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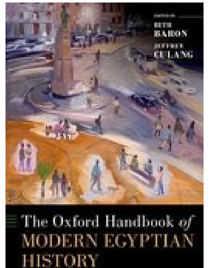

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CHAPTER

18 Photography, Selfhood, and Cultural Modernity

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Abstract

This essay looks at the cultural work of photographs and associated practices in colonial Egypt from the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century. Focusing on portraiture and the "local archive" (i.e., images produced by Egyptians for themselves), it considers what people did with photographs and what photographs did for people in their manifold incarnations as commodities, as media carrying a visual inscription, and as particular performances of selfhood. Through their exchange and circulation, photographs marked their wielders as modern urbanites, often signifying upward social mobility and the acquisition of urban sophistication. As media carrying visual inscription, photographs contributed not only to the reshaping of local constructions of gender but also contributed to a broader transformation in the role of visibility in society. Alongside other print technologies, they worked to normalize a new kind of eye understood as passive and purely optical and contributed to the emergence of visibility as a central preoccupation of modern forms of urban life. Most commonly, perhaps, visits to the photographer's studio provided opportunities for the staging of a modern self through the image. Photographs became the means through which modern forms of selfhood were enacted, asserted, negotiated, and sometimes subverted. Together with novel forms of writing, photographs also provided occasions to exteriorize and examine one's soul, realizing a desire for a singular sovereign subject as they also worked to entrench and normalize distinctly modern forms of temporality inserted into the flow of the everyday.

Keywords: gender, modernity, performance, photography, portraiture, selfhood, studio portraiture, vernacular photography, visibility

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Sometime in the mid-1890s, a young Alexandrian woman received a visit from the female relatives of a prospective groom. The women praised his qualities—all the while checking her appearance and demeanor—and handed her a tintype portrait of the young man. They apologized for the relatively meager dowry that he would be able to pay as a recent law school graduate whose career still lay ahead of him. The young lady was a descendant of a long lineage of prosperous Alexandrian seamen (*boghazi*) and had previously received marriage proposals from men of her own milieu. But this tintype photograph caught her attention. The young stranger, clad in formal attire (he wore a modern suit with a sash of office), was dressed unlike any other suitor she had encountered, and she understood the significance of his dress. He was a public prosecutor, and the sash signified authority and the promise of a distinguished public career. She had seen similarly clad men from her window on the city's main artery as they walked in and out of the viceregal palace. Though her family initially objected, her strong will eventually prevailed, and she went on to marry the gentleman in the photograph.[1]

This particular "photograph story" was told in Tawfiq al-Hakim's autobiography, *Sijn al-'Umr* (The Prison of Life), and described the marriage of his parents, but, crucially, it was just as likely to be extracted from any number of autobiographical narratives of his generation. Photography and the social practices surrounding its production, circulation, and consumption were primordial to the emergence in late nineteenth-century Egypt of a self that, as Timothy Mitchell put it, "comes to be understood as something fashioned by staging one's life as a story, in a continuous representation of oneself to oneself and to others."[2] Wherever photographic practices were to be found, photograph stories proliferated in line—both, as we shall see, were central to the Egyptian experience of modernity and should be at the heart of any critical historical retelling of it.

Photographs are ubiquitous. For well over one hundred years, analog photographs saturated the lives of most Egyptians: beginning from the late nineteenth century, when studio portraiture spread among the local middle strata, to about the end of the p. 374 ↳ twentieth century, when their replacement by their even more ubiquitous digital avatars began. They take countless material forms: snaps of friends and family; framed portraits of deceased patriarchs or images of weddings or graduations adorning the walls of a living room; passport-size portraits of one's children or sweetheart carried around in a wallet; mug shot portraits on identity cards, school applications, or, indeed, police records; and countless instances of photographic remediations in public culture from newspapers, magazines, book covers, and foldout posters to advertising posters on lampposts and metro carriages—photographs are often simply too numerous to even grab our attention. They are the "visual dust" of the everyday.[3] Even if we limit ourselves to discussing personal photographs—thus leaving their institutional and scientific usages aside[4]—their sheer ubiquity represents a vast archive that increasingly demands our attention as historians.

Just as photographs confuse by their ubiquity, they seduce by their apparent transparency. As mechanical imprints of the "real," they give the impression of direct access to the past, to "historical truth"—or at least some parts of it. Their peculiar claim to realism rests on their status as mechanical traces of things or events that unquestionably "happened" because something or somebody certainly once stood in front of the camera.[5] At stake is their ontological status: What are they, really? Are they truthful representations of reality, reflecting how things or people in the past really looked? Or are they, rather, carefully (or even cunningly) composed performances with a hidden agenda? Are they media, artifacts of popular culture, or commodities? They are all these things, of course. Yet surely historians can do better than the largely illustrative purposes to which photographs have traditionally been put: as mere illustrations of events or people, or supporting arguments reached by other, textual means.[6] We would not be grossly mistaken if we started by approaching them as we do texts: hardly any of us would take any kind of text for a transparent truth. As Jennifer Tucker has remarked, photographs are neither more nor less transparent than other documentary sources, and the questions they pose reveal the potential and limits of all historical sources.[7] At the same time, there is no single recipe for how to read texts: our reading will naturally depend on the

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genre, purpose, and social context of any given text. Like texts, photographs communicate something. But what exactly do they say, how, and to whom? What are we *really* seeing when we look at any given photograph?

The analogy with texts is primarily intended to make photographs more user-friendly as historical sources but should not be limited to questions of syntax and language (in this case, a visual language). Photographs work like texts not only on the syntactic level, but also through their material being in the world, as socially embedded objects spread across multiple contexts and media.[8] Like texts, photographs are composed of utterances, particular forms of presentation of the self, but they also carry historically situated social expectations and enjoy specific properties and affordances as media. As with texts, therefore, our work should not end with the question of what a given text (or image) says. Rather, the question should be how they matter and how publics, power, selves, and relationships are constituted through the circulation of particular images—because the excitement and challenge inherent in working with photographs is that it is never just about the photographs alone. The most crucial historical questions that need answering are less about what is encoded in any single image and more about what kind of work—social, cultural, political—the photographs perform, and for whom. How exactly did they matter in their manifold incarnations as media, commodities, forms of inscription, or historically specific performances of selfhood? Rather than being stuck in any single image, we may venture outside of its frame and ask: What did going to the photographer mean? Why did vast numbers of Egyptians fancy, obsessively, snapping themselves posing in various settings? What kind of cultural work did photographs play as material objects that were displayed, exchanged, or, conversely, hidden from sight? How can we use photographs both critically and imaginatively?

These ways of mattering can be explored through what we may call "the local archive," meaning the corpus of photographs created, consumed, and circulated locally in Egypt from the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century. This is in contrast to the colonial archive, which has received disproportionate attention by earlier generations of scholars.[9] Well known for its overwhelmingly orientalist aesthetics, the colonial archive contains photographs produced locally but intended largely for consumption abroad and (unsurprisingly) located predominantly in private and institutional collections outside of Egypt.[10] Thus, the term *local archive* refers less to a specific location or archival institution(s)—the photographs discussed here are scattered across countless private and family collections in Egypt—than it does to a different field of power: photographs that Egyptians either commissioned or took of themselves as masters of their own representation.[11] This local archive has started receiving serious attention from scholars only since the 2000s.[12] But this archive, better known in Egypt as "local photographic heritage," has also been increasingly called upon, discovered, and reanimated especially online by a number of publics in Egypt for diverse purposes; it has also been an object of attention from local and regional collectors.[13] As such, it is not a static or "forgotten" archive awaiting our discovery; it has been alive and on the move, both physically and metaphorically, for the better part of two decades. Exploring how historians of Egypt may be able to make use of this local archive can expand the range of questions we have habitually been asking when we look at photographs, and in doing so, enrich our understanding of modern Egyptian history.

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Tokens of Urban Modernity

What was the point of the photograph in al-Hakim's autobiographical narrative? Certainly, it was not his father's dashing looks; good looks carried little weight in what was effectively a transaction between two families. Indeed, the bride's positive reaction is cast not in terms of the groom's likeness but in terms of his social status. The prospective groom was the son of an Azhar-educated village mayor, whose status as a rural notable was expressed through land ownership and the number of wives and children he had. His son, p. 376 the groom on the tintype, was educated in Cairo's modern ↳ schools, epitomizing the rise of a local middle class (he was an effendi, a first-generation modern middle-class professional). The tintype photograph was used in this situation to impress the Alexandrian family of the bride, which perceived itself as more urbane. As a novelty, it was a token of urban sophistication deployed as a playing card intended to impress its recipient and increase the social capital of its holder in a high-stakes social setting. This is how photographs, in their various formats, were largely understood across the world after their commercial exploitation exploded in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.[14] As such, they were embedded less in the histories of technological transfer than they were in the spread of urban capitalism and class formation. Take what Egypt's diva Umm Kulthum had to say about her first visit to the studio as a child around World War I. As she was of very modest background, her recollection comes in the context of narrating the growing fame of her family's orchestra, when their fees were increasing to the point of their counting "as rich people" by the standards of their native village. "So my father decided we should try to behave like rich people. Rich people had photographs taken of their children, so why shouldn't he, Shaikh Ibrahim, have a portrait taken of his children?"[15]

The earliest photographic studios in Cairo and Alexandria opened their doors in the 1850s, though many appear to have been short-lived.[16] The next generation of studios that emerged in the 1880s produced some of the most famous and long-lasting names in the photography business in the region (Abdullah Frères, Sabunji, Lekejian, Sebah). These photographic establishments catered to two very different markets. One was the European market, comprising resident foreigners and tourists. Intended as souvenirs, their photographs included portraits of "local types," famously including scarcely clad women, archeological ruins, and landscapes. Some of these studios also carried a stock of "oriental" costumes, props, and backgrounds, giving their patrons the possibility of having themselves photographed as a Bedouin shaykh or an Arab warrior.[17] Tourists who came with preconceived ideas of "the East" could thus enact their oriental dreams in the studio, confirmed as "real" by the supreme authority of the camera.[18]

But many of these studios simultaneously catered to a wholly different market: wealthy local elites who came in to be photographed as proud and paying customers.[19] These elites included wide segments of the polite local society, composed of Turkish-speaking (but typically multilingual and cosmopolitan) Ottoman Egyptian elite, the more privileged among Coptic families, and the many locally established Levantine minorities. Through the second half of the nineteenth century, these elites developed the same photographic habits practiced by their European and American counterparts: exchanging photographs within their social circles, decorating the walls of their houses with enlarged and often heavily colored portraits, composing *carte-de-visite* portraits of their families and friends into albums, or indeed sporting albums of "famous personalities" of their time.[20] Some of the studios that sold souvenir photographs for the Western market also carried a stock of portraits of Ottoman princesses and dignitaries catering to this p. 377 local clientele (Fig. 18.1). ↳

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Fig. 18.1

Late nineteenth-century Egyptian elite portraits. Author's collection.

This local market left its material traces in the archives of the descendants of elite Ottoman Egyptian families. One such collection belongs to a family whose men held high offices in the army and administration through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[21] It contains more than two hundred photographs featuring portraits of men, women, and children (each of them alone or in small groups, though never within a nuclear family in this period), dating from the 1860s through the rest of the nineteenth century and executed in different formats. These portraits represent their subjects as the crème of Cairene society: ladies clad in Parisian fashions, gentlemen wearing smoking suits or ceremonial uniforms signifying their courtly functions. Some of these portraits were taken by the same studios well known to the canon of orientalist photography. Other studios amply represented in these local collections are barely known, suggesting that they placed their bets relatively early on the nascent local market for portraiture.[22] These two markets overlapped in the space of the studio, but there was little cultural blending; these publics represented two distinct communities of viewers who missed each other like ships in the night. As Stephen Sheehi convincingly argues, local visual production, rather than being an act of "speaking back" to the colonizer or being inspired by the colonial archive or orientalist aesthetics, was the product of genuinely local modernist impulses and dynamics.[23]

 While there was clearly little resistance to photography as such in terms of religious doctrine (and whatever resistance there was appears marginal and short-lived), customary notions of gender were another matter.[24] Photographs spurred anxieties about exposure in a society in which understandings of gender, class, and respectability rested on the non-exposure of women to the eyes of undeserving strangers. Female seclusion was a powerful cultural ideal even if only practicable by a fraction of mostly urban women of middle- and upper-class status.[25] It was embedded within a broader "culture of covering" (*satr*), an understanding of the world in which much was to be gained from protecting (literally, shielding) all that was considered precious, beautiful, or a source of prosperity not only from the eyes of strangers but also from other invisible (otherworldly) forces of the universe.[26] Thus, while women do appear in the above-mentioned collections of nineteenth-century Ottoman Egyptian families, they do so much less than men and children.[27] This, however, was soon to change dramatically.

Soon after World War I, women's presence in public exploded, both physically in public spaces and as images in the mushrooming illustrated magazines and the cinema.[28] Up until the early years of the twentieth century, it was unthinkable for a groom to get a glimpse of his future bride, even in a

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photograph.[29] In 1915, Ahmad Amin's bride still did not feature in his "marriage portrait"; however, by the 1920s wedding photographs showing couples had become obligatory, including among local ("traditional") middle strata groups. While this process is often cast in teleological terms as "female liberation," the issue is, rather, one of a major transformation in local constructions of gender that was itself inextricable from significant changes in the role of visibility in social life. The sheer volume and ubiquity of new visual forms (photographs, newspapers, the cinema, advertising) worked to convey the message that to be modern, women had to be visible.

More research is needed to understand how exactly this happened, but photographs clearly played an important part in an emerging culture of display. With the arrival of the portable Kodak camera, photographic practices were not only democratized and domesticated but also substantially feminized. Certainly, secluded, or "harem," women posed for the camera, and their photographs circulated within small, carefully controlled circles long before they appeared in public culture (especially the press), exposed to the eyes of strangers. The point is not to say that photographic portraiture represented a key stage in women's liberation but that it played a crucial part in a major transformation in the understanding of the relationship between female visibility and notions of class and respectability. This process was further embedded in an underlying shift in sensory priorities, especially a new understanding of vision. From this perspective, everyday mundane practices of visual reproduction, such as print and photography, worked to normalize a new kind of eye understood as passive and purely optical. Notions of female respectability did not disappear, but they were transposed to other planes, toward other kinds of social performances. The issue of "veiling" (and the gradual reinscription of the veil with political significations as the twentieth century progressed) was largely born with modernity's insistence on female visibility and the simultaneous need to assert female respectability through other means, such as education, comportment, or "character."

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Spaces of the Modern

Photographs were signifiers of modernity as commodities whose presence in social relations played an important role in the construction of social status. From this perspective, they were not dissimilar from earlier status-making objects such as pocket-watches. But as particular forms of visual inscription, they were also fodder (enabling occasions) for the staging of a modern bourgeois self through the image. As Stephen Sheehi argues, the repetitive formalism of late nineteenth-century Egyptian and Lebanese portraiture was imbued with deeply local meanings that were intelligible within the framework of the Arab Renaissance, or *al-nahda*. The portraits of Arab literati and notables examined by Sheehi reflect quintessential values of modern Arab bourgeois selfhood, such as self-confidence, learnedness, moral propriety, culture (cultured-ness, or refinement, *al-taraqqi* as Egyptian sources often have it), and progress.[30] While it is not entirely clear what makes these virtues specifically Arab, Sheehi rightly insists that the sitters understood their modernity in strictly Ottoman and then Arab nationalist terms.

Indeed, there were many cases where photographs did the kind of ideological work described by Sheehi, though often reinforced by words. The vignettes of illustrious readers so often featured by illustrated magazines in the 1920s, extolling the virtues and achievements of their subjects, are a case in point (Fig. 18.2);[31] another is the frontispiece photographs increasingly featured in books in which the author gazes down on p. 380 ↳ the reader, literally embodying a modern textual authority forged by the luminaries of *nahdawi* letters and enabled by modern print culture. But it is equally possible that these photographs mobilized, or drew upon, an older pre-*nahda* understanding of texts through embodied authorial presence—presence previously enacted through sound and recitation, as well as embedded in the textual practice of *isnad*.[32] Certainly, photographic portraits, especially before their democratization when they were still a novelty and thus a rare and costly undertaking, were expected to convey an idealized likeness of the sitter and their moral qualities. But such qualities, while ideological for some, were probably more intelligible within local

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notions of *wiqar*, or gravitas, for many others (see, for instance, Fig. 18.1 again). As public forms of gendered self-presentation, the demands placed on early photographs were not entirely dissimilar to other instances of the public staging of respectable selfhood, whether in embodied terms through social encounters, writing, or oratory practices. Local modernity cannot be understood in purely ideological terms: photographs provide an opportunity to uncover precisely the kind of vernacular or popular meanings of modernity that remain obscured if we focus on learned intellectual production alone. The many ways people engaged with photographs as discussed throughout this chapter also suggest that photographs were quite a bit more agentive as historical actants than mere “imprints” or “reflections” of a preformed *nahdawi* subject.

Fig. 18.2

Vignettes of “illustrious readers” in illustrated magazines of the 1920s. *Al-Lata’if al-Musawwara*, 5 November 1923, 13.

The photographers’ studio enabled, encouraged, and necessitated performances of the modern; in fact, the photograph itself was understood as the space of the modern. Take, for instance, the genre of wedding portraiture, which emerged among middle-class Muslim Egyptians in the 1920s. It is very likely that most of the seemingly modern bourgeois couples who posed together for their wedding portraits were the product of arranged marriages. Modern companionate couplehood, which became an increasingly normative form of framing matrimony in public culture during this period, is here literally enacted for the picture.[33] But the resulting image had tangible social effects. It allowed the couple to claim their modern middle-class status and urbanity by enacting an image of a “modern family.” Rather than (a preformed) social identity being reflected in photographs, it was literally produced through them—as well as through their specific affordances as media objects. Understanding the social workings of photography in this way is consequential to scholarly, not least historical, questions of periodization and causation. As media (or as Latourian immutable mobiles: forms of inscription that circulate and carry their inscription across time and space), such photographs continued their cultural work across multiple social contexts when framed and displayed in homes or (as was then custom) exchanged or sent by post to friends, family, and colleagues.[34] These performances of selfhood or of social relationships (here, the modern companionate couple) were an important way through which modern subjects produced themselves. While often presented as an ideological commitment, modernity really is a performative position enacted through contextualized practices—whether in Egypt or anywhere else.[35] Indeed, the field of mass-mediated popular culture is where the categories of modernity and tradition were most saliently constituted in this period.[36] Photographs were part of these processes. Among the many everyday social practices ↳ that emerged in colonial Egypt and marked people as modern subjects, photographs were high on the list.[37] In other words,

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people made themselves into modern subjects through doing things with photographs, understood as the quintessential spaces of the modern. What was historically new, and analytically important, was the control over one's representation that photography as a technological-social practice (as Christopher Piney has it) now made possible. The camera became the perfect tool at the hands of many to realize their own versions of modernity, become in control of their representation, and project such a self-image (to make it work, to multiply its effects) across time and space.

It is, however, crucial to emphasize that this modernity never operated alone but rather gained meaning within a much broader social field. Modernity was an idiom meaningful only as far as it was deployed in specific social contexts, often in contrast to the idiom of "tradition" or "local authenticity." Take, for instance, the displayed wedding portrait, dating to the 1920s (Fig. 18.3). This couple's appearance is the product of a carefully staged performance; photographic portraiture was rarely about individual selves or "true likeness" but rather about performing social roles.[38] The groom's outfit, and its style and material, points to his wealth and social status, but one understood in deeply local terms; clearly, he comes from a notable family engaged in a traditional occupation or trade. The bride's wedding gown, by contrast, is executed in the latest fashion, as featured on the pages of illustrated magazines and available for purchase in Cairo's grand department stores. This image poses two different but simultaneous claims on social identity, using the registers of a local "traditional" (or "authentic") social role as well as a "modern" urbane one. The groom's local credentials (expressed by his dress) address his primary audience: his extended family and peers. While the bridal gown is a token of urban sophistication here—just as the tinplate photograph was in al-Hakim's story—it is worth noting how "modernity" is gendered female and enacted by a commodity, the "modern dress," but also how the woman herself becomes a commodity in this schema, along with the photograph. The key point is that these two registers were neither contradictory nor exclusive; they were complementary. Real social capital lay in being able to command both codes, but equally important was knowing the appropriate context in which to perform them. The photographic act was a suitable context for the enactment, display, and circulation of their social claims. It would have been unthinkable in this period for the bride to be seen wearing such an immodest outfit in any other context but the photograph.[39]

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Fig. 18.3

Wedding photograph, Anon, Alexandria, 1920s. This portrait uses sartorial markers of "tradition/authenticity" and "modernity" simultaneously. Author's collection.

At the same time, this simultaneous use of the idioms of modernity and authenticity is often less visible in photographs (indeed, photographs such as this one are fairly rare), for these were semiotically understood as the exclusive space of the modern; it is, however, typically evident in the context. The decision of al-Hakim's father, or more likely his womenfolk, to use a photograph in the matchmaking process gave him a comparable advantage over his competitors, who, while richer, came across as less attuned to the times. The basic fact remains, however, that he only gained access to her by contacting her through his female relatives, mobilizing local codes of propriety and respectability. By contrast, when the Paris-educated
p. 382 Ahmad Shafiq insisted on seeing his prospective ↳

p. 383 ↳

bride, at least in a photograph, he encountered major resistance.[40] The photograph-wielding "modern groom" in both al-Hakim's case and Ahmad Amin's case (in the next section) never saw their brides before the night of the consummation of the marriage. Sometimes this modernity was deeply internalized, such as in the case of Ahmad Amin, for whom all knowledge resided in English books, an intellectual move common

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to his generation, for whom customary forms of knowledge and experience were rendered null and void. At other times, this modernity was performed or asserted through the picture (or a range of other well-defined objects, practices, or performances) where it would enhance the subject's social capital. This modernity was, however, always complemented by, or embedded in, a simultaneous claim to authenticity. We should never imagine these (modern) subjects as drawing a definitive boundary between themselves and their unmodern past. This performative capacity to claim both codes—to be both modern and yet authentic—is not some botched transition to modernity; it is an intentional articulation of a local modernity.[41]

Cultivating Modern Selfhood

When Ahmad Amin, a modernist intellectual and prolific writer, completed his degree at the School for Shariʿa Judges, the time had come for him to marry. While he had been part of a circle of young reformist intellectuals who criticized what they perceived as antiquated social customs and championed women's unveiling, the fact remained that a young middle-class man in the 1910s had little opportunity to meet women of similar social stature outside his circle of relatives. Amin thus resorted to the established method of asking friends to recommend marriageable girls and sending his womenfolk around, eventually relying on his mother's choice. In many other respects, however, Amin's approach to marriage was a deeply modern affair. In the four months that separated the signing of the marriage contract and its actual consummation (time spent by the bride's family in preparing the trousseau), Amin busied himself with his own version of preparation for his upcoming role as a husband and the head of a family. He bought books on marriage, family, and childcare in an English bookshop in Cairo, which he studied carefully, acquainting himself with the latest theoretical foundations of a happy home.

A few days after the marriage took place, Amin visited a photographic studio to produce a "memorial picture" of himself (not yet of the couple on the day of the nuptials—such a convention would only emerge in the next decade). On the back of the photograph, he wrote a long text, cited in his autobiography. It begins as follows:

> This is my picture taken on Friday, April 7, 1916, four days after my marriage contract, and my age is twenty-nine years and six months. I have taken books as my distinguishing mark in the picture, and so the photographer placed books of his in front of me. In my left hand I held *Primer of Philosophy*, most of which I had translated into Arabic and almost finished. I wanted the picture taken to be extremely simple. Thus p. 384 ↳ I did not affect anything, except that I chose to wear the suit I wore on the marriage day. Perhaps the motive behind this photograph was that I felt I was approaching a new life and a new phase. For I have finished the life of solitude and am approaching family life. I am convinced that this new environment will have a great influence on my soul, my body, and my mind.[42]

This epic caption continues with Amin's self-searching reflection on his own character and its formative moments: a childhood and youth that knew no innocent entertainment, joy, or love, a result of his serious upbringing (associated, as was common in this genre of texts, with his father's strict and joyless Azhari culture[43]) and the ways in which this character had been changing in recent years by virtue of the books he had read and people he had encountered. It ends on strikingly practical terms: "I am now an instructor at the Judicial School. My salary is 1320 piasters per month. I have not become weary of teaching, and I still prefer it to judicature."[44]

What we have in Amin's caption above is neither a "text" nor just a "photograph," but a bundle of cultural practices and habits of mind of recent vintage, all of which produced modern selfhood: a visit to a photographer; a photographic object that prompts, inspires, or necessitates a particular kind of writing

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practice: a lengthy reflection on himself, including his career stage and salary, reading interests, mental states, and feelings. This photographic object was presumably carefully stored for decades before it was reactivated to play a part in a particular, equally new, genre of text: the autobiography. It prompts us to ask what paying attention to photographs in conjunction with texts reveals about the relationship between these novel practices of inscription and new forms of selfhood.

Personal photographic practices emerged in Egypt around the same time that writing practices (and, of course, reading practices) were undergoing important reconfiguration. Writing as such has a long history in Ottoman Egypt, but by the end of the nineteenth century, new writing practices emerged following the growth of commercial print culture.[45] These included new forms of self-writing: diaries, longer or shorter narrative journals, and, of course, letter-writing, which expanded significantly among middling groups with the growth of the postal service. These processes were also paralleled by the simultaneous expansion of the state bureaucracy, which instigated an expansion in popular petition-writing for justice and redress at the same time as it created its own forms of records, soon incorporating photographs into its fold as tools of order, classification, and documentation (Fig. 18.4).[46] All of these records are, in one way or another, traces of novel forms of inscription and, of course, of power. But leaving institutional contexts aside, the parallel emergence of distinctly modern writing practices and photography may just crystalize the connection between these practices and the cultural processes we call modernity. New forms of writing and personal photography became popular among the same middle-class publics who were themselves an emerging p. 385 social ↳ formation and who wielded these technologies of inscription, representation, and mediation, using them to literally constitute themselves as modern subjects and construct a new world around them.

Fig. 18.4

MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR.
Public Security Department.

PHOTOGRAPH. الصورة الفوتوغرافية

نظارة الداخلية

Name
Age
Place of Birth
Residence
Height

Special Marks.

Left Arm and Hand

Right Arm and Hand

Face and Neck

Place
Signature
Date

N.B.—The Photograph should invariably bear the Police seal.

N.B.—La photographie doit toujours porter le cachet de la Police.

الاسم
العمر
محل الميلاد
محل الاقامة
الطول
علامات خصوصية
الذراع الأيسر واليد اليسرى
الذراع الأيمن واليد اليمنى
الوجه والعنق
الجهة
الامضا
تاريخ

In the early years of the twentieth century, photographs began to be used on ID documents. An identity card issued by the Ministry of Interior in 1912. Author’s collection.

Ahmad Amin was a case in point. His long caption (and his writing practices in general) had everything to do with how knowledge was constructed by his effendi peers.[47] His was a positivist and textual understanding of knowledge grounded in scientific rationalism, as also suggested in the way he prepared himself for marriage by studying books about it. Amin’s autobiography is cast in terms of a lifelong search for knowledge, which was denied to him in his childhood, when his father, a religious scholar, decided to enroll Amin into the religious educational track (al-Azhar University) after having briefly put him into a modern school. The modern schooling experience largely contributed to the emergence of a new generation of “modern men” employed as bureaucrats or in new professions: doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, and journalists. Known as the effendis (*effendiyya*), they became the nucleus of a modern middle class, around which local modernity emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century.

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Broadly speaking, the effendis perceived their society as sick ("backward") and in need of a cure, which evolved around notions of "order." Such order (standing for modernity, progress, or "civilization") was enacted through wide-ranging methods and projects that included the setting up of new schools to eradicate what they now saw as ignorance and superstition, the remaking of Egyptian cities, and various p. 386 methods of personal and mental hygiene and forms of self-discipline.[48] This order became ↳ understood as that which is visible, as visibility became the principle of the physical ordering of things and people in space.[49] Scientific rationalism was the primary tool of this new relationship to the world—a world newly apprehended as a set of processes to be observed and described. While Amin was himself deprived of modern schooling due to his father's extensive piety, his lifelong struggle to acquire "modern knowledge" made him into an exemplary effendi.

It was not only his cultural and intellectual positions that made him into an effendi but also the way he used the pen—and the camera. Amin's autobiography takes a step back to subject his childhood environment to the dissecting eye of social analysis, classifying it into categories such as "economy" and "religion"—the latter, in his narrative, is mostly designated as delusion and superstition.[50] Like a camera, an autobiography examines the self as if it were another or presents a self-as-other. The status of photography as an "objective" representational practice nested perfectly with new notions of positivism, making the camera the perfect tool of observation, description, and classification.[51] But Amin's example (standing for many others among his generation) brings up two important points. First, the pen and the camera worked similarly by introducing distance between the subject and the object, the observer and the observed, realizing (or materializing) a desire for the disembodied and omniscient observer. Both the pen and the camera were understood as tools of "objective" representation that came to mediate between an observing self and the world. Indeed, as we saw, they were often used in tandem by order-desiring and science-worshipping men like Amin. Both were deployed to exorcise older forms of conceptualizing the real and normalizing new ones in their stead, based on the logic of objective, rational observation. Second, the world thus observed and examined was not only the external world, but equally often, the very observing self.

What we have here in Amin's case is a deeply modern piece of self-writing, a brief but concise examination of a "self," its intellectual formation, emotional disposition, and—crucially—the ways in which these have been changing over time. A prime example of new writing practices (Amin, like many of his first-generation effendi peers, was also an ardent diarist), this mini autobiography betrays a deeply modernist desire to record but also to objectify, exteriorize, and dissect one's own soul, personality, and character—in brief, to describe and order. Amin carefully notes what his current job is and how much he earns, what he reads in that particular year, and how much time had elapsed since he started learning English. This speaks volumes about his way of ordering or enframing the world in a rational and structured way, with almost photographic precision. The pen and the camera thus worked not only as tools of world-making, at this historical juncture, but also of self-making, what Michel Foucault had called technologies of modern selfhood.[52]

What other kind of work may the portrait be doing for Ahmad Amin? Amin's visit to the studio and the p. 387 resulting photograph that he chose to adorn (or to "complete"?) ↳ with a lengthy self-reflexive caption provided an avenue and a space for a contingent performance of his selfhood as autonomous (individuated) and singular. In the caption, Amin characterizes his life as one of "solitude," though he had lived his whole life with his parents and four siblings, and afterward with his wife.[53] His solitude is thus a state of mind, an intellectual (ontological) condition that he (and hundreds of his effendi peers) enacted through their texts, in which they distanced themselves from their backgrounds and families deemed unmodern.[54] Such novel practices of self-representation enabled rituals of modern selfhood to take place around them. The pen and the camera thus not only stood for the disembodied and omniscient observer, but they also realized a desire for a singular sovereign subject. Far from merely "reflecting" an already formed monadic modern Arab individual, new representational practices such as photographs and self-writing were the very mechanism

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of its making.[55] The modern individual literally emerges through precisely such practices of inscription and individuation. Put differently, an atomized, self-contained modern individual selfhood (whether Arab or any other) is produced, or produces itself, precisely through such contingent acts of self-presentation, using the twin technologies of the pen and the camera.[56]

Finally, such practices also worked to crystalize new linear notions of time. The photograph in Amin's story carries several temporalities: the time of visiting the studio (the moment of the photographic event); the time of marriage (four days before, as duly recorded) and fulfilled manhood; the time of writing the caption, when both the photograph and the marriage were already history; an extended past of a "sad childhood"; and an anticipated future that such a record implies and makes possible, which eventually materialized as the time of activating the photograph in Amin's autobiography. With the popularization of photography, when photographs became multiple and serial, it became necessary to inscribe time on their versos. Captions saying "me at the age of twelve" or "after my Secondary Exam" become common, inscribed either on the back of photographs or as ordering markers inside albums. Here, modern selfhoods literally historicize themselves. What the proliferation of photographic practices effected here was to force a particular register of time onto photographs, time understood as a linear progression with a clear and orderly definition of past, present, and future "documented" beyond doubt and leaving no space for imaginative (and necessarily more fluid) recollection. Such seemingly inconspicuous practices of inscription thus worked to entrench and normalize distinctly modern forms of temporality inserted into the flow of the everyday. Diaries were, of course, meant to do exactly that; this is another example of the parallel work of photography and writing as modern forms of inscription.[57] The modern self was thus a self that must represent itself in order to be, as well as a self that constructs its own temporality cast in linear and progressive terms.

Spaces of Modern Magic

In the early decades of the twentieth century, photographic studios mushroomed across Egyptian cities; their services became increasingly affordable to individuals and families with middling incomes.[58] Ambulant photographers now toured the provinces offering their services, especially during seasonal holidays; high schools had their own photography clubs; and several publications dedicated to amateur photography emerged.[59] In the 1920s, the portable Kodak camera became broadly advertised to Egyptians on middling incomes.

New kinds of leisure activities, especially outings in public parks or on beaches or riverbanks, became unthinkable without the camera's presence, which often inspired such outings in the first place (Figs. 18.5A–18.5D). Generations of youths dreamt of having a camera, and many of them did. Once one had a camera, one had to use it.[60] In the interwar period, novel photographic genres and industries emerged that bear witness to entirely new forms of urban experience: a new quality of the urban space as "public," where anonymity and display emerged as pleasurable and desirable. Here, specific parts of large cities became performance stages where pleasure and social distinction were to be gained from seeing and being seen. With the simultaneous emergence of new forms of public visual culture, such as the cinema and illustrated magazines, visibility emerged as the key preoccupation of modern forms of social life.

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Figs. 18.5(a), 18.5(b), 18.5(c), & 18.5(d)

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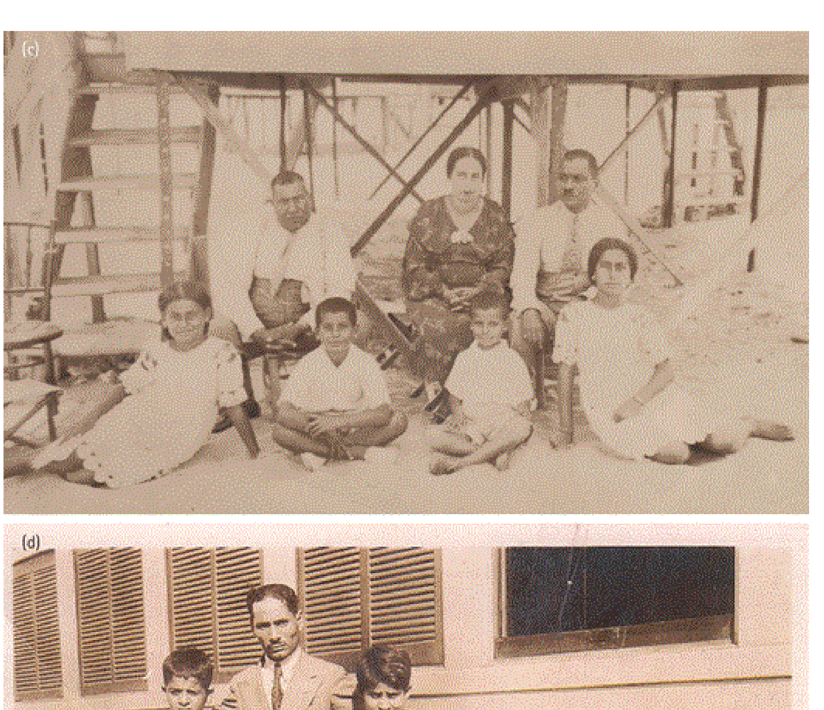

Outdoor photography becomes an obligatory element of public leisure outings. Author's collection, 023; 012; 08; 026.

As middle-class publics became accustomed to having their portraits taken at somewhat regular intervals, new demands were placed on photographs. The camera became a tool of aspirational self-making. Photographic studios functioned, often literally, as performance stages where sitters could, and did, put on the public persona they wanted to project to a given audience in order to achieve particular social effects. The nature of these performances varied according to the intended audience or purpose (the highly choreographed wedding picture was one example) and the sitter's class position, which was largely the measure of not just their wealth but also their exposure to modern urban culture. Those not accustomed to the camera, or for whom one picture was all there was to be had, posed in solemn poses in their finest attire, enacting much desired but hard to access social roles. Others, especially those more familiar with the medium, used the camera as a space of experimentation, enacting multiple, playful, and sometimes transgressive versions of a self.

For women, such desired but hard-to-access social roles often pivoted on modern urban womanhood. As historians of modern Egypt have amply demonstrated, much cultural labor went into "remaking women" and creating the "new Egyptian woman."[61] In everyday practice, the key marker of such modern urban womanhood was the modern dress, which contrasted sharply with the *galabiyya* broad robe worn by local

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women. (The 1920s, it ought to be stressed, saw a revolution in women's apparel globally, not only in Egypt.) In the early 2000s, I carried out an oral history interview with a lady who grew up in the 1930s as a merchant's daughter in the city of Banha. Her family was locally prominent, but from the perspective of p. 391 metropolitan culture, it was ↳ considered provincial. Like many women in her milieu, she longed to wear a modern dress, for modern dresses were the craze of the town (worn only by locally resident foreign minorities and women from families of local pashas, or absentee landlords), and they differed substantially from the broad-cut *galabiyya* robe that local women normally wore. She had a modern dress made by a local Levantine dressmaker, Umm Michel, and wore it only a handful of times when attending a wedding or a social occasion at the house of a local pasha. But she also wore it for a photograph taken by a local studio in Banha, accessorized with a feathery shawl reminiscent of Parisian elegance. In the studio, she magically transformed herself into the woman of her dreams and aspirations, enacting her desired self as a sophisticated modern urban lady, even holding a pen and paper (in a letter-writing pose), though she "could not quite" read and write.

Many photographs survive in the local archive featuring women of middling backgrounds putting their modern dress on for the first time in front of the camera (Fig. 18.6). As the wrinkles on the fabric suggest, these dresses were often kept folded and only worn in the studio; in many cases, the same "modern dress" was shared by several related women, each of them taking their turn to wear it for the camera. Other images show clear attempts to enact the look of a cinema star or advertising poster girl. Low-end ambulant photographers offered a hastily painted background and paper flower props to suggest bourgeois urbanity, just as many women with few literacy skills opted to pose with a book or magazine to conjure sophisticated urban womanhood. Young men, in turn, often had themselves photographed as athletes, dandies (often p. 392 smoking a cigarette), or in the style of the cinema star Rudolph Valentino.[62] ↳

Fig. 18.6

Women in wrinkled dresses, posing like poster girls or as if in advertising pictures. Author's collection.

Despite sometimes arresting details (the wrinkles on the dress, the occasional amulet or *khulkhal*, an ankle bracelet worn with a modern dress), the bulk of the local archive of personal portraiture remains intensely mimetic. These photographs emulate something, though most often they tend to copy each other. A defined range of poses endlessly repeats itself while apparently mimicking Western norms of composition, styles, and interiors. Candid snapshots taken with home-owned Kodaks then often sought to reproduce poses learned in the studio or observed on advertising posters or on the pages of illustrated magazines featuring cinema stars. The assumption remains that the imitation of what is a priori recognized as "Western" forms and fashions signifies the lack of authenticity and "localness." But we need to take this obvious desire for sameness seriously not only because it is a symptom of global capitalist modernity—which cannot be reduced to unidirectional cultural transfer, "copying," or "adoption" but is rather a process that was both

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unevenly structured and genuinely globally autogenetic—but also because such mimetic acts were socially productive in and of themselves. Stylistic emulation was exactly the point of studio portraiture. Studios, as we saw earlier, were spaces of the modern: they were where idioms of "modernity" and urban sophistication were to be enacted. The sitters went into the studio not because they wanted to capture their everyday self, but to look like somebody else.

Emulation is the basic principle, or building block, of human interaction. Everybody emulates something or somebody. It is whom we emulate that changes historically and contextually. Historically speaking, most local societies emulate within the parameters of a local repertoire of symbolic codes (or social roles): one's peers, parents, and social seniors. What changes, fundamentally, with the arrival of modernity as globally (or translocally) mediated flows of cultural or symbolic forms are the models that people emulate.[63] These images (and the social practices that produced them) betray a broader desire to forge a novel personhood, which dovetails with some of the core desires wrought by modernity, notably the possibility and imperative of social mobility, the desire to "become another." As the canon of modernist Egyptian literature never failed to emphasize in this period (think of Najib Mahfuz's *Palace Walk* and *Cairo Modern* or Latifa al-Zayyat's *The Open Door*), remaining or becoming just like one's father or mother now represented assured social death.[64] Departing from one's place of origin and assuming new social roles become socially imperative; hence the emergence of a modern middle class, the *effendiyya*, and the "modern woman." These images not only make these underlying social desires visible to us today, but they actively cultivated them and realized them. We need to understand mimesis (imitation) not as a lack, a shortcoming (perhaps a legacy of an art-historical obsession with originality?), but as social empowerment. From this perspective, we can understand photographic portraiture not as a poor imitation of foreign models or ideological imprints of modern forms of rationality or colonial culture but rather as a form of modern magic whereby re-enacting the original (or whatever counts as the model) works to assume its powers. The camera literally conjured up wonders; it realized dreams and materialized desires.

The spread of candid portraiture with the portable Kodak camera, and generally the proliferation of photographic opportunities (due to their affordability and disposability), opened further avenues for experimentation. Comfortably bourgeois women who did not need to assert their urbanity "for the picture" then playfully enacted different versions of their modern femininity, donning a variety of costumes for the camera (Fig. 18.7).[65] A stock of oriental costumes that upscale studios had carried for the tourists since the late nineteenth century became a veritable fad among the Egyptian and Lebanese bourgeoisie following the spread of Hollywood fashion in the 1920s. It was not uncommon to pose semi-nude, reclining on a sofa and holding a cigarette, enacting a femme fatale image of the silver screen. Using the portable Kodak camera, young ladies of leisure transgressed social boundaries in the privacy of their homes, donning men's costumes, often snatched from their brothers' wardrobes. At a time when young women were bombarded with novel demands placed on them in public culture and intellectual discourse, they used the camera to playfully experiment with the boundaries that publicly defined them as "good girls."

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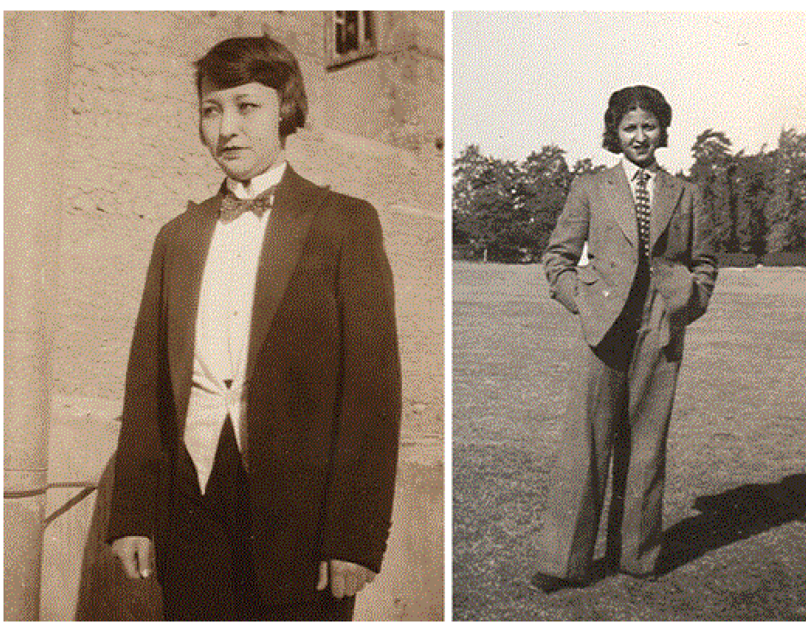
Fig. 18.7



Girls of leisure experimenting with the camera, donning a variety of costumes. Author's collection.

Such photographs were then composed into personal albums, shared, and circulated within small circles of friends. Such self-focused peer albums were common among middle-class urban youth in the middle decades of the twentieth century. While strongly gendered, they present a world of peer sociability and leisure marked by the exclusion of the family and social seniors. If, for Ahmad Amin, practicing self-narration worked to contingently individuate the writing subject and momentarily realize a desire for an atomized individuality, then these albums worked in a similar way. Together with the practices that preceded and followed them (from the moments of fun caught in the photographs to the moments of composing and then circulating the albums), peer albums created pockets of autonomy. They were spaces where young middle-class- aspiring people enacted and realized themselves as autonomous individuals, though more often than not within small peer groups, thus contingently breaking some forms of attachment (the family) and creating others in their place. Such practices are also, in many ways, the historical precursors of many contemporary social media practices that work as zones for the performance and curation of selfhood, from Facebook to Snapchat.[66] Such contingent realizations of autonomous forms of selfhood nested within broader patriarchal structures is precisely what characterized local modernity.

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Egypt's local photographic archive clearly suggests that modern forms of selfhood and social identity were inseparable from and dependent on new representational practices. Such modern selfhood was a project forged through sustained exposure to mass-mediated popular culture, which introduced new forms of experience; but importantly, it was a project that afforded agency in the form of various acts of self-mediation. Taken together, the photographs discussed in this chapter speak to an emergent self that obsessively represents itself, a self that must be photographed or written about in order to be, a self that exteriorizes, objectifies, and looks on itself as if it were another. All of these processes and connections can p. 394 be readily gleaned from the local archive but remain poorly understood. ↳

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Notes

1. Tawfiq al-Hakim, *Sijn al-ʻUmr* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Adab, 1964), 23–25; English translation by Pierre Cachia, *The Prison of Life* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1992), 14–15.

2. Timothy Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity," in *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 21.

3. This formulation is inspired by Elizabeth Edwards, *Photographs and the Practice of History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).

4. These have only begun receiving scholarly attention in the region. See, e.g., Zeynep Devrim Gürsel, "Thinking with X-rays: Investigating the Politics of Visibility through the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid's Photography Collection," *Visual Anthropology* 29, no. 3 (2016): 229–42; "A Picture of Health: The Search for a Genre to Visualize Care in Late Ottoman Istanbul," *Grey Room* 72 (2018): 36–67; Ahmet A. Ersoy, "Ottomans and the Kodak Galaxy: Archiving Everyday Life and Historical Space in Ottoman Illustrated Journals," *History of Photography* 40, no. 3 (2016): 330–57; and Tamara Maatouk, "'On the Look-Out' for the Peculiar: Photography's Application to Medicine in Colonial Egypt" (paper presented at the "Medicine in the Middle East: Doctors, Bodies, Body Parts" Workshop, Middle East and Middle Eastern American Center, The Graduate Center, CUNY, 15 May 2020).

5. This claim on truth is the cornerstone of Western theories of photography deriving from Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, Inc., 1981). For a good synthesis, see Margaret Olin, "Touching Photographs," *Representations* 80, no. 1 (2002): 99–118.

6. As pointed out by Carlo Ginsburg, *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 35; and Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Use of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 10.

7. Jennifer Tucker, "Entwined Practices: Engagements with Photography in Historical Enquiry," *History and Theory* 48, no. 4 (2009): 5.

8. For an overview of the vast literature on material approaches to photographs, see Elizabeth Edwards, "Objects of Affect: Photography Beyond the Image," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 221–34.

9. A selection includes Carney Gavin, *The Image of the East: Nineteenth-Century Near Eastern Photographs by Bonfils from the Collections of the Harvard Semitic Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Engin Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire, 1839–1919* (Istanbul: Haset Kitabevi, 1987); Nissan Perez, *Focus East: Early Photography in the Near East 1839–1885* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1988); Colin Osman, *Egypt: Caught in Time* (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1997); Engin Özendes, *Abdullah Fréres: Ottoman Court Photographers* (Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Yayinlari, 1998); Engin Özendes, *From Sébah and Joaillier to Photo Sebah: Orientalism in Photography* (Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Yayinlari, 1999); and Ken Jacobson, *Odalisques and Arabesques: Orientalist Photography 1839–1925* (London: Bernard Quaritch Ltd., 2007). For a critical assessment, see Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); and Ali Behdad and Luke Gartlan, eds., *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2013).

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10. For works questioning the limits of orientalist aesthetics, see Michelle Woodward, "Between Orientalist Clichés or Images of Modernization," *History of Photography 23*, no. 4 (2003): 363–74; and Behdad and Gartlan, *Photography's Orientalism*.

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11. The expression "field of power" belongs to Suren Lalvani, *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 60. He builds on John Tagg's classic work on photographs and power, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

12. Sarah Graham-Brown, *The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), was a pioneer. Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Maria Golia, *Photography and Egypt* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009); Stephen Sheehi, *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Arab Photography, 1860–1910* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

13. Lucie Ryzova, "Mourning the Archive: Middle Eastern Photographic Heritage between Neoliberalism and Digital Reproduction," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 4 (2014): 1037–61; Ryzova, "Nostalgia for the Modern: Archive Fever in Egypt in the Age of Post-Photography," in *Photo Archives and the Idea of Nation*, ed. Costanza Caraffa and Tiziana Serena (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015). For Egyptian initiatives, see Glimpses into Egyptian Middle Class Families, https://www.middleclassegypt.com.

14. Elizabeth Ann McCauley, *A. A. E. Disderi and the Carte de Visite Portrait Photograph* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

15. Graham-Brown, *The Portrayal of Women*, 58.

16. The first documented photographic studio in Cairo is that of Antonio Schranz, which by 1850 was selling photographic prints as souvenirs to European tourists. Jacobson, *Odalisques and Arabesques*, 33; Golia, *Photography and Egypt*, 20.

17. Ozendes, *From Sébah and Joaillier to Photo Sebah*, 166; Osman, *Egypt: Caught in Time*, 45; Jacobson, *Odalisques and Arabesques*, 53; Wendy Shaw, *Possessor and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualisation of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 140.

18. On preconceived ideas, see Derek Gregory, "Performing Cairo: Orientalism and the City of Arabian Nights," in *Making Cairo Medieval*, ed. Nezar Alsayad et al. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005); and On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), especially 35–37.

19. As in other parts of the Ottoman Empire; Ozendes, *From Sébah & Joaillier to Photo Sebah*; Issam Nassar, "Familial Snapshots: Representing Palestine in the Work of the First Local Photographers," *History & Memory* 18, no. 2 (2006): 139–55.

20. Golia, *Photography and Egypt*, 67–68; Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*, 56–57, 74; Ozendes, *From Sébah and Joaillier to Photo Sebah*, 166. For a contemporary testimony on the cartemania at the khedival court, see Ellen Chenelle, *Recollections of an Egyptian Princess by Her English Governess* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1893), 233–34. In the early 1900s, middle-class conduct manuals for girls began instructing their readers on how to decorate their homes with pictures; Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 88; Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation*: *The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805–1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 127.

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21. Collection of Mahmud Sabit in Cairo, and interviews carried out by the author in 2011–12.

22. These included Desire, Heyman, Schier, and Schoefft.

23. Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*.

24. This feeble resistance to photography was due to its being consistently presented as a scientific process; Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*, 80–81, chapter 4. Rif'at al-Imam, *'Asr al-Sura fi al-Misr al-Haditha* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma li-l-Kitab, 2010), 52–54; Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 84; and Leor Halevi, *Modern Things on Trial* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019) discuss religious opinions (*fatwas*) in favor of the many civic advantages of photography.

25. The issue was different among peasant and working women; Judith Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth Century Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

26. See al-Sayyid al-Aswad, "Thaqafat al-Satr wa-Dalalatiha al-Ramziyya fi al-Haya' al-Sha'biyya al-'Arabiyya," *al-Ma'thurat al-Sha'biyya*, July 2004, 7–28.

27. While working in this collection, I was told a family anecdote of a great-grandfather who allegedly divorced his wife, a

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princess daughter of Khedive Isma‘il, because she had herself photographed. Mahmud Sabit, interview by the author, 2011.

28. The process was more complex than can be developed here: specific 1920s magazines are indeed awash with images of women, but these are actresses, dancers, and foreign models, not actual middle-class Egyptian women. The commodification of female bodies in public culture thus preceded the normalization of images of "respectable" Egyptian women by about a decade. See Lucie Ryzova, "'I Am a Whore but I Will Be a Good Mother': On the Producing and Consumption of the Female Body in Modern Egypt," *Arab Studies Journal* 12/13 (2004/2005): 80–122. On women in public spaces, see Beth Baron, "Unveiling in Early Twentieth Century Egypt: Practical and Symbolic Considerations," *Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 3 (1989): 370–86.

29. Ahmad Shafiq Pasha, *Mudhakirati fi Nisf al-Qarn* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma li-l-Kitab, 1999 [1934]); Ibrahim al-Hilbawi, *Mudhakirat* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma li-l-Kitab, 1995); Muhammad 'Ali 'Alluba, *Mudhakirat Ijtima'iyya wa-Siyasiyya* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma li-l-Kitab, 1983).

30. Stephen Sheehi, "A Social History of Early Arab Photography or a Prolegomenon to an Archaeology of the Lebanese Imago," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 2 (2007): 178.

31. Discussed in Lucie Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 46–48; and Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 93.

32. On notions of authorial presence, see Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in an Islamic Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), especially chapter 11; Messick, "Written Identities: Legal Subjects in an Islamic State," *History of Religions* 38, no. 1 (1998): 21–52; and Abdelfattah Killito, *The Author and His Doubles: Essays on Classical Arabic Culture*, trans. Michael Cooperson (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001).

33. For the idiom of the modern companionate couple, see Kenneth Cuno, *Modernizing Marriage: Family, Ideology and Law in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Egypt* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015); Hanan Kholoussy, *For Better, For Worse: The Marriage Crisis that Made Modern Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); and Beth Baron, "The Making and Breaking of Marital Bonds in Modern Egypt," p. 398 ↳ in *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (Yale University Press, 1991), 275–91.

34. These forms of exchange, or social lives of photographs, are amply demonstrated through their material qualities as enlarged and framed objects, and in many cases also by captions dedicated to friends, family, and colleagues (for men at this period). On "immutable mobiles," see Bruno Latour, "Visualization and Cognition: Drawing Things Together," in *Knowledge and Society Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present*, ed. H. Kuklick (Greenwich, CT: Jai Press, 1986), 1–40.

35. My argument resonates with Timothy Mitchell's idea of "staging" in "The Stage of Modernity."

36. Walter Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

37. On modernity as a social position enacted through manifold acts of socialization and consumption, see Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Nancy Reynolds, *A City Consumed: Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire, and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); and Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

38. Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middlebrow Art* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1990); Elizabeth Edwards, "Little Theatres of Self, Thinking about the Social," in *We Are the People: Postcard from the Collection of Tom Phillips*, ed. James Fenton et al. (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2004).

39. Similar examples include photographs of women lounging or reclining on sofas and/or holding a cigarette, which were similarly unthinkable in a social context involving strange men, but permissible, and often de rigueur, in the space of the photograph. For more, see Lucie Ryzova, *Camera Time* (forthcoming).

40. Ahmad Shafiq, *Mudhakirati fi Nisf al-Qarn*, 501.

41. For an extended discussion, see Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya*.

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42. Ahmad Amin, *My Life*, trans. Issa Boullata (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1978), 122–23, Arabic original *Hayati* (Cairo: n.p., 1950), 130–31.

43. Other examples in Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya*, 38–40, 56–58.

44. Amin, *My Life*, 122–23.

45. Hoda Yousef, *Composing Egypt: Reading, Writing, and the Emergence of a Modern Nation 1870–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016); Lucie Ryzova, "'My Notepad Is My Friend': Efendis and the Act of Writing in Modern Egypt," *The Maghrib Review* 32, no. 4 (2007): 323–48.

46. For the increase in petition writing, see John Chalcraft, "Engaging the State: Peasants and Petitions in Egypt on the Eve of Colonial Rule," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, no. 3 (2005): 303–25; for institutional uses of ID photographs, see Golia, *Photography and Egypt*, 78 and footnote 29; and Francesca Biancani, *Sex Work in Colonial Cairo: Women, Modernity and the Global Economy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 54.

47. For the broader context, see Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p. 399 ↳ 2007); El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020); Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic,* 1860–1950 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); and Daniel Stolz, *The Lighthouse and the Observatory: Islam, Science and Empire in Late Ottoman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

48. Michael Gasper, *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants, and Islam* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Pollard, *Nurturing Egypt*; Zachary Lockman, "Imagining the Working Class: Culture, Nationalism, and Class Formation in Egypt, 1899–1914," *Poetics Today* 15, no. 2 (1994): 157–90.

49. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Stolz, *The Lighthouse and the Observatory*, 196–97. For the broader context, see Scott McQuire, *Visions of Modernity: Representation, Memory, Time and Space in the Age of the Camera* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1998); and David Martin, *Curious Visions of Modernity: Enchantment, Magic and the Sacred* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

50. Amin, *My Life*, especially chapters 6 and 7; Ryzova, *The Age of Efendiyya*, 146–51.

51. As described in the local context in Stephen Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*; see also John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Lalvani, *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies*; and Jennifer Tucker, *Nature Exposed: Photography as Eyewitness in Victorian Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

52. Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin et al. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

53. When Amin actually found himself truly "alone," this left a strong negative mark on him, as he did not fail to mention decades later in his autobiography, Amin, *My Life*, 51.

54. Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya*, chapter 4; see also Gasper, *The Power of Representation*; and Yoav Di-Capua, "The Professional Worldview of the Effendi Historian;" *History Compass* 7, no. 1 (2009): 306–28.

55. "Reflected" is the key argument in Sheehi's book *The Arab Imago*.

56. This comes at a time when such forms of singular or individual selfhood become celebrated intellectually in scientific theory and psychology and when new notions of individual personhood become the basis of new legal codes and enacted politically through ideals of representative government.

57. On diary practices, see Ryzova, "'My Notepad Is My Friend'"; and Yousef, *Composing Egypt*.

58. Golia, *Photography and Egypt*, 56 onward for a discussion of the business side of these local studios.

59. Discussed extensively in al-Imam, *'Asr al-Sura*.

60. As Bourdieu famously observed, "nothing *may* be photographed apart that which *must* be photographed," Bourdieu, *A Middlebrow Art*, 24.

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61. Mona Russell, *Creating the New Woman: Consumerism, Education, and National Identity, 1863–1922* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*; Lila Abu Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation*.

62. ʻAbd al-Hamid Gawda al-Sahhar, *Hayati* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-ʻAmma li-l-Kitab, n.d.), 123.

63. John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

64. Also here, however, it remains crucial to maintain a claim on authenticity through ethical virtues; it is never about completely rejecting the mother or father—it works the same way as I just described above.

65. For these costume sessions, see Yasmine Nachabe Taan, *Reading Marie al-Khazen's Photographs: Gender, Photography, Mandate Lebanon* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020); and Ryzova, "Boys, Girls, and Kodaks: Peer Albums and Middle-Class Personhood in Mid-Twentieth-Century Egypt," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 8 (2015): 215–55.

66. Just as the genealogy of blogging extends to the self-writing practices of the early generations of effendi youth; Teresa Pepe, "Public and Private Diaries: The Ancestral Genres of the Blog in Egypt," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 14, nos. 2–3 (2021). But we need to consider both representational practices, visual and textual, together.

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