

## 11 Reviving Qasim Amin, Redeeming Women's Liberation

---

*Ellen McLarney*

Duke University

The fin-de-siècle concept of “women’s liberation” attributed to Egyptian lawyer Qasim Amin (d. 1909) has been revived for the age of the Islamic awakening, both in state discourse and in writings of thinkers associated with the Islamic movement. Two major conferences organized in Cairo around the turn of the twenty-first century commemorated this notion of women’s liberation. The first, *Mi’at ‘am ‘ala Tahrir al-mar’a* (*One Hundred Years Since The Liberation of Woman*), held in 1999, was sponsored by the state and brought together mainly secular intellectuals to celebrate the centenary of Qasim Amin’s *Tahrir al-mar’a* (*The Liberation of Woman*, 1899). The second, *Tahrir al-mar’a fi al-Islam* (*The Liberation of Woman in Islam*), convened in 2003, was intended to honor the exiled Muslim Brother ‘Abd al-Halim Abu Shuqqa, author of the six-volume work *Tahrir al-mar’a fi ‘asr al-risala* (*The Liberation of Woman in the Age of the Message*).<sup>1</sup> This later conference brought together Islamic scholars from diverse ideological orientations, including Shaykh Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi from al-Azhar, the popular preacher Shaykh al-Sha‘arawi, the revivalist shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali, and popular intellectuals Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Muhammad ‘Imara.<sup>2</sup> Although the two conferences may have appeared to represent competing interpretations of women’s liberation, one secular and the other religious, they are better understood as a kind of call and response, a consensus reached between religious and secular intellectual positions on the question of women’s liberation.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Abu Shuqqa (1990).

<sup>2</sup> Al-Majlis al-A‘la li-l-Thaqafa (2001); al-Qaradawi et al. (2004).

<sup>3</sup> The concept of women’s liberation has now become an integral part of a transnational Islamic discourse, deployed in contexts as diverse as debates over the freedom to wear the headscarf in France, in the writings of exiled Muslim Brothers in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and in the rhetoric of the Ennahda party in post-revolutionary Tunisia. See Qutb (1990); Fernando (2010); Jouli (2011); Bohn, “Tunisia’s Forgotten Revolutionaries,” *Foreign Policy*, July 14, 2011; Hizb al-‘Adala wa-l-Tanmiya, “Qiyada bi-l-nahda al-tunisiyya: tahrir al-mar’a wa-ta’ziz huquqihia juz’ min risalat al-islah wa-bina’ li-harakatina,” *Harakat al-Nahda*, March 7, 2013.

These two mirroring conferences hark back to what Albert Hourani called a “division of spirits” in modern Egyptian society, the separation of “two systems of education [that] had produced two different educated classes in Egypt, each with a spirit of its own. One was the traditional Islamic spirit, resisting all change; the other, the spirit of the younger generation, accepting all change and all the ideas of modern Europe.”<sup>4</sup> If this “division of spirits” was also a “division of institutions” that was simultaneously intellectual and legal, understanding these splits requires paying close attention to Muhammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905), a reformist thinker who sought to “bridge the gulf within Islamic society . . . by accepting the need for change, and by linking that change to the principles of Islam,”<sup>5</sup> As the head of the “native tribunals,” or religious courts, under British rule, ‘Abduh witnessed – and fought against – the transformation of the Egyptian legal system into a European (secular) civil and criminal code that restricted “religious” law to the adjudication of personal status matters. ‘Abduh’s legacy can also be traced through his students, especially Rashid Rida (d. 1935) and Qasim Amin. If Amin seemed to follow the lead of Europe with his French education at the Sorbonne and his education in secular, civil law, he also complicated the religious/secular divide in his own body of work, mainly in his two main books *The Liberation of Woman* and *The New Woman (al-Mar’a al-jadida)*, 1900). Through the figure of the modern woman, Amin concentrated the struggle over religious and secular – and, implicitly, Islamic and European, indigenous and imported – ideologies. This struggle grew as a response to imperialism, colonial feminism, and Orientalism that fantasized (and continues to fantasize) about Muslim women, but it also grew out of colonial policies of legal administration split into secular and religious systems of law that governed public and private life with different codes. Qasim Amin’s “double approach” is what Muhammad Jalal Kishk calls the “secret of the attention paid to Qasim Amin,” the “celebration” of his ideas, and the “insistence on digging up his thought.”<sup>6</sup>

The idea of women’s liberation, long identified as growing out of colonial feminism and an imperialist secular liberalism in the Middle East and North Africa, has now become part of a popular Islamic discourse reiterated by activists and scholars alike. This chapter looks at the contingency and transformation of these secular and religious discourses – generated from as well as in response to the lives and work of ‘Abduh and Amin – while also examining how a religious resistance narrative appropriated and reinterpreted what Leila Ahmed calls “the

<sup>4</sup> Hourani (1962: 138). <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 139. <sup>6</sup> Kishk (1990: 54, 57).

symbolic terms of the originating narrative.”<sup>7</sup> Contemporary thinkers have refashioned and redeemed the legacy of Qasim Amin, casting him not only as the heir of ‘Abduh’s Islamic reformist legacy, but as its mouthpiece and public face. These writers reimagined the potential of Islamic law for governing a modern family with emancipated women at its center, claiming the “liberation of woman” for Islam. I look at instantiations of this religious discourse in the 1960s and 1970s in the writings of Muhammad ‘Imara and Muhammad Jalal Kishk, two writers who did much to revivify the concept of women’s liberation for the Islamic awakening. I trace the flourishing of this idea through the boom in Islamic cultural production in the 1980s and 1990s. After 2001, the status of “woman” in Egypt became a way of grappling with a newly emergent imperialist militarism, one that once again took the Muslim woman as its object of liberation.<sup>8</sup>

### **Women’s Liberation in Islam: From *Nahda* to *Sahwa***

In mid-1960s Egypt, new and tentative forays into the concept of women’s liberation in Islam started to emerge. The re-emerging discourse of women’s liberation in Islam – and women’s liberation in the Islamic family – coincided with the Nasser government turning its attention to reform of the family through a national family planning initiative as well as the reform of personal status laws. Both projects were launched in the early 1960s, but would be interrupted by the tumult following Egypt’s defeat in the 1967 war with Israel and, subsequently, Nasser’s death in 1970. Family planning initiatives expanded under Anwar Sadat during the 1970s. In conjunction with Sadat’s program of economic liberalization (*infitah*), his rapprochement with Israel, and his agreements with the International Monetary Fund, the role and influence of foreign funding agencies and aid organizations greatly increased. The family became a site of ideological investment, as international organizations, the state, religious institutions, and Islamic groups vied for control over the family and women’s bodies. Not only did organizations such as USAID promote the dogma of free markets; they also targeted the family for reform, beginning with a set of efforts at population control. Meanwhile, non-governmental organizations including the United Nations Children Fund (Unicef) and the Ford Foundation forged connections with Islamic institutions such as al-Azhar to create centers for population

<sup>7</sup> Ahmed (1993: 164).

<sup>8</sup> Abu-Lughod (2002); McMorris (2022); United Nations Development Programme (2005).

control that placed women at the center of discourses on economic development. These efforts to promote reform of the family through women's empowerment, equality, and liberation were paralleled by calls to reform the personal status laws. In 1979, Sadat amended the personal status laws by emergency decree. Popularly known as "Jihan's law" (because of the supposed influence of Sadat's wife), controversial reforms that had been debated for decades were pushed through in one fell swoop. Wives were given a number of rights: the automatic right to divorce if her husband married another woman and a divorced wife was given the right to custody of minor children, to maintenance, and to the marital home.<sup>9</sup>

Many of these Islamic publications were marginalized in public discourse, though, partly because of the secular state that was hostile to ideas of Islamic liberation (or what Kishk calls Islamic revolution). Bint al-Shati' – the pen name of Islamic scholar 'A'isha 'Abd al-Rahman – was only willing to venture her theory of women's liberation in Islam at the faraway Islamic University of Omdurman in the Sudan. Meanwhile, Muhammad 'Imara published new editions of Amin's work; in addition, he put forward theories of an Islamic liberation of women by projecting them back in time to the *nahda* and stamping them with the religious authority of 'Abduh. Muhammad Jalal Kishk wrote his influential *Freedom in the Islamic Family* in 1965 but it remained unpublished until 1979.<sup>10</sup> Both Kishk and 'Imara were one-time avatars of the Marxist Left who later became bright stars of the Islamic revival. Kishk was born in the village of Sohag in Upper Egypt, and later traveled to Cairo (then King Fu'ad) University in order to study at the business school. 'Imara received his degree in Arabic language and Islamic sciences from Dar al-'Ulum in 1965, completing a doctorate in Islamic philosophy in 1975. There is a palpable shift in their writings from Arab nationalism to Islamism during the mid-1960s, as they, like many others, became disillusioned with the ideology and practice of Arab nationalism. Although Kishk was essentially blacklisted from publishing in the 1960s and 'Imara first had to publish his writings in Beirut, their writings would eventually find mainstream publishers in Egypt as they became increasingly, even massively popular. Their texts were republished over and over again by various presses – putting the circulation of their works into hundreds of editions.

<sup>9</sup> Fayza Hassan, "Women's Destiny, Men's Voices," *al-Ahram Weekly*, February 3, 2000; Abu-Odeh (2004); Welchman (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Bint al-Shati' (1967); 'Imara (1972); Kishk (1979a).

As the intellectual production connected to the revival skyrocketed, new Islamic publishing houses (such as Dar al-ʿItisam, Dar al-Shuruq, Dar al-Daʿwa, al-Turath al-Islami, al-Mukhtar al-Islami, and Dar al-Qalam) emerged to cater to the growing readership of this popular scholarship. These presses created the institutional infrastructure of an Islamic public sphere, with a large body of these writings devoted to discussions of women, family, and gender relations in Islam.<sup>11</sup> The Islamic book industry and its extensive network of publishing houses came to support a critical mass of intellectuals throughout the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>12</sup>

In the midst of these contestations an Islamic discourse emerged that sought to maintain or even re-assert control over the management and reform of the family. Works on women's liberation in Islam from this period demonstrate a striking consensus on the topic: that it is to be situated within the family, restricted to women's roles as mothers, and bounded within the framework of religion. Feminist critiques of liberalism point out how the family may function as one of secular liberalism's most powerful tools of social reproduction.<sup>13</sup> Wafi's *Human Rights in Islam*, Kishk's *Freedom in the Muslim Family*, and ʿImara's writings on Qasim Amin all use the trope of "women's liberation in Islam" as a way of talking about the liberal nature of Islamic law, personal status law, and the family itself.<sup>14</sup> While these works ostensibly discuss the politics of Islamic law within the secular state, their focus on the family reinforces the restriction of Islamic law to the private realm, re-inscribes the family as the "nursery" of good Islamic governance, and interprets the family as the "natural" sphere for religion. The family thereby appears as a microcosm of Islamic politics, and the *umma* as a macrocosm of the family, an image reinforced in the writings of the *nahda* as well as the *sahwa*. This relationship is shaped by what Foucault calls a kind of "double conditioning" between the intimate sphere and the politics of the state. Even though the private realm appears as insulated from the state, the family is invested with some of the most important mechanisms of power, becoming an instrument for cultivating an Islamic politics in its most intimate instantiation.<sup>15</sup> In Egypt, assertions of the repression of an Islamic family served as an incitement to discourse, provoking a proliferation of writings

<sup>11</sup> As Carrie Wickham (2002: 134–35) points out, anything related to women in the Prophet's family was massively popular. See, too, Marilyn Booth's (2001: 280–310) discussion of the popularity of biographies about women in the Prophet's family during the height of the Islamic revival in the 1980s and the 1990s.

<sup>12</sup> Gonzalez-Quijano (1998); Wickham (2002: 134–35).

<sup>13</sup> Pateman (1988); Brown (1995: 135–65).

<sup>14</sup> Wafi (1957); Kishk (1979a); ʿImara (1980; 1985). <sup>15</sup> Foucault (1976: 132).

calling for its emancipation and accordingly, the emancipation of Muslim women, from the encroachment of a predatory secularism. New forms of religious knowledge were instrumental in shaping a productive Islamic family for the age of revival.<sup>16</sup>

### Liberalism's Two Faces: Amin and 'Abduh

Scholars of gender have analyzed the overlap between secular and religious discourses on gender, as both describe the family as free and equal but ultimately governed by male leadership.<sup>17</sup> Even though 'Abduh and Amin may appear as opposite poles in a clash between religious and secular modernities, they more accurately epitomize the mutually constitutive binaries, dualism, and paradoxes inherent in liberal discourses about rights and freedoms. Many contest Amin's status as "the first feminist" in Egypt, arguing that attention to *The Liberation of Woman* eclipsed the voices of women writing at the same time.<sup>18</sup> Others recognize that his version of women's emancipation was merely a modernist vision of the bourgeois family form – valorizing a companionate wife, an educated mother, and a well-organized household.<sup>19</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod traces Islamist discourses of women's emancipation – and their "bourgeois vision of women's domesticity" – back to Amin's text. He was more interested, she argues, in promoting a "modern bourgeois family with its ideal of conjugal love and scientific childrearing" as emblems of a new kind of Egyptian elite.<sup>20</sup> This turn-of-the-century discourse envisioned the family as a key institution for producing a rational, disciplined, and self-governing citizen subject – self-government at the microcosmic level that was a pre-condition for self-government at the level of national politics. Colonial administrators and missionaries imagined they were liberating the colonized from "oriental despotism," both in government and in the home. In response, nationalist reformers began focusing on the family as the site for cultivating new disciplines and rationalities that would foster self-rule on a larger scale. Freedom became the operative concept of this liberal ideology, idealized as a principle of political transformation of the self, human relations, and the polity. Women, as mothers of the future, presided over the transition to a new kind of governmentality within the family.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> For an excellent history of practices and discourses of population control during the interwar period, see El Shakry (2007: 146–64).

<sup>17</sup> Hatem (1994); Abu-Lughod (1998a); Stowasser (1987); Badran (1994).

<sup>18</sup> On this point, see Booth (2016). <sup>19</sup> Cole (1981); Ahmed (1993).

<sup>20</sup> Cole (1981); Abu-Lughod (1998: 255–56); Shakry (1998).

<sup>21</sup> Shakry (1998: 132–35); Foucault (1991).

Qasim Amin's intellectual trajectory vividly illustrates the ideological tension between secular and religious binaries. In his three main works, he moves from a defense of indigenous culture in *Les Égyptiens* to an Islamic intellectual framework mixed with secular liberal ideals of rights in *The Liberation of Woman* to a wholesale adoption of a Western model in *The New Woman*. *The Liberation of Woman* is composed in the vein of Islamic modernism, as Amin locates the path to women's rights, equality, and emancipation in a properly understood original Islam:

If religion had power over customs, then Muslim women today would be the most advanced women of the earth. The Islamic shari'a preceded all other legal systems in establishing woman's equality with man, proclaiming her freedom and independence at a time when she was at the depth of inferiority among all nations, granting her human rights and considering her the equal of man in all civil statutes . . . Some Western women have not obtained this type of rights. All this testifies that at the foundations of the liberal shari'a is a respect for woman and equality between her and man.<sup>22</sup>

In Kishk's *Freedom in the Muslim Family*, he glosses this passage as "the miracle of personal freedom" (*mu'jizat al-hurriyya al-shakhsiyya*) in Islam.<sup>23</sup> *The Liberation of Woman* draws on Islamic sources as diverse as the Qur'an, *hadith*, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and exegesis (*tafsir*), but also espouses a vision of the bourgeois family, based on companionate marriage and with women as household managers. Amin connects citizenship to the right to own property and roots women's rights in their right to be cared for financially by a male breadwinner.

*The New Woman*, published the following year, turned wholesale to a Western intellectual framework, holding up the West and Western rationality as models for women's emancipation.<sup>24</sup> Amin also interprets a woman's freedom – and her "obligation to her family" – with reference to European and American history, culture, and scholars. It is this that most irks Islamic reformers, as they continually assert that Islam provides the surest path to a just society, to securing political rights, to democracy, and to women's emancipation. *The Liberation of Woman* remains an intellectual blueprint for reinterpreting classical Islamic texts and arguments, despite the fact that the book continues to be a source of conflict and ambivalence. Amin was criticized for intellectual treason, even as Muslim intellectuals continue to draw on his rhetorical devices and arguments about women's emancipation in Islam.

Imara and Kishk vilify Amin for "channeling" the call of the "Western missionaries of women's liberation" while simultaneously drawing upon

<sup>22</sup> Amin (1984: 12).    <sup>23</sup> Kishk (1979a: 24).    <sup>24</sup> Amin (1900).



his understanding of women being liberated by true Islam.<sup>25</sup> In *Jahalat 'asr al-tanwir: qira'a fi fikr Qasim Amin wa-'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq* (*Ignorance in the Age of Enlightenment: A Reading of the Thought of Qasim Amin and 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq*), Kishk favorably notes that Amin's *Les Égyptiens* was written by "the Islamic Qasim Amin" who "found himself defending Islam's intellectual and historical reputation." He calls Qasim Amin of *Les Égyptiens* "Shaykh Qasim," "an extremist (*mutatarrif*) or even fanatical (*muta'assib*) Muslim," both of which are meant as a compliment.<sup>26</sup> Playing on 'Imara's argument that the nineteenth-century Islamic reformer Muhammad 'Abduh actually wrote *The Liberation of Woman*, Kishk satirically writes that it is more likely that 'Abduh wrote *Les Égyptiens*.<sup>27</sup> Or, Kishk suggests, *Les Égyptiens* could just as well have been written by the Islamic reformers 'Abd al-'Aziz Jawish or Rashid Rida.<sup>28</sup> Kishk proposes that Amin suffered from "schizophrenia" (*infisam*), a concept that he borrows from the Islamic thinker Safinaz Kazim. In her famous essay "An al-sijn wa-l-hurriya" ("On Prison and Freedom"), Kazim describes schizophrenia of the self between a secular, Europeanized exterior versus a religious interior. Kazim suffered this split on an individual level, "yet our society as a whole suffers from this schizophrenia."<sup>29</sup> Kishk uses similar language: "Like Egypt, Qasim Amin is more than one personality."<sup>30</sup> In this way, not only does Kishk bring together 'Abduh and Amin, but he also reconciles 'Abduh's disciples Rida and Amin, directing two different intellectual streams into the same channel.

### ***Freedom in the Muslim Family: Muhammad Jalal Kishk***

Kishk became most famous for his publications on the West's "intellectual invasion" of the Muslim world, drawing on a Gramscian concept of a war of ideas to cultivate his own (passive) Islamic revolution.<sup>31</sup> He began his intellectual career as a Marxist, publishing his first book *al-Jabha al-sha'biyya* (*The Popular Front*) in 1951, while still at university. The book led to his incarceration, which is where he had to take his final

<sup>25</sup> Kishk (1990: 10). <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 44. <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Rida was Muhammad 'Abduh's more conservative disciple. 'Abd al-'Aziz Jawish was an educational reformer who wrote on Islam as a "religion of instinct and freedom"; his *Islam: Din al-fitra (wa-l-hurriya)* was first published in 1910, and subsequently republished in 1952 and 1968 by the Islamic publishing house Dar al-Ma'arif, in 1983 by the more mainstream publisher Dar al-Hilal, and in 1987 by the Islamist press al-Zahra' li-l-'Ilam al-'Arabi.

<sup>29</sup> Kazim (1986: 33). <sup>30</sup> Kishk (1990: 45).

<sup>31</sup> Gramsci (1971: 289–300). For a discussion of an Islamist "passive revolution" in the case of Egypt, see Bayat (2007: 136–86).



exams in order to graduate. Released when Nasser came to power, Kishk became disillusioned with Marxism, understanding it as simply another implement of imperial rule.<sup>32</sup> He was banned from publishing in the mid-1960s after writing polemics against Russian influence on Egyptian politics. He wrote his most famous works during this period, developing his signature concept of “intellectual invasion” (*al-ghazw al-fikri*). No fewer than four different presses issued his book *al-Ghazw al-fikri, mafahim islamiyya* (*Intellectual Invasion, Islamic Understandings*), first published in 1964, and he went on to write a number of works deploying the idea of “intellectual invasion” to critique Arab nationalism, Marxism, and Zionism. It also became a term widely used in the popular press by writers such as Bint al-Shati’ and Safinaz Kazim.

*Intellectual Invasion* represents Kishk’s turn to an Islamic nationalism as an indigenous mode of revolutionary protest. “It has long been preached,” he writes, “that Islam and religion are the enemies of revolution, but the greatest revolutions of the age had a fully Islamic spirit.”<sup>33</sup> In Kishk’s advocacy of an Islamic revolution against foreign domination, women and the family are critical fronts in defining the character of an Islamic nationalism. The Islamic family becomes the source of an indigenous, revolutionary, liberated Islam wielded against a foreign, secular colonialism that threatens to liberate women from Islam. In *Intellectual Invasion*, the chapter “Jamila . . . or Simone?” poses the Algerian revolutionary Jamila Bouhrid against Simone de Beauvoir, the French Marxist who denounced motherhood as oppressive. The Algerian war of independence was an “Arab Islamic revolution” against French and Western “crusades.”<sup>34</sup> The epigraph to the book (taken from this chapter) understands colonialism as a “rejection of Islam” and as a form of undemocratic political oppression. “The rejection of Islamic ideology in colonized nations oppresses the religion of the overwhelming majority of its people.”<sup>35</sup> Kishk’s work hinges on claiming freedom for an Islamic politics, and unmasking Western claims to freedom as oppressive, backward, and reactionary. His polemics focus on the coercions of Western agendas to liberate Muslim lands, arguing that reclaiming Islam for Muslim society is true liberation – from the tyranny of Western regimes and back to a truly free originary Islam. Kishk inverts the emancipatory promise of enlightenment modernity, turning it into a form of oppression.

<sup>32</sup> Kishk (1957); Ilhami, “Muhammad Jalal Kishk,” *Majallat al-Mujtama’ al-Kuwaytiyya*, August 26, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Kishk (1964: 7). <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 102. <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

Kishk bends the lexicons of these ideologies toward his conception of an "Islamic revolution," linking what Talal Asad refers to as "new vocabularies" and new "discursive grammars" to older ones.<sup>36</sup> Kishk uses Western "tools" to "build a modern, developed Arab Islamic civilization distinct from the civilization of the Europeans," as 'Imara put it.<sup>37</sup> Kishk structures his argument according to what Leila Ahmed calls the antithesis to the colonial thesis.<sup>38</sup> In his own analyses of these antithetical discourses of the Islamic revival, Charles Hirschkind uses the concept of a "counterpublic," or a "parallel discursive arena."<sup>39</sup> These counterpublics are self-consciously oppositional, displaying an awareness of their subordination within the dominant order, carrying within themselves elements of the dominant discourse, or a "reverse discourse."<sup>40</sup>

In the closing pages of *Intellectual Invasion*, Kishk criticizes the literary critic Louis 'Awad for arguing that the word *hurriya* (freedom), "in its complete political and social sense," is derived from the Western concept of "liberty." Kishk takes up this Western concept of liberty further in *Freedom in the Muslim Family*, writing of *Libertas* in the opening pages of the book. The word jumps out from the Arabic, capitalized in Roman letters. "A generation was raised believing that it was indebted to Europe for its freedom, but it lost its freedom when Europe occupied their lands and annihilated their freedom."<sup>41</sup> As Kishk moves from this world-historical, geopolitical framing of the question of Islamic freedom into the question of more local contestations over personal status law, he continues to use similar language – of liberating Muslim lands from the tyranny of an imperial secularism – but now concentrated within the sphere of the family.

*Freedom in the Muslim Family* is a seventy-nine-page polemic against the proposed changes to the personal status laws under Nasser. Written in 1965, it would not be published until 1979, coinciding with a fresh set of proposed personal status legal reform under the government of Anwar Sadat. Kishk essentially recycled this older text for the new context. *Freedom in the Muslim Family* was published in conjunction with another pamphlet *Tahrir al-mar'a al-muharrara (Liberation of the Liberated Woman)*, both with the Islamist press al-Mukhtar al-Islami (the Islamic Choice).<sup>42</sup> Both polemics depict the existing laws as representing the true, original Islam that liberates women and the family from the true oppressor, the imperialistic West, and its handmaiden, the secular state.

<sup>36</sup> Asad (2003: 222). <sup>37</sup> 'Imara (1985: 157). <sup>38</sup> Ahmed (1993: 162).

<sup>39</sup> Fraser (1992: 123); Hirschkind (2009); for discussions of a "parallel discursive arena," see Wickham (2002: 134–43).

<sup>40</sup> Warner (2002: 121). <sup>41</sup> Kishk (1979a: 137). <sup>42</sup> Al-Qaradawi, et al. (2004).

Kishk is particularly critical of how foreign conceptions of freedom infringe on the free practice and expression of Islamic societies and Islamic laws. Echoing Amin, Kishk argues that true Islam liberated women fourteen centuries ago, giving women freedom, rights, and equality long before the West did.

Kishk relentlessly adheres to a liberal framework, opening *Freedom in the Muslim Family* by asserting the freedom and equality of the Muslim family. Like 'Abd al-Wahid Wafi's *Human Rights in Islam* (1957), his argument proceeds with a point-by-point defense of the existing personal status laws. He begins with divorce, arguing that the principal marker of freedom in the family is the right to choose a mate as well as to dissolve the bonds of marriage without restriction. "The Islamic family is based on the free will of two equal parties. It remains on the basis of a shared desire that unites two equal parties. And it separates on the basis of free will. The family is based – in the first instance – on the free will of the man and the woman."<sup>43</sup> He depicts proposed limits on men's unilateral right to divorce as infringing on the natural freedoms of the family, as well as the freedom of a properly Islamic society. Divorce is both a right and a freedom; curbs on divorce become unnecessary restrictions on God-given rights and freedoms. Yet he says nothing about women's lack of equivalent freedom to divorce. Instead, he interprets any changes in the personal status laws as the imposition of a Western model of liberation, which reenacts the intellectual invasion of colonialism.

Kishk's approach depends on the implication that state legislation of the personal status laws constitutes a form of secular interference in Islamic law. Kishk claims a violation of human rights, describing Nasser's Committee to Amend the Personal Statute as attacking Muslims' rights and as obstructing the free practice of religion, "freedom of conviction," and "the right to freely choose a religion."<sup>44</sup> He also interprets these violations as a kind of (sexual) repression perpetrated by Christian "missionaries" and Christian attitudes towards divorce, an example of the West's "intellectual invasion" and of "ideas plagiarized" from the West.<sup>45</sup> "These rights [like the right to divorce] have been in the Muslim family for four centuries," he writes, "Do we really need to make a fuss about the liberation of woman, who has been free for fourteen centuries, so that we can merely resemble Europe? How Europe has been shackled in centuries of darkness and oppression until they arrived at what has been self-evident in Islam!"<sup>46</sup> In contrast to the "subjection of woman in Western civilization," Kishk invokes women's right to property in Islam,

<sup>43</sup> Kishk (1979a: 3).    <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.    <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 33.    <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

much like Qasim Amin.<sup>47</sup> Women's right to property in Islam, he writes, has been the basis of her complete economic liberation, her freedom, and her complete equality in economic rights, and is a pillar of her social equality.

An amalgam of liberal ideas structure these writings – about the importance of rights, equality, freedom, family, and private property to an Islamic citizenship situated, however paradoxically, in the family. Critical to exercising these freedoms, Kishk argues, is sexual and psychological emancipation. Another fundamental dimension of women's liberation in Islam is the freedom to sexual pleasure within the Muslim family. Kishk graphically describes this pleasure, of the body, the appetite, and the five senses, citing the “literature of sex” in Islamic civilization. In contrast, the West and Christianity have understood the body as corrupt and women as “guilty” for Adam and Eve's fall from grace. This understanding of the body and of sexuality, he argues, has had a nefarious effect on Western society. “This inhibition (*ihtibas*),” he writes, “injures the body . . . sexual pleasure is an end in itself . . . Europe had to discover psychology and fill its mental hospitals with the sick of the two sexes,” before it learned what Muslims had known since the seventh century.<sup>48</sup> Unlike in the West, this sexual freedom is strictly confined to the marital bond, on the pain of severe punishment. Even the punishment for adultery (stoning) is described as the expression of “a deep respect for women, and a deep regard for sex . . . the organization of Islamic marriage reaches the summit of emancipation, simplicity, and sacredness at the same time.”<sup>49</sup>

Central to this liberal hermeneutic of self is choice and free will. Romantic love becomes the expression of choice (of partner) powered by individual affect, expressed in revivalist writings through reference to Qur'anic terms like affection and compassion (from verse 30:20–21).<sup>50</sup> The freedom to divorce is important in Islam, Kishk reiterates, because the Muslim family is founded on free choice and dissolved on free choice. “The Muslim family,” he writes, “is the only family that is founded on the basis of complete freedom because, as we have seen, it comes into existence through free choice, is based on complete equality of its parts. More importantly than all of this, the continuity of the marriage means consent to that continuity, because the right to annul it is guaranteed. This is the Islamic miracle known by the name of divorce.”<sup>51</sup> Here, Kishk understands divorce as a sacred right and the Muslim family as simultaneously sacrosanct and free. Kishk uses the word *mu'jiza* to refer to the

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 7.      <sup>48</sup> Ibid., 11, 15.      <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>50</sup> Sidqi (1968: 210); Mustafa (1991: 21); Ezzat (1995: 75–76); Abu-Lughod (1998).

<sup>51</sup> Kishk (1979a: 25).

“miracle” of divorce, making divorce a miracle like that of the Qur’an. Divorce, he goes on, is “at the same time, the miracle of personal freedom” (*mu’jizat al-hurriya al-shakhsiyya*) and an example of Islam’s “humanistic understanding of human behavior.”<sup>52</sup> These are exactly the same terms Kishk used in order to praise Amin’s argument in *The Liberation of Woman*, discussed above.

*Liberation of the Liberated Woman* was a ten-point refutation of Jihan’s law, describing it as infringing on Muslim women’s freedoms. Using the same vocabulary of liberation and repression, Kishk begins by saying that Muslim men and women are sinking “under the yoke of foreign power” and that the aim is “liberation of them all through unified struggle against foreign dominance and social backwardness.”<sup>53</sup> Again, Kishk equates the amendments to the personal status laws with foreign dominance. This argument was not difficult to make, given that Sadat made the amendments under “emergency decree” in the wake of the Camp David Accords. Kishk argues that “forbidding divorce” is reactionary, in contrast to the “right to divorce,” which is progressive. Deploying trenchant satire, he describes the scene of a “hippie den” he visits in Italy, with black lights, the air thick with smoke, and an androgynous (female) couple. One of these is a leader in the Italian “women’s liberation movement.” He asks her, “Liberation from what? What is left?”<sup>54</sup> Women in Italy, she responds, only gained the right to divorce two weeks ago (in 1974). He laughs, saying that the progressives in his country are against divorce. Confused, the woman says that the smoke must have gone to his head.

Kishk’s topic may be the personal status laws, but his objection is mainly to the state’s interference in what he calls the private domain of religion. The government, he says, has no right to legislate in personal affairs, which are beyond its jurisdiction.<sup>55</sup> Kishk describes “a division of labor” between rules and interdictions relating to “civil, criminal, and political” matters and those relating to religion. Through this division of labor, he both re-enacts the division of spheres assumed by secular ideology and claims the private sphere of the family for religion. “There are rules subject to the authority of belonging to a particular religion. This is what is termed ‘the personal status’. On the foundation of freedom of conviction and the free right to belong to religion, these rules become a private matter to those who belong to that religion.”<sup>56</sup>

Kishk’s writings reproduce the assumptions of liberalism about the place of religion in the private sphere. The domain of intimate relations

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.    <sup>53</sup> Kishk (1979b: 5).    <sup>54</sup> Ibid., 9.    <sup>55</sup> Ibid., 11.    <sup>56</sup> Ibid., 15–16.

provides a "home" for this religious discourse, a site beyond the reach of the secular state's legislative power. The family and its gendered relations also seem to have become a place of refuge for the articulation of an Islamic society, as well as the jurisdiction of Islamic government. This is what Habermas calls the public sphere's "privacy oriented toward an audience," where private relations are negotiated and defined. Public opinion does battle with political power to control "the social." "With the background experience of a private sphere that had become interiorized human closeness, it challenged the established authority of the monarch; in this sense its character was from the beginning both private and polemical at once."<sup>57</sup> The modern public sphere, Habermas argues, negotiations "domination" with an "illusion of freedom evoked by human intimacy."<sup>58</sup> Kishk claims this private sphere of intimacy as not only humanity's, but also religion's "genuine site." It is the site from which he launches his critique of government encroaching on human freedom. The Islamist desire for a "national nonsecular modernity"<sup>59</sup> was rooted in the personal statute, becoming an emblem of religious freedom, even as it confined religious law to the family. Any tampering with this realm was seen as an infraction on the rights of Muslims and their freedom of practice. Islamist discourse used liberal language against the politics of the authoritarian secular state, but also to bolster its extrapolitical authority within the very structure of this secularism.

For Kishk, the Islamic family is a site for cultivating grassroots democracy capable of withstanding foreign domination and its instrument, authoritarian secularism. The Islamic Qasim Amin's argument was not just for women's liberation, but also for democracy. "Qasim Amin in his Muslim role believes, like us exactly, in democracy indigenous to Islam, springing from the belief that we are all from Adam and that Adam comes from dust. Qasim Amin, member of the Islamic movement (*al-jama'at al-islamiyya*), stands proudly over the European Duc d'Harcourt with the democracy of Islam that stands on belief in equality."<sup>60</sup> He quotes Amin in *Les Égyptiens* arguing that all inhabitants of any Muslim country are equal under the law regardless of sex, religion, wealth, or birth. Islamic society cannot be founded on anything but a democratic order, "because it arises from the foundation of equality and fraternity

<sup>57</sup> Habermas (1991: 51–52). Charles Taylor (2003: 87, 91) observes that integrity of the public sphere depends on its autonomy from political power and its freedom from subjection.

<sup>58</sup> Habermas (1991: 52). <sup>59</sup> Shakry (1998: 152–53); Chakrabarty (2007: 11–14).

<sup>60</sup> Kishk (1990: 46). Qasim Amin (1984) wrote *Les Égyptiens* in French, as a response to the Duc d'Harcourt's *L'Égypte et les Égyptiens* (1893) and a defense of Egyptian cultural practices.

(*al-ikha*).”<sup>61</sup> Kishk not only recuperates Amin’s discussion of the Egyptian woman for Islamic thought, but also approves of Amin’s defense of Islam as a fair and just system of government. These writings’ subject is the free practice of Islamic law in an Islamic society and accordingly, in an Islamic politics, discussed through the trope of “woman.” In the second part of the book, on ‘Abd al-Raziq, Kishk drives this point home. His call for liberation here is from the incursions of Western governmentality through colonialism and liberalism. “Like we have said a thousand times,” Kishk writes, “Liberalism does not grow under the wing of colonialism, but begins in the clash with it, the struggle against it, and demanding freedom from it.”<sup>62</sup>

### The Liberation of Islamic Law and Letters: Muhammad ‘Imara

‘Imara and Kishk were the two main authors responsible for the revitalization of the “Islamic liberation of woman” motif, partly by recycling, reinterpreting, and reframing *nahda* ideas for the *sahwa*. The revival of women’s liberation can be attributed largely to ‘Imara, though, who dedicated his career to a full-scale excavation of the works of the *nahda*. As a graduate student at Cairo University in the mid-1960s, he re-injected *nahdawwi* ideas into popular consciousness by editing and circulating compilations of the *nahda*’s most important texts by its most illustrious thinkers: Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq, Muhammad ‘Abduh, Qasim Amin, and many others. One of the first such publications was the complete works of Muhammad ‘Abduh, published in the early 1970s. In ‘Imara’s introduction to this six-volume work, he caused a stir by arguing that ‘Abduh authored parts of Amin’s *The Liberation of Woman*, reiterating this assertion in subsequent publications.<sup>63</sup> Whereas the patriarchal conjugal bourgeois family described in Amin’s text becomes a critical unit of Islamic society, as well as of Islamic law and politics, ‘Abduh’s name serves to legitimize the concept of women’s liberation within the Islamic tradition.

‘Imara first articulated his claim that Muhammad ‘Abduh actually wrote *The Liberation of Woman* in 1972, in his *The Complete Works of Imam Muhammad ‘Abduh*, but he would reiterate this argument in numerous publications, republications, new editions, and additional volumes over the years.<sup>64</sup> ‘Imara’s aim is less to prove ‘Abduh’s

<sup>61</sup> Kishk (1990: 46).      <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.      <sup>63</sup> Al-Qaradawi, et al. (2004).

<sup>64</sup> ‘Imara (1972; 1976; 1980; 1985).



authorship of *The Liberation of Woman* than to demonstrate women's liberation as compatible with Islamic law. For him, 'Abduh is not just an emblem of reformist Islam, but also a legal authority. 'Abduh had been head of the religious courts, the "native tribunals," that governed personal status law. While he held this position, he ventured reformist ideas that found their way into *The Liberation of Woman* (about polygamy not being condoned by the Qur'an, for example). "The opinion of Islamic law in issues of the hijab, marriage, divorce, and polygamy, included in *The Liberation of Woman*," 'Imara states, "is the opinion of the Professor Imam Muhammad 'Abduh."<sup>65</sup>

'Imara disavows the secular nature of this liberation, setting up an antithetical binary between Amin's secular Western *weltanschauung* and 'Abduh's Islamic worldview of women and the family. But he also recognizes their imbrication and overlap, their mutual influence, analyzing what he calls a "division of labor" within the text. The "division of labor" is between religion and secularism, but is also a bid to delineate the jurisdiction of Islamic law over the private sphere. *The Liberation of Woman*, 'Imara asserts, is a book with not only two authors, but also "two goals."<sup>66</sup> One "goal" pertains purely to Islamic law and jurisprudence (attributed to 'Abduh), and the other to secular ideas (attributed to Amin). This division of labor creates a distinction, embodied in the two different thinkers, between the Islamic and the Western, the religious and the secular. But their juxtaposition speaks forcefully to how they mutually constitute each other – how they are tied and connected through the concept of liberation. 'Imara's claim about *The Liberation of Woman* has been widely accepted as truth in scholarship on Amin, reifying assumptions about the diametric opposition between Islamic and Western thought, the religious and the secular.<sup>67</sup> Like 'Imara, Leila Ahmed sets dichotomous personalities against one another – Huda Sha'arawi versus Malak Hifni Nasif, Doria Shafiq versus Zaynab al-Ghazali, Qasim Amin versus Muhammad 'Abduh – one embodying indigenous values and the other, imported ones. Citing 'Imara, Ahmed repeats the claim that 'Abduh wrote parts of *The Liberation of Woman*, imagining an unimpeachable version of feminism stamped by the religious authority of 'Abduh.

'Imara also emphasizes the juridical aspects of women's liberation, arguing that a liberal family and a liberated woman are fully compatible with Islamic law. He does this by emphasizing the legal dimensions of *The Liberation of Woman* and connecting them to 'Abduh. The parts

<sup>65</sup> 'Imara (1976). <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>67</sup> Ahmed (1993: 159, 270n16). See, too, Badran (1996: 18); Haj (2009: 146, 246–47n92, 249n3); Cole (1981).

written by ‘Abduh, he writes, are dedicated to studies in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and are aimed mainly at jurists and Islamic scholars. In this way, ‘Imara not only redeems *The Liberation of Woman* with the stamp of ‘Abduh’s juridical authority, but also legitimizes the text as an important contribution to Islamic legal studies. Earlier thinkers did not take the text seriously in this way, instead denouncing it as un-Islamic.”<sup>68</sup> ‘Imara, in contrast, calls the book an urgent “call – to well regarded people in Islamic law and those knowledgeable of its dictates – to protect the needs of the Islamic *umma* and its requirements with respect to women.”<sup>69</sup> “No one, except an imam *mujtahid* in Islam, could write these parts; and there was no one of that age that could do so except the Professor Imam.”<sup>70</sup> The author, ‘Imara says, possesses a comprehensive knowledge of all the schools of law, all the branches of the shari’a, all the books of jurisprudence. “Especially in the chapters dealing with the perspective of the shari’a and religion in the matter of women’s liberation, there are a series of juridical opinions and discussions of which a writer like Qasim Amin is not capable . . . more importantly, we find comprehensive legal opinions that point to their author and their source had penetrated deeply into research in this matter in all the principal sources of Islamic thought, its different schools and intellectual movements.” This is his main evidence that ‘Abduh wrote the text.<sup>71</sup>

‘Imara is preoccupied with delineating the sphere of the family as a specifically Islamic domain, one governed by the laws of shari’a. He calls for the “protection [*siyana*, a word also denoting chastity]” of the household with a law “that all individuals abide by, limits imposed on the special domain (*ikhhtisas*) between a husband and a wife.”<sup>72</sup> Using the legal term *ikhhtisas*, ‘Abduh demarcates the specific jurisdiction or sphere of authority of the shari’a in regulating the household, the marriage bond, and gendered relations, staking out the home and family as the territory governed by Islamic law. If his project includes structuring the private domain as the legal jurisdiction of Islamic law, much as colonial discourse did,<sup>73</sup> it also carves out Islamic law as a conceptual space free of secular

<sup>68</sup> ‘Azmi (1901); Wajdi (1901). <sup>69</sup> ‘Imara (1976: 139). <sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Claims that Muhammad ‘Abduh wrote parts of *The Liberation of Woman* had long circulated, but ‘Imara was the first to make a protracted argument for ‘Abduh’s direct hand in its composition. But ‘Imara relies on weak circumstantial evidence: the two men moved in the same social circles and believed in the same ideas, and that shared authorship and the use of pseudonyms were common at the time. The only real piece of evidence is a quote from Durriya Shafiq, printed in bold: “It was said that some paragraphs in *The Liberation of Woman* are evidence of the style of the Shaykh Muhammad ‘Abduh himself.” Shafiq and ‘Abduh (1945); ‘Imara (1976: 139, 144).

<sup>72</sup> ‘Imara (1976: 140). <sup>73</sup> Asad (2003).

and foreign incursions, a paradox characteristic of liberal discourse.<sup>74</sup> The division between the secular state and the Islamic family appears as a kind of Foucauldian “double conditioning” between family and state, public and private.<sup>75</sup> In these revivalist writings, it is also a “double conditioning” between religion and secularism, Islam and the West, ‘Abduh and Amin. This dualism is what Wendy Brown calls the “constitutive binaries of liberalism” and what Slavoj Žižek describes as the binaries of liberal discourse. Brown refers to the double relationship between the sexual and social contracts, between private and public, family and state, feminine and masculine. Žižek is more concerned with secular liberalism’s messianic nature, how its own religiosity is projected out onto an Islamic other, as its diametric opposite, as the very specter of itself.<sup>76</sup> ‘Imara and Kishk’s writings inhabit that space of liberalism’s “reverse discourse,” a counterpublic grounded in the private sphere, where religion in the family becomes the promise of refuge from a pervasive and invasive secularism.

‘Imara projects a liberal Islamic family, women’s rights and duties, and a social and political “division of labor” into the past, imparting it with a timeless legitimacy, even as his ideas were formulated in response to current politics. Although his *Complete Works of Muhammad ‘Abduh* was written at the end of the 1960s, it would not be published until 1972, coinciding with a conference held in Cairo on Arab Women in National Development, sponsored by the League of Arab States and by Unicef. ‘Imara would follow a pattern of publishing on “woman and Islam,” “women’s liberation in Islam,” women and the family, Amin and ‘Abduh, in response to international initiatives focusing on reform of women and the family. He published a flurry of writings on women and Islam in 1975 and 1976, in the aftermath of the International Women’s Year conference in Mexico City, to which Jihan Sadat led a delegation of Egyptian representatives. During that time, he published a compilation of ‘Abduh’s writings on “Islam and woman,” as well as *The Complete Works of Qasim Amin*, in which he reiterated verbatim the claim that Muhammad ‘Abduh wrote *The Liberation of Woman*.<sup>77</sup> Both Islamic (Dar al-Rashad and Dar al-Shuruq) and mainstream (Dar al-Hilal) presses would reissue these two works many times over subsequent decades, in addition to a satellite of related works on Amin and ‘Abduh under different titles but with similar material. Clearly, the audience and reception of these works was vast, warranting multiple editions by many different presses.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Brown (1995: 135–65); Scott (1997). <sup>75</sup> Foucault (1976: 99–100).

<sup>76</sup> Žižek (2001: 3–5, 152). Also, see Euben (1999). <sup>77</sup> ‘Imara (1975); ‘Imara (1976).

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, ‘Imara (1979; 1993; 1997).

In the wake of the 1979 “Jihan’s law,” ‘Imara republished *Islam and Woman* twice. This collection of ‘Abduh’s articles and writings focuses principally on the family and the marriage contract. ‘Imara’s interpolations into the text – its framing, the chapter titles, the epigraphs, the introduction, and the commentary – most illustrate the uses to which he bends ‘Abduh’s writings. In this we see the interpretive role played by the redactor and interpreter as these texts are recycled for a new era. The first chapter of the book, on Islamic gender “equality,” is followed by a chapter on divorce and another on polygamy – the two main issues debated in discussions over the reform of the personal status laws. The contradictions between an imagined ontological equality and the inequalities of divorce and polygamy in Islamic law are stark, but they also represent a revivalist drive to reconcile the politics of the family with the contradictions (of equality and inequality, rights and duties, freedom and submission) inherent in liberal thought. ‘Imara’s argument in *Islam and Woman in the Opinion of Muhammad ‘Abduh* depends on an extended analogy between the Islamic family and the *umma*, becoming a commentary on the nature of Islamic governance both inside and outside the home. The epigraph to *Islam and Woman in the Opinion of the Imam Muhammad ‘Abduh* is a quotation from ‘Abduh about the family as the “building block” of the *umma*: “The *umma* is made up of families. The reform of one is the reform of the other. Whoever does not have a home does not have an *umma*.”<sup>79</sup> ‘Imara’s collection of ‘Abduh’s writings on gender are a means of envisioning Islamic political liberty and Islamic government through the trope of the family as the political unit of the *umma*. ‘Imara dedicates *Islam and Woman in the Opinion of Muhammad ‘Abduh* to the “Egyptian, Muslim, and Eastern family,” arguing that the only way to cure the social ills plaguing the region is to cure the ills plaguing the family.<sup>80</sup> ‘Abduh, he argues, “was and still is – in our contemporary age – the most important *mujahid* in Islamic reasoning from the greatest Islamic mind, who stood in front of the book of God and the Sunna of the prophet in order to see in them – with an enlightened mind – the cure for the ills of our contemporary society, ills in the life of the family in particular.” The solution, he says, is the Islamic shari’a. And he rues those who see the shari’a as something “backward or calcified.” The book is dedicated to those who “search for the true meaning of the suitability of Islamic law in the progression of time and space.”<sup>81</sup>

After “Jihan’s law” ‘Imara also republished his commentary from *The Complete Works of Qasim Amin* under the title *Qasim Amin wa-Tahrir al-Mar’a (Qasim Amin and the Liberation of Woman, 1980)*. At the same time,

<sup>79</sup> ‘Imara (1979). <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

he wrote another commentary on 'Abduh and his school of thought, including Amin, and their relationship to "Islamic renewal." Both of these works would be republished in 1985 when the Mubarak government issued its own set of personal status laws.<sup>82</sup> These books Islamicize *The Liberation of Woman* in a new way: by rehabilitating Amin. Suddenly Amin becomes a *salafi*, calling for a return to the simplicity of Islam by stripping it of its cultural accretions, returning to the Qur'an and the correct *hadith*, dispensing with the corruptions of the "men of religion" and the "jurists," and focusing on the political work of the message.<sup>83</sup> Amin is no longer emblematic of the un-Islamic (social, literary, Western) aspects of the text; instead he becomes a political and religious reformer. "His Islamic intellectual background did not qualify him to be an Islamic writer rather than an Islamic reformer. But his particular nature and individual formation called him to be a writer specializing and interested in religious matters and he was proud of Islam and the attacks on Islam . . . provoked him."<sup>84</sup> A chapter on "Islamic Civilization" is structured as a six-part discussion of "Qasim Amin's Islamic viewpoints and opinions." 'Imara writes: "As for Islam, as a religion, Qasim Amin had a simple and good understanding of it at that time. He saw that religion was innocent of what had been added to it with the passing of the ages . . . those committed to this simple religion should return to its most trusted source: the Qur'an and then to a few sound hadiths."<sup>85</sup>

What kind of reform does 'Imara envision? His chapter "The Freedom of Woman" revolves around a central analogy in Amin's work: that the oppression of women in the home is like the oppression of men by the government. The chapter begins with a quote from *The Liberation of Woman*: "There is overlap between the political situation and the familial situation . . . for the type of government is reflected in household manners and household manners are reflected in social forms. In the East we find woman is the slave of man and man is the slave of the government. When women enjoy their personal freedom then men enjoy their political freedom. The two situations are completely linked."<sup>86</sup> In his discussion of freedom, 'Imara continually returns to Amin's analogy between tyranny in the home and tyranny in politics, reiterating, rephrasing, and re-quoting the original passage. 'Imara, drawing on Amin, frames women's emancipation as eradicating tyranny in the home. But it is also an argument against state interference in the domain of religious governance – in the family and elsewhere.

'Imara ideologically aligns his argument with the thought of Sayyid Qutb, with respect to questions of religious and political freedom. Qutb associates servitude to anything but God – that is, to human, secular forms

<sup>82</sup> 'Imara (1980; 1985). <sup>83</sup> 'Imara (1990: 140, 141, 144). <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 140–41. <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

of government – with *shirk* (polytheism) and *jahiliyya* (pre-Islamic age of ignorance).<sup>87</sup> In one specific passage, ‘Imara directly draws on Qutb’s language: of slavery (*‘ubudiyya*) and despotism (*istibidad*); emancipation (*taharrur*) and consciousness of freedom (*wijdan al-hurriya*); justice (*‘adala*) and sovereignty (*siyada*). Echoing Qutb, ‘Imara writes: “We perceive Qasim Amin’s depth when he connected women’s backwardness and subjugation to the dominance of a tyrannical order . . . It was not Islam . . . but tyranny made women one of its preys and shackled her with fetters and chains. Her emancipation is connected to the emancipation of man from tyranny and the emancipation of society as a whole.”<sup>88</sup> The emancipation of women becomes one battlefield in the fight against secular tyranny and political oppression, and Islam, the means to that emancipation. ‘Imara returns to the book’s epigraph about man treating woman as a “slave,” depriving her of “consciousness of freedom” (*wijdan al-hurriya*) – a term referencing Qutb’s first pillar of social justice, “emancipation of consciousness” (*al-taharrur al-wijdani*). Even as he deploys the liberal language of freedom, ‘Imara distinguishes this freedom from secularism, which is another form of human tyranny on earth.

### Conclusion

When new Egyptian personal status legislation was enacted in 2001 and 2004, ‘Imara published no fewer than four new books on the “movement for women’s emancipation in Islam,” including republications of *Islam and Woman* and *The Complete Works of Qasim Amin*.<sup>89</sup> The legal authority of ‘Abduh combined with Amin’s conceptualization of the bourgeois family form as a mechanism for emancipation created a gendered space central to revivalist discourses. The revival of Qasim Amin served to legitimize just such a bourgeois family form for the Islamic Awakening.<sup>90</sup> Kishk and ‘Imara characterize this ideal-type family as being one based on free consent, companionate marriage, and the integrity of personal property (including that of women), and made up of educated and “enlightened” subjects.<sup>91</sup> This literature emphasizes the right to private property as one of the core elements of the “freedom” of the Muslim family and the rights of its members, namely women. Muslim women’s rights to manage their own assets, their rights to personal property and to

<sup>87</sup> For a discussion of the development of certain political concepts such as *jahiliyya* in Qutb’s thought, see Khatab (2006).

<sup>88</sup> ‘Imara (1980: 111).

<sup>89</sup> ‘Imara (2001; 2002); Nadir and ‘Imara (2004). See, too, Ahmed (1993).

<sup>90</sup> Wickham (2002). <sup>91</sup> Abu-Lughod (1998: 252).

buying and trading, and their rights to financial maintenance are stressed in revivalist writings as key to women's liberation in Islam.

Both Kishk and 'Imara marketed Islam to popular audiences, tailored their work for a mass audience, and circulated their publications through both print and digital media. They published extensively: Kishk wrote nearly thirty books, 'Imara almost eighty. 'Imara appears frequently on satellite television (on CBC Egypt, al-Hafiz, al-Fajr, AzhariTV, and al-Jazeera) and has posted more than 400 videos on YouTube, and his writings have been re-packaged in lectures and interviews suited for television audiences. Kishk, a prolific contributor to the popular press, passed away in the public eye. He died in the midst of a heated debate on Arab American television with Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, the Egyptian intellectual accused of apostasy (and forcibly divorced from his wife) for his literary interpretations of the Qur'an.<sup>92</sup>

Throughout this period, thinkers such as Hasan Hanafi – analyzed by Yasmeen Daifallah in the next chapter – contributed to spirited debates over rights and freedoms within the framework of the Islamic revival even as older texts such as Muhammad al-Khidr Husayn's *Freedom in Islam* (originally published in 1909) and Sayyid Qutb's *Social Justice in Islam* (1949) were republished and circulated in new editions.<sup>93</sup> Islamist groups worked to expand the freedoms wrested through the process of partial liberalization under Sadat and Mubarak; if their project was contingent on distancing themselves from the secular state, this made much easier given the ban on the Islamic movement from Egyptian politics. Maintaining the Islamic nature of the virtuous family depended on continual disavowal that it was a "secular formula," or an invention of colonial modernity, rather than a preservation of a pre-colonial vestige of Islamic law. In Kishk's *Ignorance in the Age of Enlightenment*, colonial secularism is transformed into ignorance and Islam becomes the path to enlightenment. The spread of such ignorance has led to "an age of darkness" and "an age of oppression" (*'asr al-zalam*), a modern *jahiliyya* that calls for a second coming of Islam and true enlightenment. 'Imara's intellectual production, by contrast, revolves around conceptualizing Islam as the path to enlightenment, but it is also the way these Islamic intellectuals legitimize their own pedagogical role in leading the *umma* out of ignorance and *jahiliyya*.<sup>94</sup> Even as 'Imara

<sup>92</sup> Muhammad Jalal Kishk and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, "Akhir ma nutiqa bihi Jalal Kishk," *al-Sha'b*, December 17, 1993; Hirschkind (1996); Agrama (2012; 42–68).

<sup>93</sup> Husayn (1982); al-Banna (1985); Hanafi (1988); Gonzalez-Quijano (1998). Originally published in 1949, *Social Justice in Islam* was re-published in 1952, 1954, 1956, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1967, 1969, 1975, 1977, 1980, 1983, 1987, 1993, and 2002. Also see Yasmeen Daifallah's chapter in this volume.

<sup>94</sup> 'Imara (1984; 1995; 1997).



demonstrates an intellectual imbrication in the presumed joint authorship between ‘Abduh and Amin, and a convergence of Western secular and Islamic religious worldviews on the subject of “women’s liberation,” he sets up dichotomies between East and West, religious and secular, legal and cultural, Islamic and un-Islamic. ‘Imara identifies two *nahdas* – one calling for the wholesale adoption of Western civilization and the other for “benefiting from the ‘tools’ of the European Renaissance and civilization, making its point of departure Arab-Islamic and its character Arab-Islamic” and “building a modern, developed Arab Islamic civilization distinct from the civilization of the Europeans.”<sup>95</sup> Amin’s age, ‘Imara writes, was split between two kinds of renaissance. He describes Arab and Islamic contemporary civilization as “reliant on a model of progress and development,” using the words *nahda*, *tajdid*, and *yaqaza*, comparing them to the European Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment.<sup>96</sup> Instead of modeling the Islamic awakening on the European Enlightenment, however, he roots the Enlightenment in Islam. “The Protestant Reformation borrowed from the spirit of Islam and its teachings. Europe’s path to enlightenment and rationalism propel its enlightenment little by little to Islam.”<sup>97</sup> Amin, he writes, had an “enlightened understanding” of the Islamic religion and “one of his important references was to the unbounded and open possibility of the spread of Islam to Europe. Only a religion distinguished by such simplicity and rationalism harmonizes with their people, with the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Rationalism that prevailed and prevail in European societies. This religion is Islam.”<sup>98</sup> Islamic renewal (*tajdid*) will bring about enlightenment (*tanwir*), liberating humanity – both men and women – from the shackles of ignorance and oppression.

The writings analyzed in this chapter both exploit – and become caught in – the binaries of liberalism and its others, of the secular state and religion, public and private, the political and the personal. Because its governance had already been ceded by the secular state to Islamic law, the family became a sacred outpost in the public discourse of political Islam. As one of the pivotal “social structures of the public sphere,” the family was discursively produced through these overlapping domains: the world of letters and the letter of the law. Kishk and ‘Imara, harbingers of a flood of Islamist commentary, formulated a public hermeneutics in which legal norms pertaining to the family became expressed, critiqued, and interpreted through the Islamic world of letters.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>95</sup> ‘Imara (1980: 157).    <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.    <sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.    <sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>99</sup> Habermas (1991: 55); Fraser (1992).