation and its multifaceted demands on public discourse.

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[58] Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7.
[59] Ibid., 8.
[60] Ibid., 14.
[61] Ibid.

The year 1932 marked the beginning of the Brotherhood's involvement in Egyptian politics. Al-Banna was granted a transfer from Ismaʿiliyya to Cairo, and with him the organization relocated its headquarters to the capital. Between 1933 and 1942, it occupied an idiosyncratic role on the Egyptian political scene. As a popular organization, the Brotherhood was occasionally used by the Egyptian government—as with the Ali Mahir Cabinet (August 1939–June 1940)—to bolster support for nationalist, Pan-Arab, and anti-British policies.[62] The alliance with the government was twofold during Mahir's regime, since it was comprised of many Arab nationalists and Islamists whose views aligned with the Brotherhood's religious sentiment and constant support for the Palestine question.[63] Adamant to increase its political presence, the Brotherhood favorably viewed running for office. Al-Banna sustained two attempts to become a member of parliament. In his first bid in 1942, he was convinced to withdraw in exchange for concessions by Prime Minister Mustafa al-Naḥḥās' Cabinet (February 1942–October 1944), which included the unrestricted full-scale operation of the Brotherhood and a pledge to limit the sale of alcohol and prostitution.[64] The failure of his second bid in 1945 was believed to be the result of foul play.[65] However, the status of the Brotherhood within the Egyptian political structure was complicated by the onset of the Second World War.

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[62] Ibid., 23. Ali Mahir (1882–1960) was an Egyptian politician and served as Prime Minister of Egypt on four separate occasions. He was a member of al-Itiḥād Party, a nationalist party that saw the monarchy and Islam as symbols of Egypt. See Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J Johnson, and Barak A Salamoni, *Re-Envisioning Egypt 1919-1952* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 20-21, 35-42. Although Mitchell discusses the alignment of his policy with the Muslim Brotherhood during his reign between August 1939 and June 1940, he points out that Mahir knew Hasan al-Banna since 1935, as Mahir himself mentioned. For an overview on the relationship between Mahir and al-Banna see Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, 19-29.

[63] Basheer M. Nafi, *The Islamists: A Contextual History of Political Islam* (Baltimore: Project Muse, 2019), 37.

[64] Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, 27. Mustafa al-Naḥḥās (1879–1965) was an Egyptian politician who served as Prime Minister of Egypt on five separate occasions. He was a leading member of al-Wafd party. See Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J Johnson, and Barak A Salamoni, *Re-Envisioning Egypt*, 30-5, 108-118.

[65] Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, 33.

The anti-British Mahir government was dissolved shortly after the war broke out because of its reluctance to declare war on the Axis powers.[66] The departure of Mahir represented a hindrance for the Brotherhood since he was a valuable ally within the ranks of the Egyptian government. Mahir's departure heralded a long period in which the Brotherhood would gradually be marginalized from Egyptian politics. The government would sustain strong animosities against the organization during this era. The growing dysfunctionality characterizing Egyptian politics, and the increased unrest due to the war, encouraged al-Banna to consider establishing a militarized wing to the organization. By then, the Brotherhood had made a considerable number of enemies and was similarly antagonized by British colonial officials. A rival group inaugurated by former Brotherhood members also threatened the organization. Its founders fragmented from the Brotherhood because of their disapproval of al-Banna's leadership. By the end of 1942, a covert militarized apparatus was created and referred to as al-Tanẓīm al-Khāṣṣ (the Special Order).[67]

The growing suspicions sustained by the government against the Brotherhood were underscored when al-Banna and other Brotherhood officials were immediately arrested for assassinating Prime Minister Ahmed Mahir Pasha (1885–1945) in 1945.[68] Although the assassin was a member of the National Party and had killed Mahir to avenge his declaration of war on the Axis, Brotherhood members were among the first suspects.[69] Mahir's successor, Maḥmūd Fahmī

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[66] Basheer M. Nafi, *The Islamists*, 38.
[67] Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, 30.
[68] Ahmed Mahir Pasha was the Prime Minister of Egypt between 10 October 1944 and 24 February 1945 (not to be confused with Ali Maher). He was a member of the Saʿdist Party, which fragmented from al-Wafd because they believed it had betrayed the principles laid out by its founder Saʿd Zaghlūl. See "Saʿdist Party," in *A Dictionary of Contemporary World History*, eds. Christopher Riches and Jan Palmowski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).
[69] The National Party was a nationalist political group created by the prominent Egyptian nationalists Mustafa Kamil (1874–1908) and Muhammad Farid (1868–1919). The Party was at odds with the monarchy in Egypt. For an in-depth discussion on the national significance of Kamil and Farid, see Yoav Di-Capua, "Embodiment of the Revolutionary Spirit: The Mustafa Kamil Mausoleum in Cairo," *History and Memory*, vol. 13 no.1 (2001): 90-104.

al-Nuqrāshī (1888–1948), remained suspicious of the Brotherhood and demanded constant surveillance of its members and activities.[70] As a result, the organization was forced into underground covert operations as it had no room to operate as a public entity. It was aided in this regard by al-Tanẓīm al-Khāṣṣ, which unlocked a new realm of potential action for the Brotherhood. Prior to its creation, militancy and violence were not a possibility for the organization, which was only operational in sociopolitical activism. By creating al-Tanẓīm al-Khāṣṣ, the Brotherhood supplemented its politics with the possibility of militarized action. This use of force in the realm of politics must be contextualized in reference to Egypt's political conditions at the time. A sentiment of dysfunctionality pervaded Egyptian politics during and after the end of the Second World War. The British presence complicated matters to a great degree, yet there was an agreement between different political forces that the Egyptian government was not absolved of blame. As such, many political groups—like al-Wafd and the Muslim Brotherhood—were quick to articulate the alignment between Egyptian government officials and colonial officials.[71] Such an alignment was based on the nominal resistance of British Presence within the Egyptian government. Since political organizations were becoming more militarized, groups like al-Wafd and the Brotherhood were prepared to instigate a range of political assassinations during this uncertain era.[72]

Besides its role as a safeguard for the Brotherhood against its enemies, al-Tanẓīm al-Khāṣṣ was operational in trying to provoke change within the nationalist anti-colonial struggle.

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[70] Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, 33-34. Al-Nuqrāshī was an Egyptian politician who served as Prime Minister of Egypt on two occasions. He was a member of the Saʿdist Party. The events mentioned above took place during his first term in office.
[71] Al-Wafd is an Egyptian political party that was created in 1918. It was led by the famous Egyptian nationalist Saʿd Zaghlūl (1860–1927) and then, after his death, by Mustafa al-Naḥḥās. See Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J Johnson, and Barak A Salamoni, *Re-Envisioning Egypt*, 30-5.
[72] Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, 58-60.

The apparatus conducted guerrilla operations targeting British establishments and personnel.[73]

However, in 1948, al-Tanẓīm al-Khāṣṣ was preparing to execute its first assassination against an

Egyptian citizen. As we see below, 1948 was a seminal year for al-Tanẓīm and the Muslim

Brotherhood as a whole. In January, the government was made well aware of the existence of al-

Tanẓīm al-Khāṣṣ when police uncovered arms and explosives in an isolated safe house that

belonged to the militant apparatus. In March, al-Tanẓīm assassinated Egyptian Judge Ahmad al-

Khazindār. The killing was planned as retaliation for the harsh sentence al-Khazindār issued

against two Brotherhood members convicted of throwing explosives at the English Officers'

Club in Cairo. The incident represents a considerable turn in the Brotherhood's history, since it

marks the first targeting of an Egyptian official. More importantly, the assassination of al-

Khazindār also implied that al-Banna's authority over al-Tanẓīm al-Khāṣṣ was starting to erode.

The Brotherhood hierarchy claimed that the apparatus planned and executed this operation

independently without prior discussion with Brotherhood officials.[74] In May 1948, the Egyptian

military would start its armed intervention against the Zionist forces in Palestine. Before the war

officially started, al-Tanẓīm al-Khāṣṣ was helping transport volunteers across the Palestinian

border. Volunteers from al-Tanẓīm were accompanied by some military officers on leave,

including Ṣalaḥ Salim (1920–1962).[75]

In parallel to the Egyptian military's intervention against the Zionists in Palestine, a wave

of mass rioting targeting the Egyptian Jewish community commenced in 1948. Houses and

businesses owned by Egyptian Jews were targeted with explosives and significant attacks took

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[73] Ibid., 57.
[74] Basheer M. Nafi, *The Islamists*, 41.
[75] Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, 57. Ṣalaḥ Salim was a military officer and a member of the Free Officers movement that toppled King Farūq of Egypt (1920–1965). He was also a member of the Revolutionary Command Council. See Joel Gordon, *Nasser's Blessed Movement: Egypt's Free Officers and the July Revolution* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2016), 43-52.

place in the Jewish Quarter in Cairo. Al-Tanẓīm al-Khāṣṣ was the foremost suspect in organizing

these violent acts. As a result of the riots, the Egyptian government appeared to briefly lose

control over the capital.[76] On 4 December, the Brotherhood partook in a violent student uprising

that culminated in the death of a much-disliked police commander, Salim Zaki. The organization

was officially accused of his murder, and within two days, Prime Minister al-Nuqrāshī (who was

serving his second term, 9 December 1946–19 December 1948) issued an official decree for the

dissolution of the Muslim Brotherhood.[77] The government accused the Brotherhood of being a

terrorist organization plotting to compromise Egypt's political order through deploying its

militarized wing.[78] The Brotherhood perceived this decree as a ploy incentivized by British

officials and upheld by a pro-British puppet government, but there appears to be no substantive

evidence to this effect.[79] Al-Banna opted to resolve this matter by negotiating with the Egyptian

government, however, al-Tanẓīm al-Khāṣṣ continued to make its own plans.

It is claimed that, by this stage, the apparatus was becoming increasingly autonomous

from the Brotherhood's political hierarchy. On 28 December, al-Tanẓīm al-Khāṣṣ assassinated

Prime Minister al-Nurqrāshī as a response to the decree he issued dissolving the Brotherhood.

His successor, Ibrahīm Abdel Hadī Pasha (1896–1981) declared war on the organization.[80] Al-

Banna was still insistent on realizing a space for negotiations, but all of his bids to capitulate

were rejected by the government. The government was no longer willing to engage in political

dialogue with the Brotherhood following the assassination of al-Nuqrāshī. Meanwhile, al-Tanẓīm

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[76] Basheer M. Nafi, *The Islamists*, 42.
[77] Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, 65.
[78] Ibid., 66.
[79] Basheer M. Nafi, *The Islamists*, 44.
[80] Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, 67. Ibrahīm Abdel Hadī Pasha was an Egyptian politician who served as Prime Minister of Egypt between 28 December 1948 and 26 July 1949.

opted to resolve the issue by attempting to destroy the evidence against it and the Brotherhood.[81]

Adamant to sustain a bid for negotiating, al-Banna castigated the incident and claimed the perpetrators were neither "Brothers, nor are they Muslims."[82] However, he still distributed internal pamphlets between Brotherhood constituents denying the charges used as a basis for its dissolution, and claiming they were nothing more than forgeries and fabrications.[83] The inconsistency between al-Banna's address repudiating al-Tanẓīm and his internal actions within the Brotherhood evidence the complexity of the matter. Whether al-Tanẓīm was a rogue entity by 1948, or was acting under the direct orders of al-Banna and the Brotherhood's hierarchy, is up for debate. However, even if al-Tanẓīm was autonomous by then, there was considerable overlap in its militant interests, which makes a complete division between the two entities highly unlikely.

It was during this period, usually referred to as *al-miḥna* (the hardship) by Brotherhood members, that Zaynab al-Ghazālī joined the organization. Although al-Ghazālī was a firm believer of Islam's primacy in organizing society and politics, she was not a member of the Brotherhood until 1948.[84] She first met al-Banna in 1937 when he suggested that the Muslim Brotherhood and the Society of Muslim Women (SMW) should merge.[85] In practice, such a merger would have translated into the dissolution of the SMW and its assumption under the expansive structure of the Brotherhood. While the proposal was not welcomed by the SMW's members, al-Ghazālī was confident that cooperation between both entities remained a possibility.

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[81] Ibid., 68.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., 70.

[84] Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya Zaynab al-Ghazālī: Masīrat Jihād wa-Ḥadīth min Khilāl Kitābatihā* (The Proselytizer Zaynab al-Ghazālī: A Journey of Struggle and Dialogue Through her Works) (Cairo: Dār al-Iʿtiṣām, 1989), 19.

[85] The date at which al-Ghazālī first met Hasan al-Banna is inconclusive in her own account. This is one of the factual inconsistencies I discuss in Chapter 2. She gives two dates for their first encounter, 1937 in one account and between 1940 & 1942 in another. See Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya Zaynab al-Ghazālī*, 17. And Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima wa-al-Dāʿiyya Zaynab al-Ghazālī* (Zaynab al-Ghazālī and the Concerns of the Muslim Woman) (Cairo: Dār al-Iʿtiṣām, 1990), 36.

When the Brotherhood was disbanded in 1948, al-Ghazālī recounts that a state of disappointment and regret overwhelmed her. For al-Ghazālī, the Brotherhood's dissolution was evidence of the sincerity of al-Banna's Islamic program. In her view, if it was not a true attempt at change then it would not be resisted by oppositional forces. After this realization, al-Ghazālī got in contact with al-Banna and pledged her allegiance.[86]

Al-Ghazālī wrote to al-Banna asserting,

> To my master al-Imām Hasan al-Banna, Zaynab al-Ghazālī al-Jubaylī comes before you today as a servant devoid of everything but her submission to God and to the service of His message. Today you are the only person who could control this servant as you see fit for the sake of God's message, I await your orders and instructions, my Master Imām.[87]

Al-Banna accepted her pledge and assigned her with reestablishing contact with Mustafa al-Naḥḥas to resolve a disagreement. The SMW was to remain an independent organization that operated under the banner of the Muslim Brotherhood.[88] Al-Ghazālī's membership in the Brotherhood during this era of persecution is significant, since she evokes it in her later writings to consolidate her position in the organization. It asserts her close connection with the founding "martyr" of the Brotherhood and underlines his insistence on al-Ghazālī's membership.[89] Additionally, it solidifies her status as a member of the old guard, although she is more readily identified with the 1965 organization, which will be discussed below.

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[86] Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima* 37-8.
[87] Ibid., 38. The letter is originally in Arabic and translated by the author.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Brotherhood members often refer to al-Banna as al-imām al-shahīd or al-shahīd (the martyred imam or the martyr).

The Brotherhood in the Post-Banna Era, (1949–1954)

In February 1949, Hasan al-Banna was shot and killed. His murder was sanctioned by Prime Minister Abdel Hadī and executed by the Egyptian political police, with the alleged support of the Egyptian monarchy.[90] The assassination of al-Banna was a political calamity for the Brotherhood. The organization was positioned as a terrorist entity, lost all its political legitimacy, and was without a leader. Its survival remained at risk until 1950, when it was presented with a new lifeline in the form of Al-Wafd winning the parliamentary elections that year with the full support of the Brotherhood. As soon as al-Naḥḥās assumed office as Egypt's new Prime Minister, the antagonism sustained within the Egyptian government against the Brotherhood came to a halt.[91] The tactical alliance between al-Wafd and the Brotherhood was pivotal for al-Naḥḥās' plans in office. Having to deal with significant internal turmoil, al-Naḥḥās questioned the British presence in the Canal zone and the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty as a way to recover nationalist support for his party and to reroute attention away from the corruption of the government.[92] In October 1951, negotiations with Britain reached a deadlock, which prompted al-Naḥḥās to unilaterally abrogate the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty. This move stimulated a considerable surge of nationalist mobilization and armed resistance against the British forces in the Suez Canal Zone. Al-Naḥḥās and his government were aware of the importance of the Brotherhood to the armed struggle in the Canal Zone, due to its history of militarized action. The Brotherhood was also aware of its value in this capacity and capitalized on its involvement to maximize its political legitimacy once again. A day after the treaty was

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[90] Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, 71.
[91] Basheer M. Nafi, *The Islamists*, 53.
[92] Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *A Short History of Modern* Egypt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 104; William L. Cleavland & Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 303. The 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty was a diplomatic agreement that nominally ended the British occupation in Egypt but gave Britain the right to maintain its presence in the Suez Canal Zone. Paradoxically, it was passed by Prime Minister al-Naḥḥās, who would come to abrogate it in 1951. See Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *A Short History of Modern* Egypt, 96-8.

abolished, the Brotherhood's mouthpiece, *al-Daʿwa,* announced the organization's full support of

the decision and asserted its steadfastness to join the armed struggle.[93] The Brotherhood was

slowly regaining its political power and the antagonism held by the government and the King

toward it was considerably reduced. It was starting to reassume the politically idiosyncratic role

it was known for during its earlier days.[94] To complement its regeneration of political power, the

Brotherhood had a new leader. Hasan al-Hudaybī (1891–1973) was elected as its new General

Guide (al-Murshid al-ʿĀmm). In December of the same year, an official judiciary ruling

reinstated the organization and allowed it to resume its full activities. [95]

In 1952, a military movement, the Free Officers, mobilized to force the abdication of

King Farūq (1936–1965).[96] The Muslim Brotherhood played a significant role in the Free

Officers' movement, which bolstered their political standing for a short period. The Brotherhood

was entrusted with the plan and timing of the Free Officer mobilization against the King. They

were part of a precautionary plan to halt any possible British mobilization from Suez to Cairo by

deploying members of al-Tanẓīm on the road between the two cities.[97] The relationships between

some of the officers and the Brotherhood dates back to the early 1940s. According to historian

Basheer Nafi, multiple dissatisfied contingents existed within the Egyptian Army throughout the

1940s and 50s.[98] Although these contingents saw Britain as their primary enemy, they were also

very critical of the monarchy. Two future presidents of Egypt were members in these contingents

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[93] Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, 89.
[94] Ibid., 88-94.
[95] Basheer M. Nafi, *The Islamists*, 54. Hasan al-Hudaybī was an Egyptian judge who succeeded Hasan al-Banna as the second General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood. The term General Guide is used within the Brotherhood to denote its leader. For a full discussion of the appointment of the second General Guide for the Muslim Brotherhood, see Basheer M. Nafi, *The Islamists*, 54; Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, 84-88.
[96] King Farūq abdicated his thrown to his infant son King Aḥmed Fuad II. He died in exile in Italy in 1965. For an in-depth first-hand account of King Farūq's abdication, see Sulayman Hafez, *Dhikrayatī ʿan al-Thawra* (My Memories of the Revolution) (Cairo: Dār al-Shorūq, 2010), 38-48.
[97] Basheer M. Nafi, *The Islamists*, 56.
[98] Ibid., 51-3.

and had contact with the Brotherhood. In 1940, future Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat (1918–1981) had regular correspondence with Hasan al-Banna.[99] He was part of a group that was joined by the Brotherhood in its uncontested hatred for the British colonial presence. Sadat wrote to al-Banna requesting that he arrange a meeting with the former commander-in-chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces, General ʿAzīz al-Miṣrī (1879–1965).[100] Al-Banna's ability to arrange the meeting consolidated their relationship and prompted Sadat to realistically consider him as an ally. According to historian Richard Mitchell, Sadat believed that the Brotherhood might serve as a popular front for a military liberation movement against Britain. He was sure that al-Banna would be dedicated to such a cause, but questioned whether his participation could occur according to the military's terms. Sadat believed that al-Banna may have demands that the military would not be willing to accept and vice versa.[101]

Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970) had a more elaborate relationship with the Brotherhood.[102] He was part of another cohort of military officers distinct from that of Sadat (Sadat later joined the group that would eventually form the Free Officers). In 1942, he joined al-Tanẓīm al-Khāṣṣ with other future Free Officers. Nasser and his cohort remained members of the apparatus until the late 1940s. They rescinded their membership around that time because of their dissatisfaction with the leadership model in al-Tanẓīm. They also wished to expand recruitment

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[99] Anwar al-Sadat succeeded Gamal Abdel Nasser as Egypt's president. He was a member of the Free Officer movement in 1952. His regime endorsed lenient policies toward Islamist movements to counter the leftist legacies left by Nasser. He was assassinated by extremists in 1981. See William L. Cleavland & Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 373-387.

[100] Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, 24-5. Aziz al-Miṣrī was an Egyptian Military officer and served as Chief of Staff of the Egyptian military during the Ali Mahir cabinet of 1939. He was a strong opponent of British Colonialism and resisted Britain on multiple occasions. See Heyworth Dunne, *Religious and Political Trends in Modern Egypt* (Washington: Published by the Author, 1950), 25-30.

[101] Ibid., 26.

[102] Gamal Abdel Nasser was Egypt's second president. Originally a pivotal member of the Free Officers, Nasser became president of Egypt after ousting Muhammad Naguib (1901–1984). His legacy is complicated, as it straddles the social and economic reforms he instituted and the authoritarian practice and torture his regime was infamous for. For an in-depth discussion on Nasser, see Joel Gordon, *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

in their contingent to include non-Islamists. Additionally, Nasser and his fellows' tactical enrollment in the apparatus corresponded with the height of the Brotherhood's popularity during the post-Second World War era. Yet, when the Brotherhood was banned, most of the officers were reluctant to maintain their status in al-Tanẓīm al-Khāṣṣ. As soon as the Brotherhood regained its legitimacy and popularity by the end of 1951, Nasser and his fellows re-initiated contact, as they were focused on planning to overthrow the King.[103]

The alliance between the Free Officers and the Muslim Brotherhood remained active following the success of the 1952 movement. As the military junta took power, Ali Mahir was appointed as Prime Minister and tasked with forming the first post-1952 government at the recommendation of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood had a significant relationship with Mahir since 1935, and sought to employ him in a position of authority.[104] By then, it was clear that the Brotherhood represented an important asset for the Free Officers. When the government issued laws organizing political parties shortly after the coup, the Free Officers were determined to ensure the uninterrupted operation of the Brotherhood. The new law stipulated that all political parties be dissolved and file for reinstatement as a measure to undercut the old regime of Egyptian politicians and reinvent political parties under a new leadership. Although the Brotherhood did not view itself as a political party, it opted to file for reinstatement under the new law as a precautionary measure. Nasser personally assisted in its reinstatement and communicated the importance of doing so swiftly to the Minister of Interior Affairs, Sulayman

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[103] Basheer M. Nafi, *The Islamists*, 51-2.
[104] Ibid., 57.

Hafez (1896–1968).[105] To ensure that the Brotherhood was legally sanctioned, Nasser accompanied al-Hudaybī to Hafez's office to oversee the completion of the process.[106]

This alignment seems to be a marriage of convenience. Nasser and the Free Officers sought to reap the political and social benefits an alliance with the Brotherhood could provide. Meanwhile, their willingness to cede political authority in return was non-existent. They were inclined to politically involve the Brotherhood, but only on certain terms. If the Brotherhood was to gain a political standing, in other words collaborate with the Free Officers, it must do so as a minority partner without any form of genuine authority to contest key decisions.[107] On the Brotherhood front, these terms were problematic and unrealistic. The terms represented a reality check that interrupted a sense of false confidence shared among the Brotherhood hierarchy following the coup. After the Free Officers successfully overthrew the King, Brotherhood cadres believed that they possessed true political power through Nasser's ostensible loyalty to the organization. Back when he was a member of al-Tanẓīm al-Khāṣṣ, Nasser had sworn an oath of allegiance (*bayʿa*) to the Brotherhood, which he was expected to honor.[108] As such, Hasan al-Hudaybī and other Brotherhood members anticipated holding leading positions in their partnership with the young and politically inexperienced Free Officers, given that they already had Nasser's support. Nevertheless, they were only presented with a nominal position by Nasser and his fellows. The incommensurable expectations and intentions sustained by the Free Officers and the Brotherhood were ultimately the reason behind the breakdown of their strategic

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[105] Sulayman Hafez, *Dhikrayatī ʿan al-Thawra*, 78.
[106] Ibid.,79.
[107] Fawaz A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb, and the Clash that Shaped the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 93.
[108] *Bayʿa* is a term denoting the recognition of the authority of a ruler by an individual or group. It could be considered a pledge of allegiance, whereby a person pledges to observe the authority of the ruler. See E. Tyan, "Bayʿa," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition,* P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), http://dx.doi.org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0107.

partnership.[109] Accordingly, a heightened sense of suspicion defined Nasser's perception of al-Hudaybī and the Brotherhood, and vice-versa.

A confrontation between the Brotherhood and Free officers appeared to be unavoidable as a result of the dynamic described above. This took place in 1954, a year that is considered a critical juncture in the history of the Brotherhood and Egyptian politics in general. Nasser and his supporters in the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC, Majliss Qiyādat al-Tharwa) were adamant about monopolizing political authority in Egypt by resorting to a system of political syncretism.[110] By instituting the Liberation Rally (Hayʾat al-Taḥrīr), Nasser planned to undercut the Brotherhood (and many other political entities) by forcing them to operate through the confines of the regime's political structures. Already at odds with Nasser, the Brotherhood was becoming increasingly disenchanted with the Free Officer regime. Their lack of trust in Nasser and continued resistance against joining the Liberation Rally damaged their ties with the Free Officers beyond repair. On 11 January 1954, Brotherhood members were involved in an incident where they used weapons in a quarrel during a public address at Cairo University, leading to several injuries. They were heard berating the army and the Communists.[111] Looking at this incident as an opportunity, the state issued a declaration dissolving the Muslim Brotherhood on 13 January.[112] The decree accused the Brotherhood of plotting the overthrow of the political regime through the use of religion.[113]

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[109] Fawaz A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, 89-90.

[110] The Revolutionary Command Council was an institution created by the Free Officers to oversee the governance of Egypt after the abdication of the King. See Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society: The Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change Under Nasser*, Trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Random House, 1968), xxvii.

[111] Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society*, 94.

[112] The Liberation Rally was an attempt to formally conceive a one-party system by the RCC. It was created in January 1953 to operate as a framework for political action entirely under the aegis of the state. See Fawaz A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World,* 82-3. Also, see Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society*, 92-7.

[113] Ibid., 110-1.

In parallel to the policing of political entities in Egypt, fragmentations within the RCC culminated in a confrontation between Muhammad Naguib (1901–1984) and Gamal Abdel Nasser.[114] The power play pitting Nasser and Naguib against one another, popularly dubbed as the March 1954 crisis, postponed Nasser's crackdown on the Brotherhood. Needing to focus on his confrontation with Naguib, and finding that his popular standing had taken a hit due to his resort to authoritarian measures, Nasser temporarily reinstated the Brotherhood and released its members from imprisonment.[115] Nasser was also aware of the popular weight held by the Muslim Brotherhood, which could influence his faceoff with Naguib. He sought to reconcile with the Brotherhood to bolster his bid to marginalize his opponent. To do so, he communicated with al-Hudaybī and agreed to some of his demands in order to co-opt his support and the popular foundation of the Brotherhood against Naguib. Nasser's plan worked, and Naguib was successfully sidelined by the end of March.[116] By mid-November, he was seized and placed under house arrest.[117]

The Brotherhood Under the Persecution of the Nasserite Regime (1954–1970)

After becoming the center of authority within the RCC, Nasser shifted his focus to the Brotherhood. He continued to search for the right opportunity to undermine the Islamists, as he did with Naguib. The opportunity presented itself through the Brotherhood's stance on his negotiations with Britain concerning its withdrawal from Egypt. The Brotherhood believed Nasser was capitulating to imperialist forces, which ignited the disapproval of al-Tanẓīm al-

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[114] Naguib was the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Egypt and its first president. He was marginalized by Nasser in March 1954 and held under house arrest. For his account of the 1954 incident, see Muhammad Naguib, *Kunt Raʾīsann l-Miṣr* (I Was the President of Egypt) (Cairo: al-Maktab al-Miṣrī al-Ḥadīth, 1984), 221-270.
[115] Fawaz A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, 111-2.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society*, 96.

Khāṣṣ.[118] As a result, the organization orchestrated an assassination attempt targeting Nasser, and carried it out on 26 October 1954.[119] The perpetrator shot eight times at Nasser, who was miraculously uninjured. Shortly after, an expansive plan to retaliate against the Brotherhood was put in motion.[120] Police forces immediately arrested around seven thousand Brotherhood members, 876 of whom were convicted. Brotherhood cadres were rounded up and tortured, and six of them were sentenced to death.[121]

At this moment, the Nasserite regime had officially overcome the Brotherhood. The short-lived alliance between the Brotherhood and the Free Officers had come to an end, which was detrimental for the organization's political aspirations. In the years to come, the Brotherhood was not allowed any form of political representation, and mass imprisonment became a fundamental trope in its trajectory. The organization remained non-operational to a large degree throughout this era until it was revived by the release of Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) in May 1964. During his time in prison, Qutb composed his seminal work, *Maʿālim fī al-Tarīq* (signposts), which provided the ideological guidance for the construction of the 1965 reformulation of the Muslim Brotherhood.[122] Although the Nasserite regime did not immediately react to the reincarnation of the Brotherhood, it briefly recognized its novel approach to militancy inspired by *Maʿālim.* Another wave of mass imprisonment ensued, accompanied by a significant effort by Zaynab al-Ghazālī to reorganize the movement according to the Qutbian worldview. Al-Ghazālī's Society of Muslim Women (SMW) also supported the recently-released Brotherhood prisoners in restructuring the movement. Meanwhile, her personal residence was a popular

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[118] Fawaz A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, 112-3.
[119] Ibid., 115.
[120] Ibid., 119-120.
[121] Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society*, 96.
[122] Ibid., 30.

Brotherhood meeting spot, where seminars and discussions were contravened.[123] Al-Ghazālī also

had an instrumental role in disseminating *Maʿālim,* since Qutb wrote the majority of it during his

imprisonment.[124] Her influence within the Brotherhood's apparatus was more consistent with the

1965 organization, in contrast to the preceding era. Her most significant work, *Ayyām min*

Ḥayātī, which underlined her dedication to the Islamist project, was composed during this

time.[125]

In *Maʿālim*, Qutb conveyed his critique of the contemporary state of affairs that

crystallized in capitalism and communism and their derivative modes of governance. *Maʿālim*

was primarily critical of these ideologies, asserting that they deprive humans of their moral

faculties (akhlāq). For Qutb, the Western world was devoid of values and was unable to provide

an ethical framework for humanity, signifying the need for a new paradigm.[126] Moreover, Qutb

observed the primacy of man-made ideologies in the organization of sociopolitical systems as a

reincarnation of *Jahiliyya*, the state of pre-Islamic ignorance or barbarism. *Jahiliyya* in this sense

was seen as undeniably immoral, but more importantly as the result of a compromise of

ḥakimiyya (God's sovereignty), because it ascribes man-made ideologies with a productive

capacity that enables them to dictate sociopolitical systems, values, and laws. According to Qutb,

this amounted to an overstepping on God's Divine attributes, since this paradigm assigned

sovereignty to man over God's creation.[127] *Maʿālim* suggested that religion should become the

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[123] Azza Karam, *Women, Islamisms, and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 61.
[124] Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and the Pharaoh*, 30.
[125] Kepel uses the term "1965 organization" to refer to the reconstructed structure of the Brotherhood in 1965. See Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and the Pharaoh,* 30-5. Al-Ghazālī wrote *Ayyam min Ḥayātī* when she was imprisoned with Qutb and other brotherhood members in 1965, and she was released in 1971 after the death of Nasser. See Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī* (Days from my Life) (Cairo: Electronically Published by al-Kottob, n.d).
[126] Sayyid Qutb, *Mʿālim fī al-Tarīq* (Signposts) (Cairo: Dār al-Shorouk, 1979), 3-4.
[127] Ibid., 7-9.

only valid source for shaping sociopolitical organization to overcome *Jahiliyya*. Qutb argued that

Islam must become autonomous by being the central domain that produces the limits and dictates

the ontology of all other domains without being called on to do so. Islam must, therefore,

become a paradigm that exclusively superimposes its demands without being susceptible to any

exterior inputs, a hermetically Islamic *modus operandi* so to speak. Any concession to Islam's

autonomy was viewed by Qutb as a compromise of *ḥakimiyya,* which he aligned with idolatry.

Qutb's critique was fundamentally positioned against the Nasserist state in which he

wrote *Maʿālim* in its prisons. He made sure to note that Nasser's regime belonged to the category

of *Jahiliyya*, as manifest in different forms. Among them, he maintained, are regimes that,

> . . . permit people to worship God in synagogues, churches, and mosques, [but] it
> prevents them from demanding that divine law govern their existence: it thus either
> denies God's divine quality on earth or renders it ineffectual. . . This is likewise a
> *jahiliyya* society.[128]

As Kepel points out, Qutb's contemporary society was the one in question in the passage above.

It was a society that exhibited socialism and complemented it with nominal Islam, according to

Qutb.[129] This perspective suggests that societies exist within this binary without medial zones or

grey areas. A society is either fully Islamic or fully *Jahilī*. By asserting that Nasser's regime

belonged to the category of Jahiliyya, Qutb was positioning it outside the limits of Islam, a non-

Islamic society so to speak. It thus needed to be the subject of a new resurrection (*baʿth*) of Islam

(the same way pre-Islamic society was enlightened by the coming of it), which would construct a

hermetically Islamic society on the ruins of its *Jahilī* predecessor. For Qutb, the success of this

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[128] Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and the Pharaoh*, 51.
[129] Ibid., 52.

vision required the dedication of an Islamic vanguard that would take the Quran as its exclusive model and marginalize non-Islamic cultures and ideologies.[130]

The significance of Qutb's worldview lies in it providing the ideological foundations for the Muslim Brotherhood after 1965.[131] *Maʿālim* clearly antagonized the state as its enemy and prescribed a formula for cleansing it from its *Jahilī* conditions. Kepel describes it as a manifesto that aspired to be "both an instrument for the analysis of contemporary society and a guide for a vanguard whose task is to inaugurate the resurrection of the umma."[132] More significantly for this study, the ideas put forth in *Maʿālim* transverse Zaynab al-Ghazālī's work by supplying its theoretical underpinnings. Al-Ghazālī directs her message to a world that she sees through the idiom of Qutb's *Maʿālim*. She follows Qutb's assertion that the world has plundered into *Jahiliyya* once again and could only be salvaged by a new Islamic resurrection (*baʿth*). Such a perspective crystallizes in many of her writings, including her seminal works, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī* and *Naḥw Baʿth Jadīd*.[133] Similarly al-Ghazālī also evokes the idea of an Islamic vanguard that needs to be educated to propel societies out of *Jahiliyya* and back into Islam.[134] Al-Ghazālī is thus embedded in the Qutbian frameworks articulated through *Maʿālim*. Her perception of Qutb as an ideologue who defined the world in which Islamism existed, and attempted to alter it greatly, influenced her thought. The extent of this influence is underlined in al-Ghazālī's work in chapter 2.

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[130] Ibid., 52-4.
[131] Ibid., 37.
[132] Ibid., 46.
[133] For al-Ghazālī's perspective on neo-*Jahiliyya* see Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Naḥw Baʿth Jadīd* (Towards a New Resurrection) (Dār al-Tawzīʿ wa al-Nashr al-Islāmiyya, 2000), 37-55.
[134] For a discussion on creation of the Islamic vanguard, see Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*, 17-8, 20-21.

Conclusion

As evidenced throughout this chapter, the intellectual tradition of Islamic modernism was fundamentally articulated in response to Western ideological and physical encroachment. The result of the changing realities that accompanied colonial penetration prompted Muslim intellectuals to consider the validity of Western epistemologies as a universal law that could sustain the modernization of the Islamic world. Muslim intellectuals sought to reformulate Islamic knowledge through the sphere of Western rationalism and notions of civilization and progress in an effort to emphasize the coherence of Islam in the modern world. Unfortunately, their initial attempt to do so was based on a compromised view of the self as intellectually and practically inferior to the Western other. By the time Mohammad ʿAbduh had popularized Islamic modernism in Egypt, he was already attempting to forward a new structural framework that had the potential to provide Muslims with Islamic answers to modern problems. Although embedded in the tradition of Islamic modernism, ʿAbduh was aware of the need to undercut the hegemony of Western discourse. His approach idealized the spirit of *ijtihad* that defined the early Muslim community, and sought to employ it as a way of overcoming the strictures imposed by modernity. Using this approach, ʿAbduh envisioned a reality where modernity is not limited to emulating European models. However, ʿAbduh's premature death compromised his vision by scattering his legacy between his disciples. The monopoly of ʿAbduh's legacy by Rashīd Riḍa, who allied himself with the Wahhābī movement, eroded much of his reformative logic and literalized the admiration of the righteous forebears. Where ʿAbduh asserted that the forebears' emphasis was on *ijtihād* as the model to follow, Riḍa took the forebears themselves to represent a way of life.

In terms of discourse on women and gender, ʿAbduh's legacy also expressed approaches for negotiating women's public visibility and roles in the private and public domain. As I will discuss in more detail in chapters 2 and 3, the two currents that defined the early perspectives on women's rights derived from ʿAbduh's disciples. Two paradoxical readings of ʿAbduh's ideas concerning women and gender were articulated by Qāsim Amīn and Rashīd Riḍa. Amīn promoted a liberal modernistic framework which contrasted with Riḍa's restrictive outlook. In practice, however, their ideas were separated by politics more than by ideology. Having appropriated the tenets of Islamic modernism from Riḍa, the Muslim Brotherhood realized the space to organize independently and develop its discourse, requiring multifaceted change on socio-political and religious aspects. Despite the Islamist movement being often on the wrong side of the Egyptian government due to its political program, it remained politically operational to some degree even during times of hardship. Nevertheless, with the coming of the Free Officer movement in 1952 and the consolidation of the Nasserite regime's monopoly on independent discourse, the Brotherhood slowly marginalized its political apparatus in favor of a new radical approach. For Nasser and his entourage, the existence of populist groups organizing beyond the outreach of the state's apparatus was not tolerated. This promoted the novel paradigms of Sayyid Qutb, which provided intellectual currency for the Muslim Brotherhood.

As such, the so-called liberal experiment (the period between 1922 and 1952) in Egypt's history could be perceived as a formative era for many of the intellectuals and militants who were active in the years that followed. The cadres whose political and social awareness matured during this liberal period partook in a wide variety of religious, political, and social practices. They witnessed the negotiation of social transformations and the space for political change, witnessing numerous attempts to construct the identity of the self and negotiate the demands

posed by that of the other. For those intellectuals and militants, post-1952 Egypt was an era disconnected from the context in which their ideologies matured. It was a highly politicized environment with limited room for independent political, social and religious expressions. At the same time, the emphasis on militancy and radicalism was increasing, especially within the Islamist movement.

The contextual study above is pivotal to understanding the various forces that influenced the intellectual formulation of Zaynab al-Ghazālī. The surge of militancy that occurred in post-1952 Egypt also had a significant influence on her work and worldview. One could assert that al-Ghazālī was familiar with the discourses of the Islamic modernist and Islamist traditions in Egypt during the early twentieth century. How these influences manifest in al-Ghazālī's work will be examined in the coming chapters, where the historical context delineated above will anchor a grounded understanding of al-Ghazālī's work.

Chapter 2

Politicizing the Narrative: Zaynab al-Ghazālī's Life, Narrative, and Historicity

Zaynab al-Ghazālī's life, both as it is represented by others and projected in her own writing, represents an important element of her discourse. This chapter is divided into two parts: The first delineates the early life of al-Ghazālī, which is commonly underrepresented in Western academic sources. In this section, I outline the Arabic sources that describe her early life, including those that involve personal contributions by al-Ghazālī herself, and I hypothesize new ideas for understanding her narrative. I examine how al-Ghazālī's political agenda pervades the majority of her writing, including her personal narratives. In the second part of the chapter, I examine the militant aspect of al-Ghazālī's life through her memoirs, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*, which I treat as a historical artifact that reflects various sociopolitical forces that impacted its writing and publishing. I contend that *Ayyām min Ḥayātī* cannot only be viewed exclusively as a work of literature, since it intersects with multiple social, political, and religious ideologies. My objective in this chapter is to identify the dominant themes in al-Ghazālī's writing in order to construct a revisionist study of her life and political experience. Through this chapter, I argue that the conscious and unconscious decisions that construct al-Ghazālī's narrative into a discursive tool obfuscate and mystify our understanding of her as a historical figure and perpetuate inaccurate perceptions of her narrative and its historicity.

Before outlining the life of Zaynab al-Ghazālī, I must first briefly address the sources I used to compile this narrative. To my knowledge, there exists no comprehensive biography of Zaynab al-Ghazālī. The book by Amr Farūq, *Banāt al-Murshid,* provides a limited account of al-

Ghazālī's life.[135] It gives a terse overview of her background and does not provide any unique information, as it seems to be entirely based on her memoirs. Anthropologist Saba Mahmood and professor of Islamic studies Valerie J. Hoffman conducted personal interviews with Zaynab al-Ghazālī. Their interviews are relevant to her work and provide a general yet insightful glimpse into her life story and political experience.[136] Although the information available from these interviews is important, they are not comprehensive of al-Ghazālī's early life. Beyond the works discussed, the available material that delineates Zaynab al-Ghazālī's early experiences is her own writing. Here I am referencing a set of books published between the late 1970s and early 1990s that offer fragmented perspectives on her life. Al-Ghazālī's articles, speeches, and papers have been compiled into two edited volumes by the Algerian Islamist Ibn al-Hāshimī. These volumes also include a unique interview with her, in which she discussed her life, in addition to excerpts from articles by her that reference her personal life. Possibly the most famous book by al-Ghazālī is her memoir, *Ayyam min Ḥayātī,* which documents her interlude in prison during the Nasserite Era (1954–1970). Finally, al-Ghazālī succinctly framed narratives from her past in some of her ideologically intensive works, like *Naḥw Baʿth Jadīd* and *Mushkilāt al-Shabab wa al-Fatayāt fī Marḥalat al-Murāhaqa*.[137] Parts of a tape-recorded autobiography by al-Ghazālī are also

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[135] Amr Farūq, *Banāt al-Murshid: al-Qiṣṣa al-Kāmila l-Ṭanẓīm al-Akhawāt min Zaynab al-Ghazālī ʾila Fatayāt 7 al-Subḥ* (Daughter of the Murshid: The Full Story of al-Akhawat from Zaynab al-Ghazali to Fatayat 7 al-Subh)*,* (Cairo: Kunūz lil-Nashr wa al-Tawzīʿ, 2014); also see Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī* (Days from my Life).

[136] Saba Mahmood references her interview with Zaynab al-Ghazālī in Chapter 3 of Politics of Piety. See Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (New Jersy: Princeton University Press, 2011), 67. Valerie J. Hoffman's interview with Zayanb al-Ghazālī also contains relevant information on her life. See Valerie J. Hoffman, "An Islamic Activist: Zaynab al-Ghazali," in *Women and the Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change*, ed. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 233-8.

[137] These following sources contain the majority of the content analyzed in this Chapter; see Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya Zaynab al-Ghazālī*; and *Humūm al-Marʾa al-*Muslima. Also, Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*; Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Naḥw Baʿth Jadīd*; and Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Mushkilāt al-Shabāb w-al-Fatayāt fī Marḥalat al-Murāhaqa*, (The Issues of Male and Female Teenagers) (Cairo: Dār al-Tawzīʿ w-al-Nashrr al-Islāmiyya, 1996).

available online, and appear to be unofficially distributed as it is frequently edited and uploaded by others.[138]

As I outline below, al-Ghazālī claims to have extensively written on women and gender through an Islamic/Islamist lens between 1950 and 1958 in the *Society of Muslim Women's Journal*. She asserts that the Nasserite regime suspended the journal as a part of its efforts to subdue the Muslim Brotherhood, and destroyed all of the printed issues.[139] My attempt to locate any surviving issues was unsuccessful, and to the best of my knowledge, none remain in circulation. The sources I have outlined point to the dearth of resources available on al-Ghazālī's life, most of which are of her own attempts to disseminate her narrative. All these sources were written post-1971, when al-Ghazālī was released from prison during the reign of Anwar Sadat (1970–1981).

Consequently, I suggest that al-Ghazālī exercises a monopoly on narratives surrounding her life, ideology, organization, and militancy. I propose that such a monopoly ultimately shifts our perspective closer to her post-1971 persona and subjectivities. As a result, analyzing and commenting on the historicity of al-Ghazālī's narrative appears to be an increasingly difficult task. The pursuit of historical authenticity is redundant in light of the limitation of sources. The inconsistency of al-Ghazālī's account of different events complicates the issue to a greater degree. Al-Ghazālī's narration of her life story often comes across as a compilation of an assortment of stories combined into an agenda. She seldom reveals the entire narrative all at once and usually relies on emphasizing certain aspects of any given event, depending on the context in which the story is published. By doing so, al-Ghazālī scatters her account across different

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[138] Saba Mahmood references this tape-recorded biography; according to her, it was not officially distributed. See Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety,* 67.
[139] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Mushkilāt al-Shabāb wa-al-Fatayāt*, 17.

channels, which convolutes our ability to combine these histories. Moreover, the dates given for some events do not always line up, and the sequence of events occasionally does not make sense. In my view, this results in a piecemeal effect evoked by al-Ghazālī's narration of her life, which compromises the historicity of her narrative.

To overcome this impasse, I propose to observe al-Ghazālī's construction of her personal narrative as an analytical object in and of itself. Her self-perception and the decisions she employs in constructing her story are the historical artifacts to be studied in this case. The objective behind analyzing this narrative is not to evaluate the occurrence of historical facts. In other words, historicity is no longer an objective here. I propose, rather, that this narrative be analyzed against its author's beliefs and ideologies, which has the potential to facilitate the deconstruction of al-Ghazālī's life.

Model and Mysticism in the early life of Zaynab al-Ghazālī (1917–1930)

Zaynab al-Ghazālī was born on 2 January 1917.[140] Her father was Muhammad al-Ghazālī al-Jubaylī, a well-established cotton merchant who refused to pursue a career in the state bureaucracy.[141] She claims that her father's family comes from the bloodline of ʿUmar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (582/3–644) and al-Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAlī (626–680).[142] Her ancestors are said to have

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[140] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya,* 17.

[141] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima*, 26. Her father is not to be confused with the Egyptian Islamic scholar and Islamist, Muhammad al-Ghazālī al-Saqqa (1917–1996) referenced briefly in chapter 3.

[142] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya*, 17. ʿUmar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was one of the companions of Prophet Muhammad and the second to succeed him after Abu Bakr. Many Muslims idealize him for his justice and piety during his reign; See G. Levi Della Vida and M. Bonner, "ʿUmar (I) b. al- Khaṭṭāb," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), http://dx.doi.org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7707. Al-Husayn ibn ʿAlī was the grandson of Prophet Muhammad and the son of the fourth rightly guided caliph ʿAlī ibn abī Ṭālib and Faṭima bt. Muhammad. He is a venerated figure in both Sunni and Shiʿi Islam. Egyptians (especially Cairenes) consider al-Husayn as a saint. They believe his head is buried in a mausoleum in Old Cairo; See L. Veccia Vaglieri, "(al-) Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition,* P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), http://dx.doi.org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2978.

immigrated to Egypt during the Islamic conquest. Originally, her paternal lineage comes from a village called Jubayl (hence the name Jubaylī), located in the Arabian Peninsula.[143] According to al-Ghazālī, her father, who was an Azharite scholar, was only ever concerned with giving her a comprehensive Islamic upbringing (Tarbiyya Islāmiyyah Mutakāmila). Al-Ghazālī saw her upbringing as pivotal for the adoption of essential Islamic ethics and virtues.[144] Zaynab's father was inspired by the example of the righteous female companions of Prophet Muhammad (ṣaḥābiyyāt) in raising his daughter, and took them as a model for her.[145] Despite him discussing some contemporary female figures with Zaynab, like Huda Shaʿrāwī (1879–1947) and Bahithat al-Bādiyya (1886–1918), she was inclined to idealize the Prophet's companions as her role model.[146] Al-Ghazālī especially resonated with Nusayba bt. Kaʿb.[147]

For Zaynab, her father was undoubtedly the most influential figure during her childhood. She remarked that he was the closest family member to her and that his influence remained significant even after his death.[148] Likewise, Zaynab was very dear to her father, who celebrated her birth as if it were that of a firstborn son. He paid particular attention to her upbringing because he believed she would go on to achieve a lot during her life and have substantial

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[143] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima*, 26.

[144] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya,* 17.

[145] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima*, 26.

[146] Huda Shaʿrāwī is considered by many as a pioneer of the Egyptian women's movement. She galvanized much of the early discourse for women's rights in Egypt and founded one of the foremost women's rights organizations, the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU); for a more comprehensive account of Shaʿrāwī's life, see Sania Sharawi Lanfranchi and John Keith King, *Casting Off the Veil: The Life of Huda Shaarawi, Egypt's First Feminist* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012). Malak Ḥifnī Naṣif, known under her pseudonym Bāhithat al-Bādiyya, was one of the first advocates for Egyptian women's rights. She is widely known for her speech at the club of the nationalist Umma Party; see Charles Kurzman, *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 70-76.

[147] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima*, 27. Nusayba bt. Kaʿb, also known as Umm ʿImara, was one of the early converts to Islam. She participated in many battles with Prophet Muhammad, including the battle of ʾUhud; see Yusuf al-Qaradāwī, *Nisāʾ Muʾmināt* (The Believing Women) (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1990), 65-73.

[148] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima*, 28.

religious achievements.[149] According to Zaynab, her father's intuition about her future was furthered by a *ruʾya* (vision) he received when she was an infant.[150] In the vision, an infant Zaynab falls from her father's hands into a muddy puddle. As he goes to pick her up, another man carries her out and hands her back to him. Although he expected her to be covered in mud, he was surprised to find that she was entirely clean. The man then identified himself as ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.[151]

In al-Ghazālī's perspective, this mystical experience foreshadowed her preeminence and achievements in Islamist activism. Despite it being unclear whether this *ruʾya* inspired or complemented her father's particular attention to her, it could be seen as a foundational event in al-Ghazālī's narrative. In this respect, she was predisposed to become a religious figure by forces transcending human desire. Indeed, *ruʾā* became a consistent trope in al-Ghazālī's narrative and were manifest to her in times of need. Moreover, this event also sets in motion a trend whereby al-Ghazālī's childhood is dominated by male figures (most significantly her father). It is quite intriguing that al-Ghazālī's mother is entirely written out of her narrative. She makes no reference to who her mother was or her role in raising her. The absence of al-Ghazālī's mother from her narrative adds to the contradictions that scholars emphasize when discussing her.[152] Having constantly underscored the centrality of the role of mothers in shaping their children's

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[149] Ibid., 27-8. A common stereotype in Egypt is that a girl's birth is not heavily celebrated by a family the same way a boy's birth is.

[150] *Ruʾya* (plural *ruʾā*) is Arabic for a dream or vision that communicates support or brings glad tidings. It is considered a gift from God to righteous and pious Muslims and is a significant aspect of popular Egyptian religious life. The relevance of *ruʾa* will be discussed more at length below.

[151] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima*, 25.

[152] For a discussion on these contradictions, see Miriam Cooke, "Ayyām min Hayātī: The Prison Memoirs of a Muslim Sister," *Journal of Arabic Literature,* vol.26, no.1/2 (Mar – Jun, 1995): 147-164; see Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 180-5; and See Lucia Carminati, "Zaynab al-Ghazālī's Women, Marriages and Contradictions: Her Life as an Archive," *Al-Raida,* vol.148-149-150 (Winter/Spring/Summer 2015-2016): 70-79.

Islamic consciousness, one might assume that al-Ghazālī would be influenced to a greater degree by her mother.

Al-Ghazālī's account of her childhood is noteworthy because it inspires and informs her work on the role of Islam as a framework and model for childrearing. Among al-Ghazālī's characteristic beliefs is the importance of targeting future mothers with Islamic educational programs as a way of instituting grassroots change. Upcoming generations could not be educated through Islamic frameworks, she insisted, unless their mothers possessed the fundamental principles of Islam. This was seen by al-Ghazālī and many other Islamists as a prerequisite for establishing an Islamic state. As such, I postulate that al-Ghazālī's discussion of her upbringing could be seen as her packaging her experience as evidence of the validity of this framework. Her articulation of her experience is a testament to the importance of a comprehensive religious upbringing to produce pious and religiously observant individuals. In this respect, she draws on her experience and early life as a model for her audiences to follow. As several scholars noted, al-Ghazālī often evokes models (or counter-models), either of her own life or the lives of other religious figures, to argue for the importance and implementation of some of her ideas.[153] In the example above, as in the majority of the work examined throughout this chapter, al-Ghazālī frames her narrative as a way for presenting her argument and reaffirming its validity.

However, scholars that view al-Ghazālī as a role model often overlook the elevated status she ascribed to herself. As demonstrated, she set herself apart from the layman by inferring her

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[153] See Lucia Carminati, "Zaynab al-Ghazālī's Women, Marriages and Contradictions: Her Life as an Archive," 70-9. Marylin Booth offers an extensive analysis of al-Ghazālī's use of models through writing the biographies of religious female figures, see Marylin Booth, *May Her Like Be Multiplied: Autobiography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 289-310. Also, Miriam Cooke suggests al-Ghazālī presented herself as a model in two studies; see Miriam Cooke, "Ayyām min Hayātī: The Prison Memoirs of a Muslim Sister," 147-164 and *Women Claim Islam* (London: Routledge, 2001), 83-107. I disagree with Cooke's argument; however, the grounds for my disagreement will be discussed in chapter 3.

positionality as an eminent religious figure, legitimized by mystical experiences. Her standing as a pious and significant Muslim, therefore, is posited as being not solely the product of her upbringing, because it was predestined. As such, al-Ghazālī was not simply inviting her audience to emulate her experience, given that they lacked the religious validity to do so, but was attempting to underline the validity of her own position and that which she advocates for as the ultimate experience. The end result for all might not be the same religious standing acquired by al-Ghazālī, yet it leads to the fulfillment of one's potential, whatever that may be.

Overall, mysticism is an abundant element in al-Ghazālī's writing. It occurs throughout her narrative in many forms, and manifests as support during crucial life-altering intervals. Al-Ghazālī's use of mysticism is warranted by the significance of mystical or supernatural occurrences in Islamic tradition, particularly in the Egyptian context. *Awliya* (saints), venerable figures, or even ordinary pious Muslims, are often believed to be blessed with divine gifts from God in the form of *karamat* (wonders) or *baraka* (blessing). The manifestation of these gifts automatically presupposes that the individual associated with the gift occupies a distinguished spiritual rank, or possesses hidden religious knowledge.[154] *Ruʾā*, however, remain mystically relevant to a lesser extent, since they are perceived as a more common phenomenon, representing a path into a spiritual dimension that provides insights and guidance.[155] Another possibility for visions is the revelation of divine inspiration, which could potentially transform a person's life.[156] As such, mystical visions symbolize considerable authority in Islamic societies. They represent an absolute form of knowledge that is beyond critique.[157] As Hoffman notes, visions often

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[154] El-Sayed El-Aswad, "Dreams and the Construction of Reality: Symbolic Transformations of the Seen and the Unseen in the Egyptian Imagination," *Anthropos,* vol. 150, no. 2 (2010): 443.
[155] Valerie J. Hoffman, "The Role of Visions in Contemporary Egyptian Religious Life," *Religion,* vol. 27, no. 1 (1997): 46.
[156] El-Sayed El-Aswad, "Dreams and the Construction of Reality," 444.
[157] Valerie J. Hoffman, "The Role of Visions," 59-60.

"remove spiritual teachings from the domain of polemics, and confer spiritual legitimacy on those who lack the proper linkages and social qualifications."[158] In this capacity, visions convey the supremacy of divine knowledge and grant the visionary a form of religious authority. This is especially valid when the vision involves a visitation from a sanctified figure, like the Prophet Muhammad or a famous religious saint.[159] As such, the utilization of mysticism in al-Ghazālī's narrative evokes similar effects, creating religious legitimacy, and denoting al-Ghazālī as a person worthy of receiving divine gifts. Besides consolidating her religious integrity, the use of mysticism by al-Ghazālī's serves her narrative through presenting it in an intelligible syntax easily identifiable by her prospective audiences. Visions and mystical encounters are important facets of popular religious life in Egypt, propelling al-Ghazālī's experience an impetus for her public acceptance and popular legitimacy.

Building on al-Nahḍa in the Egyptian Women's Movements (1900–1952)

During the next phase of al-Ghazālī's life, she was involved with Huda Shaʿrāwī and al-ʾItiḥād al-Nisāʾī al-Miṣrī (The Egyptian Feminist Union, EFU). Before examining her experience in depth, I will first provide a history of Egyptian women's movements, building on the outline of Islamic modernism in chapter 1. The main aim of this section is to properly situate a 'womanist discourse' in the broader dynamics of the early twentieth century, in order to understand the context in which Zaynab al-Ghazālī joined the EFU.[160] It also underlines the continuation of Islamic modernism through the women's movement. I primarily underline the

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[158] Ibid., 59.
[159] El-Sayed El-Aswad, "Dreams and the Construction of Reality," 445.
[160] I follow Sherifa Zuhur in using the term 'womanist' as an adequate translation for the Arabic word *nasawiyya*. Zuhur uses the term to overcome the complexities of the word feminism. The term is helpful to distinguish between the movement in its Egyptian context and Western context, and to avoid any assumptions or unwanted connotations; see Miriam Cooke, "Ayyām min Hayātī: The Prison Memoirs of a Muslim Sister," 149.

most prominent womanist forces in Egypt during the early twentieth century and survey the discourse that led to their development.

As historian Nikki Kiddie notes, Egypt has one of the longest and best documented womanist traditions in the Middle East. Compared to its regional counterparts, the Egyptian women's movement was significantly more diverse and very influential, since it played an important role in inducing change in health, employment, personal status laws, and education for women.[161] In *The Women's Awakening in Egypt,* historian Beth Baron analyzes the early periodicals published to support the discourse on women's rights. These periodicals—which in numerous cases were written by women—solidified the fundamental perceptions that anchored the women's movement over the course of the following century. Consequently, Baron delineates the early rhetoric that allowed the women's movement to flourish after the 1919 revolution. She argues that womanist activism observed after the 1919 revolution, and its success as an organized movement, must be located in a continuum of action that originated in the previous decades.[162]

Since the women's movement primarily expressed its message within the framework of modernization, the importance of religion in articulating the movement's early agenda is significant. In fact, religion remained an important vehicle for mediating modernity and gender throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Egypt. The blurry divide delimiting the distinctions between modernist liberals and Islamists is reflected in much of what was written by Muslim women before 1919. Many authors expressed their ideas on women's rights by appealing to the discourses of one or other of the two camps. The distinctions between both ideologies did not simply correspond to a secular/religious dichotomy. Indeed, both camps

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[161] Nikki R. R. Keddie, *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present*, 89-90.
[162] Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 3-4.

forwarded different (and in some cases oppositional) arguments within the context of Islam.[163]

Such a distinction could be commensurable with the similar trajectory observed among the

disciples of Mohammad ʿAbduh, as explained in chapter 1. However, the differences were more

significant when it came to the political applications of these ideas. Evidently,

> Modernists sought expansion in the realm of education and reform in marriage and
> divorce laws. Islamists, on the other hand, sought enforcement of Islamic laws, including
> women's right to education, but encouraged women to learn the law to know their rights,
> not to modify them. If ideological positions sometimes seemed close, political alliances
> showed sharper distinctions. Islamists were associated with the popular pro-Ottoman
> Watani party, whereas modernists tended to be linked with the liberal Umma party.[164]

In practice, the two camps called for different demands. The modernist liberals wanted to erode

so-called backward practices like tomb visitation and Zār with no intention of instituting Western

alternatives.[165] They advocated for the reformation of family, marriage, and divorce laws, while

maintaining the importance of female modesty and segregation.[166] Islamists, however, believed

that the women's question would be solved (similar to all the other malaises of society) by

resorting to true Islam, which they believed granted women considerable rights that had been lost

because of religious ignorance and decay.[167]

Women's movements in Egypt remained divided along modernist liberal and Islamist

lines after the 1919 revolution. The earliest organized movement calling for women's rights as its

primary agenda after 1919 was Huda Shaʿrāwī's (1879–1947) EFU. Shaʿrāwī's EFU was

considered part of the modernist liberal camp. Conversely, the Islamist position pertaining to

women was amalgamated with the more comprehensive Islamist project of Hasan al-Banna and

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[163] Ibid., 111.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Zār is a popular ceremonial healing ritual practiced to cure patients of mental illness and demonic possession. For an in-depth study of Zār, see Hājir Ḥadīdī, *Zar: Spirit, Possession, Music and Healing Rituals in Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2022).
[166] Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 112-3.
[167] Ibid., 114.

the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood was allied with a few women-led initiatives.[168] In this respect, the most significant affiliate of the Brotherhood was al-Ghazālī's Society of Muslim Women (SMW)—which will be discussed in more dept below. Yet, it must be noted that the SMW was active independently of the Brotherhood as well. The EFU, considered by many as the foremost modernist liberal women's organization of the time, was founded in 1923. It made its first public appearance in May of that year at the International Women Suffrage Alliance Congress in Rome.[169] Shaʿrāwī described her agenda during the conference as a call for the restoration of women's "lost" rights and reclamation of their national Islamic and Pharaonic heritage.[170] The expansion of the women's movement was carefully considered by Egyptian womanists. As Egypt received its nominal independence from Britain in 1922, male nationalists turned their backs on the women's question.[171] These nationalists drew on the movement to popularly back their claims, but their support of the cause diminished post-independence. As such, women realized the importance of organizing a movement independent of other political groups.

The EFU focused on dealing with women within the institution of the family. It called for reforms to the laws organizing the nuclear family, and sought to limit men's exploitation of familial authority. In so doing, the EFU employed the modernist Islamic rhetoric to argue for the religious permissibility of the reforms and enact a shift in opinion for their politically capable male counterparts.[172] The EFU was also concerned with introducing other reforms like women's education, the banning of prostitution, and reforms in health and hygiene. Meanwhile, the legal

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[168] Nikki R. R. Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 90.
[169] Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and the Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 91.
[170] Nikki R. R. Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 92.
[171] Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and the Nation*, 92.
[172] Ibid., 125.

demands the EFU called for were never really instituted.[173] Other practices of the organization revolved around undertaking a plethora of philanthropic projects aiming to serve women and children. Through its vast network and ongoing projects, the EFU consolidated women's organized activism in Egypt to a great degree. Within its ranks came a new generation of politically and socially aware womanists who embarked on their independent mission by creating other womanist entities. Among this generation is the founder of the Bint al-Nīl Union (Daughter of the Nile), Doria Shafīq (1908–1975), founder of Shaqiqāt al-ʾItihād al-Nisāʾī (Sisters of the Feminist Union) Ḥawāʾ Idrīss (1909–1988), and Zaynab al-Ghazālī, among others.[174]

Independent women's activism remained a characteristic of Egyptian urban social and political life for the first half of the twentieth century. However, the space for independent activism diminished with the success of the Free Officer's movement in 1952. The women's movement was affected by the tighter grasp on free social and political action. After Nasser monopolized power, the Nasserite regime was insistent on marginalizing any sociopolitical entity outside its political apparatus. The women's movement was not beyond the reach of the state and was swiftly subdued into a facet of the Nasserite regime.[175] As historian Laura Bier notes, a survey of women's journals shows the effects of Nasser's policies on the women's movement. Only one publication directed toward a female readership existed in 1958, compared to around

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[173] Nikki R. R. Keddie, *Women in the Middle East*, 93.
[174] Doria Shafiq was a member of the EFU. She believed politics must be the central sphere to advance the women's question and established an organization called Bint al-Nīl Union in 1945 to pursue this objective. She was placed under house arrest during the Nasserite era as she criticized the regime for its towering authoritarianism. See Cynthia Nelson, *Doria Shafik, Egyptian Feminist: A Woman Apart* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1996), 211-253. Ḥawāʾ Idrīss was a prominent figure in the EFU. She went on to create Shaqiqāt al-ʾItihād al-Nisāʾī (Sister of the Feminist Union) later in her life. In her edited memoir, she is pictured alongside al-Ghazālī in an event dating to 1952; See Ḥawāʾ Idrīss, *Anā wa al-Sharrq* (the East and I)*, (Cairo: Women and Memory Forum, 2016), 246.
[175] Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 178-9.

ten distinct publications in 1920. *Hawwāʾ* was the last women's journal after *Bint al-Nīl* was terminated because its founder, Doria Shafiq, accused the Nasserite state of authoritarianism.[176]

Zaynab al-Ghazālī in the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) (1933–1936-7)

By the time Zaynab al-Ghazālī's father passed away, she had idealized the parenting style he followed.[177] She adopted the path her father drew for her and decided to become a significant religious figure to honor his memory.[178] However, al-Ghazālī's eldest brother, Saʿd al-Dīn al-Ghazālī, vehemently opposed her continuing her education and kept her home after completing her secondary-level schooling.[179] Frustrated with her brother's decision, al-Ghazālī rebelled and applied for a scholarship offered by the EFU to study politics in France. She was selected by the Union, and left Huda Shaʿrāwī impressed by her knowledge and independence after their first meeting. Al-Ghazālī recalls that during their meeting, Shaʿrāwī expressed her intention to (literally or metaphorically) adopt her. To that al-Ghazālī took great offence and exclaimed, "My father is greater than you; I would never replace him with anyone."[180] Seemingly, al-Ghazālī interpreted Shaʿrāwī's invitation as a nefarious attempt to reformulate her sensibilities.[181] According to al-Ghazalī, a similar encounter took place between her and Taha Hussein (1889–1973), when she similarly rejected his mentorship offer.[182]

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[176] Ibid., 19.

[177] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima,* 26. Al-Ghazālī notes that she was thirteen when her father died.

[178] Ibid., 28.

[179] Ibid., 28-9.

[180] Ibid., 30. It is relevant to note that al-Ghazālī compares Huda Shaʿrāwī to her father not her mother. When Shaʿrāwī proposes her adoption, al-Ghazālī's refusal is linked to her father's importance.

[181] Ibid.

[182] Mahmoud Morgan, "*Al-Ḥajja Zaynab al-Ghazālī,*" 11 March, 2013, YouTube Video, 21:04, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3IW8FL_ZME. Accessed on June 14, 2023. Taha Hussein was an Egyptian writer and educator who was influenced by Muhammad ʿAbduh. He had significant achievements in developing Egyptian educational and cultural institutions; see Hussam Ahmed, *The Last Nahdawi: Taha Hussein and Institution Building in Egypt* (California: Stanford University Press, 2021), 2-41.

Applying for the EFU's scholarship was the first step taken by al-Ghazālī toward joining

the organization. Although she was accepted, a decisive mystical experience changed her

priorities before leaving for France. Al-Ghazālī claimed that she received a *ruʾya* in which her

father asked her not to participate in the scholarship and to remain in Egypt. In the vision, he

informed her that greater plans awaited her in Egypt. This *ruʾya* convinced al-Ghazālī to swiftly

abandon her travel plans. Her decision to do so represented a great disappointment to Shaʿrāwi

who, notwithstanding her frustration, still invited al-Ghazālī to become a permanent member of

the EFU. Al-Ghazālī agreed to join the organization, yet only on the condition that she was

appointed to the executive board. Initially, Shaʿrāwī was hesitant to accept such a condition since

al-Ghazālī was young and inexperienced. However, Shaʿrāwī ultimately upheld al-Ghazālī's

request and supported her bid against EFU members who objected.[183]

It was during her time at the EFU, that Zaynab al-Ghazālī's inclination toward Islamic

activism crystallized. Although she was only a member of the organization for around 2-3 years,

it was at the EFU that al-Ghazālī came into contact with religious figures who ideologically

influenced her. When the EFU decided to establish a set of committees responsible for promoting

women's participation in different activities, al-Ghazālī had some input. According to her, the

Union consciously avoided establishing a religious/Islamic committee. She objected to their

ambivalence and demanded that an Islamic committee be founded. Consequently, she was tasked

with overseeing the creation of an Islamic committee and was appointed as its leader. The

committee was not a popular one among EFU members, since she was the only active member

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[183] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima,* 28,31.

during its formative stages. Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī describes it as one of the most functional and thriving bodies in the EFU.[184]

One of the most considerable shifts in al-Ghazālī's experience occurred during her interlude at al-Azhar as a member of the EFU's Islamic committee, and it was fundamental in shaping her Islamic awareness. When al-Azhar publicized its new initiative offering Islamic instruction to women by organizing afternoon classes, al-Ghazālī was interested to learn more about the project. She suggested that the EFU send a delegation to audit these classes and generate an opinion on the matter. Shaʿrāwī advocated for al-Ghazālī's proposal, and soon a delegation of three EFU members was lined up to pay al-Azhar a visit. It consisted of Zaynab al-Ghazālī, Ḥawāʾ Idrīss, and Nusayba al-Ṭarāwī.[185] According to al-Ghazālī, this marked the first involvement of women in the field of *daʿwa* in the Islamic world.[186] Throughout the delegation's visits, al-Ghazālī would engage in polemics with various Azharite scholars on matters concerning women and *daʿwa*. She was outspoken on these matters and debated with many scholars, which left a good impression on the head of the Preaching and Guidance Office at al-Azhar (Qism al-Waʿẓ wa al-Irshād), Shaykh ʿAbd Rabu Muftāḥ (d.1938).[187]

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[184] Ibid., 31.

[185] One of the discrepancies in al-Ghazālī's conflicting accounts of this event is about who served with her on this committee. In the cited source, she mentions Nusayba al-Ṭarāwī, while in the tape-recorded interview, she claims Ceiza Nabrāwī attended in her stead. Almost no information is available on who al-Ṭarāwī is. On the other hand, Ceiza Nabrāwī was an influential womanist figure who removed her face veil with Huda Shaʿrāwī in 1923. She was an editor for the EFU's periodical, *L'Egyptienne* and attended many conferences as an EFU member; see Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 279-281.

[186] In Islam, *al-daʿwa* is the call addressed to humanity by God to believe in Islam. It represents an invitation to non-Muslims to convert; see M. Cannard, "Daʿwa," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition,* P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), http://dx.doi.org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1739. In Islamist literature, it is synonymous with the call for establishing an Islamic state and is often employed as a motif to articulate the Islamist project, a facet of Islamic belief.

[187] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima,* 32.

Although al-Ghazālī was convinced of her opinions when she debated the scholars, her perspective changed when she met Shaykh Muḥammad Sulaymān al-Najjār. She resonated strongly with al-Najjār's sincere and passionate religiosity.[188] Despite his influence not being well illustrated by al-Ghazālī, she mentions that he was one of the conclusive forces in her departure from the EFU. After their initial meeting, al-Ghazālī and al-Najjār agreed on a dynamic that would allow both of them to present their ideas to one another in a study group. Al-Najjār had six weeks of uninterrupted lecturing to propose his ideas to al-Ghazālī. After this, al-Ghazālī would get the same amount of time to respond with her ideas. The rest of the EFU delegation disagreed with this proposition and withdrew from participating in the project.[189]

This era marked the final moments of al-Ghazālī's membership in the EFU. Toward the end of this intermission, al-Ghazālī was exposed to a housefire, which afflicted her with injuries that were so severe that her doctor questioned her ability to fully recover. The chronology of this part of her narrative is not precise; however, two mystical experiences necessitated her departure from the EFU. In the first, al-Ghazālī was greeted by her father who reassured her that she would have a long and prosperous life.[190] Meanwhile, she had also committed a *nadhr* (vow) through which she pledged to dedicate herself to spreading a womanist awakening (*nahḍa*) through an Islamic framework if God was to grace her with a full recovery. [191] Following this vow, al-Ghazālī made an unexpected recovery in record time, described as miraculous by her doctor. She fulfilled her vow in resigning from the EFU and founding the SMW in 1936-1937.[192]

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[188] Ibid., 34.
[189] Ibid., 33.
[190] Ibid., 34.
[191] Another common theme in Egyptian religious life, a *nadhr*, is a religious transaction where a person vows to undertake good deeds or leave sinful acts in the hope of God fulfilling specific prayers.
[192] Al-Ghazālī gives two different dates for the establishment of the SMW. See Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima,* 29; and Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Mushkilāt al-Shabāb w-al-Fatayāt*, 17.

Transcending Secular Womanism? Al-Ghazālī Establishing the Society of Muslim Women

The Society of Muslim Women (SMW) was a womanist organization that operated through religious frameworks and was involved in a diverse set of practices. Al-Ghazālī cited the principal activities of the SMW in multiple articles. The association adopted the characteristics of a political party and a philanthropic association simultaneously. First and foremost, the Society of Muslim Women emphasized the importance of spreading religious awareness between Muslim women. It focused on educating women on their history (most likely the history of key Muslim Figures) and raised awareness of their religious and social duties. The association also created an educational program that offered mentorship and training to women in the field of proselytizing, and qualified them to work in *da ʿwa*.[193] The SMW also undertook different activities that focused on social reform and philanthropy like jalasāt ʿurfiyya (conflict resolution and arbitration), marriage facilitation, and social rehabilitation.[194] The organization was similarly concerned with undertaking welfare programs that targeted orphans, the sick and needy.[195]

Among the SMW's most important activities was organizing a yearly pilgrimage congregation that traveled to Mecca headed by al-Ghazālī. These delegations convened with pilgrims from around the Muslim world. The goal was to engage in reformative discourse to revive the Muslim umma and restore it to its historic prominence. These ideas were constantly discussed within the sphere of reinstituting the Caliphate or Islamic statehood.[196] This was in line with al-Ghazālī's belief that the SMW should have political contributions. As she noted, "it [the Society of Muslim Women] disagreed with the majority of the other political parties in that it

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[193] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima,* 29.
[194] Al-jalasāt al-ʿurfiyyah is a form of informal popular conflict arbitration in Egypt. The arbiter is usually a distinguishable local religious, political, or social figure known to be wise and just. Al-Ghazālī's assertion conveys to the reader the popular perception of her social and religious legitimacy.
[195] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Mushkilāt al-Shabāb w-al-Fatayāt*, 17.
[196] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya,* 18.

called for Egypt to be ruled according to *Sharīʿa*," which suggested that the association opted to address the political conditions it contested.[197] The SMW called for the rule of *Sharīʿa* in Egypt and all Muslim countries, in addition to the return of people to the Quran and Sunna.[198] In addition to proselytizing, the association relied on its weekly journal, *Majallat al-Sayyidāt al-Muslimāt* (The Muslim Women's Journal), to disseminate its ideas and address its followers. The SMW's journal was published between 1950 and 1958, when it was suspended under the order of Gamal Abdel Nasser.[199] In 1964, Nasser issued a decree banning the SMW and confiscating all of its assets. Shortly after, Zaynab al-Ghazālī herself was arrested. According to her, the SMW had around 119 offices all over Egypt by the time of its termination.[200]

Despite formally resigning from the EFU and establishing the SMW, al-Ghazālī did not immediately sever relations with the organization and the broader network of secular women's movements.[201] Throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, women's movements reacted to the general political climate in Egypt by becoming more militant.[202] By then, al-Ghazālī had secured the position of the SMW among the cohort of womanist organizations in Egypt. By doing so, she was looking to realize the potential of engaging in politics alongside other womanist organizations regardless of ideological incompatibility. Although al-Ghazālī's departure from the EFU was abrupt, as she describes herself, she remained well connected through the networks of

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[197] Ibid.

[198] Ibid.

[199] The crackdown on the SMW's journal and the eventual termination of the association, in addition to the imprisonment of al-Ghazālī, coincides with the Nasserite regime's persecution of the Muslim Brotherhood, see chapter 1.

[200] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Mushkilāt al-Shabāb wa-al-Fatayāt*, 17.

[201] I use the term secular to denote womanist movements that do not organize under politico-religious frameworks, which means non-Islamist movements in this context. My use of the word is inclusive of all non-Islamist women's movements in Egypt, as it does not limit the term to modernist and liberal organizations, nor exclude leftist and socialist organizations.

[202] Nadje al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 66.

the Egyptian women's movement. Her ongoing contact with and cooptation of the secular

women's movement suggests that by creating the SMW, al-Ghazālī was not exhaustively

rejecting other organizations. Despite being at odds with many of these groups ideologically, Al-

Ghazālī remained open to collaborating with them when there were potential benefits,

particularly in the contexts of nationalism and anti-Zionism.[203]

Shortly after leaving the EFU, al-Ghazālī participated in the Conference of Eastern

Women for the Defense of Palestine.[204] She delivered a speech at the conference and joined the

women's delegation to the International Parliamentary Conference in 1938. The delegation

included well-known womanist figures like Huda Shaʿrāwī, Ceiza Nabrāwī (1897–1985), Doria

Shafiq, and Ḥawāʾ Idrīss.[205] In her speech at the conference, al-Ghazālī called for men and

women to combine their voices as a means of returning the East to its past glories. She concluded

by demanding that Arab women must take their history as an example and penetrate the sphere of

public employment and *jihad*.[206]

Unsurprisingly, al-Ghazālī's cooperation with other women's organizations did not end in

1938, as she sporadically participated in rallies alongside leftist groups. For example, in 1947, al-

Ghazālī joined ranks with the leftist Rabiṭat Fatayāt al-Mʿāhid wa al-Jāmiʿāt (Union of Colleges

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[203] Margot Badran, "Competing Agenda: Feminists, Islam and the State in 19th and 20th Century Egypt," in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (London: Macmillan Press, 1991), 210.

[204] This conference was held between 15 and 18 October 1938 in the headquarters of the EFU. The conference discussed means to support Palestine and Palestinian women against the Zionist movement; see conference proceedings; The Egyptian Feminist Union, *al-Marʾa al-ʿArabiyya wa Qaḍiyat Filisṭīn: al-Muʾtamar al-Nisāʾī al-Sharqī, 15-18 October* (Cairo: Al-Maṭbaʿah al-ʿAṣṣriya b-Miṣr, 1938).

[205] The Egyptian Feminist Union, *al-Marʾa al-ʿArabiyya wa Qaḍiyat Filisṭīn*, 41.

[206] Ibid., 142-43.

and University Young Women) to organize a demonstration in support of Palestine.[207] Similar to the conference, it was an anti-Zionist protest that also voiced demands for gender equality.[208] Moreover, the nationalist movement also offered space for cooperation between al-Ghazālī and secular women's movements. Through al-Lajna al-Nisāʾiyya lil Muqāwama al-Shaʿbiyya (The Women's Committee for Popular Resistance), al-Ghazālī coopted the support of leftist womanists like Injī Aflaṭūn (1924–1989).[209] The Committee supported the nationalist movement in 1952 after the war between the British colonial army and the Egyptian resistance in the Suez Canal Zone.[210] Such a collaboration with the secular women's movement illustrates a gradual change in al-Ghazālī's perspectives toward them. It was not until her release from prison in 1971 that al-Ghazālī started to openly reject and challenge these collectives.

After 1971, critique of the women's movement was central to al-Ghazālī's discourse. By then her perspective had shifted, and she blamed the movement for precipitating the moral depravity she observed during her captivity in al-Qanāṭir Prison. As al-Ghazālī outlined in her memoir, she believed that the women's movement had turned them into a "lost troop of wandering humanity in the depths of ignorance [who have] forgotten their humanity, purity, chastity, and nobility and become animals."[211] Her rejection was acute in an article composed in

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[207] Rabiṭat Fatayāt al-Mʿāhid w-al-Jāmiʿāt was a leftist initiative created by a group of university graduates. The main objective of the Union was to send a delegation to the Women's International Democratic Federation conference held in Paris in 1945. It remained a leftist group and had to reorganize under different names to escape the state's hostility toward leftist organizations between 1946 and 1950. See Akram Khater & Cynthia Nelson, "Al-Harakah al-Nissaʾiyah: The Women's Movement and Political Participation in Modern Egypt," *Women Studies International Forum*, vol. 11, no. 5, (1988): 465-483.

[208] Ibid., 474.

[209] Injī Aflatūn was an Egyptian Marxist who participated in numerous leftist women's organizations. She was also an acclaimed artist. See Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, *Opening the Gates*, 343-51.

[210] Margot Badran, "Competing Agenda," 213.

[211] Miriam Cooke, "Zaynab al-Ghazālī: Saint or Subversive?," *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 34, no. 1 (April 1994): 16; also see Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*, 101.

1981, in which she accused Huda Shaʿrāwī (who by then had been dead for 34 years) of corrupting the values of Muslim women, and being an aide for Zionist and Christian agendas.[212]

Al-Ghazālī's advocacy for women's public employment and gender equality could be seen as being paradoxical to her post-1971 works (see chapter 3 for a breakdown of her arguments concerning women's roles). Her speech at the 1938 conference, and participation in rallies alongside other womanists, infers that at this point in the history of the SMW, al-Ghazālī had not yet repudiated the modernist and secular discourses of the Egyptian women's movement. On the contrary, her perspectives aligned with many of the ideologies advocated by other secular women's organizations. This substantiates two perspectives that I forward in this thesis: The first relates to the monopoly al-Ghazālī exercises over her own narrative. Although al-Ghazālī might lead us to believe that her departure from the EFU was ideologically and practically confrontational and abrupt, it appears that in reality it was far more gradual. Al-Ghazālī's creation of the SMW did not entail an instant rejection of secular womanist values, nor the articulation of an Islamist alternative from the outset. This analysis highlights the way in which al-Ghazālī dictated her experiences as an ideological utility. The reliance on al-Ghazālī's own narrative to understand her work and character thus results in a skewed perception. Al-Ghazālī often projected her post-1971 beliefs onto her past to construct a more powerful self-history. The product of this dynamic is the distortion of our understanding of her. Additionally, this analysis corroborates Baron's argument about the overlap between modernist liberal and Islamist women's movements in Egypt. As Baron suggests, the differences lay in the political programs adopted by each camp, which fundamentally explains why it was not until al-Ghazālī subscribed to the Muslim Brotherhood's political regime that she started to transform her discourse.

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[212] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya,* 58.

Building on this, the second perspective, which will be presented in chapter 3, deals with the centrality of women's domestic roles to the Islamist project. As I show, al-Ghazālī's call for women to observe their domestic roles was not motivated by a quest to reinstate religious authenticity, as she claims, but as a method for constructing a political program. Again, her early interactions with the secular women's movement show that in the absence of the demands dictated by a political program, she does not problematize women's public visibility.

Re-reading Zaynab al-Ghazālī's Marriages

Zaynab al-Ghazālī was married twice. Her first marriage was to al-Imām Muhammad al-Ḥafeẓ al-Tījānī (1896–1978), a Ḥadīth scholar and the exalted Shaykh of the Tījāniyya Sufi order.[213] Her second husband was Muhammad Salem, an influential businessman and a Muslim Brotherhood sympathizer.[214] Al-Ghazālī does not elaborately discuss Imām al-Tījānī in her writing, she only mentions that their short-lived marriage fell apart due to al-Tījānī disapproving of her political and religious activism with the Brotherhood.[215] Her account largely omits the role al-Tījānī played in establishing the Muslim Brotherhood, in addition to his importance to the Sufi tradition in Egypt as the leader of one of the most significant mystical orders. Conversely, al-Ghazālī discusses her relationship with Muhammad Salem more extensively. Having met him through her work in *daʿwa*, Salem expressed his interest in marrying al-Ghazālī, to which she agreed. Her agreement, however, was conditional, as it depended on Salem not interfering with her "Islamic work," either directly or indirectly. If he had any demands that posed a risk on al-

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[213] Al-ṭarīqa al-Tījaniyya is a Sufi order that was created in eighteenth-century Algeria and quickly expanded throughout the maghrib and North Africa; see Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, "Tidjāniyya," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition,* P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), http://dx.doi.org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7537.
[214] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima*, 34.
[215] Ibid.

Ghazālī's pursuit of *da ʿwa*, their marriage would come to an end at once.[216] In this respect, al-Ghazālī prioritized her obligation to the *da ʿwa* over her marriages. The way al-Ghazālī illustrates her interactions with her husband positions her as an authority in their marriage, as he constantly submits to her demands.[217]

Al-Ghazālī's marriage to Salem ended in 1965 when the Nasserite regime imprisoned her and sentenced her to twenty-five years in prison. According to her memoirs, the prison authorities used her marriage as a pressure tool to provoke her. At that moment, al-Ghazālī received another *ruʾya*. Shortly after she was sentenced to prison, she dreamt that she read her husband's obituary in the newspaper, only to wake up to the news of his passing.[218] She claimed that the Nasserite regime coerced her husband, Salem, to commit perjury against her and even detained him when he refused. Only if he divorced al-Ghazālī, she asserted, would the regime allow his release.[219] Salem forcefully agreed to the regime's demands, yet, he later petitioned the court to reverse the divorce.[220] These conditions, alongside al-Ghazālī's unjust prison sentence, took a toll on his deteriorating health and eventually led to his death.[221]

Soon, another *ruʾya* complemented these difficult personal circumstances, this time involving Prophet Muhammad, his wife Aisha (613/14–678), and Hassan al-Hudaybī.[222] In the vision, al-Ghazālī witnesses the Prophet exclaiming, "*ṣabbran*" (patience) to Aisha, who was

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[216] Ibid., 35.
[217] Ibid., See the referenced source for an account of al-Ghazālī's interactions with her husband, where she portrays him as submissive.
[218] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī,* 97.
[219] Ibid., 98.
[220] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima*, 36.
[221] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī,* 98.
[222] Aisha was the third and favorite wife of Prophet Muhammad. Muslims commonly refer to her as ʾUmm al-Muʾmynīn (mother of the believers); see W. Montgomery Watt, "ʿĀʾisha Bint Abī Bakr," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition,* P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), http://dx.doi.org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0440.

standing next to her and al-Hudaybī.[223] Here, patience appears to be the underlying virtue

intended from this mystical experience. For al-Ghazālī, the vision represented some form of

support by invoking the importance of perseverance and inspiring a mode of action. As a

mystical experience, it furthers the impression that al-Ghazālī is being guided on her path of

Islamist activism through mystical and metaphysical inspiration, which has religious and

authoritative implications.

 Strictly speaking, al-Ghazālī firmly separated between her actions in her personal

marriages, and the norms she believed should determine how Muslim women must conduct

themselves in matrimony. She explained her ability to do so by citing a set of favorable

circumstances that enabled her to loosen her marital and domestic obligations and pursue

Islamist activities. For example, al-Ghazālī perceived not having children of her own as a "great

blessing which would not usually be considered a blessing."[224] Although she is sure not many

people would agree with this perspective, al-Ghazālī claims that not being restricted by having a

family was instrumental in her ability to pursue her work. Similarly, she perceived her second

husband's polygamy in the same light. Al-Ghazālī was free from wifely duties during her

husband's visits to his other wives, which meant she had more space to work. Housework was

also not a concern for al-Ghazālī because her husband was wealthy, which afforded her to hire

servants to help.[225] While al-Ghazālī was always conscious of her obligation to obey her

husband, this obligation was superseded by the *daʿwa* imperative, especially during decisive

junctures in the history of the Islamist project.[226]

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[223] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī,* 98.
[224] Valerie J. Hoffman, "Muslim Fundamentalisms: A Psychosocial Profile," in *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, edited by Martin E. Marty & Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 216.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Zaynab al-Ghazālī & Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima*, 36.

Moreover, al-Ghazāli often used the institution of marriage as an entry point to critique and reform gender roles through Islamist frameworks. As I will discuss in chapter 3, marriage was one of the fundamental spheres that al-Ghazālī sought to reform and utilized to disseminate her reformative agenda. She believed that marriage was a fundamental building block in establishing an Islamic state. However, such a fundamental institution was always eclipsed by Islamist activism in her personal experience. Al-Ghazālī's marriages exemplify one of the contradictions that define her for many academics and motivate much of the scholarly attention that has been paid to her. I contend that, in order to fully understand al-Ghazālī's illustration of her marriages, we first need to analyze their importance to her political agenda. My contention is driven by the peripheral significance certain scholars ascribe to the effects of al-Ghazālī's involvement in a political framework that calls for Islamic statehood. For example, Saba Mahmood postulates that the unconventional authority retained by al-Ghazālī in her marriages was a product of the context within which her political awareness matured. The extensive discourse on women's rights in Egypt in the early twentieth century crystallized al-Ghazālī's awareness of the juristic options available for women in Muslim Marriages.[227] Due to this context, Mahmood argues, al-Ghazālī possessed specialized knowledge in the religious laws governing Muslim marriage and therefore had the ability to find space for more flexible conditions and particularities. Literary scholar Miriam Cooke suggests that the divergence between al-Ghazālī's actions and her agenda could be understood as a form of "contradictory consciousness." This manifests in her ideological acceptance of normative Islamic frameworks, while exhibiting alternative potential models through her personal actions.[228] Moreover, Professor of Islamic Studies Ibrahim Olatunde Uthman argues that al-Ghazālī's marriages must

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[227] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety,* 183.
[228] Miriam Cooke, "Ayyām min Hayātī: The Prison Memoirs of a Muslim Sister," 161.

be examined within the frameworks of reformative action that emerges from the rejection of preexisting norms. He explains her divorce from her first husband as a challenge of the objectification and subjugation of women by 'establishment Islam'. Along similar lines, her ability to stipulate conditions in her second marriage must be seen as a way of realizing an authentic Islam, independent of alien intrusions and ignorance.[229]

While the opinions showcased above represent substantial academic conclusions that attempt to provide a grounded reading of al-Ghazālī, they all seem to be entangled in a compartmentalized approach that views different elements of her life and ideology separately.[230] These analyses place the emphasis on deconstructing the paradox evident in al-Ghazālī's actions through a framework that only accounts for gender and socio-religious inputs. While such a paradigm can provide important conclusions, it also speaks to the preoccupation of scholars, especially in the West, with the assumption that the relationship between Islam and women's gender roles is problematic to begin with. Because of this assumption, significant scholarly attention has been diverted to exclusively investigate this relationship, with little acknowledgment given to other relevant factors, including Islamist politics. By resorting to such a depoliticized approach, the effects of al-Ghazālī's political agenda are marginalized which leads to an incomplete understanding of her ideas and imperatives. Although al-Ghazālī's

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[229] Ibrahim Olatunde Uthman, "A Triadic Re-reading of Zaynab al-Ghazali and the Feminist Movement in Islam," *Islamic Studies,* vol. 49, no.1, (Spring 2010): 72. By discussing al-Ghazālī's stipulations in her marriage contract, Uthman is referring to her prioritizing of the Islamist project over her marital obligations discussed above. According to al-Ghazālī, her conditions to agree to the marriage were added to her marriage contract.
[230] Without a doubt, it is important to acknowledge the diverse scholarly traditions and schools of thought that inform the works of Mahmood, Cooke and Uthman. While these scholars proffer different interpretations and analyses of al-Ghazālī based on their understanding of the relationship between women, gender, and Islam, it is noteworthy to highlight the overlap in their approach. Despite their ideological differences, a commonality emerges wherein these scholars engage in a depoliticized reading of al-Ghazālī's gender agenda by not considering how her ideas were influenced by Islamist politics.

marriages could be seen as personal events that do not encompass a political meaning, I hold that her discussion of these events through her works is highly politicized.

To explain al-Ghazālī's exceptional subversion of 'normative' gender roles in comparison to other women, we must understand her political devotion to the Islamist project, i.e. Islamic statehood. Al-Ghazālī consistently communicated the primacy of the Islamist project to her husband, which secured her right to pursue public work at the expense of her 'domestic duties.' The importance al-Ghazālī ascribes to herself for the fruition of the Islamist program, in this case, represents the greatest justification for her subversion of 'normative' gender roles. Not only is she involved with the Muslim Brotherhood, which she claims every Muslim must be a member of, or else run the risk of being a 'deficient Muslim', but she also possesses a high level of religious legitimacy, as communicated through her mystical repertoire.[231] As a result, al-Ghazālī's particular case does not characterize a model for other women, whom she maintains must remain observant of their domestic duties. As I argue in chapter 3, the Islamist call for Muslim women to adhere to their domestic roles was part of a wider plan to incur grassroots change and press for Islamic statehood. The Islamist political program, as such, poses a fundamental demand for how the Muslim woman is being produced, whether through militancy and the subversion of 'normative' gender roles as in the case of al-Ghazālī, or through honoring women's domestic roles in the case of the laywoman.

Militancy and Imprisonment: Contextualizing *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*

The next interval of Zaynab al-Ghazālī's life, which spanned from 1965 to 1971, was discussed in her memoire *Ayyam min Ḥayātī,* and is characterized by militancy and political

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[231] Valerie J. Hoffman, "An Islamic Activist," 235.

dissidence. *Ayyām min Ḥayātī* is often seen as a valid entry point to al-Ghazālī's worldview and discourse. A significant portion of scholarship studying al-Ghazālī builds on this work as a fundamental primary source. In the forthcoming section of this chapter, I critically engage with *Ayyām min Ḥayātī,* while maintaining that it needs to be appropriately contextualized before unpacking the historical, political, and personal dimensions of the text. Following a failed alliance with the Nasserite regime, the Muslim Brotherhood was forced to return to operating underground, and its members were subject to the state's surveillance and coercion. Al-Ghazālī's memoir, which was published in 1978, chronicles her experiences during this period.[232] It opens with her account of the regime's attempt to appropriate the Society of Muslim Women and repackage it as a form of state feminism. This overlapped with the Nasserite regime's strict policies on independent discourse, as discussed above (also see chapter 2). Al-Ghazālī's refusal of the regime's advances positioned her as an enemy of the state, and she was eventually imprisoned. Her position was exacerbated by her already being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the early pages of *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*, al-Ghazālī discusses the last days leading up to her imprisonment, including a description of the gradual injustice and subjugation exercised by the Nasserite regime against her and the Brotherhood.[233]

In 1965, al-Ghazālī was imprisoned with many other Muslim Brotherhood members. Her experience in the notorious 'War Prison in Cairo'—where she was detained in the same quarters as male prisoners—is the centerpiece of her memoirs. The various methods of physical, psychological, and sexual torture endured by al-Ghazālī stand out throughout the text. Following

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[232] According to Miriam Cooke, Zaynab al-Ghazālī published her memoirs in 1972. However, the earliest editions I found evidence of in circulation date back to 1978. It is certain that al-Ghazālī composed her memoirs between these dates, however, I opted to settle for the later date of publishing, since it is more plausible within the context discussed below; see Miriam Cooke, "Zaynab al-Ghazālī: Saint or Subversive?," 2.
[233] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*, 4-11.

her trial, she was transferred to the women's facility in al-Qanāṭir Prison. Unlike the War Prison, al-Qanāṭir was an ordinary prison with separate quarters housing women and no rooms for torture. Despite the fact that these conditions seem fairly pleasant compared to the horrors of the War Prison, al-Ghazālī believed that al-Qanāṭir represented a new form of hardship. In her perspective, the immorality and corruption prevalent between the inmates there represented a hostile environment that surpassed the War Prison in terms of suffering. For al-Ghazālī, the animal-like women she encountered in al-Qanāṭir were lost in their vast ignorance and degeneracy, which she saw as being precipitated by the women's movements and their call for emancipation and gender equality, particularly the abandonment of their domestic roles.[234] This idea will be examined further in chapter 3.

Theoretically, memoirs/autobiographies convey considerable complexities when they are used as analytical objects.[235] These bodies of text tend to represent different meanings depending on the reader and their analytical approach. Often historians contend that memoirs/autobiographies are the product of a diachronic process, meaning that the composition of this genre of writing is not informed by a single context but evokes, and even blurs, the lines between multiple separate temporalities. Although memoirs/autobiographies typically claim to represent a certain point in history, their composition at a later date often infers that they are subject to other temporal possibilities.[236] In this respect, the "autobiographical pact" is broken once memoirs/autobiographies are viewed as analytical objects.[237] The critical viewer is no

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[234] Miriam Cooke, "Zaynab al-Ghazālī: Saint or Subversive?," 16; also see Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*, 101-8.

[235] Penny Summerfield points out that, in theory, autobiographies are texts discussing a person's whole life, while memoirs recount a small segment or experience. In reality, the two terms are used interchangeably. See Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice,* (London: Routledge, 2019), 78.

[236] Ibid., 99.

[237] Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self,* 81. The autobiographical pact is an implicit acknowledgment between the writer of a memoir/autobiography and the reader that the text's contents are trustworthy.

longer convinced that the protagonist of the memoirs/autobiography—the memoirist—represents the objective persona of the author. In other words, the text loses its referentiality. However, this approach does not necessarily mean that memoirs/autobiographies equate to a work of fiction. On the contrary, it assumes that there are layers of subjectivity effectively mediating the author's account through the text. Thus, the author is not simply retelling but constructing a narrative through a series of conscious and unconscious decisions.[238] As such, memoirs/autobiographies become an artifact that reflects how people perceive their lives instead of factual evidence of what their lives were like.[239] Some historians who attempt to locate such perceptions accurately use the memoirists as an entry point to shape their inquiry. This is achieved by attempting to reconstruct what the narrative in question represented for the memoirist as a first step to examining their subjectivities.[240] In this methodological framework, key considerations are used to critically structure the analysis. The first of which was outlined above, and has to do with the diachronic qualities of memoirs/autobiographies. Indeed, memoirs/autobiographies are influenced by the norms and sensibilities of the time of composition.[241] Analyzing the narrative against the context of its composition would, in this case, reveal the multiple meanings and underlying dynamics of memoirs/autobiographies.[242] Another important consideration are the interconnected forces that make it possible for memoirs/autobiographies to be written and published, which involves prospective audiences, publisher, sponsors, and editors.[243] All of these stakeholders represent potential influences that could shape the composition of the work. As Summerfield points out, some historians, in their inquiries into memoirs/autobiographies, build

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[238] Ibid., 86.
[239] Ibid., 81.
[240] Ibid., 82.
[241] Ibid., 88.
[242] Ibid., 89.
[243] Ibid., 91.

up a suspicion of the author's choices in tandem with publishing policy and prospective audiences. They propose that some authors might adjust or exaggerate their experiences to accommodate a wider audience or maximize their sales.[244]

Building on this theoretical framework for understanding and analyzing memoirs/autobiographies, it is important to probe the different themes emphasized by al-Ghazālī herself in order to better analyze *Ayyam min Ḥayātī*. In my discussion of al-Ghazālī's life, I have proposed a few ideas that underline how al-Ghazālī's subjectivity manifests in her use and monopolization of her own narrative. Additionally, I situate *Ayyām min Ḥayātī* within its sociopolitical context to understand how this shaped its composition, publishing, and distribution. Similarly, the intended audience of the text will be called into question to further scrutinize its imperatives.

The choices taken by al-Ghazālī in composing her memoirs occurred in a broader sociopolitical context, and within the proliferation of Islamist literature throughout the 1970s in Egypt. As political scientist Hesham Sallam argues in his study of Islamist incorporation policies in Sadat's Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood was implicated in a sociopolitical plan by the Sadat regime.[245] The Brotherhood was allowed political visibility and afforded the autonomy to operate without restriction as the state's ability to keep up with the "Nasserist Social Pact" diminished. Connecting these two dynamics was the regime's need to erode the social and political clout of leftist currents in Egypt. Remnant forces of Nasser's Arab Socialism did not take lightly to the state's abandonment of redistributive policies and its resort to economic liberalization, commonly referred to as *Infitah*. Sadat's regime hoped that Islamists would help neutralize their leftist

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[244] Ibid., 91.
[245] Hesham Sallam, *Classless Politics* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2022), 16-17.

opponents as they became more significant political actors.[246] Therefore, the importance of Islamist politics ran in parallel to the declining economic conditions. Such a correlation was evident in the increased need for Islamist penetration into Egyptian politics after the 1977 Bread Riots. The riots were in protest over price increases in essential commodities. They embodied popular disapproval of the *Infitah* policies and underlined the potential for leftist mobilization and capitalization on the deteriorating economic conditions.[247] The regime perceived the riots as a marker of incomplete de-Nasserization and publicly criticized the Communist radicals who harvested economic difficulties for political gain.[248]

Early editions of *Ayyām min Ḥayātī* were swarming bookstore shelves during the aftermath of the Bread Riots in 1978. The memoirs depicted Nasser as a disbelieving tyrant who rejected Islam.[249] Moreover, al-Ghazālī's disapproval was essentially ideological, since it strongly condemned Nasser's secularism and Arab Socialism which she readily described as Communist. This discourse goes hand-in-hand throughout the memoirs with imagery that illustrates the old regime's evil character. The conflict between al-Ghazālī and the Nasserite regime was presented through the idiom of good versus evil, with the prisoners described as *atqiyāʾ* (pious) and the jailers as *shayāṭīn* (devils).[250] The War Prison is portrayed as hell, an endless continuation of torture that could only be halted by Nasser's orders, guarded by *zabāniyya*, the protectors of hell in Islam.[251] The reference to Islamic tropes of good and evil to structure her memoirs was a general approach used by al-Ghazālī throughout *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*.

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[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid., 50.
[248] Ibid., 65-66.
[249] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*, 18.
[250] Marilyn Booth, "Women's Prison Memoirs in Egypt and Elsewhere: Prison, Gender, Praxis," *MERIP Middle East Report*, no. 149, (Nov. – Dec. 1987): 39.
[251] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*, 45-9.

Not only did it serve her sociopolitical goals, but it also evoked the newly-constructed religious identity that fueled Sadat's de-Nasserization policies. Sadat described his vision for Egypt as the "State of Science and Faith," suggesting that the path toward modernization was a product of Egypt's Islamic heritage combined with technological advancements.[252] Through the media, he assumed the title of *al-raʾīs al-muʾmin* (the believing president), which served this narrative and furthered the Islamic identity he wished to endorse.[253] For Islamists like al-Ghazālī, Sadat's policies represented an ideal opportunity to disseminate their work, since it aligned with the state's new identity and enabled them to cultivate sizable political gains. According to Sallam, the Islamists were well aware of their role in marginalizing the left and were determined to please the state.[254] This being the case, al-Ghazālī's memoirs could be understood as a political tool within this context. It is certain that al-Ghazālī benefited from the increased freedom Sadat gave to Islamist movements, and consequently positioned her memoirs in such a way as to secure considerable political returns. This assumption opens possibilities for investigating the existence of various exaggerations and inaccuracies used to further political agendas throughout the text.

Zaynab al-Ghazālī prefaces her memoirs with a founding text that explains to her reader the positionality of the work. She begins with a dedication to Islamist martyrs and those who were tortured on their path of *jihād*.[255] She employs broad terms to identify these martyrs, which enables her to place them among a wider cohort of Muslim heroes who died defending the faith. The reliance on martyrology in the opening pages of her memoirs is significant, because it builds on the significance of the Nasserite-era persecution within the Islamist movement. Generally, the torture and persecution experienced by Islamists in Nasser's prisons is often used to evoke a

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[252] Hesham Sallam, *Classless Politics*, 75.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Ibid., 100.
[255] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī,* 1.

sense of absolute legitimacy in Islamist literature. This approach servers a double meaning, as it accentuates the role of Islamists in "defending the faith"—which is a common trope in Islamic literature—and demarcates the divide between Islamism and other ideologies.[256] After doing so, al-Ghazālī concludes by devoting *Ayyām min Ḥayātī* to all Muslims. By staging the book to all adherents of the Muslim faith, she gave her experience wider appeal and framed her memoirs as an experience of a religious process that needs to be acknowledged by Muslims at large.

The overarching theme of the book is set within the Islamic understanding of suffering and sacrifice, and of spiritual experience. Al-Ghazālī's introduction begins with a phrase that is commonly used in Islamic treatises: "Prayers and peace on our master, Muhammad, and on his family and on his companions."[257] Then, she explains that writing *Ayyām min Ḥayātī* was a challenging task that she only undertook because her confidants and companions in *daʿwa* argued for the importance of sharing this experience with others. Her acceptance to do so, she asserts, was the result of her responsibility toward Islam, which obliged her to share the battles between faith and the forces of atheism. Al-Ghazālī deems her memoirs a form of guidance to those on the path of *daʿwa* and *jihād,* and a reminder to uphold this cause.[258] Despite al-Ghazālī's statement appearing to be a direct effort to contextualize the composition of the text, it may also be understood as an attempt to diffuse an implicit tension associated with writing autobiographical works in Arabic literary tradition. This tension is identifiable in the conflict between "portraying the self and self-aggrandizement," a long-standing predicament that authors of Arabic autobiographical works sought to negotiate as a way of rebuking accusations of pride

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[256] Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and the Pharaoh,* 33.
[257] Miriam Cooke, "Ayyām min Hayātī: The Prison Memoirs of a Muslim Sister," 147.
[258] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*, 2.

and hypocrisy.[259] By presenting her work as a selfless act intended to guide and inspire others, al-Ghazālī suggests that her motivations are not aligned with personal interests. Such a claim could be employed to maximize the sincerity of the author and further validate her experience. Thereon, she establishes an autobiographical pact with her readers through the introduction and consolidates it through her spirituality. She invokes God to support her in remembering the events she wishes to narrate, despite acknowledging that complete remembrance is a difficult task.[260] As such, the introductory pages of the text suggest that al-Ghazālī was intending to compose a multifaceted work that is both religious and Islamist, and is an extension of Islamic literature with its inherent literary themes. It is written through the use of religious, political, and mystical imagery, through which al-Ghazālī attempts to connect with readers on multiple levels. It is written for its readers and seeks to provide them with guidance. This intentional positioning helps us to understand its purpose and audience.

Modeling Prophethood: Islamist Education and Religious Legitimacy

Examining *Ayyām min Ḥayātī* through different analytical perspectives reveals multiple meanings within the text. Viewed as one cohesive entity, the text reflects certain ideas, yet dividing the memoirs into sections and understanding their interconnectedness reveals additional details. In my analysis of *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*, I utilize both methods to examine how the different elements of the memoirs contribute to creating a unified paradigm that persists throughout the text, and to help in studying its individual facets. I argue that the author employs literary tools, such as language and imagery, to illustrate the *da'wa* project as an extension of the religious message revealed by Prophet Muhammad. I contend that al-Ghazālī employed her memoirs as a

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[259] Dwight Fletcher Reynolds, ed., *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in Arabic Literary Tradition* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2001), 3-4.
[260] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*, 2

means of generating legitimacy for the Islamist project and her positionality within it. My

analysis draws on al-Ghazālī's theoretical texts, particularly *Naḥw Baʿth Jadīd* (Towards a New

Resurrection), in order to understand the key concepts that define her thought. It also draws

parallels between al-Ghazālī's discourse and that of Sayyid Qutb, which clarifies its purposes and

intentions. In my opinion, reading *Ayyām min Ḥayātī* in parallel to the wider set of al-Ghazālī's

works and foundational Islamist literature, like *Maʿālim*, illuminates new possibilities for

understanding her Islamist ideology.

In *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*, Zaynab al-Ghazālī spoke of a nationwide Islamist education and

instructional program that was introduced to sustain the *daʿwa* project of the Muslim

Brotherhood. The aim of this program was to raise Islamist awareness and induce grassroots

change to ultimately shift public opinion in favor of establishing an Islamic state ruled by

Sharīʿa. The program was focused on delivering sermons and lectures that discussed diverse

religious topics, including *tafsīr* (interpretation of the Quran) and Ḥadīth in different locations

throughout Egypt.[261] This program generated its religious authority by building on textual

sources dating back to between the ninth and twentieth centuries.[262] According to al-Ghazālī, it

was designed to last for an initial thirteen-year period of instruction, after which the Brotherhood

would survey the extent of popular support for their political project. The goal was to obtain the

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[261] *Tafsīr* refers to religious interpretation of the Arabic text of the Quran. *Tafsīr* usually focuses on a specific passage of the Quran, offering a word-by-word or phrase-by-phrase interpretation as an ongoing commentary; see A. Rippin, "Tafsīr," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition,* P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), http://dx.doi.org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7294. *Ḥadīth* is the tradition of compiling and discussing the actions and saying of Prophet Mohammad. The study and analysis of *Ḥadīth* is referred to as *ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth*; see J. Robson, "Ḥadīth," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition,* P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), http://dx.doi.org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0248.
[262] For a list of textual sources, see Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyam min Ḥayātī,* 20, 42. The most significant of these sources are: Abī al-Fidāʾ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm* (The Interpretation of the magnificent Quran) (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2000), Mohammad Ibn Idrīs al-Shafˇī, *al-Umm* (Mansura: Dār al-Wafāʾ lil Ṭibāʿa wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzīʿ, 2001), Sayyid Qutb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qurʾān* (In the Shadows of the Quran) (Cairo: Dār al-Shorouk, 2003), Sayyid Qutb, *Mʿālim fī al-Tarīq*, Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2016).

support of 75 percent of Egyptians and thus call for the immediate establishment of an Islamic State, backed by public demand. In case this level of backing was not secured, the Brotherhood would proceed with another thirteen-year period of instruction.[263] The decision to set the interval of instruction to thirteen years was inspired by the period in which the Prophet spent spreading Islam and proselytizing in Mecca before the *Hijra*.[264] Creating this parallel between the Prophet's spreading of Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood's political project was the first of several overlaps that were used to construct a sense of commensurability between the two. This was constantly perpetuated by al-Ghazālī's use of Islamic language and imagery throughout her memoirs. An example of this is when a member of the security forces tried to negotiate with al-Ghazālī before her arrest. Her reply to the him was that any form of dialogue would be impossible, since "throughout history, the convocations of Prophets did not interact with the forces of injustice but to convert them."[265] Evidently, al-Ghazālī positioned herself and the Islamist project as the continuation of the genuine religious doctrine conveyed by the prophets in Islam that culminated with Prophet Muhammad. She does not claim to bear a personal revelation, but sees the reformative *da'wa* and Islamist project as complimentary to the divine mission of prophets. Interestingly, this belief was shared by Sayyid Qutb, who articulated it in *Ma'ālim,* which exemplifies his influence on al-Ghazālī, as discussed in chapter 1. This idea also pervades *Naḥw Ba'th Jadīd*, al-Ghazālī's other work, as discussed in this section. Similarly, the

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[263] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*, 21.
[264] Ibid. The *Hijra* refers to Prophet Muhammad's emigration from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E. It is perceived as an important event in Islam, and it signaled the beginning of the *Hijrī* calendar; see Wim Raven, "Hijra," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Three*, Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Devin J. Stewart (eds.), http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30461.
[265] Ibid., 11. Translated from Arabic by the author.

education program discussed by al-Ghazālī resonates to a significant degree with the concept of an Islamic vanguard proposed by Qutb.[266]

The consistent correlation by al-Ghazālī between the Brotherhood's Islamist project and the tradition of the prophets in Islam, or *qiṣaṣ al-ʾanbiyāʾ* (stories of the prophets), is seen more explicitly in her book *Naḥw Baʿth Jadīd*.[267] The book is a hagiographical work that retells the stories of the prophets and messengers of God according to Islamic tradition. Al-Ghazālī framed the coming of the prophets as a form of awakening in response to successive cycles of moral decay. This trope, which is commonly evoked in Islamic literature, was then utilized as a pretext by al-Ghazālī to postulate the need for new generation of reformers and revivalists to counteract contemporary moral decay. By resorting to this line of reasoning, al-Ghazālī revealed the ways through which the prophetic tradition in Islam inspired her framing of the Islamist project. Indeed, *daʿwa* and Islamic statehood transcend the sphere of politics when examined through al-Ghazālī's discourse. She depicts them as a new religious awakening that is structurally connected and even foreshadowed by preceding prophetic traditions. However, the Islamist project does not equate to revelation, as she clarifies, because the Prophet Muhammad is the seal of prophets and Islam is the final religion. The Islamist project is thus suggested as a reformative effort, given that only reformers could bring about comprehensive change to the umma after the death of the Prophet.[268]

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[266] See Qutb's discussion on an Islamic Vanguard, and his ideas as a continuation of prophetic traditions; Sayyid Qutb, *Mʿālim fī al-Ṭarīq*, 46-54.

[267] To be clear, Prophet Muhammad received the revelation in Islam. However, an important part of the Islamic faith is the belief in prophets who came before Muhammad, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus. My use of the term 'Prophets in Islam' refers to the prophets accepted in Islamic tradition which culminates with Muhammad.

[268] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Naḥw Baʿth Jadīd*, 5.

The appropriation of *qiṣaṣ al-ʾanbiyāʾ* to corroborate the Islamist *daʿwa* makes *Naḥw Baʿth Jadīd* a relevant work for understanding *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*. For al-Ghazālī, the message of Prophet Muhammad was indeed a new resurrection (*baʿth jadīd*) for the entire human race. The world needed that message as a result of the immorality and paganism that defined *jahiliyya*, the pre-Islamic state of ignorance that pervaded Arabian society before Prophet Muhammad.[269] By describing the Prophet's spread of Islam in these terms, al-Ghazālī was methodically paving the way for the new awakening that she saw as the Islamist project. To be clear, she was proposing that the Islamist *daʿwa* served the purpose of renewal that was needed in contemporary society. Nonetheless, this *daʿwa* she saw as being modeled by and serving the Prophet's initial message. Inspired by the first spread of Islam, the Islamist *daʿwa* was to reform a neo-*jahilī* society that had been overrun by the ignorance produced by modernity and the rise of capitalism and socialism. This *jahilī* world, which was primarily articulated by Qutb (see chapter 1), could only be transformed through reform as articulated within an Islamic paradigm that resists all non-Islamic notions. To use Qutb's terminology, reform needed to be compatible with *hakimiyya,* so as to evoke Islam's autonomy as a *modus operandi*. This anticipated reform concords with the divine message relayed by Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, according to al-Ghazālī. Because Muhammad was the seal of prophecy and had the final revelation, *jahiliyya* could only be resisted thereon by socio-political and religious reform.[270] This reform must mimic the example set by Prophet Muhammad in seventh century Meccan society to prepare the umma for a new awakening.[271]

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[269] Ibid., 37.
[270] Ibid., 50-52.
[271] Ibid., 65.

The message communicated by *Naḥw Baʿth Jadīd* polishes al-Ghazālī's choices in *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*. It contextualizes her decision to foreground the narrative with imagery that corroborates the similarities between the Islamist project and Muhammad's Prophetic revelation. Al-Ghazālī clarifies that the moral decay she perceived in contemporary society had parallels to that which preceded the rise of Islam, mainly *jahiliyya*. This conception of a neo-*jahiliyya* foreshadows the coming of a new resurrection.[272] The use of this term already denotes a political imperative, as it is consistent with Sayyid Qutb's influences on al-Ghazālī (see chapter 1). Additionally, al-Ghazālī's use of the term places her narrative in the context identified by Qutb, as she discussed the Islamist project through the paradigms he articulated. The first step of the project was grounded in an educational program that emulated, as al-Ghazālī highlights, the Prophet's Meccan *daʿwa,* and sought to establish an Islamic vanguard. According to al-Ghazālī, the revival of the Islamist project and its education program was conceived in a meeting with Abdel Fattāḥ Ismaʿīl.[273] The meeting took place in one of Islam's holiest sites inside the premises of the *Kaʿba* beside *maqām Ibrāhīm* (the station of Abraham).[274] As such, the beginning of the new revival was formulated in the same geographic location where the Prophet first called the people to Islam, fixing the Islamist project on its course.

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[272] As I pointed out before (see chapter 1), al-Ghazālī was inspired by Sayyid Qutb's ideology, where he asserted that the Nasserite State is identifiable with the pre-Islamic state of ignorance referred to as *jahiliyya* in Arabic. Based on this, he theorized a second coming of the Islamic state. See Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and the Pharaoh,* 37.

[273] Abdel Fattāḥ Ismāʿīl was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and of al-Tanẓīm al-Khaṣṣ, and worked on reestablishing the organization in the 1950s and 1960s. He also had a role in disseminating *Maʿālim* with the help of al-Ghazālī and was a close confidant of Qutb. He was executed with him in 1966; see Fawaz A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, 257-77.

[274] Maqām Ibrāhīm is an artifact associated with Ibrāhīm (Abraham) and Ismāʿīl (Ishmael) and the process of building the *Kaʿba*. According to Islamic tradition, the artifact has the imprint of Ibrāhīm's feet as he stood to build the *Kaʿba*. It is referenced in the Quran in 3:97 and 2:125; see Francis Edwards Peters, *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021), 16-7. For al-Ghazālī's account of the meeting, see Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī*, 17.

Al-Ghazālī furthers this trope throughout *Ayyām min Ḥayātī* through the use of imagery to perpetuate the religious persona of herself and her compatriots. For example, she calls her house *dār ibn Abī al-Arqam,* because it was often used as a venue to host educational lectures and sermons.[275] Her decision to do so underlines her constant comparison of her own narrative with the story of Prophet Muhammad, since *dār ibn Abī al-Arqam* was a secretive spot where the Prophet met his companions and spread Islam.[276] Similarly, when al-Ghazālī looked to inspire her tortured brethren to remain strong and persevere, she comforted them, "Patience, O family of Yāsir, your meeting-place will be in paradise."[277] The exact statement al-Ghazālī used was narrated by Ibn Isḥāq and was said by Prophet Muhammad when he witnessed the torture of the family of ʿAmmār Ibn Yāsir by the disbelievers.[278] As al-Ghazālī tries to show, the torture of the Muslim Brothers in the War Prison could be seen in a similar light to the torture of the tribe of Yāsir by the disbelievers.

Al-Ghazālī's experience of prophetic narratives was also supported by her accounts of wonders and mystical occurrences throughout *Ayyām min Ḥayātī.* The extreme hardships al-Ghazālī faced in the War Prison were usually mitigated by the manifestation of *karamāt* (wonders) and *ruʾa* (mystical visions), according to her memoirs. These metaphysical occurrences inspired a sense of perseverance, protection, and support as they guided al-Ghazālī and sustained her during this experience. She recounts the first miracle she witnessed during the

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[275] Al-Arqam Ibn Abī al-Arqam was one of the early converts to Islam. His house was used by Prophet Muhammad to spread the teachings of Islam in the early period of the revelation. It is said that plenty of people became Muslims in his house; see Muhammad Ibn Saʿd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Trans. Aisha Bewley (London: Ta-Ha Publishers Limited, 2013), 185-7

[276] Zaynab al-Ghazālī, *Ayyām min Ḥayātī,* 25.

[277] Ibid.

[278] See Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 145. The original statement by al-Ghazālī was in Arabic; I chose to translate it as Guillaume did, as it captures the meaning and context appropriately. The Family of ʿAmmār Ibn Yāsir were killed due to the torture of the disbelievers, for an in-depth discussion of Āl Yāsir, see Muhammad Ibn Saʿd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, 188-203.

first time she was tortured. When a group of trained canines were ordered to attack her, all that she could do was close her eyes and invoke the name of God. Al-Ghazālī was in awe when she realized that time had passed and that she had emerged untouched from this vicious attack.[279] Later, she received a vision in which the Prophet explicitly asserted to her that she was on the right path. Al-Ghazālī claims that during her imprisonment, she received four visions of the Prophet.[280] Other wonders that al-Ghazālī recounts involved her sustenance during times of hunger and unexplained strength for self-defense against sexual violence.[281] In both cases, she articulates these occurrences as gifts from God, which underlines the persona she wishes to emphasize.

Moreover, the mystical repertoire in al-Ghazālī's memoirs (and generally her self-history) is consistent with similar use cases from autobiographical works in Arabic literary tradition. As discussed in *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in Arabic Literary Tradition*, mystical experiences in the form of dreams and visions were repeatedly identified in several Arabic autobiographical works dating back to different time periods. These experiences were evoked by authors in several ways, however, the most relevant of which to al-Ghazālī's case deals with visions as messages delivered to the visionary (the author in this case) by an important figure like a prophet or a dead family member.[282] As the book notes, there are considerable analytical benefits in opting to look beyond the psychoanalytical reality of the vision or to questioning the sincerity of the author as a critical tool. Instead, attempting to determine the purpose that mysticism serve in a text that claims to be a truthful expression of the author's life could reveal

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[279] Ibid., 26-7.
[280] Ibid., 27.
[281] Ibid., 51-2
[282] Dwight Fletcher Reynolds, ed., *Interpreting the Self*, 89.

valuable information.[283] As such, examining the incorporation of visions and mysticism in al-Ghazālī's narrative suggests that her use could align with trends evident in Arabic autobiographies that employ these experiences to "function as the displaced authority of the authorial 'I'."[284] Simply put, authors generally relied on these experiences as an external mechanism that channels the authority to say whatever cannot be said on their own personal authority.[285] Dreams and visions, therefore, were commonly deployed in Arabic autobiographies as an affirmation or consolidation of the author's spiritual or scholarly status.[286] Keeping this parallel in mind, it is more evident that al-Ghazālī's reliance on visions and dreams in *Ayyam min Ḥayātī* furthers her construction of political agendas on religious foundations. I assert, therefore, that *Ayyām min Ḥayātī* is far from being a simple biography or literary work. It is an expansive composition that is implicated in multiple political and religious dynamics that have clear and specific objectives. Consequently, it is a work that seeks to direct its reader's engagement in certain ways to serve certain purposes. As a result, it is only by contextualizing *Ayyām min Ḥayātī* and understanding the multiple themes at the center of its experience that we can truly locate its intended message. The text is not simply a recollection of al-Ghazālī's journey in Nasser's prisons, but a politically charged spiritual journey that articulates a political commentary seeking to reinforce Islamist agendas.

Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, Zaynab al-Ghazālī's life story and narrative are complicated analytical objects that need to be appropriately situated before they are analyzed. In many ways, Islamist politics and the primacy of Islamic statehood were pervasive in the self-

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[283] Ibid., 93.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid., 92.

narratives al-Ghazālī disseminated. She framed her life story as an account that exemplified the Islamist project and propagated it to the supporters of Islamism and prospective constituents alike. This account portrayed al-Ghazālī as an exceptional religious figure since her childhood, who was destined to assume a path of Islamic work and raised to fulfill this potential. Her authority was further substantiated through the legitimacy of mysticism and mystical encounters, authenticating her experiences in intelligible terms for her audiences. Moreover, al-Ghazālī's memoirs sought to recount Islamist political narratives through a chronicle of good versus evil that aligned with the political context in which it was published, and outlined the momentum of the Islamist project. All of these decisions were taken with a specific political agenda at the crux of the narrative, which supplied its socio-religious and political functions.

As such, the history of the self composed by al-Ghazālī cannot be reduced to a simple recollection of previous events. It is vital for the viewer of this material to perceive the centrality of Islamist politics for al-Ghazālī's discourse prior to examining her account. The composition and dissemination of her work must be considered in parallel to the imperatives of Islamist political agendas. This was evident through the different ways al-Ghazālī utilized her work to engage with and cater to the Islamist project by expounding on its legitimacy and underlining its validity to produce political and religious subjects. As I demonstrated, prior to al-Ghazālī's adopted sense of urgency in relation to her Islamist politics, her public discourse differed drastically. Al-Ghazālī openly advocated for certain rights and freedoms, like women's work, that she vehemently contested later in her political career. She also found no issue in collaborating with secular women's movements, which she subsequently antagonized and accused of moral corruption. This does not only point to the influence of Islamist politics on al-Ghazālī's thought, it also indicates the inaccuracies that are associated with subscribing to her

personally-narrated history as an exclusive reference for her life. Indeed, the historicity of al-Ghazālī's work and ideas is constantly jeopardized due to the political impetus that pervaded her writing and informed her objectives.

Al-Ghazālī's discussion of events like her imprisonment and marriage must be seen as political occasions that she articulated to address different objectives, as I showed above. Since marriage itself holds a political meaning for Islamists, al-Ghazālī depicted her marriage as a personal event that held the key to understanding her subversion of the gender roles she advocated. Her marriage thus served as a way of reaffirming the gender model she advocated and simultaneously justified her rejection of this model. The publishing of al-Ghazālī's memoirs was itself a politicized event that capitalized on the context of Sadat's regime. Moreover, she structured her memoirs according to a notion that defined a significant Islamist ideology and was discussed in some of her other works, including *Naḥw Baʿth Jadīd*. Her memoirs were shaped to mimic the trajectory of prophetic traditions in Islam, most significantly the story of Prophet Muhammad, which underlines how it was affected by the work of Sayyid Qutb, especially the concept of *ḥakimiyya* and an Islamic vanguard. Accordingly, the narrative had sociopolitical perspectives that it sought to assert.

By rereading al-Ghazālī's own account with an increased awareness of the pervasiveness of Islamist politics in her work, the challenges to historically examine it come to the fore. The historicity of al-Ghazālī's life is severely undermined when it is viewed through her constructed political narrative. This was evidently shaped by her post-1971 subjectivities, and informed by a heightened sense of militancy and a newfound theoretical purpose aligned with the ideology of Qutb. By 1971, her unrelenting devotion to Islamic statehood and Islamist politics was crystallized, and her unwavering rejection of alternative models and women's movements had

grown. As a result, these forces shaped al-Ghazālī's composition of her memoirs as she

consistently articulated it through her recent convictions and values. Without a doubt, these

forces transcended al-Ghazālī's depiction of her experience, which ultimately disrupts our

perception of herself as a historical figure and her work.

Chapter 3

Pseudo-authenticity and the Production of the Islamist Woman

This chapter focusses on Zaynab al-Ghazālī's creation of the ideal Islamist female subject. Following the argument laid out by Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon in *The Production of the Muslim Woman: Negotiating Text, History, and Ideology,* I subscribe to the notion that the Muslim woman can be understood as an unfixed entity. According to Zayzafoon,

> As a single "category," the "Muslim Woman," is an "invention," whether in the Western discourses of Orientalism and Western psychoanalytical feminism or the discourse of Arab nationalism and Islamic Feminism in colonial and postcolonial North Africa.[287]

Building on Zayzafoon's argument, the Muslim woman is a dynamic entity that is subject to appropriation and reappropriation, packaging and repackaging, to align with diverse socio-political structures. Zayzafoon contends that the Muslim woman functions as a "semiotic subject," fashioned through the law of supply and demand to fulfill varying political and ideological objectives.[288] A "semiotic subject" is, therefore, a "subject who is constituted through previous discourses, but who is historically situated."[289] Consequently, this chapter aims to identify, analyze, and discuss the production of the 'Muslim woman' through Zaynab al-Ghazālī's writings.

I examine al-Ghazālī's work within the context of the discourse on women and gender prevalent in the Muslim Brotherhood and the broader Islamist movement. My central argument is that the Muslim woman is shaped according to two fundamental tenets derived from Islamist ideology: Firstly, there is the principle of complementarity as a gender model, wherein it is

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[287] Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman*, 1.
[288] Ibid., 2.
[289] Ibid.

prescribed that women remain at home while men assume professional roles—an assertion deemed non-negotiable by Islamists. Nonetheless, I contend that this prescription is subject to negotiation, given its intrinsic connection to the broader Islamist objective of establishing an Islamic State. The second fundamental involves amalgamating public morality with the nation, treating women as conduits for observing and negotiating public morality within the nation-state. This perspective closely aligns with early twentieth century reformative viewpoints, wherein women were perceived as the gateway to national reform—a reflection and means of controlling and negotiating public morality. These fundamental tenets, which I term the Islamist thesis on women and gender, epitomize a meticulously articulated and prescribed ideological framework. It is imperative to underscore that the Islamist thesis on women and gender is not a haphazard amalgamation of disparate ideas; rather, it constitutes an authoritative framework profoundly influencing the treatment of women, who are conceived of as unfixed subjects, by al-Ghazālī, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Islamists at large.

Numerous scholars have contributed diverse perspectives on women and gender within the Islamist movement. My utilization of al-Ghazālī's ideas does not purport to define the entire trajectory of Islamism, nor is it a dismissal of other Islamists and their ideas, I rely on al-Ghazālī because of the importance of her work to the Islamist movement in general and for the Muslim Brotherhood in particular. Her status as a senior figure in the Muslim Brotherhood and her role in the 1965 organization positions her as a significant source, especially in relation to gender ideology.

My main argument is that al-Ghazālī's production of the Muslim woman, or the Islamist thesis on women and gender, is falsely propagated as an authentic Islamic model intended to resist colonial advances in the context of women and the family. I contend that al-Ghazālī's work

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draws inspiration from the ideas of Muhammad Rashīd Riḍa, who was influenced by Western discourses on nation-building and social reform around the turn of the twentieth century. By repeating Riḍa's ideas, al-Ghazālī actively compromises one of the fundamental ideals of *al-Nahḍa*, namely *ijtihad*. I argue that the drive to embrace Riḍa's ideas was necessitated by the primacy of Islamic statehood in the Islamist outlook. As such, al-Ghazālī's production of the Muslim woman resembles early twentieth century reformative agendas that viewed women as sites of social and national reform. According to my finding, I will evaluate the various methods used to describe al-Ghazālī's work and ideas. This chapter begins by discussing the various classifications proposed by scholars to delineate al-Ghazālī and her ideas. The purpose behind this exploration is rooted in the significance of addressing assumptions associated with different terms that seek to capture the meaning of al-Ghazālī's work.

Islamic Feminism Vs Islamism

Academics typically perceive Zaynab al-Ghazālī as a female Muslim thinker who articulated gender reform within Islamic frameworks.[290] Different scholars have proffered various classifications to describe al-Ghazāli's perspectives on women. For example, literary scholar Miriam Cooke suggested that al-Ghazālī could be construed as a model embodying Islamic womanism. She explains that Islamic womanism is a concept that builds on,

> Muslim women's awareness of their lack of social equality and their activism to change the situation so as to gain access to and to achieve a measure of freedom in the public

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[290] See Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety,* 67-76, 180-185; see Lucia Carminati, "Zaynab al-Ghazālī's Women, Marriages and Contradictions: Her Life as an Archive," 70-79; see Miriam Cooke, "Zaynab al-Ghazālī: Saint or Subversive?" 1-20; and *Women Claim Islam,* (London: Routledge, 2001), 83-106. See Roxanne Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds, *Princeton Reading's in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021), 275-301; and Jeffry R Halverson and Amy K Way, "Islamist Feminism: Constructing Gender Identities in Postcolonial Muslim Societies," *Politics and Religion*, vol.4, no.3 (2011): 503-25.

domain, but always within the religious framework of a well understood and interpreted Islam.[291]

Ibrahim Olatunde Uthman, Professor of Islamic Studies, develops this perspective to further assert that al-Ghazālī is an Islamic feminist. According to Uthman's work, Islamic feminism holds a deeper meaning, as it refers to "Muslim women activists who hold onto a double commitment of their faith and the feminist struggle."[292] This description by Uthman sets out to differentiate between "Muslim women who are committed to Islam and those who bear Muslim names."[293]

Cooke, Uthman, and others who subscribe to descriptions that position al-Ghazālī's ideas as a system of resistance exclusively based on discussing gender roles through Islamic frameworks could be critiqued for their limited perception of al-Ghazālī. This is a result of omitting the importance of the Islamist political program and its perception of women from understandings of al-Ghazālī's views on women and gender. The Islamist commitment to establish an Islamic state is unequivocally essential to making sense of the gender roles advocated by Zaynab al-Ghazālī. To establish a popularly-backed Islamist regime, representatives like al-Ghazālī focused on orchestrating grassroots change as a means for creating a popular front as an "Islamic vanguard" that would safeguard *ḥakimiyya* and resist *jahiliyya* (see chapters 1 and 2). Thus, I subscribe to the perspective articulated by historian Margot Badran and anthropologist Ziba Mir-Hosseini, which emphasizes the importance of holding a firm divide between Islamic feminists and Islamists.[294]

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[291] Miriam Cooke, "Ayyām min Hayātī: The Prison Memoirs of a Muslim Sister," 149.

[292] Ibrahim Olatunde Uthman, "A Triadic Re-reading of Zaynab al-Ghazali and the Feminist Movement in Islam," 69.

[293] Ibid., 70.

[294] Margot Badran, *Feminisms in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 1-6; Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Beyond 'Islam' Vs 'Feminism,'" *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 42, no.1 (January 2011): 67-77.

Accordingly, Islamic feminism is proposed as "an egalitarian mode of Islam," or a feminism that draws "inspiration and even legitimacy in Islamic history and textual sources."[295] This differs from the "commitment to public action to implement what Islamists regard as an Islamic agenda."[296] This Islamic agenda, in most instances, prescribes a political program as its ultimate objective. However, differentiating between the meanings of "Islamic" and "Islamist" does not conclusively assert the impossibility of their convergence; rather, it simply emphasizes their separate objectives.[297] While for some observers, certain Islamist views on women and gender may initially exhibit egalitarian tendencies or draw inspiration from specific aspects of Islamic history and textual sources, the inherent political component within Islamism reshapes and transforms these ideals into something else. This political aspect superimposes its demands and ideas that alter the production of the Muslim woman. By using the term political here, I am referring to the primacy of applying a specific political regime which seeks to setup political institutions and governing structures with the aim of creating a so-called Islamic state. The primary concern of this carefully constructed model is largely disassociated from particular considerations for resolving gender issues or promoting social justice in the first place. Instead, Islamists often suggest that these issues will autonomously get resolved as soon as Islamic statehood is achieved. To reiterate this idea more simplistically, certain Islamists who discuss gender issues like al-Ghazālī are more concerned with how different gender models complement their political regime than they are with promoting egality through addressing gender issues. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize that the underlying logic shaping the Islamist thesis on women and gender is not egalitarian or religious but ultimately political and statist. To a large

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[295] Margot Badran, *Feminisms in Islam*, 6; Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Beyond 'Islam' Vs 'Feminism'," 68.
[296] Ibid.
[297] See Margot Badran, *Feminisms in Islam*, 141-167.

degree, even notions of equality within Islamist frameworks often build on conceptions of domesticity and patriarchy that cater to statist imperatives of the Islamist project. Moreover, this critique should not be viewed as an assertion that the practical implementation of Islamic feminist ideas is purely egalitarian and apolitical. While some might interrogate Islamic feminism and its intertwining with political dynamics, this remains beyond the scope of this study, which aims to emphasize the centrality of a political regime to the Islamist thesis on women and gender.

The pre-eminence of politics within the Islamist thesis supersedes any ethical, scriptural, or authentic concerns. This phenomenon arises from the dichotomy between the ethical logic intrinsic to Islam and the socio-legal codification, institutionalization, and implementation of the rules that govern Islamic society. Leila Ahmed, a professor of women's studies in religion, describes these categories as "ethical Islam" and "establishment Islam," respectively. Through historical analysis, she posits that politics is inherently necessary for and intertwined with establishment Islam, while ethical Islam is more relatable to the lay Muslim's personal and non-legal understanding of the religion. This demarcation is heightened in discussions pertaining to gender, since these discussions tend to occur through the conflicting opinions articulated within each category.[298] The hyper-obsession of the Islamist project with Islamic statehood, coupled with its focus on a literalist Islamic pseudo-authenticity, is deeply entrenched within the tradition of establishment Islam, with a marginal focus on Islam's ethical component. Consequently, Islamism becomes implicated in the assumption that,

> The meaning of gender inhering in the initiatory Islamic society and in Muhammad's acts and sayings is essentially unambiguous and ascertainable in some precise and absolute sense and that the understanding of gender articulated in the written corpus of

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[298] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 65-6.

establishment Islam represents the only possible and uncontested understanding of the meaning of gender in Islam.[299]

Indeed, it is difficult to accurately determine an appropriate term to describe the set of ideological and practical tenets endorsed by Zaynab al-Ghazālī. A simplistic description might be tempting to avoid possible contradictions or assumptions. However, a nuanced examination is crucial to acknowledge the multifaceted layers of al-Ghazālī's ideology. As such, I postulate that, first and foremost, al-Ghazālī must be seen as an Islamist. Through the literature discussed below, I showcase the centrality of Islamic statehood that pervades her writing, as this remains the paramount objective for al-Ghazālī and the majority of other Islamists.

On a secondary level, the question arises of how to characterize al-Ghazālī's perspectives on women and gender roles. Could she be considered a womanist? This inquiry constitutes another focal point of this chapter. While some of her ideas could speak to a womanist concern, my perspective remains consistent that, given the primacy of politics and statehood in al-Ghazālī's thought, her commitment to empowering women and addressing gender issues is unclear. This viewpoint does not hinge on the rejection of the gender roles al-Ghazālī prescribes for women, nor does it reflect the inability of these gender roles to empower women in specific contexts. Instead, it is grounded in an understanding that the underlying motives driving al-Ghazālī's views are political rather than egalitarian. As elucidated in chapter 2, the term "womanism" is employed as an alternative to feminism to denote discourse related to women's rights and roles. Sharifa Zuhur inspires this usage to better capture the Arabic term *nasawiyya* and to overcome the complexities and assumptions associated with the Western conception of feminism.[300]

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[299] Ibid., 238.
[300] Miriam Cooke, "Ayyām min Hayātī: The Prison Memoirs of a Muslim Sister," 149.

The Islamist Thesis on Women and Gender in al-Ghazālī's Thought and the Muslim Brotherhood

The gender model Zaynab al-Ghazālī advocates is not unique, as I show below. The domestic roles posited as a religious obligation by al-Ghazālī were widely accepted as the Muslim Brotherhood's policy on women and gender. These gender roles, which I underline through the Islamist thesis on women and gender, trace their eminence to prevalent modernist paradigms at the close of the nineteenth century and the onset of the twentieth century. While the articulation of women's domestic roles in Islam predates modernity, the renewed draw on these roles to define normative gender behaviour intersects with modern discourse.[301] These paradigms, which advocated for women's domestic responsibilities, were extensively deliberated upon and embraced by certain twentieth century reformers. Accordingly, the Islamist thesis on women and gender converges with these discussions, infused with theories of nation-building and the reformulation of religious norms. Noteworthy proponents of these ideas, as I will expound upon, include Islamic modernist and Islamist Rashīd Riḍa, and nationalist Qasim Amin.

However, prior to delving into the discourse on early twentieth century social reform, it is imperative to elucidate the significance of the Islamist gender model for al-Ghazālī and the Muslim Brotherhood. This model is deemed indispensable for the realization of an Islamist project, particularly the establishment of an Islamic state. In a 1981 interview with Valarie Hoffman, al-Ghazālī gave a general overview of how the Muslim Brotherhood views women. According to her account,

> The Brotherhood considers women a fundamental part of the Islamic call. They are the ones who are most active because men have to work. They are the ones who build the kind of men that we need to fill the ranks of the Islamic call. So women must be well

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[301] See Marion Holmes Katz, *Wives and Work: Islamic Law and Ethics Before Modernity*.

educated, cultured, knowing the precepts of the Koran and Sunna, knowing world politics, why we are backward, why we don't have technology. The Muslim woman must study all these things, and then raise her son in the conviction that he must possess the scientific tools of the age, and at the same time he must understand Islam, politics, geography, and current events. He must rebuild the Islamic nation.… Islam does not forbid women to actively participate in public life. It does not prevent her from working, entering into politics, and expressing her opinion, or from being anything, as long as that does not interfere with her first duty as a mother, the one who first trains her children in the Islamic call. So, her first, holy, and most important mission is to be a mother and wife. She cannot ignore this priority. If she then finds she has free time, she may participate in public activities. Islam does not forbid her.[302]

While the notions proposed by al-Ghazālī define her personal ideology, an examination

of the early Brotherhood position on gender roles reveals many similarities. Hasan al-Banna, the

founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, perceived women's influence to be in the private domain.[303]

Arguing that women, through childrearing, wield substantial authority over the subsequent

generation, al-Banna contended that they indirectly bear responsibility for shaping the nation's,

or in this case, the Islamist movement's, future trajectory. Having expressed these ideas through

the scope of modern science, al-Banna asserted that the fate of the umma indirectly depends on

women.[304] In alignment with this perception, he established the Institute for the Mothers of the

Believers in Ismaʿiliyya, intended both as an educational institution, and as a means to rally a

considerable number of women to become Brotherhood constituents.[305] Al-Banna's successor,

Hasan al-Hudaybī, maintained this approach by asserting that the woman's natural place is the

home. Nevertheless, if she finds that after doing her duty in the home she has time, she can use

part of it in the service of society, on condition that it is done within the legal limits which

preserve her dignity and morality.[306]

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[302] Valerie J. Hoffman, "An Islamic Activist: Zaynab al-Ghazali," 236-7.
[303] Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, *The Idea of Women in Fundamentalist Islam* (Florida: University of Florida Press, 2003), 19-20.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Richard P. Mitchel, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, 175.
[306] Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, *The Idea of Women,* 19.

Although women were deemed most beneficial to society when they adhere strictly to their traditional roles as mothers and wives, they can pursue their public interests if they receive their husband's permission. This perspective aligns with multiple Islamist ideals, emphasizing the family as the foundational unit of a prosperous nation or society. These ideals also touch on safeguarding social morality and preventing extramarital relations that could potentially corrupt families and induce moral decay.[307] The Islamist thesis on women and gender encapsulates a dualistic view, portraying women as both the key contributors to prosperity and potential catalysts for societal decay. Al-Ghazālī, in alignment with this perspective, attributes the reluctance of women to fulfill their roles as good wives and mothers as the source of inefficacies within the Muslim family. The repercussions of the breakdown of the family unit extend beyond the individual, implicating the entire umma. Consequently, the pathway to reforming the Muslim woman—and, by extension, the Muslim family and umma—begins with correcting the inefficacies of women.[308]

In light of this perspective, al-Ghazālī's incentivization of women's membership in the Muslim Brotherhood and their participation in its public activities appears paradoxical. This inconsistency is sometimes rationalized by necessity, wherein the suspension of Islamic law (in the absence of an Islamic state) compels women to share in the duty of *jihad* alongside men to realize the establishment of an Islamic state. This duty runs concurrently with women's domestic responsibilities and shows the importance of Islamic statehood to al-Ghazālī's conception of gender roles.[309]

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[307] Ibid., 19.
[308] Azza M. Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State*: *Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt*, 212.
[309] Ibid., 215.

Al-Ghazālī and the Islamist Thesis on Women and Gender: Sources and Considerations

As outlined in chapter 2, most of Zaynab al-Ghazālī's early articles were confiscated or destroyed by the Nasserite regime. All the extant literature authored by al-Ghazālī originates from the post-1971 era. In her narrative, al-Ghazālī articulates her views on women and gender as a continuous discourse that traces its starting point to her departure from the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) in 1936-1937.[310] Unfortunately, the sources that could potentially authenticate this claim are not available (see chapter 2). While it would be undeniably fruitful to analyze al-Ghazālī's writings prior to 1971, her more recent publications remain relevant for the Islamist thesis on women and gender.

Two meticulously edited volumes by the Algerian Islamist Ibn al-Hāshimī serve as the primary repositories encompassing the majority of al-Ghazālī's published and unpublished works.[311] The articles presented in these volumes span the late 1970s and early 1980s, and were circulated in periodicals that include *al-Daʿwa, Liwāʾ al-Islām*, and *al-Mujtamaʿ*.[312] Al-Ghazālī contributed to these volumes by granting the editor access to her personal archive, which included her unpublished essays, speeches, and articles. Additionally, she participated in an in-depth interview, published in one of the volumes, which introduces al-Ghazālī to readers and directs them to understand her worldview.[313] Moreover, the well-known Islamist scholar Muhammad al-Ghazālī (1917–1996) provides a preface in one of the volumes by giving further

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[310] See footnote 189 in chapter 2 for discussion on the date al-Ghazālī left the EFU and established the SMW.
[311] See Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya Zaynab al-Ghazālī: Masīrat Jihād wa-Ḥadīth min Khilāl Kitābatihā & Humūm al-Marʾa al-Muslima wa-al-Dāʿiyya Zaynab al-Ghazālī.*
[312] Al-Daʿwa, Liwāʾ al-Islām and al-Mujtamaʿ were periodicals that circulated Islamist articles and perspectives. Al-Daʿwa and Liwāʾ al-Islām were closely associated with the Muslim Brotherhood.
[313] See Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya*, 17-23.

insights on the Islamist thesis on women and gender.[314] This preface aligns with the ideas of Zaynab al-Ghazālī and theoretically prepares the reader for her work.[315] The deliberate framing of these edited volumes as a discourse intended for public dissemination underlines the significance of this material to understanding the Islamist thesis on women and gender through the work of Zaynab al-Ghazālī. It is within the articles of these volumes that al-Ghazālī's production of the Islamist female subject transpires, as I discuss below.

Furthermore, the historical context in which al-Ghazālī composes these articles informs my interpretation and analysis. The fact that a surge in gender discourse within Islamist circles took place throughout the late seventies and early eighties of the last century reflects an essential development in the trajectory of political Islam in Egypt. As I outlined in chapter two, the Sadat regime was involved in an alliance of convenience with the Islamists in Egypt. The increase in public roles played by Islamists in general and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular led to the formation of a "progressive" coalition within the Brotherhood. This coalition took on more moderate views to counter the radical center of power consisting of the old guard. They advocated for an alternative and more inclusive stance on public policy, political participation, and gender roles.[316] The old guard, primarily composed of members of the 1965 organization who shared prison time with the radical ideologue Sayyid Qutb, resisted the embrace of these "progressive" ideas. While the "progressive" coalition retained significant authority within the Brotherhood hierarchy throughout the Islamist alliance with Sadat, much of it was lost to the old guard when this strategic partnership broke down. The increased authoritarianism of the Sadat

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[314] For a brief overview of Mohammad al-Ghazālī, see Lena Larsen, *How Muftis Think: Islamic Legal Thought and Muslim Women in Western Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 52, 64-65; and Benouda Bensaid, "Towards a Model of Daʿwa in Contemporary Societies: The Case of Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazālī (1917-1996)" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2008), escholarship.mcgill.ca/concern/theses/dv13zx76d.
[315] For Muhammad al-Ghazālī's preface, see Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya*, 9-11.
[316] Fawaz A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, 343-4.

regime and his unpopular peace with Israel compromised relations between the state and the Brotherhood. As such, moderates could not argue for their reformative agenda and were overrun by the old guard within the Brotherhood.[317] From the 1980s onward, most of the Brotherhood's General Guides were members of the Qutbian old guard.[318] As professor of international relations Fawaz Gerges notes, the views held on gender roles by the old guard and reformist camp in the Muslim Brotherhood are among the most definitive disagreements between the two groups. The old guard (which included Zaynab al-Ghazālī) maintained that they unquestionably respected women; however, they believed women must remain observant of their roles in the private sphere since they are "the builders of men."[319]

The limited space for women's public participation because of biological and moral concerns has its root in the ideology of al-Banna and al-Hudaybī, as I showed above. This position was adopted by al-Ghazālī as well as other Brotherhood officials from the Qutbian old guard. As Gerges writes, this idea was reasserted by a rhetorical question posed by one of these officials, who asked, "What happens if a woman is in a meeting and suddenly had her period? She would stain the wall and be humiliated… Women could easily be exploited by unscrupulous men who play on their emotions and lead them astray."[320] Biological justifications were often cited as the reason behind women's domestic roles. Women are inherently suited to the private sphere, while their existence in public leads to biological and moral concerns. Furthermore, their irrational or emotional tendencies render them an easy target for exploitation and manipulation. This stance appears to be a long-standing policy that defined the Brotherhood's perspective on women and gender. Even when moderate Brotherhood members challenged such a perspective,

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[317] Ibid., 345.
[318] Ibid., 347.
[319] Ibid., 364.
[320] Ibid.

their critique was not a complete dismissal of these views but rather a call for increased efforts to raise awareness on the rank-and-file level about the importance of inclusivity and gender tolerance.[321] Therefore, contextualizing the surge of gender discourse spearheaded by Zaynab al-Ghazālī amid this landscape is undeniably important. Her work serves a dual purpose: Firstly, it operates as a public address integral to the Islamist program, establishing foundations for an Islamist regime. Secondly, it constitutes a firm reaffirmation of the Islamist thesis on women and gender, which encountered internal criticism and demands for reconsideration from moderates. In this dual role, al-Ghazālī was not only expressing her vision of the ideal Islamist woman but was also rejecting an alternative model that attempted to negotiate more space for change. This articulation underscores the centrality of the Islamist thesis on women and gender because it emphasizes the significance of women's domestic roles for the materialization of the Islamist project. Furthermore, the interconnectedness between these gender roles and Islamist politics within the work of al-Ghazālī could be further substantiated by assessing her views prior to her commitment to Islamism. As I showed in chapter 2, al-Ghazālī was not against women's pursuit of public employment during the early days of the Society of Muslim Women.[322] By then, she cited religious frameworks as her reference, nonetheless, it was not until her active involvement with Islamist politics and determination for Islamic statehood that she came to express this gender model.

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[321] Ibid., 365.

[322] See the section, "Transcending Secular Womanism? Al-Ghazālī Establishing the Society of Muslim Women" in chapter 2, where al-Ghazālī's interaction with the secular women's movement and her call for gender equality in multiple events is discussed.

Religious Equals, Temporal Complements: The First Fundamental of the Islamist Thesis

The Islamist thesis on women and gender, which I propose was first theorized by Rashīd Riḍa, centralizes two theoretical principles as its core premise. These fundamentals, which shape the Islamist perception of women and define how they are socio-politically and religiously approached, were endorsed by Zaynab al-Ghazālī and exemplified by the Muslim Brotherhood's policy. As such, the Islamist thesis transcends multiple social modalities, since it informs how the Muslim woman is simultaneously produced religiously, socially, and politically.

First and foremost, the Islamist thesis applies a religious value system to infer a theoretical spiritual equality between men and women. As a moral and spiritual ideal, Islam's intrinsic egalitarianism paradoxically precedes the Islamist configuration of their socio-political agenda and rejection of gender equality. In this perspective, true equality is only possible on a spiritual level and must be reworked once it becomes a practical framework. I refer to this notion as 'religious equals–temporal compliments.' As Zaynab al-Ghazālī noted, men and women reflect "one truth," and are seen as religious and spiritual equals before God.[323] As a moral ideal, complete equality is divinely ordained by asserting that men and women are equal religious subjects since Islam does not administer its belief differently along the lines of sex and gender. It is a faith that calls on the entirety of people, a humanitarian message, so to speak, that only distinguishes between its subjects according to belief and the level of submission to God. However, equality as a moral ideal is only possible on a theoretically spiritual level. In practice, al-Ghazālī argued that men and women are not equals; they complement each other.[324]

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[323] Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya,* 27. For the complete discussion of this issue by al-Ghazālī, see the article titled, "Qadiyat al-Marʾa" (The Women's Question), Ibid., 27-8.
[324] Ibid.

Although the reinstatement of God's Caliphate (what Islamists believe to be the Islamic state) requires the determination of both men and women, they each are designated distinct social roles. Men are given the greater *wilāya*, meaning they are responsible for leadership. Women, on the other hand, contribute to this duty by facilitating and supporting male leadership and ensuring its success.[325] This division hinges on the notion of religious equals–temporal compliments. Al-Ghazālī writes,

> There is no place for the women's question in Islam; Islam sees her [the woman] as a reflection of one reality split in two, both complete one another and life is balanced out by their balance together… If it is argued that men possess a higher rank because God chose His prophets among them, we say: the prophets were not raised but by their mothers, which esteems women since God honored her alone with raising the bearers of His message to humans.[326]

Al-Ghazālī uses this argument to clarify that women's equality as religious subjects does not translate into practical equality in real life. Her critique does not deal with absolute equality, but remains focused on equality as a gender model promoted by secular women's movements. According to al-Ghazālī, women do not represent a hermetic entity in Islam and this, therefore, leaves no space for these discussions in Muslim societies. In this view, the exclusive roles prescribed for women as homemakers and child-nurturers do not contradict women's equality as religious subjects. For al-Ghazālī, the complementary gender roles she advocates for are an extension of the shared truth men and women equally represent. Since this truth is shared, al-Ghazālī assumes it must be complementary. Thus, the concept of religious equals–temporal compliments is drawn upon to represent complementarity as a gender model, and to ambiguously

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[325] *Wilāya* is an Arabic term that means guardianship and the ability to act on someone's behalf. See Mawil Y. Izzi Dien and P.E. Walker "Wilāya," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition Online*, P.J. Bearman (ed), https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1349. What al-Ghazālī means by the greater *wilāya* is the office of ruler or president; Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa*, 57. See also "al-Marʾa al-Muslima ʾila ʾayn?" (The Muslim Woman, Where to?) for a more comprehensive discussion on this viewpoint ibid., 57-61.

[326] Ibid., 58. This excerpt from the article is translated by the author.

position it as an Islamic necessity. Women's domestic roles, and men's pursuit of public work are presumed to be a religious outcome following this line of thought.[327]

Despite al-Ghazālī's persistence in reaffirming the importance of women's domestic roles, her judgment was not definitive when she expressed a juristic opinion. Islam does not forbid or oblige women's pursuit of public employment, she asserted. However, by assigning the financial responsibility to the man, Islam ensured that the role of women in carrying out their essential roles as "generation builders" was upheld.[328] Al-Ghazālī is careful not to mislead her readers with an invalid juristic opinion and, therefore, does not claim that women's work is religiously impermissible. Nevertheless, her position fervently oscillates between discussing the religious permissibility of women's work to a vehement rejection of it as a catalyst for societal decay. The paradox evident in this argument shows that religious equals–temporal compliments was not popularized by al-Ghazālī as a recourse to implement Islamic law, instead it reflects her intent for the diminution of a gender model that is incompatible with her political agenda.

After mentioning this juristic opinion, al-Ghazālī quickly starts to describe women's work as a form of modern slavery, surpassing its historical counterpart in terms of severity and mercilessness.[329] Discussing women's work as a form of exploitation was only an introduction to another argument that al-Ghazālī employs to dissuade women from pursuing public employment. In an article titled "Musawāt al-Rajul bil-Marʾa" (equating men to women), she considers the risks associated with women coveting male qualities and specificities, and vice versa. The call for gender equality and women's employment is a form of coveting, according to al-Ghazālī. It

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[327] For a comprehensive discussion of al-Ghazālī's views on women and work, see the article "al-Marʾa wa al-ʿAmal," (Women and Work) in Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya,* 39-40 and the article "Lakī ya Sayidatī, (To You my Lady) in Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa*, 115-120.
[328] Ibid., 108.
[329] Ibid., 109.

represents a step towards women's encroachment on the job market, which would result in the desertion of their households and children.[330] Furthermore, she contends that women's work could also precipitate the rejection of male authority, the disintegration of the nuclear family, and the downfall of social morality.[331] Al-Ghazālī justifies these concerns by asserting that only women possess the instinctual means to carry out domestic roles and build the next generation, while men are inherently suited to public work. Thus, this division of labor is grounded on *fiṭra*, the natural tendency and instinct inherently present in all creation.[332]

The Roots of Religious Equals–Temporal Compliments in Writings of Muhammad Rashīḍ Riḍa

The concept of religious equals–temporal compliments and the coveting proposition echo arguments presented by Muhammad Rashīd Riḍa in his 1932 book, *Nidāʾ ʾila al-Jins al-Laṭīf*.[333] In this book, Riḍa provides an early reference for Zaynab al-Ghazālī's gender model by asserting that women are "the sisters of men," a ḥadīth by the Prophet Muhammad that she heavily cites throughout her work.[334] Commenting on this *ḥadīth*, Riḍa initially sought to infer the spiritual and religious equality shared between men and women and subsequently their equal rewards in the Hereafter.[335] He proceeded to note that the equality enjoyed by women as religious subjects should not undermine men's authority and leadership over them because men are naturally

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[330] See Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya*, 47-8.

[331] Ibid.

[332] *Fiṭra* is a term that often translates to "original disposition," "natural constitution," or "innate nature." It is a term that is commonly found in the Quran and ḥadīth. Islam is widely seen by Muslims as the universal religion at birth which deems Islam as the religion of *fiṭra*. See Jon Hoover, "Fiṭra," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Three,* Kate Fleet, Gurdun Kramer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Devin J. Stewart (eds.), https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27155. Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa*, 106.

[333] Muhammad Rashīd Riḍa, *Nidāʾ ʾila al-Jins al-Laṭīf Yawm al-Mawlid al-Nabawī al-Sharīf Sanat 1351 fī Huqūq al-Nisāʾ fī al-Islām wa Ḥaẓahon min al-Iṣlāḥ al-Muḥammadī al-ʿām* (a Call to the Gentler Sex) (Cairo: Ḍār al-Nashr l-al-Gāmiʿāt, 2007).

[334] Ibid., 15.

[335] Ibid., 15-17.

qualified and religiously authorized in this respect.[336] Clearly, Riḍa's analysis exhibits the dependence on religious equals–temporal compliments to rationalize his argument. However, he contradicted himself by outlining, in an earlier section discussing men's authority over women (*qiwama*), that women's worldly rights and duties are determined through each society's social norms and traditions.[337] This view detaches gender roles from religious frameworks by suggesting that every society could articulate its own idea of rights and responsibilities for each gender. Yet, Riḍa overlooked this as a possibility when he explicitly discussed religious equals– temporal compliments. His reasoning centralized the importance of *fiṭra* as the primary determinant of gender roles, suggesting that complementary gender roles are an outcome of human nature and, consequently, must be endorsed by Islam.[338] The logic of his argument relied on the view that since complementarity is a rational outcome of human nature, then it must be found in and even advocated by Islam, since Islam is the religion of *fiṭra*.[339] Thus, the interconnectedness of Islam and complementary gender is indirectly drawn in light of this line of reasoning.

Thereon, Riḍa cited Prophet Muhammad's advice to his daughter, Faṭima (604–632), instructing her to manage the household and, in the meantime, ordering her husband, ʿAlī ibn

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[336] Ibid., 32-5.
[337] Ibid., 30-1.
[338] Ibid., 35-6.
[339] Ibid. The only occurrence of the word *fiṭra* in this form in the Quran (30:30) relates to Islam being the true religion (Islam). According to the verse and several *aḥādīth* (i.e. every newborn is born with the natural constitution *(fiṭra)*. Then, his parents make him a Jew, Christian, or Zoroastrian.) man's natural disposition is to be a Muslim which makes Islam *dīn al-fiṭra* (the religion of man's innate nature); see Jon Hoover, "Fiṭra," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Three*.

Abī Ṭālib (600–661), to pursue work outside of it.[340] Riḍa's opinion was expressed as a possibility deduced through independent reasoning instead of a definitive positivistic religious law. He noted a trend amongst Ḥanbalī scholars who proposed the Prophet's guidance as non-binding, attributing it to social norms and traditions rather than prophetic directives for the umma.[341] The Prophet's advice to Faṭima and ʿAlī, and the subsequent division of labor in this case, reflected the social mores and customs that date back to their time.[342]

The Ḥanbalī analysis of this *ḥadīth* converges with Riḍa's earlier statement on the possibility of gender roles being shaped on the basis of local realities and traditions. Riḍa's awareness and expression of the Ḥanbalī analysis in his book are significant, as they invite questioning of his decision to favor another interpretation. Riḍa was well informed on the Ḥanbalī school of Islamic jurisprudence and agreed with many of its conclusions. Nevertheless, his decision to favour another interpretation implies that there were additional factors that influenced his stance on religious equals–temporal compliments and complementarity as a gender model. His position was built on the need to propose complementarity as a religious product that needs to be observed and not a contextual reality of the time of the Prophet.

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[340] Faṭima was the daughter of Prophet Muhammad and his first wife Khadīja. She is a venerated figure throughout the Muslim world in Sunnī and Shīʿī Islam. She was married to the Prophet's cousin, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. See Verena Klemm, "Fāṭima bt. Muḥammad," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Three*, Kate Fleet, Gurdun Kramer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Devin J. Stewart (eds.), https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27039. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib is a significant figure in Sunnī and Shīʿī Islam. He was the fourth Rightly Guided Caliph and a close companion of the Prophet Muhammad. See Robert M. Gleave, "ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Three*, Kate Fleet, Gurdun Kramer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Devin J. Stewart (eds.), https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_26324.
[341] Ḥanbalī fiqh is the fourth school of Islamic Sunni jurisprudence. It was based on the ideas of Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal (780–855) that survived through his students and followers. Hassan Ansari and Ahmad Pakatchi, "Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal," Suheyl Umar (trans.), in *Encyclopaedia Islamica Online*, W. Madelung and F. Daftary (eds.), https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1163/1875-9831_isla_COM_0207
[342] Muhammad Rashīd Riḍa, *Nidāʾ,* 34.

The ulterior influences shaping Riḍa's perspective can be clearly seen in his ultimatum on women's employment. His intention was not to reject the practice altogether but to regulate it to ensure the family and the nation were not afflicted.[343] Indeed, Riḍa does not critique unmarried women's pursuit of education or public work according to their abilities and desires.[344] It is the married woman whom he fears could be distracted by other obligations besides her household and family. Further emphasis is placed on the family and the nation by Riḍa's call for unmarried women to pursue the sciences and works related to maternity and wifehood since they offer more valuable outcomes to women, the umma, and humanity as a whole.[345] Through this example, we can see that Riḍa's concern for complementarity as a gender model intends to sustain the institution of marriage and the nuclear family as the nation's most straightforward and crucial building block of the umma. This concern was also manifest in Riḍa's critique of jurists who limit a woman's wifely obligations to obedience and the husband's sexual rights. He rejects how these jurists absolve women of housework and other domestic or motherly obligations.[346] As such, homemaking and the upkeep of household tasks were a paramount concern that pervaded Riḍa's gender discourse in *Nidāʾ*. It underlines the perspective that essentializes the ideal woman as a competent mother and an obedient wife.

The mainstream patriarchal perception during the early twentieth century conceived the production of this ideal woman as a foundational step towards building the nation, be it secular or religious. This notion is exemplified by Riḍa's opinion that women are not required to have elaborate religious knowledge. On the contrary, they must remain updated on the latest

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[343] Ibid., 36

[344] Ibid., 36-7. Riḍa's approach in describing non-married women indicates a significant categorical perception in his thought; he calls them women who are not wives or mothers, which further clarifies his intentions. Thus, it could be seen that wifehood and motherhood were the primary concerns of Riḍa in this discussion.

[345] Ibid.

[346] Ibid., 34-5.

household management and childrearing practices. He noted that these techniques constantly

evolve; therefore, women must remain open to adaptation.[347] Furthermore, Riḍa elaborately

discussed the coveting proposition as a way to reiterate the concept of complementarity in the

same way al-Ghazālī did. He firmly concluded that men must remain within their designated

domains, just as women should within theirs. This argument is derived from Riḍa's commentary

on verse 32 of chapter 4 of the Quran, which states,

> Do not covet what God has given to some of you more than others- men have the portion
> they have earned; and women the portion they have earned- you should rather ask God
> for some of His bounty: He has full knowledge of everything. (4:32).[348]

It is important to note that interpretations of this verse vary, and one of the significant

viewpoints is attributed to Riḍa's teacher, Muhammad ʿAbduh. Contrary to Riḍa's assertion,

ʿAbduh posited that the verse is not setting out to address gender-specific coveting. In other

words, the verse does not discuss women coveting men's gender roles or vice versa. Instead, it

seeks to deal with coveting in the context of usurping other people's wealth or property.[349]

Interestingly, Riḍa attributed his perspective in *Nidāʾ* to ʿAbduh, although ʿAbduh himself

resorted to other exegetic principles that led him to the differing interpretation highlighted

above.[350] In this case, Riḍa's attribution to ʿAbduh and his insistence on propagating this opinion

without acknowledging the potential alternative shows how his subjectivities were shaped. The

significance of the coveting proposition lies in its reiteration of the importance of adhering to

fiṭra-inspired gender roles. The proposition renders the possibility of subverting these roles as a

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[347] Ibid., 33.

[348] Ibid., 39. The verse is from Surat al-Nisāʾ, Muhammad Abdul Haleem translation.

[349] Yusra Khreegi, "Women in the Writings of Muhammad ʿAbduh" (PhD diss., SOAS University of London, 2014), https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/id/eprint/20318, 176-7. As Khreegi notes, Riḍa and ʿAbduh both referred to different exegetic principles to further their interpretation. Where Riḍa used the preceding verse for context, ʿAbduh focused on the context of the revelation. Khreegi stresses that Riḍa is often found citing religious opinions and attributing them to ʿAbduh, and therefore questions whether these attributions were factual, or an addition or interpretation entirely added by Riḍa given the difference in opinion. See Ibid., 175-181.

[350] Ibid., 177-8.

form of coveting that is outlawed by Islamic ethics. Therefore, the coveting proposition attempts to locate a religiously-substantiated argument that asserts complementarity more consistently and outlaws its subversion. Additionally, it further underlines Riḍa's influence by mainstream discourse in the early twentieth century that viewed women as nation builders.

Examining the first fundamental of the Islamist thesis on women and gender reveals a paradox in its prescription of "complementary gender roles," because it claims to build on women's spiritual equality as religious subjects. The rationale employed in this approach invites scrutiny, since it emphasizes the rupture between equality, as the expression of a religious ideal, and its implementation in a practical framework. Both Riḍa and al-Ghazālī offer limited or non-exhaustive justifications for complementarity in their arguments. Questions arise regarding how the shared truth manifested through men and women conclusively determines their gender roles? How are religious arguments used to justify women's domestic roles, although they are equals only when they are seen as religious subjects?

To a great degree, the arguments employed to address this issue crystallize the concept of religious equals–temporal complements. Under this pretense, Islamists are afforded the space to construct the limits of women's private or domestic obligations and their participation in public space, while claiming to be religiously sanctioned. A primary focus on *fiṭra* tends to dominate this rhetoric. Through the association between Islam and *fiṭra,* the argument for complementary gender roles is substantiated as a religious product. In this view, gender roles are a natural outcome of the instincts embedded by God in men and women. Men are instinctively suited for public work, while women possess the natural ability to educate their children and facilitate men's pursuit of income by managing the household. In that regard, Al-Ghazālī is clear: women must only exist as mothers and wives. She maintains that "the first, second and third duty of

women in society is to build a generation with a firm Islamic doctrine."[351] Understanding the validity of this approach aligns with the practices of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (the righteous forebears), seen by al-Ghazālī as a comprehensive role model. She argues that this model was abandoned as a result of women's deviation from their essential gender roles. Women could only amend the harm they precipitated by returning to their domestic roles.[352] Consequently, al-Ghazālī echoes the position advocated by Muhammad Rashīd Riḍa, which views social and moral stagnation as a reflection of women's practices, identifying Muslim women as instrumental in societal reform. The Muslim woman is perceived as the culprit behind decay and, therefore, must become the site for reform.

The arguments used by Zaynab al-Ghazālī to support the concept of religious equals– temporal compliments often exhibit ambiguity and rely on *fiṭra* to invoke notions of biology as a form of legitimacy. Although she draws on some Quranic verses and sayings of the Prophet, there is a notable absence of independent reasoning connecting these sources with her argument in the cited articles. The textual sources drawn upon by al-Ghazālī were never contextualized within a proper juristic framework, which ultimately shifts their interpretation in favor of al-Ghazālī's reading. A general state of disconnect can be seen between al-Ghazālī's arguments and the scriptural sources she draws upon, raising questions about the coherence and validity of her positions. Although, it could be argued that her work does nothing more than relay authoritative juristic opinions forwarded by others, an examination of Riḍa's treatise does not offer any more authoritative reasoning or elaboration on this position.

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[351] Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm al-Marʾa*, 106-7.
[352] Ibid., 108.

Reading Riḍa's work alongside al-Ghazālī's shows his authority in the Islamic modernist tradition, as he inspired the Islamic Brotherhood during its formative years (see chapter 1).[353] Given that his work was famous when al-Ghazālī was maturing as a religious and social militant, I perceive the possible influences that could have shaped her perspective and the Muslim Brotherhood's policy. The influence of Riḍa on al-Ghazālī's work is significant, since it speaks to the continuity of Riḍa's discourse through political Islam in Egypt, as evoked in chapter 1. Such an overlap is significant because it helps to contextualize some of the influences on al-Ghazālī, aiding in the elucidation of her objectives. Accordingly, I view *Nidāʾ* as an early theoretical reference to the Islamist thesis on women and gender. As I show in my discussion of the second fundamental of the Islamist thesis on women and gender, the significance of religious equals–temporal compliments far outweigh the individual, since it ties into the Islamist drive for Islamic statehood.

The Second Fundamental of the Islamist Thesis: Women, Marriage, and Social Reform

When Valerie J. Hoffman interviewed Zaynab al-Ghazālī in the early 1980s, she asked her about the importance of marriage and the role of women in society. Al-Ghazālī's answer was consistent with the themes I have showcased so far. Her conviction that marriage, women, and the family are some of the most crucial institutions for establishing an Islamic state was evident. Her response showed these categories as being profusely interconnected, because women were assigned the responsibility for sustaining their marriages and families, given that men were expected to pursue work outside the household. Thus, educating women was deemed a necessity since, "they are the ones who build the kind of men that we need to fill the ranks of the Islamic

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[353] As I pointed out in chapter 1, I use the term Islamic modernism to denote the intellectual movement that attempted to reform and modernize Islam and was influenced by modern Western values; see footnote 2 in chapter 1.

call," the same men who will eventually "rebuild the Islamic nation."[354] Furthermore, al-Ghazālī expressed additional views that emphasized her belief in the importance of women for the fruition of the "Islamic nation." For example, she articulated women as essential in observing and negotiating social morality and collective honor. Women hold responsibility for safeguarding social morality, she argued, by making sure they dress modestly, while failing to do so could lead to corruption and decay enticed by promiscuity.[355] Similarly, al-Ghazālī held women accountable for the deterioration of the sociomoral conditions of society. Women were at fault for the absence of an Islamist regime, which al-Ghazālī considered as the embodiment of decline, since they had an essential duty as nation-builders. In other words, since women independently retained the ability to establish an Islamic state, they must, in turn, be held accountable for its suspension and the degeneration caused by its absence. Nonetheless, al-Ghazālī noted that such a serious form of neglect could only be absolved if women were to revert to their essential roles in the private sphere and commit to the Islamist project.[356] To be sure, the Islamist view of marriage, women, and the family was not perceived independently of Islamic statehood since the nuclear family is a product of marriage. The family was perceived, therefore, as a "fundamental unit in building the Islamic State."[357]

Repackaging perceptions of marriage, women, and the family represents a reference to al-Ghazālī's appropriation of the discursive trends on social reform typically promoted around the turn of the twentieth century. Reformers from different backgrounds were incentivized by a surge of modernizing reform and nascent nationalist discourse to articulate new conceptions of

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[354] Valerie J. Hoffman, "An Islamic Activist: Zaynab al-Ghazali," 236.
[355] Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Al-Dāʿiyya*, 90.
[356] Zaynab al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Hāshimī, *Humūm,* 108.
[357] Valerie J. Hoffman, "An Islamic Activist: Zaynab al-Ghazali," 237.

women's roles and motherhood.[358] Women were assigned the responsibility of overseeing their

children's intellectual, moral, and physical development, which was reformulated through

scientific jargon and modern notions of cleanliness and hygiene, and referred to as *tarbiya*

(childrearing). This model of "rational" childrearing signified a modern framework theorized

with the intention of producing productive subjects capable of working to serve the nation, and

aware of the principles of industry and economy.[359] The origin of this discourse, however, is

exceedingly problematic. Historian Omnia Shakry posits that,

Motherhood, as taken up within the context of colonialism, was fundamental to the constitution of national identity and entailed the formation of a series of discursive practices that demarcated women as both a "locus of the country's backwardness" and a sphere of transformation to be reconstituted and raised up onto the plane of enlightened rationality. As such, it figures centrally in turn-of-the-century modernizing discourse and was essential to the nationalist project. Thus the focus on proper rational and scientific mothering is situated within both the colonial discourse on motherhood and the nationalist discourse on modernity.[360]

Locating the origins of this discourse in perspectives professed by British colonial

officials in Egypt underlines the contentious underpinnings of isolating women as subjects of

reform and barometers of the nation's conditions. British colonial officials, most significantly the

Earl of Cromer, articulated the unqualified position of Egyptian women as a signifier for the

country's unpreparedness for "the introduction of European civilization."[361] As such, the colonial

establishment in Egypt identified the reformulation of women as an integral step for achieving its

"modernizing" project. Despite the ostensible importance of social reform to British colonial

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[358] Omnia Shakry, "Schooled Mothers and Structured Play: Child Rearing in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East,* ed. Lila Abu Lughod (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 126.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Ibid., 126-7.
[361] Ibid., 128-9. Lord Cromer, also known as the Earl of Cromer, or Evelyn Baring, first came to Egypt as a member of one of the banking families that owned a significant portion of Egyptian debt in 1879. He then returned to Egypt as the first Consul-General after the Anglo-Egyptian war of 1882 and held the position until 1907; see Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *A Short History of Modern* Egypt, 69-80. The complete overview of Cromer's perspectives and policies in Egypt was expressed in his work; see Evelyn Baring Cromer, *Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

policy, the vocalized significance of this notion resonated with many reformers in Egypt. As Leila Ahmed postulates, the centrality of women as a category of social and cultural transformation for Egyptian reformers in this period was influenced by colonial discourse. Concepts discussing women's roles were,

> Interjected into the native discourse as Muslim men exposed to European ideas began to reproduce and react to them and, subsequently and more pervasively and insistently, as Europeans–servants of empire and individuals resident in Egypt–introduced and actively disseminated them.[362]

As such, identifying women as conduits for social transformation by viewing them as sites for reform and determinants of a nation's backwardness was popularized into a dominant paradigm for many early-twentieth-century reformers. While reformers accepted these ideas as a driving force for modernization, their colonial origin raises questions as to the kind of functions they served, and their assimilation in indigenous reformative frameworks, especially for Islamists.

The persistence of early-twentieth-century reformist conceptions of marriage, women, and the family in Islamist ideologies highlights an interesting paradox. How could these ideas be proposed as a return to an authentic Islam, as claimed by Zaynab al-Ghazālī, if they were derived from modern notions? As social scientist Lila Abu Lughod argues, the Islamist claim for authenticity—which rests on defining women's normative relations with their husbands and children and the significance of the nuclear family for social reform—is "profoundly modern."[363] Nonetheless, Islamists often evoke this notion to counterclaim liberal forces demanding more public freedoms for women. The Islamist claim usually purports these freedoms as a Western infringement on Muslim culture that incites corruption.[364] Although Islamists often build on

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[362] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 149.
[363] Lila Abu Lughod, "The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiation as a Dynamic of Postcolonial Cultural Politics," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East,* ed. Lila Abu Lughod (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 255-256.
[364] Ibid., 248-252.

these notions in particular ways, their acquiescence to the modern premise of reform, and their search for a similar model within Islamic tradition, is juxtaposed with their claim for authenticity reflecting the speciousness of their argument.[365] Additionally, the consequential gender model that essentializes complementarity between the sexes, discussed above, is equally modern, since it was at the heart of the restructuring of the bourgeois family characteristic of modernity. It was theoretically and practically infused with the forces of "the encroachment of colonial modernity, of eugenics discourse, of imperial nationalism, of capitalist modes of production, and of the influences of the discourses of liberal secularism," as Yusra Khreegi asserts.[366] Therefore, the pseudo-authenticity evoked by al-Ghazālī in her discussion of women and gender roles was, in most cases, fundamentally shaped by modern notions. These notions came to be seen as normative by many reformers in the early twentieth century, like Rashīd Riḍa, and were therefore lodged in their frameworks.

As such, I propose that the second fundamental for the Islamist thesis on women and gender is a conception of women's essential abilities and social roles in the Islamic nation that was inspired by modern discourses and idealized by early-twentieth-century reformers. This included an emphasis on the Muslim woman as a primary basis for moderating, reforming, and negotiating the nuclear family, the institution of marriage, social morality and, accordingly, the Islamic nation. Analogous to the modern woman, the Muslim woman becomes seen as the gatekeeper of these axiomatic building blocks of the Islamic nation. The second fundamental draws its legitimacy by evoking a perception of pseudo-authenticity to assert that the Muslim woman is a site of social reform and an indicator of sociomoral conditions.

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[365] Ibid., 255
[366] Yusra Khreegi, "Women in the Writings of Muhammad ʿAbduh," 178.

Once again, to understand the roots of al-Ghazālī's argument and its interconnectedness with the modern trends outlined above, I examine the work of Rashīd Riḍa, since it informed much of al-Ghazālī's ideology. As I pointed out in chapter 1, Riḍa differed from other reformers and students of Muhammad ʿAbduh in the tradition of Islamic modernism by asserting the necessity of the Caliphate as an Islamic institution. His concern with articulating a framework that could develop the Caliphate into a modern system of governance was a marker of his drive to validate conditions like the modern state through Islamic tradition (see chapter 1).[367] It is highly likely that the tends discussed above influenced Riḍa's perception of women as nation-builders, as they appeared eminently normative in the early twentieth century. Yet more significantly, I suggest that Riḍa's engagement with this model was more rigorous because it connected to sustaining the Islamic nation and modern Islamic statehood.

Riḍa's position with respect to modern trajectories discussing the role of women and social reform was well documented in his reaction to Qasim Amīn's seminal works, *The Liberation of Women* (1899), and *The New Woman* (1901), which was published in *al-Manār*.[368] These books were influential in nationalist circles and reflected the pervasiveness of these trends in the ideology of a well-known nationalist reformer like Qasim Amīn.[369] In *the Liberation of Women*, Amīn insisted that women are at the crux of the Egyptian family and are, therefore, an essential category for reform, which should start with the family and women's familial roles. His advocacy for women's education, and critique of veiling and seclusion, was tied to rectifying women's efficacy in raising competent children.[370] Overall, Amin subscribed to the notion that

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[367] Kosugi Yasushi, "Al-Manār Revisited," 21-2.
[368] Yusra Khreegi, "Women in the Writings of Muhammad ʿAbduh," 118-9.
[369] Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing and Liberating Egypt, 1805-1923* (Berkely: University of California Press, 2005), 152.
[370] Malek Abisaab & Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "A Century after Qasim Amin: Fictive Kinship and Historical Uses of 'Tahrir al-Marʾa'," 8.

women played a decisive role in nurturing and shaping the men of the nation, which meant that their amelioration equaled the development of a whole nation.[371] Despite fundamental disagreements with Amīn's liberal tendencies and his criticism of the veil, Riḍa expressed support for Amīn's conclusions, highlighting the nuanced engagement with evolving perspectives on women in Egyptian society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although Riḍa's personal views were different, which is evident through *Nidāʾ,* he expressed his support for *The Liberation of Women* and *The New Woman,* and published a positive review of them.[372] While Amīn's works stirred a mixed reaction, critics and supporters alike agreed that the conditions of women, both domestic and public, were reflective of Egypt's political circumstances.[373]

The endorsement of this discursive trajectory targeting social reform through the category of marriage, women, and the family was also articulated in Riḍa's *al-Manār*, further substantiating his agreement with these ideas. Articles calling for the centralization of *tarbiya* as the foundation of national progress were published in *al-Manār,* asserting the importance of educating boys and girls. However, it was seen as best for girls to be instructed in subjects like household management, of which they were ignorant according to some of these articles, given that this would be their future occupation.[374] In 1912, Riḍa delivered a lecture in which he lamented the decline he perceived in contemporary Muslim societies, claiming that this included language, religion, morals, and manners. *Tarbiya* was identified as the proper mode of action to propel an Islamic renaissance and dispel social and intellectual decay. For Riḍa, *tarbiya* needed to be grounded in the principles of Islamic faith and, meanwhile, aptly aligned with modern

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[371] Ibid.
[372] Yusra Khreegi, "Women in the Writings of Muhammad ʿAbduh," 118-9.
[373] Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation*, 153.
[374] Omnia Shakry, "Schooled Mothers and Structured Play," 154-5.

concerns for childrearing and orderly households so that the East could reach Europe's technological and educational progress.[375] Similarly, a sermon delivered in 1912 was published in *al-Manār* underlining *tarbiyat al-Buyūt* (the upbringing of houses) as the nucleus of national progress. This responsibility was for mothers to endure, as the sermon claimed,

> How will this matter be dealt with when our women are ignorant of everything related to *tarbiya* – all forms of knowledge, and religious and secular manners (*adab*)?... A national upbringing cannot proceed unless we teach women what it is necessary of them to know in order to raise their children.[376]

The importance of *tarbiya* as a central domain for social reform was similarly expressed by other reformers like Amīn. According to him, the new woman played an instrumental role in synthesizing future generations of men by serving as the source of modern *tarbiya* in the Egyptian household. For Egyptian women to carry out this responsibility properly, they needed to be adequately educated. Furthering the perception that women are blameworthy for the state of Egyptian society, Amīn noted "that the faults we see in children—lying, fear, laziness, and stupidity—result from the fact that mothers are ignorant of the laws of tarbiya."[377] Women held the solemn ability to fashion their households into drivers for modernity or to wallow in backwardness, according to Amīn. He saw that many mothers had little education or moral instruction, arguing that,

> "The woman . . . passes her morals along to her children who, in turn, pass them on to those they come in contact with. Thus, morals become those of the community after they are the morals of the family and after they are the morals of the mother.... A good mother is more beneficial to the species than a good man, and a corrupt woman is more damaging than a corrupt man."[378]

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[375] Ibid., 155.
[376] Ibid., 156.
[377] Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation,* 159.
[378] Ibid.

Accordingly, the recurrent portrayal of women as pivotal agents in nation-building and social reform emerges as a common trope for certain social reformers in the early twentieth century. This evolution was deemed indispensable to multiple parties, aligning with what was perceived as a universal trend in all modern nations. This perspective was far from particular to religious reformers like Riḍa as it appears to be eminent in the work of others like Qasim Amīn.

A final point that indicates an overlap between al-Ghazālī's ideas and popular frameworks for social reform around the turn of the twentieth century in Egypt was the conception of women's representation of collective honor and morality. Conceptions that associated family honor with national honor were analyzed by Historian Beth Baron in her book, *Egypt as a Woman: Gender, Nationalism and Politics*. As part of the nationalist fashioning of a collective Egyptian identity, nationalist reformers appropriated social codes of family honor that were linked to female purity and constructed it into a representation of national honor.[379] Family metaphors and female images of the nation were drawn upon to consolidate this imagining and popularize the notion that women of the nation needed to be protected to safeguard national honor.[380] This constructed model of national morality was absorbed by the Muslim Brotherhood, and was evident in their critique of prostitution. As Baron notes, "a contributor to the Muslim Brothers' publication al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun reiterated, "For forty years the honor [karama] of Misr and her purity have been stained with the disgrace of the dishonor of legalized prostitution licensed by the Muslim Egyptian government."[381]

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[379] Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2005), 40-2.
[380] Ibid., 53-6.
[381] Ibid., 51.

To be sure, social reformers in the early twentieth century in Egypt were acting in response to the realities of their time. Their expression of the concepts outlined above is a reflection of the mainstream paradigms that defined much of the discourse concerning marriage, women, and the family in the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, the continuity of the same ideas and approaches in the work of Zaynab al-Ghazālī almost fifty years later is what concerns us here. Al-Ghazālī's appropriation of these trends, building on Rashīd Riḍa's work, constitutes a betrayal of *al-Nahḍa's* founding logic, which emphasized *ijtihad* for renewal. Her insistence on repackaging women as nation-builders, categories for reform, and markers of decay points to her use of Riḍa's arguments in an uncontextualized manner, implicating her in the blind *taqlīd* (imitation) of antiquated juristic opinions. As I showed in chapter 1, Islamic modernists strongly opposed *taqlid,* since it restricted Muslims to medieval opinions and practices. Their emphasis on *ijtihad* favored the use of independent reasoning to draw on textual sources and propose new opinions. Although al-Ghazālī advocated Riḍa's ideas, she decontextualized them by repurposing his arguments for a different time with different realities and inputs. As such, al-Ghazālī's use of Riḍa's ideas constitutes a paradox, because it contradicts the logic these ideas were built upon. Similarly, if we examine the worldview al-Ghazālī subscribes to, namely Qutb's binary of *ḥakimiyya* and *jahiliyya*, we'll find that, given the problematic legacy of this discourse, she is implicated in *jahiliyya* as defined by Qutb. Since her discourse is not entirely Islamic, it coincides with Qutb's attack on man-made ideologies in Muslim societies and holds al-Ghazālī guilty of breaching *ḥakimiyya*.

Moreover, I contend that al-Ghazālī's appropriation of this discourse was not exclusively motivated by a quest for recapturing and applying an authentic religious model. Instead, the defining factor that instilled her commitment to these ideas must be seen as the superimposition

of political statehood on Islam. In a similar vein to Riḍa's ideology, Islamic statehood anchored al-Ghazālī's articulation of religious opinions on gender roles, echoing the trajectories of early twentieth century social reform.

As part of this agenda, Riḍa looked at reconfiguring the Muslim woman as a subject of the Islamic state. Thus, the Muslim woman needed to abide by the religious ideals Riḍa interpreted, which were influenced by colonial policy and shared with other reformers, to facilitate the process of nation-building on religious terms. This framework he articulated as a course for Islamic statehood became incorporated as a model by the Muslim Brotherhood and Zaynab al-Ghazālī for their perceived primacy of Islamic statehood. Al-Ghazālī built upon these ideas by hypothesizing that, if the Muslim woman was produced religiously, her essential output as an Islamic nation-builder would propel the establishment of an Islamic state.

Conclusion

Building upon the first fundamental of the Islamist thesis on women and gender—in which the role of women is perceived to be in the home and family—to discuss the second fundamental—which conflates the role of women with that of the nation and public morality—, it is possible to understand the Islamist utilization of women and gender for political means. Women in this context are perceived as a vehicle for socio-political reform, negotiated through religiously-ambiguous readings. The limits of this reform are constructed concerning modern ideas which inform the production of the Muslim woman as hypothesized by Zayzafoon. The convergences between various social reformers to uphold these notions has solidified the perception of women as sites of social and political change, which was built upon by al-Ghazālī and the Muslim Brotherhood.

However, the preexisting discursive trends that shaped and defined al-Ghazālī's perspective on women and gender roles, rooted in the reorientation of family structures associated with capitalism and modernity, betray the notion of authenticity she claims, and infringe on the theory of Qutb she subscribes to. As I noted above, these trends were sometimes embraced as a universal ideology that determined how states were built and nations were modernized. Their authority was associated with the British colonial presence in Egypt, and their practice must be seen as a product of the turn of the twentieth century. As such, there is no authenticity to be realized in this respect, contrary to what al-Ghazālī claims.

The production of a modern Islamist female subject, as seen through al-Ghazālī's work, was also a case of ideological betrayal to *al-Nahḍa*. By recourse to Riḍa's arguments, al-Ghazālī was no longer considering the need to propose contemporary solutions to contemporary problems, which defined *al-Nahḍa's* ethos of *ijtihād*. This suggests that al-Ghazālī emulated Riḍa's opinions in the same fashion that medieval juristic opinions were blindly emulated. The reformers of al-Nahḍa had come to symbolize a new medieval consensus that compromised the development of religious thought in these domains. Accordingly, I postulate that al-Ghazālī's implication in this predicament represents the failure to apply the principles of Islamic modernism as a political framework. As I showed, the primacy given to statehood overshadows the need for *tajdīd* (renewal) in this case.

Throughout this chapter, I showed how al-Ghazālī attempted to produce the Muslim woman according to the Islamist thesis of women and gender. For her, the Muslim woman was a site of reform and equally, an entry point to address socio-political issues. Her perspective was clear: the majority of social and political problems could be remedied by women's embrace of domesticity. My critique of al-Ghazālī follows the work of critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha and

Leila Ahmed. As Bhabha argues in The *Location of Culture*, a shift in objectives and critical

methods offers limited decolonial gains so long as a stereotype still stands as a "secure point of

identification."[382] Bhabha suggests that "the stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory

mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our

critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself."[383] In this respect,

al-Ghazālī's appropriation of preexisting conceptions of the Muslim woman, many of which

were informed by intellectual engagement with colonial discourse, could be seen as an example

of submitting to the stereotype. The same could be said concerning her view of women, which

was inspired mainly by Western conceptions of reform and nation-building. Following Bhabha's

argumentation, the insistence on building on the same stereotype compromises al-Ghazālī's

claim that her discourse resembles a genuine decolonial reorientation of socio-politics resistant to

Westernization. By appealing to these structures, al-Ghazālī is implicated in the perpetuation of

these stereotypes that hold Muslim women as culprits of moral decay and vehicles for reform

and national synthesis. Leila Ahmed proposes a similar analysis in *Women and Gender in Islam,*

where she postulates that in the Islamic world,

> The discourses of resistance and rejection are inextricably informed by the languages and
> ideas developed and disseminated by the West to no less a degree than are the languages
> of those openly advocating emulation of the West or those who, like Frantz Fanon or
> Nawal El-Saadawi, are critical of the West but nonetheless ground themselves in
> intellectual assumptions and political ideas, including a belief in the rights of the
> individual, formulated by Western bourgeois capitalism and spread over the globe as a
> result of Western hegemony.[384]

Ahmed notes that Marxists, feminists, and secularists often concede that their grounding is in

Western thought. On the other hand, this phenomenon represents a more complicated

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[382] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 99.
[383] Ibid., 99-100.
[384] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 235-6.

predicament for Islamists who claim to advocate a form of religious authenticity and indigenous tradition that they claim is marginalized by their Westernized opponents.[385] Additionally and most importantly, limiting gender issues to ideas of cultural dialectics between the East and the West perpetuates the colonial discursive position, which tethered similar attitudes at a time when Europeans were critiquing Eastern societies.[386] As such, the Islamist thesis on women and gender represents a misplaced effort that canonizes non-contextual ideas of gender as a manifestation of religious authenticity. Without a doubt, the primacy of politics in al-Ghazālī's discourse and her implication in practical and theoretical frameworks that do not observe egalitarianism deems her concern primarily political. Therefore, al-Ghazālī must be seen as an Islamist, given that her devotion to gender justice is often marginalized in favor of politics. The construction of the Muslim woman al-Ghazālī engages in is one where Islamic statehood dictates the intersection between supply and demand. To put it more clearly, al-Ghazālī envisions a statist Muslim woman that could only be an exclusive subject of Islamism, an 'Islamist Woman' so to speak.

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[385] Ibid., 236.
[386] Ibid.

Conclusion

This thesis has evidenced the predominance of Islamist politics and Islamic statehood in Zaynab al-Ghazālī's discourse, especially her self-history and "womanist" agenda. I have underlined the inability to appropriately understand and analyze al-Ghazālī's work without locating the numerous political forces that influenced it. To do so, I first delineated the long and complicated history of Islamism in Egypt, starting with the early reformers of *al-Nahḍa* to the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood and its venture into Egyptian politics. I exhibited the expansive, and occasionally paradoxical, trajectories in the history of Islamic modernism, and underlined how the differences between these paths was often political. In this respect, I discussed the work of Muhammad ʿAbduh and Muhammad Rashīd Riḍa and their significance to Muslim Brotherhood policy. I attempted to emphasize the complicated history of political Islam and its ideological engagement with the concepts formulated by *al-Nahḍa.* I also discussed the Muslim Brotherhood after the 1952 Free Officer movement and its emphasis on radicalism, which was introduced with the ideas of Sayyid Qutb.

Using this historical context as an entry-point for my analysis of al-Ghazālī, I turned my attention to discussing her personal life and her own composition of her self-history. I examined and analyzed al-Ghazālī's writing outlining her early life, including her prison memoirs, *Ayyam min Ḥayātī*. My analysis of these texts pointed to how Islamist politics suffused al-Ghazālī's composition of her narrative. Additionally, I discussed the ways in which al-Ghazālī's exercised a self-monopoly over the dissemination of her narrative, and how this affects our perception of her as audiences and critics. The lack of diverse material covering al-Ghazālī's life significantly skews our interpretation of her narrative such that our understanding is closer to her politicized account. Moreover, to consolidate the reception of her narrative, al-Ghazālī drew on authoritative

tropes in popular Egyptian religious life to ascribe an elevated level of legitimacy to her experience. The use of mysticism and mystical experiences was, therefore, repeatedly relied on in al-Ghazālī's self-history. Meanwhile, popular Islamist ideologies articulated by Sayyid Qutb, especially in *Maʿālim*, appear to have also played a role in shaping certain portions of al-Ghazālī's narrative. However, the comprehensive effects of Qutb's ideology on al-Ghazālī deserves a separate study. Based on these conclusions, I suggest that al-Ghazālī's narrative must be seen as a personalized Islamist experience that acts as a political tool intended to further Islamist ideologies through public dissemination.

Finally, my examination of al-Ghazālī's work concludes with critiquing her production of the ideal Islamist female subject. I argue that her approach toward articulating the ideal Muslim woman's gender roles and normative, social, and domestic, responsibilities might be understood through the framework proposed by Lamia Ben Youssef Zayzafoon. According to Zayzafoon, the Muslim Woman is an unfixed entity produced through the laws of supply and demand. In this case, the demand al-Ghazālī dictates to produce the Muslim woman is essentially political, as it is primarily shaped by the Islamist obsession over establishing a modern Islamic state. Furthermore, al-Ghazālī's production of the Muslim woman was often expressed through a broader paradigm that claimed to represent authentic Islam as a way of rejecting western and colonial frameworks calling for women's emancipation. I showed how al-Ghazālī's pseudo-authentic conceptions of women was inspired by the work of Muhammad Rashīd Riḍa and, paradoxically, had its roots entwined with colonial arguments and policies put forth in the early twentieth century. I highlighted the two fundamentals defining the Islamist thesis and stressed the contradictions evident in their underlying logic. These contradictions were often a resort to

sustain Islamist politics. I use this discussion to suggest that addressing al-Ghazālī as a womanist entails various assumptions, given that her primary devotion is to Islamist politics.

To conclude, my examination of al-Ghazālī's work shows that it is imperative to remain critical when studying the legacies associated with Islamist groups. Such an approach helps probe the various assumptions that precipitate Islamist thought, which are often brushed over when aligned with religious pseudo-authenticity. In my opinion, this is of the utmost importance in cases where Islamist groups claim to possess a legitimate truth which they seek to reinforce through the authority of religion. Uncritical attitudes toward these groups and key figures often lead to grave assumptions and wide inaccuracies that perpetuate political or politicized readings of Islam and posit them as absolute religious conclusions.

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