

NOTES AND COMMENTS

THE *EFFENDIYYA*: WHERE HAVE ALL THE WOMEN GONE?

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In his “Note about the Term *Effendiyya* in the History of the Middle East” (*International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41 [2009]: 535–39), Michael Eppel clarifies his own use of *effendiyya* in an article he wrote for *IJMES* in 1998.¹ In the 1998 article, Eppel emphasized the value of studying the *effendiyya*, or what he called the “Westernized middle stratum,” and its dominance in political life to better understand Hashimite Iraq (1921–58). Members of this group, he argued, benefited from modern education and donned Western dress. They were young state employees (officials, teachers, health workers, engineers, and, later, military officers) who adopted Arab nationalism and Pan-Arab ideology as a means to cope with their socioeconomic and political discontent. From the 1930s, Eppel noted, the *effendiyya* created the radical political atmosphere that lent backing to the “militant-authoritarian trends” that led to the pro-German Rashid ‘Ali coup and the war with Britain in 1941. After World War II, they joined with other nationalist forces to lead the 1948 Wathba (uprising) against prolonging the Anglo–Iraqi treaty. In 1958, the army officers among them overthrew the monarchy. This “middle stratum” differed from the Western concept of the “new middle class,” and the indigenous Arabic term *effendiyya*, as employed by Eppel, endeavored to grasp the essence of this difference. It reflected a common experience that was the result of its members’ similar education, culture, and concerns rather than their economic status, social origins, and type of employment.

Scholars reacted differently to Eppel’s argument, and a debate ensued concerning the appropriateness of the term and the delineation of the young, discontented social group to which it refers. Peter Sluglett granted that because the term was widely used in correspondence by British diplomatic representatives in various part of the Middle East, it had some utility in the sense of “new middle class.” He utterly rejected, however, the characterization of the Iraqi “middle strata” as overwhelmingly Pan-Arab in outlook. Pan-Arab ideology, with its generally Sunni Arab vision of the Arabo-Islamic world, was less appealing to the Shi‘a, who comprised more than half of Iraq’s population, and the Kurds, who were at least one-fifth. It was rather Iraqi nationalism, with its emphasis on Iraqi independence and social reform, promoted vigorously by the Iraqi Communist Party, Sluglett opined, that appealed to Iraq’s educated youth of the time.²

Meanwhile, Peter Wien focused on the “young *effendiyya*,” whose members entered public life in the 1930s advocating Arab nationalism, but delineated the group primarily in terms of “generation.” He differentiated between the older “Sherifian generation” and the young *effendiyya* in terms of experience, values, expectations, and awareness. By investigating how journalists, editors, and writers of this younger generation conceptualized the meaning of nationalism, he challenged the historical narrative about

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the pro-Nazi and profascist inclination of Iraqi nationalists leading to the 1941 Rashid ‘Ali al-Kaylani coup. Orit Bashkin likewise used *effendiyya* as a synonym for “the educated middle class” in her research on Iraqi intellectuals of the Hashimite period. Bashkin showed how Sunni, Shi‘i, Kurdish, Christian, and Jewish intellectuals created an intellectual field that was more democratic and pluralistic than many have realized and in which both Arab nationalism and Iraqi nationalism were at play.³

In his 2009 note, Eppel refines the term *effendiyya* and reiterates its usefulness not only in the study of Iraq but also of the Middle East in general. He explains that the *effendiyya* from the 1930s to the 1950s were the creators and disseminators of different nationalisms as well as of communist and Islamist visions. The young *effendiyya*, he adds, were the backbone of political and social unrest in the Middle East in those years and were not characterized by their middle-class status. Poor and rich, even “sons of government ministers and parliament members,” joined forces to protest the status quo. “The best way to characterize them—these teachers, high school graduates, and college and university students—is by utilizing the term used by the participants themselves: *effendiyya*.” Eppel suggests using this local term in conjunction with “middle class,” which is not sensitive enough by itself to capture past developments in Middle Eastern societies, based as it is on “Western capitalist sociopolitical praxis and modern thought.” Combined with terms borrowed from the social sciences such as “urban bourgeoisie,” “professional intelligentsia,” and so forth, *effendiyya* can help scholars more precisely describe and understand social and political realities.

The term *effendiyya* (singular: *efendī* or *afandī*), however, remains problematic. In Eppel’s discussion, it refers almost exclusively to men—“the sons of,” “the educated young men,” and so forth. Indeed, throughout most of its Ottoman and Arab history the title *afandī* has denoted lord, master, gentleman, or mister and has excluded women.⁴ Eppel’s usage of this term as a social category, however, cannot—by his own criteria of shared experience, discourse, and activities—ignore women. I will briefly examine the case of Iraq to hone this point.⁵

Modern education, as noted by Eppel, was a main characteristic of the *effendiyya*. The 1947 Iraq census tells us that only 3 percent of the female population in Iraq was educated, but this represents a critical mass of about 73,000 literate women, most of them in the major cities. In Baghdad, the heart of political turmoil, women actually represented 30 percent of the literate population.⁶ In the urban setting and educational system, women no doubt had their own unique experiences, yet autobiographical accounts, especially of students in the coeducational medical and law schools, reveal an overlap with male experiences. Like educated men, for example, many women adopted modern fashion, which in their case included discarding the veil. Young educated and professional women perceived themselves as part of a generation very different from that which Wien termed “the Sherifian generation.”⁷

Educated women clearly took an active part in shaping the new discourses. Poets such as Nazik al-Mala’ika and her mother Um Nizar as well as Rabab al-Kazimi, ‘Atika al-Khazraji, Lami‘a ‘Abbas ‘Amara, and Amira Nur al-Din were known for their social and political writings. They not only tackled the question of women’s position in society but also urged Arab unity, the liberation of Palestine, and the end of foreign domination. From the late 1920s women participated in activities and intellectual debates at mixed clubs such as Nadi al-Shabiba, the earliest communist forum in Basra, and the Pan-Arab Nadi al-Muthanna.⁸

Women intellectuals and activists shared men's dissatisfaction with the socioeconomic and political order and took part in the same or similar protests. In Baghdad in 1930, women demonstrated against the pending approval of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty. Women also actively supported the anti-British coup in 1941. During the "Thirty Days War" against Britain, women joined troops (*katā'ib al-jawwāl*) whose task was to promote passive resistance.⁹ Women's participation in and support of later popular manifestations of public unrest, most notably, the wathba of 1948 and the intifada of 1952, are well documented in many scholarly works.

The gender-biased concepts *effendiyya* and "young *effendiyya*," then, obscure our view of women's contributions. In using such terms we misrepresent a generation of men and women that so eagerly promoted different nationalisms and disseminated fervently embraced philosophies, whether communist or Islamist, and whose growing socioeconomic concerns and political actions eventually brought down the old regimes in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East.

NOTES

¹Michael Eppel, "The Elite, the *Effendiyya*, and the Growth of Nationalism and Pan-Arabism in Hashemite Iraq, 1921–1958," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30 (1998): 227–50.

²Peter Sluglett, "The Urban Bourgeoisie and the Colonial State: The Iraqi and Syrian Middle Classes between the Two World Wars," in *The Role of the State in Western Asia*, ed. Anika Rabo and Bo Utas (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 2006), 77–90.

³Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism: Authoritarian, Totalitarian and Pro-Fascist Inclinations, 1932–1941* (London: Routledge, 2006); Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq, 1921–1958* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008).

⁴See B. Lewis, "Efendi," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2010), www.pauyonline.brill.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-2170 (accessed 26 December 2010). In my studies of Iraqi women's history under the monarchy I encountered only one historical instance of the word used in reference to women (*afandiyyāt*). A similar absence has been noted in the history of modern Egypt. See Lucie Ryzova, "Egyptianizing Modernity through the 'New *Effendiyya*': Social and Cultural Constructions of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy," in *Re-Envisioning Egypt, 1919–1952*, ed. Arthur Goldschmidt et al. (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 151.

⁵There is a growing body of scholarly works that lends support to my argument. See, for example, Nadje Sadig al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* (London: Zed Books, 2007); Orit Bashkin, "Representations of Women in the Writings of the Intelligentsia in Hashemite Iraq, 1921–1958," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4 (Winter 2008): 53–82; Noga Efrati, "The Other 'Awakening' in Iraq: The Women's Movement in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 31 (2004): 153–73; and idem, "Competing Narratives: Histories of the Women's Movement in Iraq, 1910–1958," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40 (2008): 445–66.

⁶Calculated using data provided in Doris G. Adams, "Current Population Trends in Iraq," *Middle East Journal* 10 (1956): 151–65.

⁷Sabiha al-Shaykh Da'ud, *Awwal al-Tariq ila al-Nahda al-Niswiyya fi al-'Iraq* (Baghdad: al-Rabita, 1958), 65–76; Saniha Amin Zaki, *Dhikrayat Tabiba 'Iraqiyya* (London: Dar al-Hikma, 2005), 122–69, 305–309.

⁸Da'ud, *Awwal al-Tariq*, 189–208 (she mentions eleven women's magazines and the names of eight female poets and twenty-six other female writers); Efrati, "Competing Narratives," 454; Khalid Kishtainy, "Women in Art and Literature," in *The Awakened: Women in Iraq*, Doreen Ingrams (London: Third World Center, 1983), 131–54; *al-Mu'tamar al-Nisa'i al-Sharqi, Cairo, 1938* (Cairo: Matba'at al-'Asr, 1938), 76–78, 128–30, 184–85, 116–20.

⁹*Al-Istiqlal*, 7, 19, 20, and 28 May 1941, as quoted in *Kashshaf Mawdu'at al-Mar'a fi Jaridat al-Istiqlal: 1920–1960* (Baghdad: n.p., 1980), 49; *al-Bilad*, 22 June 1959, 3; *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, 24 March 1973, 4.