

# The Egyptian Women's Movement: The Vision of Huda Shaarawi



NCHE, Washington 2019

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# Egyptian Women's Movement Early Twentieth Century



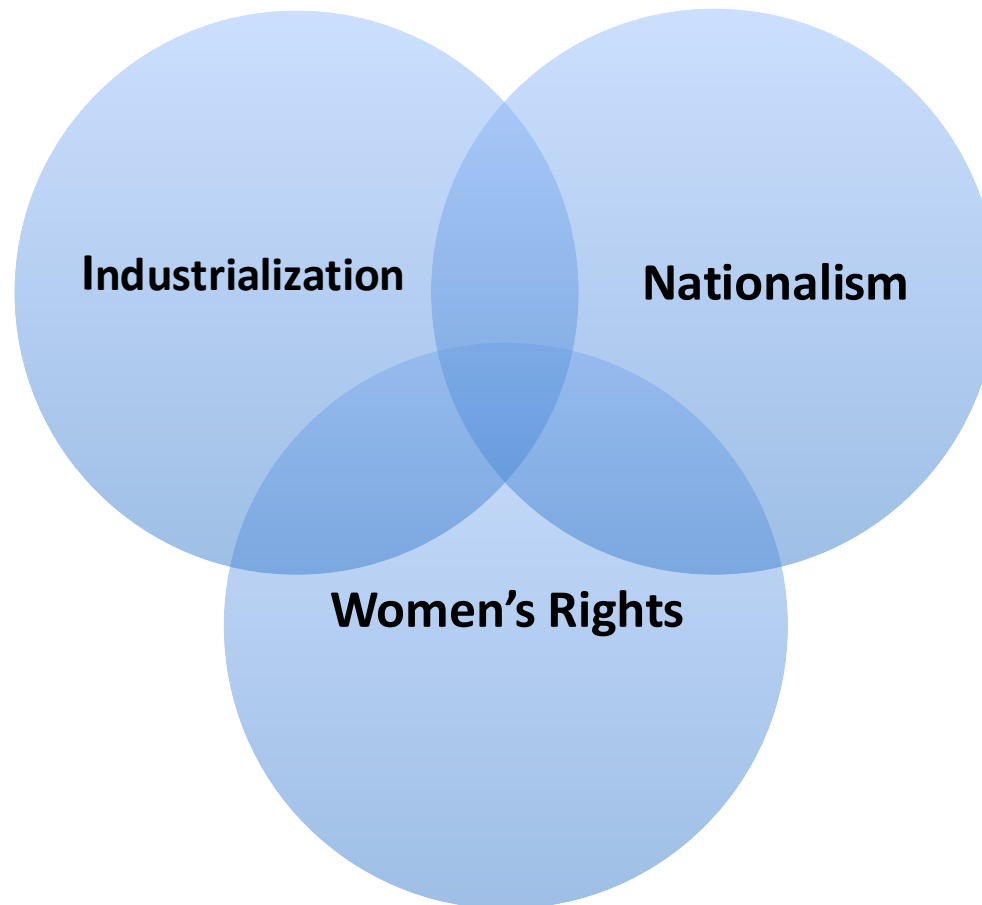
- Turkey
- France
- New Zealand
- United States
- Switzerland
- Egypt

- 1893            1920
- 1934           1945
- 1956           1971

Photo: Egyptian Revolution, Wiki

# Exercising Power: Individuals and Institutions in History

Huda Shaarawi  
1879-1947



# Egyptian Revolution 1919-1922

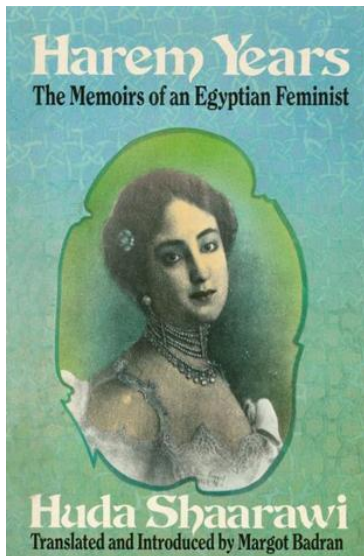
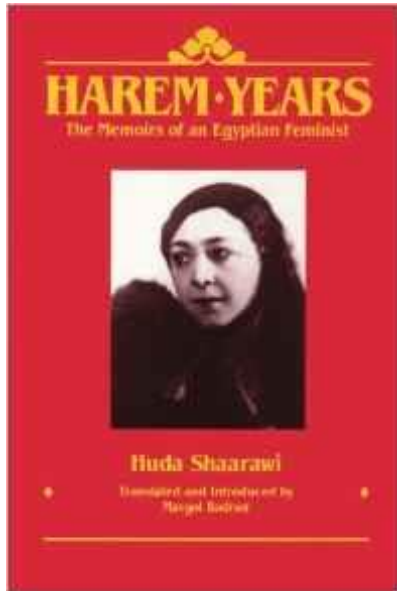


- Britain invades Egypt 1882.
- Britain claims Egypt as a protectorate in 1914.
- Zaghlul founds the Wafd party, 1918
- British arrest Zaghlul on March 8, 1919 and send him to Malta.
- Egyptians take to the streets.
- 1922 Britain nominally leaves Egypt.
- **1923 first Egyptian Constitution**

# Huda Shaarawi: Early Life

Born 1879

- Born into the very upper echelons of Egyptian society just years before Britain seizes control.
- Married at 13 against her will to her cousin
- Left the marriage for 7 years on a legal technicality
- Lives in a French speaking world
- French women in her life as tutors and mentors, including Eugénie Le Brun
- Becomes a “hafiz” at 11
- She reunites with her husband as Egyptian nationalism comes to the fore



Life in the Harem

# EGYPTIAN WOMEN TO DEMAND FREEDOM

*Program Calls for Mingling of  
Sexes, New Social Status and  
Higher Education.*

Copyright, 1923, by The New York Times Company.  
By Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

CAIRO, Egypt, May 4.—If the Egyptian delegation which left for Rome today to attend the International Women's Conference has its way, Egypt will step from the Middle Ages to a period approximate to modern conventions in so far as Egyptian women are concerned. The program which the delegation will advocate at the conference includes the abolition of many ancient restraints on Moslem women, particularly concerning marriage.

The delegation is determined to work for abolition of the custom of Egyptian men and women not being allowed to see each other before marriage. They regard this restriction as injurious and recommend that both sexes be allowed to mingle freely, both to permit those of marriageable age to select suitable mates and to enable elder women to take their proper place in the social and political life of their country.

They will also urge improvement of sanitary conditions in Egypt and a campaign against the worst superstitions in vogue locally and also recommend higher education for women. What Egyptian men think about this unorthodox creed remains to be seen as the feminists' revolutionary ideas were made public only this afternoon and the men who hitherto were unqualified lords and masters are now too startled to do anything but wipe their foreheads and read the afternoon papers again.

Egyptian EFU led by Shaarawi in Rome  
As the International Women's Conference  
1923



Internationalizing the movement brings  
recognition  
French, the international language

# Shaarawi's Political Life

- Founds and leads the **women's division** of the Wafd nationalist party 1922
- “Unveils” in public upon return from an international women's meeting
- Founds the Egyptian Feminist Union, 1923
- Leads the Arab Feminist Union founded in 1944

# Goals of the First Women's Movement

- Education at all levels for women.
  - Effects on women's potential.
- End to/limits on polygamy.
- Greater equity in divorce.
- Ending the barriers of seclusion of women.
- The right to vote and seek public office.

→ The role of French and Arabic in seeking demands

Hazaranlar Museum, Amasya,  
Turkeyphotos posted on Trip Advisor



# Selamlık

# Haremlik



**Male and Female Spheres in  
the Ottoman Empire**

**Public Space: Male**

**Private Sphere: Female**

# Mashrabiya: To see without being seen





**20 East 9th Street**  
Apartment 7C | Approx. 1,300 sq. ft.



Sotheby's

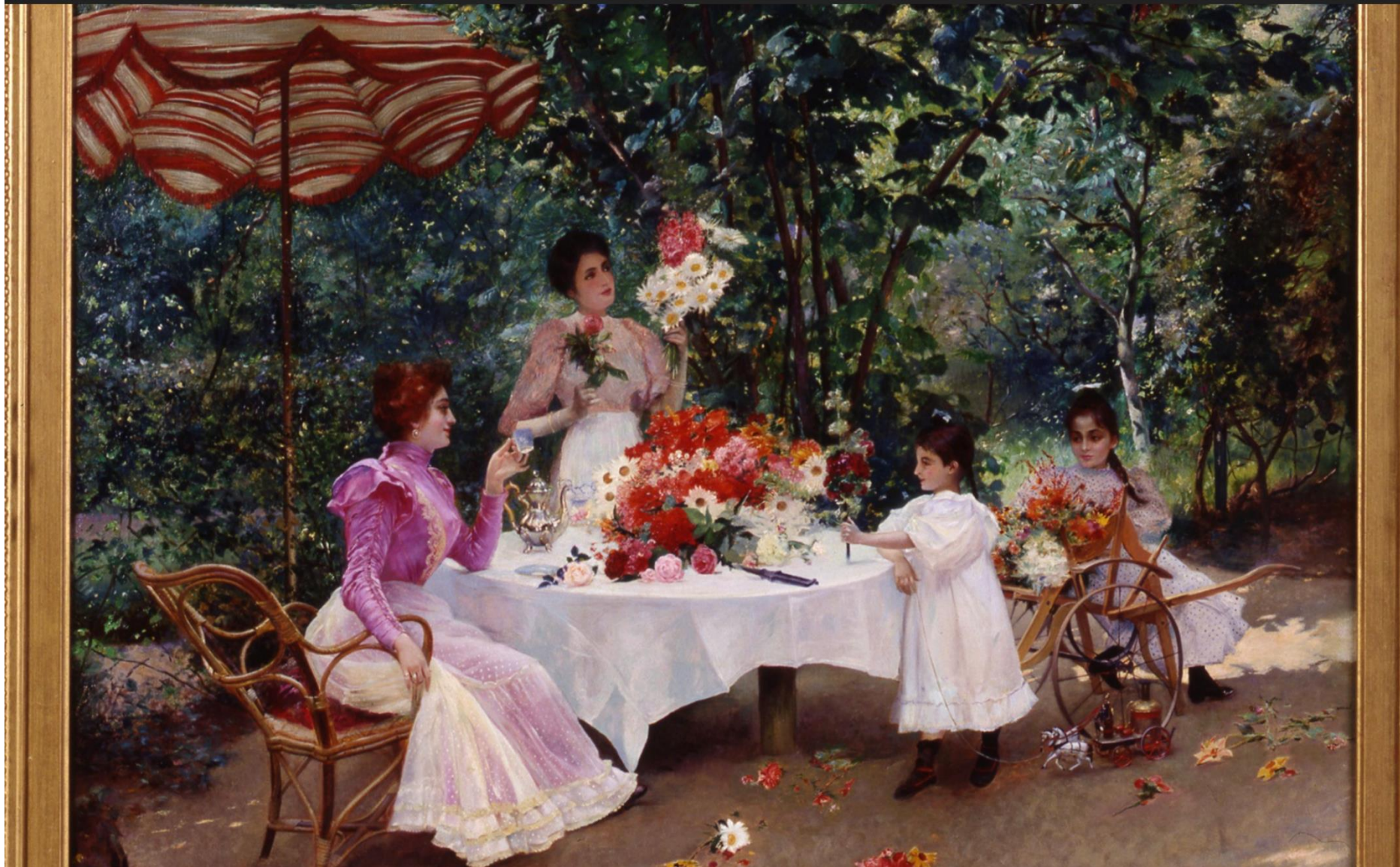


**PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERES, NYC**





**EDOUARD FRÉDÉRIC WILHELM RICHTER (Paris, 1844 -  
1913)**  
**Dance in the Harem**

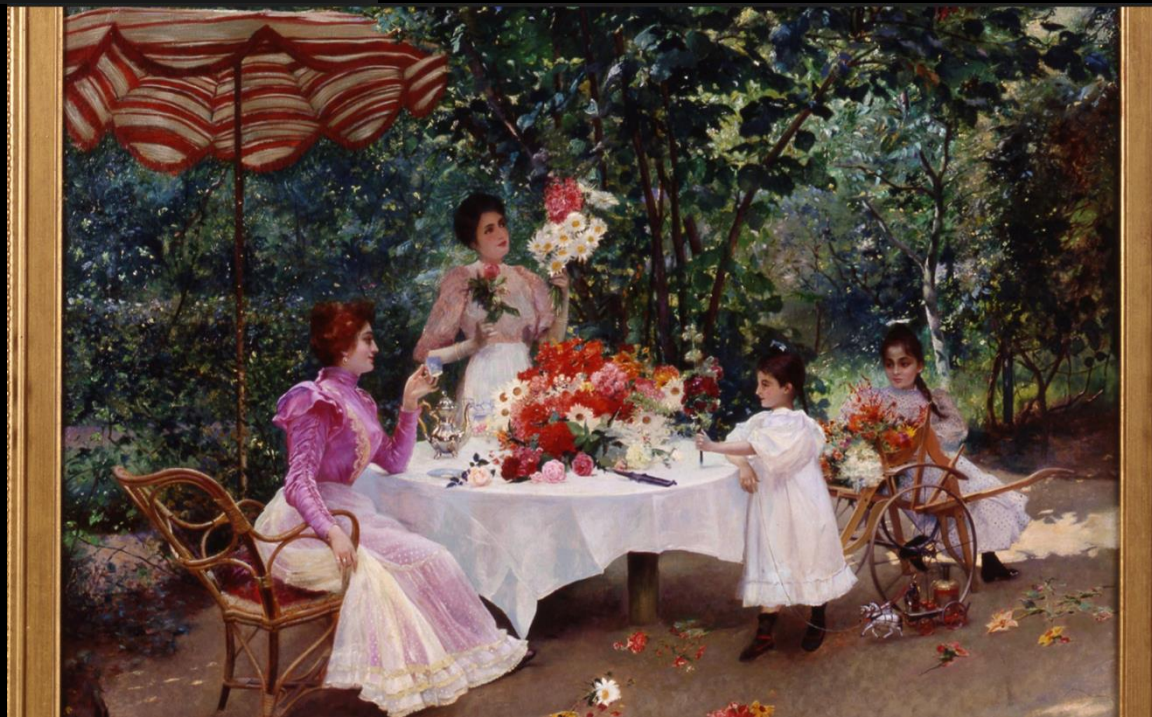


"In the Garden" by Edouard Frédéric Wilhelm Richter, Paris c. 1880

## WHAT'S GOING ON IN THIS PAINTING?



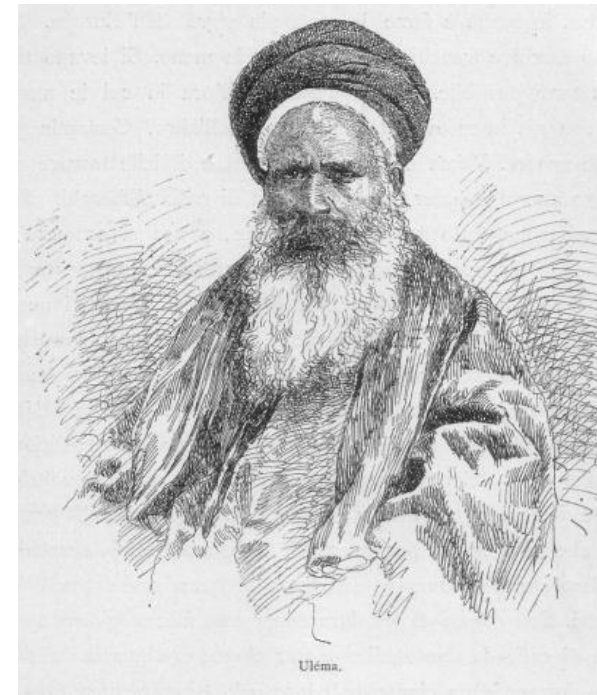
The same artist's gaze  
of women's domains  
"East" & "West"



# SALONS

- Intermediaries between the private sphere: the home and
- Public space, the place of men
- Salons and women readers
- Salons have both Arab and European antecedents.
- Adapted in Egypt and the Levant to further women's public presence. Seneca Falls Convention held in the *home* of Elizabeth Cady Stanton

# Madame de Staël (1766-1817)



Artist: Jean Etienne Liotard



Bloomers or  
Turkish Trousers



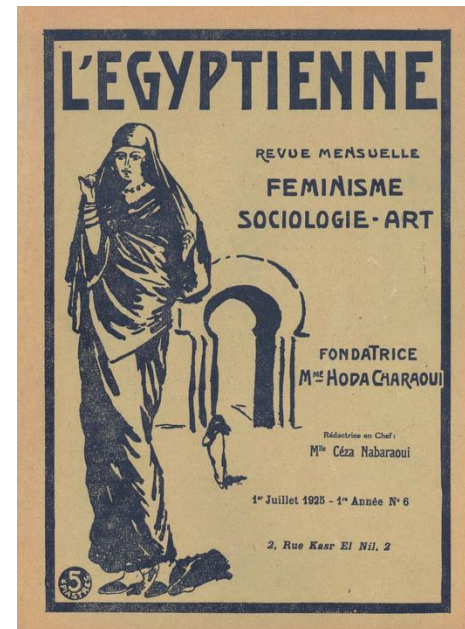
Woman Reading on a Sofa 1748

# From Salons to Activism

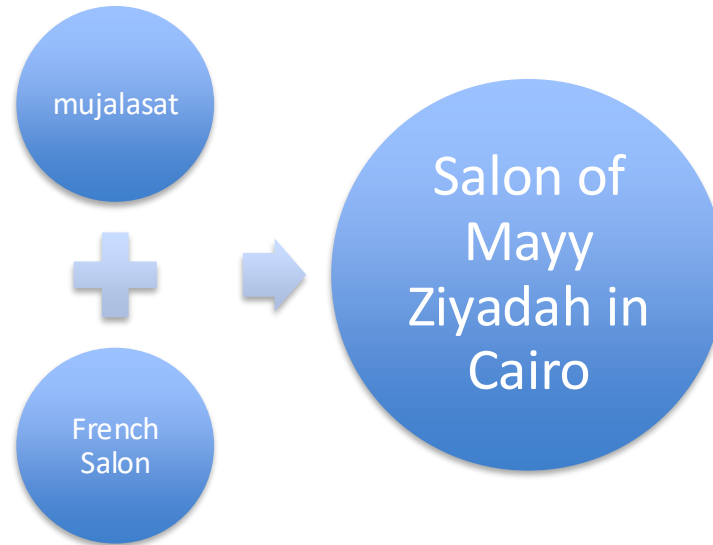
- Many who attend the salons are writers: poets, novelists, journalists.
- Women also start their own journals.
- Incubator for organizations to help lower class women and fight for women's rights



The WAFD Women's Committee 1925



# Elements of Arabic tradition and French tradition in the Cairo salon of Mayy Ziyadah.



**Women transform the private into a public sphere while remaining in the home.**

**1886-1941, Lebanese/Palestinian**  
**Educated in French convent schools**  
**Publishes poetry, articles in Arabic**  
**Father runs a newspaper**  
**Salon 1912 & mixed gender**





Mary Ajami, Syria



Princess Nazli Fazil, Egypt

## Salonnières across the Mediterranean

Qasim Amin attended The salon of Princess Nazli Fazil.



Maryana Marash, Syria



Geneviève Straus Halévy

Paris

Bizet's widow, and Proust's muse, Halévy's salon was a center of support for Alfred Dreyfus.

<http://www.arabwomenwriters.com/index.php/2014-05-03-16-01-55/1/labiba-hashim>



**Cairo, 1919**





# Selections of Huda Shaarawi's Writings

Directions:

- Read the section beginning next to the arrow.
- If you have time, read the questions accompanying the reading.

Discuss as a group:

- How does Shaarawi take charge of her own fate?
- How does she demonstrate courage on behalf of other women?
- How does she challenge the powers that be (male, colonialist, etc)?



## **Malak Hifni Nasif (1886-1819) Egypt**

A reformer in the Islamic modernist tradition focusing on gender, Nasif inveighed against men's abuses relating to divorce and polygamy. She insisted that women be allowed to participate in congregational worship in mosques.

### **Letter from Malak Hifni Nasif to Mayy Ziyadah, 1913**

We women are still burdened by the injustice of man and his oppression. We have no control over ourselves... **If man asks us to wear the veil, we wear it. And if he asks us to remove it, we remove it.** And if he demands our education, does he have good intentions or bad intentions? There is no doubt that he was right and wrong in determining our rights before and he is right and wrong in determining them now.... **It is time for man to stop acting as a despot when he "liberates" us, just as he did when he "enslaved" us.**

# Lord Cromer, *Modern Egypt* 1908

trative matters, generally bad.

The effects of polygamy are more baneful and far-reaching than those of seclusion. The whole fabric of European society rests upon the preservation of family life. Monogamy fosters family life, polygamy destroys it. The monogamous Christian respects women; the teaching of his religion and the incidents of his religious worship tend to elevate them. He sees in the Virgin Mary an ideal of womanhood, which would be incomprehensible in a Moslem country.<sup>1</sup> The Moslem, on the other hand, despises women; both his religion and the example of his Prophet, the history of

LORD COMER, BRITISH CONSUL GENERAL OF EGYPT 1883-1907

She let the legions thunder past,  
And plunged in thought again.

The mind of the true Eastern is at once lethargic and suspicious; he does not want to be reformed, and he is convinced that, if the European wishes to reform him, the desire springs from sentiments which bode him no good. Moreover, his conservatism is due to an instinct of self-preservation, and to a dim perception that, if he allows himself to be even slightly reformed, all the things to which he attaches importance will be not merely changed in this or that particular, but will rather be swept off the face of the earth. Perhaps he is not far wrong.

→ Although there are many highly-educated gentlemen who profess the Moslem religion, it has yet to be proved that Islam can assimilate civilisation without succumbing in the process. It is, indeed,

# Lord Cromer

## Consul General of Egypt

11 September 1883 – 6 May 1907

- **Founder & President**  
**Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage.**
- **Father of an illegitimate child.**
- **In Egypt raised school fees, affecting girls' ability to be educated.**  
**Discouraged training of women doctors.**
- **What of 'the unsexed woman voting at the polling booth, declaiming on the platform and in Parliament, and possibly sitting at the desk of the Cabinet Minister to decide some question affecting the destinies and interests of her fellow-countrymen and women in the Antipodes?'**



# The Effect of the Civilizing Mission

- ...Colonialism's use of feminism to promote the culture of the colonizers and undermine native culture has ever since [Cromer] imparted to feminism in non-Western societies the taint of having served as an instrument of colonial domination, rendering it suspect in Arab eyes and vulnerable to the charge of being an ally of colonial interests. That taint has undoubtedly hindered the feminist struggle within Muslim societies. Leila Ahmed

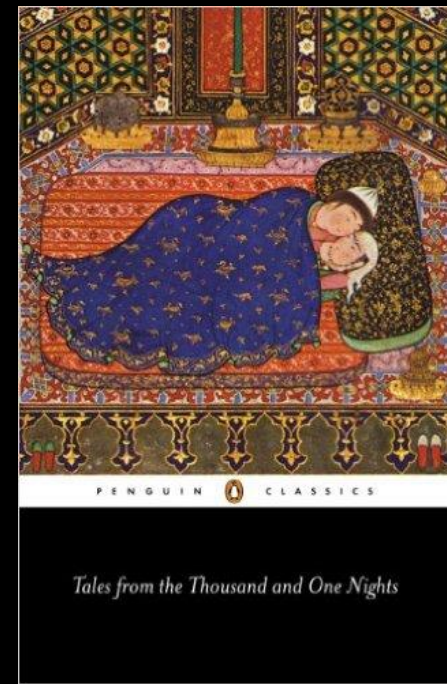
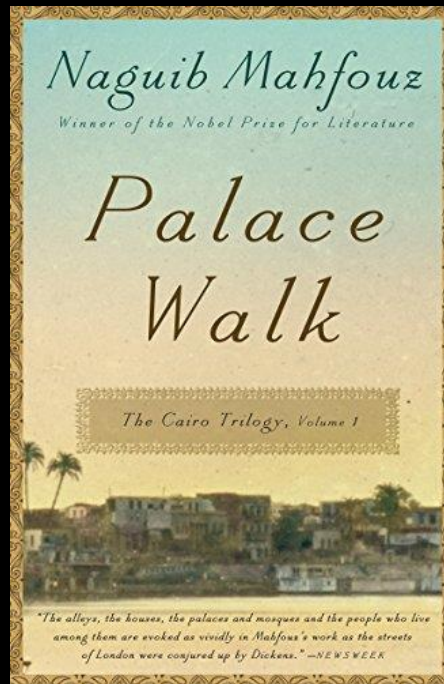
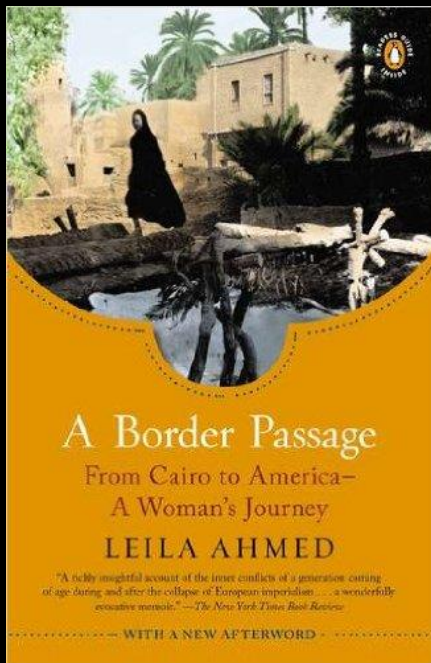
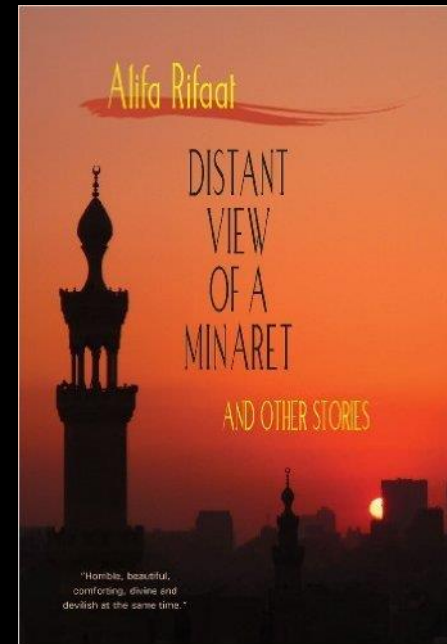
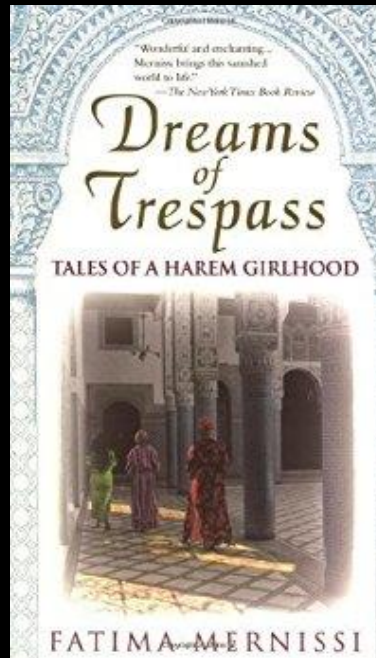
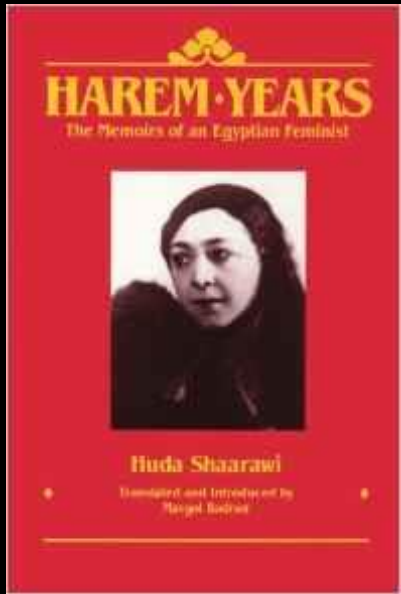
# First Feminists of Egypt

## Lesson Plan\*

- Two views of the harem: Naguib Mahfouz and Leila Ahmed
- Six primary source documents written by women in the founding years of Egyptian Feminism
- Strategizing and prioritizing demands of feminists
- Then reading excerpts from Lord Cromer
- Analysis of the effect of the colonial context of the movement
- Comparing demands to accomplishments up to 1957 or beyond
- Comparing the Egyptian movement to U.S. or others

\*To locate Google “First Feminists of Egypt Joan Brodsky Schur”

Posted at NYU Kevorkian Center. Also three lessons on World War I.





## Our Shared Past in the Mediterranean



A World History Curriculum Project for Educators

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**MODULE 5: REFORM AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN, 1798-1914**

Title

While the Mediterranean features heavily in many conventional tellings of “Western civilization,” it tends to be figured as a zone in which precursor civilizations are born, die, and subsequently become reanimated by the cultural inheritors of a uniquely European legacy.

# LESSON PLANS & CURRICULAR RESOURCES

## LESSON PLANS FROM TEACHER FELLOWS AND PAST WORKSHOPS

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WORLD WAR I AND THE MIDDLE EAST

REFUGEE STORIES FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

WOMEN & ISLAM

U.S. AND THE MIDDLE EAST

OTTOMAN EMPIRE



### THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN WORLD WAR I: A STUDY IN MAPS

BY JOAN BRODSKY SCHUR (2015)

Grade Level: High School (9 - 12)

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