

## PREFACE

One hot summer morning in June 1933, an orphan girl named Turkiyya Hasan failed to rise in a show of respect for a visiting Protestant missionary at the Swedish Salaam Mission School in Port Said, Egypt. The defiance of the fifteen-year-old Muslim girl infuriated the Swiss matron, who rebuked and then began caning her when she answered back. News quickly spread from the Mediterranean port city to Cairo that a matron of the “School for Peace” had beaten an orphan in an attempt to convert her to Christianity. The story fed into a stream of reports on conversions, or attempted conversions, touching a deep nerve among Egyptians and creating a national uproar with international repercussions. The scandal marked the beginning of the end of foreign missions in Egypt and the simultaneous take-off of Islamist organizations such as al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin (the Muslim Brotherhood).

*The Orphan Scandal* uses the Turkiyya Hasan affair in the summer of 1933 as a lens to examine the dynamic among Christian evangelicals, Islamists, and officials of the semi-colonial Egyptian state. It details the passionate efforts of American and European missionaries, many of whom were single women with little more than their faith to guide them, to look after orphaned and abandoned children. Their attempts to convert their wards aroused the concern of Muslim activists, for whom the beating of Turkiyya Hasan at the Swedish Salaam Mission served to communicate the need for Muslim social welfare to the wider public. In battling missionaries for the bodies and souls of Egypt’s children, Islamists appropriated evangelicals’ tools to fight them, and in the process created their own network of social welfare services. State officials viewed the expanding anti-missionary movement as a threat and moved to crush it by cutting off its ability to fundraise, to assemble, and to publicize its views. At the same time, the state tightened control over private social welfare institutions and extended its own, sowing the seeds of a Muslim welfare state.

Facilitated by the British occupation, Christian missions reached their

height in the 1920s, the exact decade the Muslim Brotherhood, among other Islamist organizations, was founded. The British had unilaterally bestowed independence on Egypt in 1922 after thirty years of occupation, and oversaw the writing of a constitution that was promulgated the following year. Egyptian independence was incomplete, however, and a semi-colonial regime continued to operate in tandem with the Capitulations inherited from the Ottomans that gave foreigners certain privileges. The Muslim Brotherhood was born in Isma‘iliyya in 1928 as a response to concerns about the power of colonialism (the British army had a base there), the ability of evangelicals to operate freely in the vicinity, and the weakness of Muslims in confronting the West. Launching some of their first branches in cities and towns along or near the Suez Canal, the Muslim Brothers sought to revitalize Islam. At the same time, they organized resistance against the missionaries and formed the vanguard of the anti-missionary movement.<sup>1</sup>

With a trail that winds through the Arabic press and leads in and out of different missionary and state archives, the Turkiyya Hasan affair allows us to read the histories of missionaries, Muslim Brothers, and the semi-colonial state together. This in turn gives a new perspective on the early years of the Muslim Brotherhood, beyond a stress on the Brotherhood’s antagonistic relations with British colonial authorities or Egyptian state officials. Richard Mitchell, Brynjar Lia, and Gudrun Kraemer, have extensively researched this early history.<sup>2</sup> *The Orphan Scandal* maps out the connections they have briefly noted between missionaries and the Muslim Brotherhood, taking us into the small cities, towns, and villages in Egypt where some of the most intense contests between evangelicals and Islamists occurred. Focusing on contact points, tracing struggles at particular moments, and identifying specific missionaries and missions—such as the Swedish Salaam Mission or the Egypt General Mission—becomes critical in detailing these encounters.

This approach of concentrating on events in the Canal Zone and Upper Egypt (where an important missionary orphanage was founded) has the advantage of decentering Egyptian history.<sup>3</sup> In so many works (my own included), Cairo becomes synonymous with Egypt. Here the emphasis is on linkages between the periphery and the center: events in Port Said, Asyut, and other cities and towns have important implications for politics in the capital. *The Orphan Scandal* traces how the anti-missionary movement started in the provinces—specifically in the Canal Zone—and only then migrated to the center and elsewhere in the country. This focus on the provinces also helps to shift the

spotlight away from Hasan al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood founder and general guide, to illuminate the activities of branch members in places such as al-Manzala, Port Said, and Suez.

This book also shows semi-colonialism in action. What did it mean for Egypt to be independent and yet have British army bases and British police commanders and advisors working for the Egyptian government? How did this work out in practice, where did power lie, and who made the important decisions? Calling this period in Egyptian history a failed liberal experiment and putting the blame on Egyptian politicians ignores the extent to which Egyptians were constrained in their actions. This chapter of British imperial history has not gotten the attention it deserves, at least lately, perhaps because Egypt's status was so unique: it was not a formal colony like India nor a mandate like Palestine nor even a protectorate, as it had been during World War I. The manipulations of Sir Alexander Keown-Boyd, British advisor in the Egyptian Ministry of Interior, in the course of the orphan scandal reveal the complexities of semi-colonialism. Pushed by Keown-Boyd, Egyptian officials moved to suppress a peaceful protest movement against missionaries, which in the long term only fueled the Islamist opposition.

Under the watchful eyes of the British and protected by the Capitulations, Protestant missionaries found great liberty to proselytize in Egypt from the time of the occupation in 1882. Yet the armies of European and American evangelicals that descended on the Nile Valley had to do more than preach in order to reach the population. To win converts, they opened schools, clinics, hospitals, and orphanages, and sent Bible women into the homes of Egyptians to read the gospel to illiterate girls and women. A few came over unaffiliated with a church or board, but most came with missions. The largest of these was the American (Presbyterian) Mission, whose converts launched the Egyptian Evangelical Church. They had plenty of company in, among others, the Nile Valley Mission, the Assemblies of God Mission, the Church Missionary Society, the Egypt General Mission, and the Swedish Salaam Mission, all of which are discussed here.

Scholars have only recently started to explore this critical chapter of American and European forays in Egypt, with Heather Sharkey and Paul Sedra leading the way.<sup>4</sup> Their works have emphasized evangelicals' involvement with Orthodox Coptic Christians. Indebted to these scholars and not wanting to retrace their steps, *The Orphan Scandal* focuses on missionary interactions with the Muslim population and Islamic activists' responses to foreign missions.

In discussing some of the larger missions, including the American Mission and the Egypt General Mission, this book pays particular attention to Pentecostal and other evangelicals from non-mainline churches. Their brand of “muscular Christianity,” aggressive proselytizing, and attempts to convert Muslims often got them into trouble with locals and state authorities.

What did conversion mean in a semi-colonial context and in sites where power was unequal on multiple levels, such as an orphanage or school? Did these encounters constitute “conversations,” that is, dialogues between evangelists and locals, or between adults and children, as some have theorized? Or were they part of a regime of “coercion,” that is, where undue pressure or excessive force was designed to force transformation?<sup>5</sup> The answer may well lie in the distinctions between the notion of religion as belief, which cannot be forced, and of religion as a set of practices, which can be prescribed. Christian missionaries stressed belief and faith; Muslims saw practice as central. There is also a third possibility, that religious conversion meant not just a shift in belief or practice but in legal identity. At what age could this occur, who counted the years, and what constituted force? These all became critical questions in contestations over conversion.

This work suggests that the number of converts cannot be taken as a measure of the success or failure of missions, which is relative in any case, and not necessarily germane. That missionaries did not “succeed” at converting a large number of Muslims does not mean that missionaries did not leave a large footprint in Egypt. Just as those who carried the call and those who were converted were “mutually transformed,”<sup>6</sup> those who fought conversion and those they fought against were both changed as well. In short, American and European missionary actions had unintended and unforeseen consequences, generating ripples with deep reverberations in Egyptian society, culture, and politics.<sup>7</sup>

While accounts of United States involvement in the Middle East generally take World War II as a starting point, a new body of work has begun to address the legacy of American missionaries in the region over a century before. These works seek to deepen the history of American imperialism by showing how profoundly earlier engagements touched local populations.<sup>8</sup> Yet Americans tend to see their history as apart, rather than a part of struggles in places where their predecessors sojourned, and to see Islamists as extremists who have no possible connection to their own past. In the story told here, American missionaries clearly had a hand in exacerbating tensions between Christians and Muslims and in mobilizing Islamists in Egypt.

In a recent renaissance of work on European evangelical missions to the Middle East, historians have attempted to shift interpretations away from ones that see missions as the “religious wing of imperialism” to ones that stress their contributions to social work, health care, education, and science. Part of the argument is that missionaries themselves made a shift from attempts to Christianize the population to attempts to modernize and secularize it.<sup>9</sup> *The Orphan Scandal* suggests that the religious imperatives of missionaries to save populations and their social welfare work cannot be neatly separated, and that missionaries, at least in Egypt, used social services to try to convert locals. At the same time, rather than promote secularism, missionaries may well have helped to derail a movement in that direction on the part of local Egyptians that was already under way. The missionary model of education fused secular/scientific education with religious indoctrination; while the Christian content of that education did not appeal to Islamic activists, the model did.

Missionaries, Muslim Brothers, and Egyptian state officials fought their battles over the bodies and souls of orphans, who are the real protagonists in this story. The “orphans” here came from a variety of backgrounds: they were abandoned, disabled, motherless and/or fatherless, or did not have relatives who were able or willing to care for them. *The Orphan Scandal* moves youth lacking parental care, such as Turkiyya Hasan, from the shadows to the light, showing that they were not only pawns in a struggle between foreign evangelicals and local Islamists, but also formidable actors in their own right. Their exceptional histories, and those of orphaned and abandoned children in general, have the potential to tell us a great deal about family, society, and the state.<sup>10</sup>

Re-creating the world of orphans, who are so often marginalized, is not easy. In *Orphans of Islam: Family, Abandonment, and Secret Adoption in Morocco*, the anthropologist Jamila Bargach chronicles the lack of choices for pregnant women in a North African country where single mothers are unknown and legal adoption does not exist, writing movingly about the dilemmas and stigmatization of orphans and abandoned children.<sup>11</sup> Nazan Maksudyan, Andrea Rugh, and Amira Sonbol, among others, have explored the history of orphans in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt.<sup>12</sup> How did those who were the recipient of missionaries’ orphan care experience it? What did their everyday lives look like? How were they impacted by custody battles between missionaries, Islamists, and the state? This work seeks, in humanizing its subjects, to enrich our understanding of the social history of early twentieth-century Egypt.

Missionaries generally documented their work carefully, yet missionary archives present certain methodological challenges. Scholars are often overwhelmed by the sheer volume of material produced by evangelicals, who left letters, diaries, minutes, reports, magazine articles, and other papers. Much of this material was meant to record their successes and struggles overseas, part of an effort to raise funds at home. By contrast, the populations among whom they worked seemed to have little to say about their encounter with missionaries. Residents in orphanages, pupils in schools, or patients in clinics and hospitals often have no names or voices. This has sometimes led to the assumption that evangelicals had a minimal impact on the societies in which they worked.

Looking at a specific event in a fixed period of time—the summer of 1933—punctures this image. The Turkiyya Hasan affair generated a paper trail of press stories, confidential consular reports, government files, and missionary records that help to document the relationship of Muslims and missionaries. The Arabic press, including Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic publications, heatedly discussed the orphan scandal, capturing the intense local reaction to proselytizing in Egypt. Hasan al-Banna had quite a lot to say about the fight against missionaries in his newspaper and memoirs. The United States and British National Archives detail behind-the-scenes government machinations, particularly in some fascinating confidential files. The archives of the Presbyterian Historical Society, the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, the Friends Historical Library, and Yale University Divinity School also document the lead up to the Turkiyya Hasan affair and its aftermath.<sup>13</sup>

*The Orphan Scandal* starts with the story of the Turkiyya Hasan affair, telling it from the perspective of the international cast of characters involved and, where possible, in their own words. The multiple vantage points reveal the intractable dilemma at the heart of missionary-Muslim encounters in Egypt. The kaleidoscope of contending views demonstrates that missionary understandings of their project were often vastly at odds with the understandings of those they had come to save. While many Egyptians saw the beating of the Muslim teenager as a criminal act, some European and American observers considered it an overblown “missionary incident.” Yet the views did not simply polarize along a Muslim-Christian or Egyptian-foreign axis. Egyptians had multiple perspectives—with some joining the foreign attempt to quiet the noise around it and contain the damage—as did Americans and Europeans who became caught up in the drama.