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SAYYID QUTB AND THE CRISIS OF CULTURE IN LATE 1940S EGYPT

Abstract

This article focuses on the writings and literary networks of the Egyptian intellectual and activist Sayyid Qutb during the late 1940s. Scholars have tended to explain Qutb's political radicalization and joining of the Muslim Brotherhood during the subsequent decade via aspects of his personality or personal life, such as his quick temper, conservatism, or frustration over unfulfilled aspirations to become a writer. Drawing on three periodicals published respectively by leftist, Islamist, and independent aspiring writers, I instead place Qutb's criticism of political, economic, and cultural elites in the context of an emerging generation of critical intellectuals. By shedding light on intellectual cooperation between Qutb, Muslim Brothers, Marxists, and independent writers, this article challenges established scholarly narratives that locate the Islamist project outside the Egyptian intellectual field.

Keywords: Egypt; history; intellectuals; Islamism; literature

In January 1945, a prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood accused Sayyid Qutb (1906–66) of defending Western culture at the expense of Arab culture. He had been irritated by one of Qutb's articles in which this renowned literary critic known today as the spiritual father of Islamic radicalism claimed that, contrary to the needs of the age, Egyptians were more receptive to Arab than to European cultural heritage.¹ Four months later, Qutb was subject to similar criticism—this time from leftist intellectuals. In reviewing his newly published book *al-Atyaf al-Arbaʿa* (The Four Phantoms), cowritten with his brother and two sisters, the leftist weekly *al-Fajr al-Jadid* (The New Dawn) urged Qutb to focus on the suffering of all Egyptians rather than exclusively that of his own family.²

These criticisms of Qutb are indicative of the kinds of critique that a generation of intellectuals emergent in the 1940s and 1950s leveled at Egypt's older intellectual class, which they saw as lacking social and political commitment. Although Qutb had been one of their targets, he eventually joined the chorus of voices criticizing established writers. Beginning in 1947, Qutb systematically accused Egypt's premier intellectuals, including Taha Husayn, ʿAbbas al-ʿAqqad, and Tawfiq al-Hakim, of involvement in the entertainment industry, indifference to social oppression, and compliance with

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Western colonial domination. As a state employee in the Ministry of Education, Qutb increasingly saw Egypt's cultural establishment as an obstacle to the country's political liberation.

Biographies of Qutb tend to explain his campaign against Egypt's senior literati via aspects of his personality or personal life, such as his quick temper, his conservatism, or his frustration over his unfulfilled aspirations to become a writer.³ However, these explanations ignore Egypt's intellectual milieu of the 1940s and 1950s, in which criticism of elites was on the rise. Such criticism was not limited to leftist intellectuals, whose efforts would, in the 1950s and 1960s, turn cultural criticism into a full-fledged doctrine of "committed literature" (*al-adab al-multazim*) based on the conviction that Arab literature should take an active role in liberating Arab countries.⁴ Members of the Muslim Brotherhood also questioned the validity of established literary canons. Whereas leftist writers argued that the separation between politics and literature enabled Egypt's elite writers to maintain their dominance, Muslim Brothers accused this elite class of imposing on Egyptians an essentially foreign culture that hindered their spiritual emancipation. The literary revolt also extended to politically independent writers. Inspired by postwar radicalism, these authors criticized what they saw as a monopoly over culture held by the same group of intellectuals since the interwar period. Before he joined the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1950s, Sayyid Qutb was among this group.

This article locates Qutb within this context of rising cultural critique. Drawing on three magazines published by groups from different ideological backgrounds—the leftist *al-Fajr al-Jadid* (The New Dawn, 1945–46), the Islamist *Jaridat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimin* (Journal of the Muslim Brotherhood, 1945–48), and the weekly *al-Fikr al-Jadid* (New Thought, 1948), edited by Qutb and several others⁵—it argues that intellectuals from each background shared a commitment to cultural criticism and promoted a similar vision of culture. Collectively, they ascribed to culture, and more specifically literature, the role of enabling the population (*al-shaʿb*) to rise up against social oppression and Western colonial domination. By the 1950s their vision of culture would give rise to separate, though in many ways parallel, literary projects: the leftist version of committed literature (*al-adab al-multazim*), and so-called *Islamic literature* (*al-adab al-islāmī*), which developed within Muslim Brotherhood intellectual circles.

By weaving together fragments of Egypt's history that are often treated separately, namely the left, Islamism, and literary trends, this article contributes to debates over Arab decolonization recently renewed by historians Yoav Di Capua and Omnia El Shakry. Both scholars have urged a rethinking of Arab decolonization from the perspective of local intellectual dynamics. Viewing the surge of commitment in Arab literary circles in the 1950s as part of reignited postwar efforts at political and cultural emancipation, Di Capua has shown how established Egyptian intellectuals lost their monopoly over culture to a new generation of writers, most of them with leftist leanings.⁶ This study builds on Di Capua's work by bringing Islamists into the picture. Arguing that Muslim Brothers were equally affected by calls to put culture at the service of decolonization, it nuances the association between literary commitment and European left-wing debates over culture inspired by Jean Paul-Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (What Is Literature?).⁷

This article suggests that the revolt against Egypt's premier writers was part of a broader local rebellion against economic, political, and cultural elites. The writers who

participated in this rebellion belonged to the same generation of Egyptians that discovered politics through radical extraparliamentary movements during the 1930s (the Muslim Brotherhood, Young Egypt, and the Communist parties), participated in student and labor activism during the 1940s, and cheered the 1952 military coup. As Lucie Ryzova has argued, this generation shared the view that the political elites who emerged out of the 1919 revolution had failed to deliver on the promises that garnered them legitimacy, namely, to achieve modernization and independence. Accusing Egyptian elites of having grown too comfortable with the colonial regime, it designated them a local enemy.⁸ The contribution of young and aspiring writers was to extend existing political criticism to the previously incontestable senior literati. They demonstrated how this elite group had contributed to an unbearable status quo by catering to British interests through hesitant support of the national cause, by involving itself in popular culture, and by divorcing literature from politics. More related to their own careers, they also accused it of monopolizing culture and blocking their access to the publishing market and fame. The radicalized context in which this new generation acted provided fertile ground for the reception of Sartre's notion of committed literature after its introduction in Egypt in 1947.⁹

This article also explores Qutb's position within the Egyptian intellectual field before he was classified as a Muslim Brotherhood ideologue. This concern grows out of El Shakry's call to incorporate Qutb into the history of Arab decolonization. As El Shakry has noted, the exclusion of the Islamist project from official decolonization narratives is both a result and cause of representations of Arab history as characterized by an "incommensurable divide" between Islamism and secular nationalism.¹⁰ Among the many biographies produced on Qutb, some have located his Islamist thought in the anticolonial rhetoric that dominated Arab and African countries in the 1950s.¹¹ However, influenced by an Islamism–secularism binary, most have viewed him from an exclusively Islamist perspective or have organized his biography around the theme of his presumed conversion—formulated as "a turn"—from different versions of secularism to Islamism.¹² The thesis of Qutb's "turn" assumes Islamism to be a unified ideological block immune to historical transformation, and perhaps too quickly labels the literary establishment to which Qutb was associated as "secular."¹³ More crucially, it isolates Qutb from his relational and discursive environment during the 1940s—an environment that, as this article suggests, was marked by significant ideological fluidity. Thus, instead of focusing on abstract ideologies that influenced Qutb, this article explores his intellectual networks, which brought together leftist, Islamist, and independent intellectuals around a shared critique of cultural elites. Following Angela Giordani, I argue that what appeared as Qutb's conversion to Islamism was in fact a broader internal shift within Egypt's postwar intellectual scene. Accordingly, Qutb less "turned" to Islamism than "transited" to new politicized conceptions of intellectual practice.¹⁴

In the next section, I place the rise of new conceptions of culture in late 1940s Egypt in the context of a long history of debates over literary commitment among Egyptian intellectuals. As I show, although the need to create authentic literature had been advocated by writers as early as the 1920s, only after World War II did a cultural break with the imperialist West come to be seen as a necessary condition for political liberation. Next, I turn to Qutb's intellectual networks. Drawing on the periodical *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, I demonstrate that the conviction that literature should serve social, political, and moral

aims was shared by Egyptian writers of different ideological sympathies. Concluding with a comparative analysis of arguments against cultural elites in Islamist, leftist, and independent periodicals, I suggest that young writers from across the political spectrum advocated a common vision of culture, which gave rise to ideologically different, but essentially comparable, literary projects in the 1950s.

A SURGE OF COMMITMENT

The outbreak of World War II renewed an ongoing debate over commitment in literature. As Verena Klemm has pointed out, the belief that literature should serve politics has been a constant theme since the 1920s, when it emerged hand-in-hand with nation-building projects.¹⁵ Writing in 1927, the prominent poet ‘Abbas al-‘Aqqad complained about the burden placed on writers to produce “national anthems and enthusiastic poems” that aroused pride and encouraged Egyptians to demand national rights.¹⁶ However, postwar developments such as the reignited struggle for Egyptian independence and European debates accompanying the trials of Nazi collaborators over writers’ moral and political responsibility to their societies added a new dimension to the discourse in Egypt. Specifically, Egypt’s prominent writers faced increasing pressure to clarify their position on imperialism and social inequality, with editors of many periodicals beginning to provocatively probe them on these issues¹⁷ and to publish lengthy essays openly criticizing their notions of literature.¹⁸ The critic Taha Husayn, who was among those targeted, responded by claiming that he was not “a bourgeois writer,” but “a man of the people [*rajul sha‘bī*] by birth and upbringing . . . and by feelings and mission as well.”¹⁹ Writing in 1945, Qutb registered a response of his own. He criticized the “extremism” (*ghulū*) of those who sought to impose on writers a commitment within literature as if it were a tax liability owed to society.²⁰

Another outcome of postwar developments was the belief that Egypt’s political independence hinged on its cultural emancipation. Interwar conceptions of Arab literature had assumed it to be in a sharp decline whose reversal required incorporation of the Western literary heritage.²¹ This assumption contributed to the promotion of a form of symbolic capital based on mastery of European literary canons and languages. Among the earliest forms of resistance to the proclaimed superiority of Western culture were attempts to produce Egyptian national literature (*al-adab al-qawmī*) in the 1920s and the rise of “Easternism” in the 1930s.²² Although these trends involved criticism of Western influence in Egypt, they did not view cultural authenticity as a condition for political independence. Instead, the creation of authentic forms of literature was seen to contribute in a more general sense to Egypt’s catching up with the West. Consistent with a then-dominant scientific paradigm that viewed cultural homogeneity as the foundation of nation-states, these cultural movements believed that the mixing of local and Western cultures generated dysfunction.²³ Thus, many Egyptian intellectuals viewed excessive Western cultural influence in Egypt as the cause of the country’s social, economic, and moral crisis. The promotion of “national literature” resolved this problem, while fulfilling a desire among Egyptian writers to leave their mark on “the global table of literature,” as Qutb put it.²⁴

By the end of the war, the boundary between literature and politics had begun to blur. Dominant conceptions of literature and the capital associated with knowledge of

European literary canons, both increasingly understood as forms of collaboration with colonial domination, began to collapse. Meanwhile, some intellectuals began to see in-depth reform of Egypt's cultural institutions as crucial to political liberation. One of the earliest outlets to systematically advocate a committed form of literature was the weekly *al-Fajr al-Jadid*. Launched in 1945 by a group of Marxist intellectuals, the journal represented the first attempt in Egypt to indigenize leftist ideology, which hitherto had been the domain of foreign-language minorities.²⁵ Although *al-Fajr al-Jadid* was primarily concerned with social issues such as poverty, underdevelopment, and agrarian reform, it dedicated significant attention to culture, partly due to the interest of its editor, Ahmad Rushdi Salih, in folklore. Among its other goals, the journal aimed to align Egyptian culture more closely with Egypt's social and national struggles, which involved redefining the role of the intellectual. In accomplishing this latter task, the journal drew on John Dewey's work on aesthetics, intellectuals involved in the French Resistance, various Soviet writers, and left-wing British poets of the 1930s, who since the Spanish Civil War had been urging writers to step into the battle between fascism and communism. Solidarity with European writers in their battle against fascism was an important conduit through which the idea of commitment in literature reached young Egyptians. Egyptian youth then incorporated European experiences into existing realities in Egypt, where criticism of elite society, including its canonic writers, was on the rise.

Attacks against representatives of the cultural elite, such as Tawfiq al-Hakim, 'Abbas al-'Aqqad, Ibrahim al-Mazni, and, to a lesser degree, Taha Husayn, occupied substantial space in *al-Fajr al-Jadid*. In fact, one of the journal's declared aims was "to expose reactionary writers and intellectuals, who had failed to respond to cultural . . . challenges, and [in doing so] disclosed their danger to the national cause."²⁶ Labeled *al-burjiyyin*, a title that referred to their self-isolation in "ivory towers," Egyptian intellectuals were accused of having sided with reactionary elements such as feudalists, capitalists, and colonizers. Drawing on historical materialism, *al-Fajr al-Jadid* dismissed these writers as inadequate for Egypt's contemporary historical development. Young Marxist contributors argued that the fissuring of literature from politics was a fiction used to justify social oppression. In presenting elite intellectuals as limited by their historical stage of development, *al-Fajr al-Jadid* challenged the supposed universal character of interwar literature.

Attempts to reshape culture in the light of Egypt's struggles extended well beyond leftist circles, to political groups on the opposite end of the Egyptian political spectrum, including the Muslim Brotherhood. Between its founding in 1928 and the end of World War II, this Islamist organization seemed to have limited interest in modern literature. While the Muslim Brotherhood did encourage certain forms of cultural expression, especially poetry and theater,²⁷ its press allotted little space to discussions of literature—and the space it did allot to such discussions encompassed mainly book reviews. Islamist intellectuals have long suspected that the West carried out imperialism through culture. As early as 1930, Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, the well-known Muslim reformer and founder of the Salafiyya Bookstore who patronized many Islamist networks in Cairo, argued that the West was pursuing the "colonization of the hearts" of Arab people through novels, plays, and books on literature.²⁸ However, this position did not lead to any substantial attempt to produce an alternative version of culture. It was only after World War II that Islamist intellectuals expressed an urgent need to reform the

Egyptian humanities—from rewriting Egypt’s national history to creating specific methods of literature—in attempt to “purify” Egyptian culture from Westernizing influences that had been brought in by interwar intellectuals.

One of the main figures responsible for this reorientation was Anwar al-Jundi. Born in 1917, al-Jundi exemplifies the trajectory of many young Egyptians of his generation, for whom joining radical political organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and leftist groups was part of their youth experience rather than a lifelong engagement. In 1946, al-Jundi started contributing regularly to the Muslim Brotherhood’s outlet *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn* (Journal of the Muslim Brotherhood). His association with the Brotherhood’s press was cut short when it was dissolved in 1948, after which he transferred his journalistic activities to nonpartisan literary outlets such as *al-Risala* (The Message). After the 1952 coup, al-Jundi easily found a place within the Nasserist cultural establishment and did not return to the theme of cultural imperialism until the 1970s, when it became relevant again due to the expansion of conservative Islamist discourse.²⁹

Aided by the general ambiance of criticism of established notions of culture, al-Jundi played an important role in the elaboration of the discourse of cultural imperialism in the 1940s. In his essays in the Brotherhood’s journal, he portrayed Western imperialism as operating through Egypt’s cultural institutions, which he saw as disseminating knowledge that normalized the British occupation. The school system, the Ministry of Education, Egyptian writers and historians, and radio, cinema, and the press, he argued, were all implicated. In the 6 March 1948 issue of the Brotherhood’s journal, al-Jundi announced his intention to rewrite modern Muslim history.³⁰ In a series of essays published in subsequent issues, he proposed a new periodization of the modern Muslim past based on the degree of intellectual and political liberation that Egypt had achieved. According to his vision, modern Muslim history consisted of three successive stages: torpor (*ighfāʿ*), Westernization (*taghrīb*), and awakening (*yaqāza*). He described the first two stages as having spanned, respectively, the years 1830–1914 and 1914–39, and the third stage as having begun in 1939. The first stage was characterized by Ottoman domination of the Arab lands and gradual Western penetration of the region. Al-Jundi argued that the important efforts to revitalize Islam in Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, Sudan, and India failed to ward off Western imperialism, and this failure enabled the establishment of “blatant colonialism” (*al-istiʿmār al-sāfir*) in Muslim lands, which was accompanied by “imitation” (*taqlīd*) of the West in culture, science, education, and family life. Writing in 1948, al-Jundi believed he was witnessing the dawn of a new era, an awakening evidenced by the expansion of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the creation of Pakistan, and the growing popularity of Islamic reform in Turkey and Morocco.³¹

Al-Jundi’s onslaught against Egypt’s cultural institutions rested on his belief that World War II had provided the foundations for a genuine intellectual revival. Similar to leftist Egyptian intellectuals who dismissed the dominant class of writers as historically obsolete, al-Jundi defined the intellectual trends that this class represented as belonging to the past. Both Muslim Brothers and leftist intellectuals subjected cultural production to the criteria of whether it advanced the liberation of Arab countries. Eventually, due to the different ideological agendas of their proponents, calls to reform literature took different shapes. Leftists demanded that literature reflect surrounding political and

social struggles, and Islamists that Egyptian culture be purged of Western influence. What united them, however, was their promotion of politicized forms of writing and deep skepticism toward interwar writers' pretention to universality.

WRITERS AND ISLAMISM: *AL-FIKR AL-JADID'S* CIRCLE

The charge of Westernization directed at Sayyid Qutb by a member of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1945—referred to at the beginning of this article—was part of a broader campaign against Egypt's writers. Yet, within two years Qutb had redirected that charge toward writers more prominent than himself. Beginning in 1947, he systematically challenged the integrity of the Egyptian literati and questioned their competence to lead Egypt toward progress. Qutb's critical tone peaked in two short-lived periodicals he helped to edit in 1947 and 1948 respectively, *al-'Alam al-'Arabi* (The Arab World) and *al-Fikr al-Jadid*. It was in *al-'Alam al-'Arabi* that Qutb initiated his offensive. Publishing an article against the senior generation of writers (*jil al-shuyūkh*), he accused them of having betrayed "the country, society, and humanity."³² This first stone rapidly developed into a full-fledged assault on Egypt's cultural establishment, which Qutb would carry out in collaboration with the team at *al-Fikr al-Jadid*.

Although published for only a short period between January and March 1948, *al-Fikr al-Jadid* has been discussed by most of Qutb's biographers. As they have noted, the weekly journal was an attempt to articulate an authentic social justice program that could challenge leftist approaches. This program owed much to Islamism, fusing religious concepts with Marxist frames of reference into social, political, and cultural criticism that causally connected underdevelopment, imperialism, and moral decrepitude. As such, the periodical represents Qutb's first attempt to present an Islamic vision of social justice, which he would further develop in his 1949 bestseller *al-Idalat al-Ijtima'iyya fi al-Islam* (Social Justice in Islam).³³ However, no study to date has paid sufficient attention to the individuals who collaborated with Qutb at *al-Fikr al-Jadid*. An understanding of the editorial team's composition and the personalities who lended material support to the journal provides important insight into the status of Islamism in 1940s Egypt.

At first glance, *al-Fikr al-Jadid* seems to be a publication closely connected to the Muslim Brotherhood. In a note published in its own periodical in February 1948, the Brotherhood enthusiastically welcomed the new journal, describing it as an extension of its own attempts at "protecting the oppressed classes and revealing to the people the truths of Islamic socialism."³⁴ This warm reception is not surprising given that *al-Fikr al-Jadid* was owned and published by an influential member of the Brotherhood, Muhammad Hilmi al-Minyawi. A successful businessman in the publishing field, and possibly "a war profiteer,"³⁵ al-Minyawi joined the Brotherhood in the 1940s and quickly became a member of its Consultative Assembly.³⁶ For an organization that had lacked a steady journalistic presence,³⁷ al-Minyawi provided the opportunity to expand its publishing activities. In 1946, he brokered the purchase of two companies, opening the way for the Muslim Brotherhood to establish a printing house and launch a daily newspaper for the first time in its history.³⁸ Al-Minyawi also seems to have opened opportunities for Qutb personally. As owner of *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, he allowed Qutb to significantly sharpen his revolutionary tone against the regime, a possibility that had not

been made available by the proprietor of *al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi*, the journal that Qutb had previously edited³⁹

The publishing house that printed *al-Fikr al-Jadid* also linked the periodical to the Muslim Brotherhood. The birth story of Dar al-Kitab al-‘Arabi (The Arabic Book Publishing House) centers on al-Minyawi as well as another personality in the Egyptian publishing scene, the founder of Maktaba Misr (Egypt Publishing House) Sa‘id al-Sahhar. Qutb had known al-Sahhar from at least 1945, when the latter published Qutb’s aforementioned book *al-Atyaf al-Arba‘a*, and Qutb’s publishing history suggests that al-Sahhar had a hand in introducing him to al-Minyawi, who helped Qutb integrate into the Muslim Brotherhood’s intellectual network. Dar al-Kitab al-‘Arabi was founded in 1946 as a joint partnership between these two men.⁴⁰ In the early 1950s, its catalogue mainly included books by Muslim Brothers, especially the prolific young shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazzali, as well as the Brotherhood’s official publications. Thus, in 1952 Dar al-Kitab al-‘Arabi printed the Brotherhood’s statement supporting the military coup carried out in the summer of that year.⁴¹ During this period, the publishing house also served as a meeting space for the Brotherhood’s top brass to discuss sensitive issues, such as the budding conflict with the new military regime and the internal split caused by the election of Hasan al-Hudaybi as general guide.⁴² Given the chronology of these connections, Qutb’s experience at *al-Fikr al-Jadid* likely also represented his first collaboration with the Brotherhood, a relationship that would deepen in the ensuing years.⁴³

However, apart from Muhammad al-Ghazzali, who was a full member of the Brotherhood, the periodical involved writers who today are hardly remembered as Islamists: novelist ‘Abd al-Hamid Jawda al-Sahhar, literary critic ‘Abbas Khidr, poets Fayid al-‘Amrusi, ‘Adil Ghadhban, and Ibrahim al-Wa’ili, essayist ‘Imad al-Din ‘Abd al-Hamid, and playwright ‘Abd al-Mun‘am Shumayyis.⁴⁴ The majority born between 1913 and 1919, at the time of *al-Fikr al-Jadid*’s publication these were young and aspiring writers at the dawn of their careers, similar to the previously discussed Anwar al-Jundi. They also shared with al-Jundi shifting political convictions. As writers primarily interested in culture, they praised the benefits of Islam only peripherally, and mostly in the context of their relationship to Qutb.⁴⁵ As suggested in his essay published in *al-Fajr al-Jadid* in 1946, the Iraqi poet Ibrahim al-Wa’ili had even flirted with the left before joining Qutb’s periodical.⁴⁶ Only a few of *al-Fikr al-Jadid*’s writers followed Qutb to his new magazine published in 1954 under the name of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴⁷ After the government crackdown on the Brotherhood at the end of that year, however, even these writers abandoned Islamist themes in favor of those better fitting the Nasserist state.

How should we understand Qutb’s young literary companions’ tolerance and, in some cases, espousal of Islamism? One should not underestimate the appeal that Qutb’s revolutionary tenor had for these young writers. Perceiving Egypt’s cultural elites to be riddled with corruption, they viewed Qutb as an exception. One writer described him as a committed intellectual who had descended from “the ivory tower” and joined the ranks of the people.⁴⁸ Another praised him as a “free soul, both in mind and consciousness . . . neither a rented politician nor a turbaned [shaykh] trading in religion.”⁴⁹ As a relatively established intellectual who maintained a regular column in the prestigious magazine *al-Risala*, Qutb was a towering figure to his younger colleagues, often acting as their mentor and promoter in the highly saturated literary market of the 1940s.

He introduced their first novels to literary audiences and even attempted to place their manuscripts with publishers.⁵⁰ Qutb viewed the writers associated with *al-Fikr al-Jadid* as a united front in the struggle against corruption and social injustice. Years after the closure of the journal, in 1951, Qutb still referred to his team as a “battalion” (*katība*) united in a battle to achieve a “clean culture.”⁵¹ For their part, the young writers at *al-Fikr al-Jadid* fully participated in this endeavor, consistently surpassing each other in denouncing moral decay in the film industry, favoritism in literary competitions and the public job market, and indifference among Egypt’s well-known writers. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Qutb’s Islamism appeared to them as a viable solution to Egypt’s cultural, political, and social problems. Against the backdrop of increased international competition between communism and capitalism to heal the world’s ills—and those of Egypt—Islamism had the undeniable advantage of “authenticity.” Portrayed by Islamist intellectuals as more in tune with the beliefs of “the masses,” Islamism carried the promise of efficient reform. More significantly, its local origins were held to guarantee both national independence and emancipation of the mind.

FOR THE SAKE OF “CLEAN CULTURE”

Al-Fikr al-Jadid’s battle for clean culture was indicative of a broader trend in Egypt’s postwar cultural scene. Social indifference and cultural corruption were denounced not only in literature, but also in mainstream cultural forms such as popular music and cinema. Calls to censor popular songs, branded as immoral, had been voiced since the 1920s. But by the mid-1940s Egypt’s National Radio had itself adopted the cause of clean culture, adjusting its repertoire by increasing the number of patriotic and nationalist songs.⁵² During the same period, as cinema grew into one of the most profitable cultural institutions in Egypt, questions were raised about the social role of films.⁵³ Some filmmakers denounced cinema for its frivolity and called for a ban on the portrayal of belly dancing.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, increasing numbers of films addressed issues of political and social significance.⁵⁵

Writers and literary critics, whether Islamist, leftist, or ideologically uncommitted, actively supported these calls to make popular culture socially responsible. They accused cinema, radio, and the commercial press—the three mass media vehicles available in 1940s Egypt—of facilitating capitalist exploitation, Western domination, and moral decline. Anwar al-Jundi argued, for example, that it was through capitalist control of “the printing house, screen, and radio” that admiration for the West was instilled in the minds of Egyptians.⁵⁶ Similarly, the leftist *al-Fajr al-Jadid* accused Egyptian cinema of screening unrealistic stories that offered nothing to “incite the people to revolt,”⁵⁷ and denounced Egyptian National Radio as the voice of capitalists and an ally of the British and the ruling Egyptian parties.⁵⁸ In March 1946, the journal accused the radio of broadcasting songs that “lulled” (*tukhaddir*) people into a false sense of happiness, pointing especially to the music of the prominent composer and singer Muhammad ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1902–91). Criticizing a line from one of his songs that encouraged people to “forget the world and put one’s mind at ease,” the periodical lamented how his music distracted “the masses from their current problems and [plunged them] into the fictitious mood of optimism and delight.”⁵⁹ This argument echoed Qutb’s long-standing campaign against popular music. In several articles, Qutb attacked the radio for

broadcasting songs that sapped people's ability to rebel. Similar to his leftist counterparts, he particularly targeted Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab, "the chief of the school of morally dissolute art," for singing that "the world" was "a cigarette and a drink."⁶⁰

The contribution of the rebellious writers was to extend this criticism to Egypt's previously incontestable elite literary class. They equated the latter with frivolous mainstream culture, arguing that socially detached literature had no other aim than to provide amusement that diverted people's attention from the national struggle, consumed their vital energies, and veiled the reality of oppression. Leftists and Islamists alike saw this class as guilty of *takhdīr al-sha'b* (sedation of the people), and took aim specifically at its elitism. *Al-Fikr al-Jadid* referred to Egypt's most prominent writers as *al-kuttāb al-mutrifūn*, or *al-aqlām al-mutrifa* (writers of luxury). The word *taraf* (luxury) had a double meaning, referring both to the extravagant lifestyle that they allegedly enjoyed and their self-isolation from society, which afforded them the "luxury" of not seeing the suffering of Egyptians. For example, in February 1948 *al-Fikr al-Jadid* criticized the time-honored literary magazine *al-Hilal* (The Crescent) for having convened a group of intellectuals to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the passing of the Egyptian nationalist leader Mustafa Kamil. It argued that this type of event was a "luxury" in a country suffering from political subordination and social oppression.⁶¹ One month earlier, *al-Fikr al-Jadid* carried an article unambiguously titled "Kuttabuna al-Mutrifun" (Our Writers of Luxury) that identified writers' isolation in "ivory towers" as a feature of the luxury they enjoyed.⁶² This stance echoed the leftist attacks against *al-burjiyyin* that filled the pages of *al-Fajr al-Jadid*.

Accusations of luxury were part of a general outcry against the commodification of culture in postwar Egypt. One reason for Qutb's anger at Egypt's premier writers was their association with the commercial press. In 1946, Tawfiq al-Hakim, 'Abbas al-'Aqqad, and Ibrahim al-Mazni became regular columnists in the controversial weekly *Akhbar al-Yawm* (Daily News).⁶³ *Al-Fajr al-Jadid* denounced the magazine as "sexual," arguing that "the trade in sexual matters is characteristic of capitalist societies at the point of their dissolution."⁶⁴ Qutb, for his part, considered the journal the leading representative of "the press of thighs and bosoms" (*ṣahāfat afkhād wa-nuhūd*).⁶⁵ The fact that al-Hakim's column, entitled "The Box of the Accused" (*qafaṣ al-ittihām*), was devoted to exposing those responsible for Egypt's ills did not alleviate Qutb's anger. On the contrary, Qutb maintained that the column was merely a strategy to mask the ignominious intentions of the newspaper. "*Akhbar al-Yawm* was established to fight the people and to protect the exploiters," he affirmed. "In so doing, [it] rented Tawfiq al-Hakim to write some lines in 'The Box of the Accused,'" a writer "who has no qualms in helping [the journal] to conceal its exploitative nature as long as he received his due." Qutb reminded his readers that this was the same newspaper that employed "men such as al-'Aqqad and al-Mazni, who in their old age are up to nothing but running after cash by any means."⁶⁶ The leftist *al-Fajr al-Jadid* echoed the charge of writing solely for financial gain. One author described the state of culture in Egypt as "intellectual decadence" (*al-inḥilāl al-fikrī*), where literature had become the means of getting rich rather than educating the people.⁶⁷ Young Marxists had their own reasons for resenting elite writers, namely their staunch anticommunism, best represented by the critic 'Abbas al-'Aqqad. Labeled the "old shaykh" with "marketplace manners," al-'Aqqad was deemed the embodiment of "the reactionary writer."⁶⁸

Islamists and leftists likewise shared the view that the Ministry of Education was to blame for the durability of British colonial domination in Egypt. Qutb's *al-Fikr al-Jadid* accused the institution of perpetuating practices that had been established during the colonial era. Part of a general devaluation of the mastery of European languages in Egypt, its chief complaint against the ministry was its preferential treatment of English-speaking employees. The journal lamented the discrimination faced by graduates from Dar al-'Ulum, the teacher training college focused on Arabic and religion from which Qutb himself graduated.⁶⁹ Viewed as a reflection of "the imperialist mentality," these practices were seen as fulfilling policies that had been advocated by colonial advisers on education such as Douglas Dunlop, who was famous for his opposition to the use of Arabic in Egyptian schools.⁷⁰ *Al-Fajr al-Jadid* was equally concerned about the Ministry of Education's lack of autonomy from the British. In May 1946, it published a guest article blaming the institution for distributing "imperialist textbooks" that undermined the popular will.⁷¹ It must be noted, however, that leftist intellectuals were ambivalent about condemning Western culture as intrinsically imperialist. After all, Egyptian Marxists were strongly convinced of the international dimension of the socialist struggle. In speaking about European culture, *al-Fajr al-Jadid* was careful to distinguish between "real" European culture, which fought for freedom, and its political use within the imperialist project.⁷²

As these examples demonstrate, Islamists and leftists employed a shared language to denounce established elites. Their criticism, however, did not equate to complete renunciation of all that the previous generation stood for. Rather, it acted as a sort of repertoire from which to draw in pursuing their struggles. More than indicating that writers aligned their work with Egypt's social and political battles, it points to the establishment of a new normative order in Egypt's cultural field defined by a requisite commitment to social and political issues.⁷³ During the 1950s and 1960s, this requirement would dominate the Arab cultural scene, acting as the guiding imperative for attempts to produce committed literature. As Yoav Di-Capua has shown, these efforts were especially put in practice by *al-Adab* (Literatures), a magazine founded in 1953 in Beirut that became the main proponent of Arab existentialism and leftist versions of committed literature.⁷⁴ I view *al-Adab* more as a generational than an ideological project, a product of the 1940s cultural battles in which both Islamists and leftists took part. The continuity between these battles and *al-Adab* is suggested by the fact that some who revolted against the senior literati in the 1940s joined *al-Adab* as regular writers in the 1950s. These include writers previously associated with the leftist *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, such as the Egyptian novelist Yusif al-Sharuni, the Lebanese writer Ra'if al-Khuri, the Syrian-born intellectual Qadri al-Qala'ji, as well as contributors to Qutb's *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, such as the Iraqi poet Ibrahim al-Wa'ili and 'Abbas Khidr. A further indication that *al-Adab* did not exclude Islamists at its outset is suggested by the fact that Qutb and his sister Amina were associated with it for a period of time. In the first issue of the magazine, published in January 1953, *al-Adab* quoted an excerpt of Sayyid Qutb's radio talk entitled "Adab al-Thawra" (Literature of the Revolution) as an example of the resurgence of literary activities and debates after the 1952 revolution.⁷⁵ In April 1953, Qutb was interviewed by the journal on the state of Arab poetry, and in July and November of that year it published several of his sister Amina's stories.⁷⁶ The pair's relationship with *al-Adab* lasted less than a year. Qutb's family had a fall out with the magazine in December 1953 after one of its

regular contributors criticized Amina Qutb's short story as inconsistent with the goals of cultural commitment.⁷⁷ Convinced that *al-Adab's* vision of cultural commitment was taking a secular path, Qutb embarked on his own project to create an Islamic version of politically conscious literature.

Qutb first presented this Islamic version in an article entitled "Manhaj al-Adab al-Islami" (Method of Islamic, or Islamist, Literature)⁷⁸ that was published in the first issue (May 1954) of the Muslim Brotherhood outlet edited by Qutb himself, possibly as his contribution to a controversy pitting Taha Husayn against Marxist intellectuals earlier that year.⁷⁹ In the article, which sparked a month-long debate on Islamic literature in the magazine, Qutb distanced himself from both Marxist and, indirectly, Husayn's literature. He argued that both approaches were essentially different from Islamic-inspired literature because they rested on a different conception of life through which the writer connected to the world. Qutb devoted a substantial part of the article to explaining why Islamist literature discouraged the representation of humans as fragile and powerless. In attempt to elevate the human condition, he argued, the Islamic movement prefers to focus on human strength. Although Qutb never mentioned Husayn's name, these lines probably referred to him, as Qutb had previously identified a focus on human weakness as the defining feature of Husayn's literature.⁸⁰ Similarly, Qutb criticized the left-wing version of literary commitment for being based on the materialist interpretation of history with its limited goals. He predicted that the social and political demands that formed the core of committed literature would be fulfilled in the course of his own generation, ending the appeal of Marxism for many Egyptians. In its place, he suggested an alternative form of literary partisanship driven by the spiritual values of Islam. Defined as "guided art" (*al-fann al-muwajjih*), Qutb's approach to literature saw him temporally joining the leftists in their battle for social justice, but claiming to surpass them through his commitment to elevate humans spiritually. If in Marxist philosophy the driving force of history is class struggle, in Islam, Qutb argued, it was the never-ending goal of the elevation of humankind, which also involved ending injustice.⁸¹

CONCLUSION

The story of Qutb and his sister Amina's short association with *al-Adab* and the subsequent birth of the Islamist vision of literary commitment provides a window onto the intellectual reshuffling that accompanied political change in late 1940s and 1950s Egypt. One year after the 1952 military coup, leftists and Islamists still seemed to share similar cultural concerns. Loosely defined as the need to align Egyptian culture with Egypt's sociopolitical struggles, these concerns took shape amid the cultural battles of the late 1940s involving intellectuals associated with both ideological trends. In rebelling against Egypt's established writers, they forged mutual solidarities and friendships and "borrowed" arguments of cultural criticism from each other. Rather than representing well-defined and rigid ideological blocks, in the eyes of many the left and Islamism offered an essentially equivalent set of solutions to Egypt's problems, namely independence, social justice, and politically conscious culture.

In 1953, when Qutb and his sister Amina followed their young intellectual colleagues to *al-Adab*, they probably held the same expectations that characterized the cultural milieu of the late 1940s. However, as the postcolonial Arab world began to take shape,

Islamists soon found themselves at the margins of its cultural and political projects. Those who stayed within the Muslim Brotherhood fold were imprisoned by ʿAbd al-Nasir in 1954, while those who left it adopted themes more fitting to the epoch. This fissure eventually gave rise to two different projects of literary creation with similar roots: the leftist project of *al-adab al-multazim*, and the Islamist method of *al-adab al-islāmī*. While the former became the rallying cry of a whole generation of Arab intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s, the latter was stalled by government crackdowns on the Muslim Brotherhood in 1954 and 1965. Products of the same cultural shifts that were driving the politicization of culture, both projects were essentially comparable in their attempt to connect literary production to contemporary political battles.

My analysis of this short episode in Egypt's history invites us to rethink the conventional ways it has been studied. The article's focus on young intellectuals who joined leftist and Islamist organizations as rank-and-file members provided a more complex view of their ideological affiliations than does a focus on the career activists and leaders of these organizations. In addition, it challenged the relevance of studying Qutb exclusively from the prism of Islamism, and highlighted the limitations of understanding Islamism from the exclusive perspective of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Islamist project of the 1950s was forged within intellectual spaces primarily defined by rebellion against Egypt's ruling classes, such as *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, and involved the contributions of writers who are today classified as representatives of Egyptian secular culture. The existence of intellectual spaces such as *al-Fikr al-Jadid* also suggests that, contrary to the contemporary official representation of Egyptian intellectual history as a Manichean battle between Islamism and literature, the Islamist project, the ideology of Islamism, and the Muslim Brotherhood were all linked to other literary milieus. Finally, this study conveys the advantages of focusing on intellectual networks. Analysis of these networks, forged and sustained in journals, publishing houses, and other intellectual meeting spaces, conveys how leftists, Islamists, and literary histories were ideologically fluid rather than sharply distinct. Such a "horizontal" view of history reveals intellectual circulations and cross-pollinations. In the case of Egyptian postcolonial history, it raises further questions about the conditions under which the fluidity between Islamism, literature, and the left were forgotten in historical narratives.

NOTES

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¹Muhammad Farid ʿAbd al-Khaliq, "Tahta Mijhar," *Majallat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, no. 3, 9 January 1945.

²Ahmad Rushdi Salih, "al-Atyaf al-Arba'a," *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, no. 1, 16 May 1945.

³The thesis that Qutb attacked senior literati out of frustration over his lack of literary success is defended by ʿAli Shalash in *al-Tamarrud ʿala al-Adab: Dirasa fi Tajribat Sayyid Qutb* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1994). John Calvert ascribes Qutb's attacks on the entertainment industry to his conservative background, and explains his life shifts with reference to his emotional states; Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (London: Hurst and Company, 2010), 109 and 110, respectively.

⁴Verena Klemm, "Different Notions of Commitment (*iltizam*) and Committed Literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 3 (2000): 51–62; Yoav Di-Capua, "The Intellectual Revolt of the 1950s and 'The Fall of the Udabā'," in *Commitment and Beyond: Reflections on/of the Political in Arabic Literature since the 1940s*, ed. Friederike Pannewick and Georges

Khalil (Wiesbaden: Ludwing Reichert, 2015), 89–104; Di Capua “Arab Existentialism: An Invisible Chapter in the Intellectual History of Decolonization,” *American Historical Review* 117 (2012): 1061–91.

⁵The chief editor was Mudarrak Sawi, while Qutb is listed as “participating in the edition.”

⁶Di-Capua, “The fall of the Udabā’.”

⁷Jean Paul-Sartre, *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964 [1948]).

⁸Lucie Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 250–58. For more on the rise of revolutionary rhetoric in postwar Egypt, see Joel Gordon, *Nasser’s Blessed Movement: Egypt’s Free Officers and the July Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992), 18–20; and Tariq al-Bishri, *al-Haraka al-Siyasiyya fi Misr (1945–1953)* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2002).

⁹Klemm, “Different Notions of Commitment,” 51.

¹⁰Omnia El Shakry, “The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East,” *American Historical Review* 120 (2015): 920–34.

¹¹Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 157–97. The biographic literature on Qutb is vast. In addition to the aforementioned biographies by Calvert and Shalash, see James Toth, *Sayyid Qutb: The Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Adnan Musallam, *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2005); Hilmi al-Namnam, *Sayyid Qutb: Sirat al-Tahawwulat* (Cairo: al-Karma li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi’, 2014); Sherif Yunis, *Sayyid Qutb wa-l-Usuliyya al-Islamiyya* (Cairo: Dar Tayba li-l-Dirasa wa-l-Nashr, 1995); and ‘Abd al-Fatah al-Khalidi, *Sayyid Qutb: Min al-Milad ila al-Istishhad* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 2007).

¹²The trope of Qutb’s “turn” appears in most of his recent biographies and is explicitly referred to in their titles. Scholars differ somewhat on the orientation from which Qutb had purportedly “departed,” identified alternatively as “secularism” (Toth, *Sayyid Qutb*, 36–55); “Muslim secularism” (Musallam, *From Secularism*, 50); “secular nationalism” (Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 126–27); “romanticism” (Younis, *Sayyid Qutb*, 11); and “literature” (Shalash, *al-Tamarrud*; al-Khalidi, *Sayyid Qutb*, 13). All of these orientations, including “Muslim secularism,” are understood to be essentially opposed to Islamism. The inclusion of literature among them is not surprising given the close connection that prevailing narratives of the origins of modern Arab literature draw between literature and the rise of secularism. See Michael Allan, *In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016), 5–12.

¹³Musallam justified his use of the term “Muslim secularist” to describe Qutb by claiming that Qutb had inner faith while not being “religiously oriented”; Musallam, *From Secularism*, 50. Other biographers of Qutb did not specify what they meant by “secularism.” Toth seems to have used this term in a very broad sense, even defining Qutb’s parents as secular (Toth, *Sayyid Qutb*, 12).

¹⁴Angela Giordani, “To be an *Adib*: Sayyid Qutb’s Intellectual Biography Reconsidered” (MA thesis, Columbia University, 2014).

¹⁵Klemm, “Different Notions of Commitment,” 52.

¹⁶‘Abbas Mahmud al-‘Aqqad, *Sa‘at bayna al-Kuub* (Cairo: Matba‘at al-Muqtataf wa-l-Muqattam, 1929), 121–25.

¹⁷See, for example, “al-Su‘al li-Taha Husayn,” *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, no. 8, 26 February 1948; “Lahazat ma‘ Tawfiq al-Hakim,” *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, no. 2, 8 January 1948; “Radd ‘ala al-Mazni,” *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, no. 8, 1 September 1945; “Radd ‘ala al-‘Aqqad,” *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, no. 10, 1 October 1945; “Radd ‘ala al-Ustadh Ahmad Amin,” *al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi*, no. 2, 10 May 1947.

¹⁸See, for example, ‘Ali al-Katib, “Mulahazat ‘ala Bahth al-Duktur Taha Husayn,” *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, no. 11, 15 October 1945.

¹⁹“Ta‘aqib li-Duktur Taha Husayn,” *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, no. 12, 1 November 1945.

²⁰Sayyid Qutb, “Milim al-Akbar: Bahth wa-Qissa,” *al-Risala*, no. 600, 1 January 1945.

²¹The idea that European progress was due to the assimilation of Greek and Arab legacies was at the core of this argument, which was expressed even by conservative writers such as Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi‘i. See al-Rafi‘i, *Tahta Rayat al-Qur’an: Ma‘araka bayna al-Qadim wa-l-Jadid* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-‘Asriyya, 2002), 63.

²²Both trends have been described by Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski. On “national literature,” see Gershoni and Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), esp. 191–229. On “Easternism,” see *ibid.*, 255–69; and Gershoni and Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 35–96.

²³Omnia El Shakry has shown the extent to which nascent social sciences in interwar Egypt, including geography and anthropology, were dominated by the idea that cultural homogeneity was essential for mutual understanding and cooperation between peoples. El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 55–86.

²⁴Sayyid Qutb, *Kutub wa-Shakhshiyat* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1983), 159.

²⁵On the place of *al-Fajr al-Jadid* in the Egyptian Left, see Joel Beinin, “Le marxisme égyptien (1936–52): nationalisme, anti-impérialisme et réforme sociale,” *Cahiers d’histoire. Revue d’histoire critique* 105–6 (2008): 129–43; and Roel Meijer, *The Quest for Modernity: Secular Liberal and Left-Wing Political Thought in Egypt (1945–1948)* (London: Routledge/Curzon, 2002), 104–6.

²⁶Ahmad Rushdi Salih, “Marhala Jadida fi al-Fikr al-Misri,” *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, no. 2, 1 June 1945.

²⁷On the Muslim Brotherhood’s attitude toward poetry and theater, see ‘Issam Talima, *Hasan al-Banna wa-Tajribat al-Fann* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 2008).

²⁸Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, “al-Isti‘mar al-Fikri fi al-Sharq,” *al-Fath*, no. 181, 9 January 1930. Al-Khatib’s Salafiyya Bookstore and Publishing House was a central meeting place for intellectuals and associations of Islamic sensibilities in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1927 al-Khatib took part in the creation of the Young Men’s Muslim Association (Jama‘iyya al-Shubban al-Muslimin), and in 1933 he provided support to the Muslim Brotherhood by printing its first journal.

²⁹In the 1960s, al-Jundi contributed articles to Nasserist intellectual periodicals such as *al-Majalla* (1957–71). In the 1970s and 1980s, he produced a volume of Taha Husayn’s writings, portraying him as central to the Westernization of Egyptian culture. On al-Jundi’s contributions to Islamist discourse of the 1970s, see Salwa Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, the State and Islamism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 34–57. See also Hilmi Muhammad al-Qa‘ud, *al-Zahid: Anwar al-Jundi: Hayatuhu, Adabuhu wa-Fikruhu* (Cairo: Dar al-Bashir li-l-Thaqafa wa-l-‘Ulum, 2016); and ‘Ala’ Mamduh, “al-Ustadh Anwar al-Jundi. Qa‘id al-Katiba al-Islamiyya li-l-Muqawama al-Fikriyya,” IkhwanWiki, accessed 10 November 2016, <http://bit.ly/2wskCdi>.

³⁰Anwar al-Jundi, “Kayfa Naktub al-Ta‘rikh al-Islami?,” *Majallat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, 6 March 1948.

³¹See his series of articles entitled “al-Marahil al-Thalatha: al-Ighfa’, al-Taghrib, al-Yaqaza,” *Majallat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, 1–29 April 1948.

³²Sayyid Qutb, “Ma‘araka al-Damir al-Adabi: Shubban wa-Shuyukh,” *al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi*, no. 5, April 1947.

³³Musallam, *From Secularism*, 95; Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 125–26; Toth, *Sayyid Qutb*, 56–58; Giordani, “To Be an Adib,” 31–32.

³⁴The note published in the Muslim Brotherhood’s journal challenges James Heyworth-Dune’s assertion that *al-Fikr al-Jadid* and the Brotherhood were competitors in the Islamic publishing market. According to Heyworth-Dune, the Muslim Brotherhood boycotted the journal, thus contributing to its closure. Subsequent accounts include Musallam, *From Secularism to Jihad*, 94–95, and Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 126. For the published note, see *Majallat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, 22 February 1948.

³⁵The identification of al-Minyawi as a “war profiteer” was made by his former business partner Sa‘id al-Sahhar. According to the latter, al-Minyawi started his career in the printing business as an employee in ‘Issa and Mustafa Halabi’s printing house. During World War II al-Minyawi became one of the biggest paper suppliers in the country; Sa‘id al-Sahhar, *Mawaqif fi Hayati* (Cairo: Maktaba Misr, 1991), 138–45.

³⁶Ashraf ‘Id al-‘Antabli, “al-Hajj Muhammad Hilmi al-Minyawi Rajul al-‘Amal al-Da‘iyya,” IkhwanWiki, accessed 10 November 2016, <http://bit.ly/2hftpor>. The Consultative Assembly (al-Hay‘a al-Ta‘assisiyya) is a decision-making body within the Muslim Brotherhood elected by direct vote among the group’s members.

³⁷The Muslim Brotherhood was unsuccessful in maintaining hold of its publications; its outlets were regularly shut down, and members with the license to publish them were ousted or departed from the organization. This was true of the following periodicals: *Jaridat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin* (1933); *al-Nadhir* (The Warning, 1938–39); and *al-Da‘wa* (The Call, 1951–53). Until 1946 the Brotherhood had only weekly news magazines, and no dailies.

³⁸Adil Ahmad Kamil, *al-Nuqat Fawqa al-Huruf: al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin wa-l-Nizam al-Khass* (Cairo: Zahra li-l-A‘lam al-‘Arabi, 1987), 123.

³⁹A disagreement over the editorial line of *al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi* was the reason for Qutb’s resignation from the journal; Yunis, *Sayyid Qutb*, 25.

⁴⁰This partnership eventually dissolved, leaving the publishing house exclusively in the hands of al-Minyawi. Sa‘id al-Sahhar, *Mawaqif*, 138–45.

⁴¹*Al-Bayan Aladhi Aqarratuhu al-Hay'a al-Ta'assisiyya li-l-Ikhwān al-Muslimin fi Ijtima'iha ghayr al-'Adi al-Mu'ataqid bi-l-Markaz al-'Am fi al-Yawm al-Jum'a 10 Min Dhi al-Qa'ada 1371/1 Ughustus 1952* (Cairo: Matabi' Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1952).

⁴²The Brotherhood's use of Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi as a meeting space for its top officials was mentioned by the fourth guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, 'Umar al-Tilmisani; see Ibrahim Qa'ud, *'Umar al-Tilmisani Shahidan 'ala al-'Asr: al-Ikhwān al-Muslimun fi Da'ira al-Haqiqa al-Gha'iba* (Cairo: Dar al-Mukhtar al-Islami, 1985), 33.

⁴³The closure of *al-Fikr al-Jadid* was followed by Qutb's one-and-a-half-year stay in the United States. After his return in August 1950, Qutb increasingly became part of the Brotherhood's intellectual networks. In 1951, he joined two of the Brotherhood's outlets, *al-Da'wa* and *al-Muslimun* (The Muslims); in 1952, his two books, *al-'Idala al-ijtima'iyya fi al-Islam* and *al-Ma'araka bayna al-Islam wa al-Ra'smaliyya* were reprinted under the insignia of the Islamist organization, a sign of the incorporation of these texts into its official corpus. In 1953 Qutb officially became a member of the organization, and in 1954 he edited its new magazine, *Majallat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimin*.

⁴⁴Musallam, Calvert, and Giordani include among *al-Fikr al-Jadid's* team the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Najib Mahfuz. I was unable to locate Mahfuz's essays in the collection of *al-Fikr al-Jadid* preserved in the Egyptian National Library. However, Mahfuz did contribute to *al-'Alam al-'Arabi*, which Qutb had previously edited.

⁴⁵See 'Abd al-Mun'am Shumayyis' book in which he recommends Qutb's *al-Ma'araka bayna al-Islam wa-l-Ra'smaliyya* for "further reading"; Shumayyis, *Suqut al-Qahira* (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1951), 141. See also the reviews of Qutb's books by *al-Fikr al-Jadid's* associated writers: Ibrahim al-Wa'ili, "Ma'arakat al-Islam wa-l-Ra'smaliyya," *al-Risala*, no. 921, 26 February 1951; and 'Abbas Khidir, "al-Islam wa-l-Nizam al-'Alami," *al-Risala*, no. 913, 1 January 1951.

⁴⁶Ibrahim al-Wa'ili, "al-Rusafi ba'd 'Am," *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, no. 30, 17 April 1946.

⁴⁷These include 'Abd al-Mun'am Shumayyis, 'Abd al-Hamid al-Sahhar, and Qutb's brother and sister, Amina Qutb and Muhammad Qutb.

⁴⁸Muhammad Fayad, "al-Salam al-'Alami wa-l-Islam li-l-Katib al-Da'iyya al-Ustadh Sayyid Qutb," *al-Risala*, no. 952, 19 November 1951.

⁴⁹Ibrahim al-Wa'ili, "Ma'arakat al-Islam."

⁵⁰It is common knowledge that Qutb was the one who "discovered" Najib Mahfuz. Mahfuz was part of the Committee of Publication for University Graduates, a series launched by Maktabat Misr in 1943 to promote young writers, and Qutb regularly reviewed Mahfuz's novels in *al-Risala* between 1944 and 1946. In 1945 Qutb solicited Taha Husayn to publish or at least "write a word" on a manuscript by one of *al-Fikr al-Jadid's* contributor's, 'Imad al-Din 'Abd al-Hamid. The letter was reproduced in *Akhbar al-Adab*, no. 970, 26 February 1946, 17. In 1951, Qutb prefaced Shumayyis' book *Suqut al-Qahira*; Shumayyis, *Suqut*, 3.

⁵¹Qutb, "Nahwa al-Mujtam' al-Nazif," in Shumayyis, *Suqut*, 3.

⁵²Hilmi Shalabi, *Ta'rikh al-Idha'a al-Misriyya* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-'amma li-l-Kitab, 1995), 172–73.

⁵³Walter Armbrust, "The Golden Age before the Golden Age: Commercial Egyptian Cinema before the 1960s," in *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond*, ed. Walter Armbrust (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000), 301.

⁵⁴Ildal El Saket, "Projecting Egypt: The Cinema and the Making of Colonial Modernity, 1896–1952" (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2013), 327–28, 418–28.

⁵⁵Notably, the films labeled as socially committed included those produced by Husayn Sidqi.

⁵⁶Anwar al-Jundi, "Matba'a, Shasha wa-Midhiya'," *Jaridat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimin*, 9 October 1948.

⁵⁷"Madha Tafa'al bi-na al-Sinima," *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, no. 21, 13 February 1948.

⁵⁸See, for instance, "al-Isti'mar aladhi Yaql: Hunna al-Qahira," *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, no. 25, 13 March 1946.

⁵⁹"Iftah Radiyu Tajid al-Ra'smaliyyin . . . (2)," *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, no. 27, 27 March 1946.

⁶⁰Sayyid Qutb, "Adab al-Inhilal," *al-Risala*, no. 999, 25 August 1952. Qutb's attacks against popular songs date from the mid-1930s. See "al-Ghina' al-Marid," *al-Ahram*, 25 June 1934; and "al-Mutribun wa-l-Mutribat Humma al-Tabur al-Khamis fi Misr," *Sahifat Dar al-'Ulum*, no. 1, July 1940.

⁶¹*Al-Fikr al-Jadid*, no. 7, 19 February 1948.

⁶²Subhi Shafiq, "Udaba'una al-Mutrifun," *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, no. 8, 29 January 1948.

⁶³Founded in 1944 by brothers 'Ali and Mustafa Amin, *Akhbar al-Yawm* was one of the first news outlets to use techniques characteristic of yellow journalism.

⁶⁴“Akhbar,” *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, no. 40, 26 June 1946. Similar criticism of *Akhbar al-Yawm* was expressed by another leftist periodical, *al-Jamahir* (The Masses), no. 29, 16 October 1947.

⁶⁵Sayyid Qutb, “Afkhad wa-Nuhud,” *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, no. 5, 29 January 1948.

⁶⁶*Al-Fikr al-Gadid*, no. 8, 26 February 1948. See also Qutb’s comment on al-Hakim’s association with the commercial press in Sayyid Qutb, *Kutub*, 121n1.

⁶⁷Amin Takla, “Mulahazat ‘ala al-Harakat al-Fikriyya fi Misr,” *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, no. 6, 1 August 1945.

⁶⁸Tensions between the periodical and al-‘Aqqad were exacerbated in 1945 when al-‘Aqqad published an overtly anti-Marxist book titled *Fi Bayti* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma‘arif, 1945). For *al-Fajr al-Jadid*’s reactions to this book, see “Barid al-Fajr al-Jadid,” no. 36, 29 May 1946; “al-‘Aqqad Lam Yantahi!! Wa-l-‘Aqqad La Yuzal Yukhadir al-Sha‘b,” no. 39, 19 June 1946; and Muhammad Isma‘il, “Fi Bayti: Naqd Kitab ‘Abbas al-‘Aqqad,” no. 8, 1 September 1945.

⁶⁹See, for instance, Ibn Khattab, “Hal Fashalat Wizarat al-Ma‘arif fi Mahamatiha?,” *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, no. 2, 8 January 1948. These complaints should be viewed in the context of the institutional rivalry that existed between Dar al-‘Ulum and Cairo University, the former having been accused of resisting modernization. See Taha Husayn’s criticism of Cairo University in *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ma‘arif, 1969), 211–23. For his defense of Dar al-‘Ulum, see *Naqd Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr* (Jedda: Dar al-Sa‘udiyya, 1969), 65–66.

⁷⁰Mona Russell, “Competing, Overlapping and Contradictory Agendas: Egyptian Education under British Occupation, 1882–1922,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 21 (2001): 51–54.

⁷¹“Al-Isti‘mar al-Thaqafi,” *al-Fajr al-Jadid*, no. 36, 29 May 1946.

⁷²See *al-Fajr al-Jadid*’s reaction to the announcement by French authorities of its readiness to preserve its “cultural interests” in the Arab East: “Masalih Faransa al-Thaqafiyya fi Misr,” no. 13, 16 June 1945.

⁷³The concept of “repertoire,” posed by Charles Tilly, highlights the strategic dimension of social movements choosing certain tools and actions to reach particular goals; Tilly, *Contentious Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Tellingly, in 1953, one of the most emblematic “ivory tower intellectuals,” Tawfiq al-Hakim, was described as a “committed writer”; “al-Nashat al-Thaqafi fi al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi: Misr,” *al-Adab*, vol. 1, February 1953, 72. Similarly, in the cinema industry, filmmakers who called for a ban on belly dancing scenes frequently included such scenes in their own films; El Saket, *Projecting*, 327–28.

⁷⁴Di-Capua, “Arab Existentialism.”

⁷⁵“Al-Nashat al-Thaqafi fi al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi: Misr,” *al-Adab*, vol. 1, January 1953, 71.

⁷⁶“Hal Asaba al-Shi‘r al-‘Arabi bi-Naksa? Jawab al-Ustadh Sayyid Qutb,” *al-Adab*, no. 1, April 1953; Amina Qutb, “Awham,” *al-Adab*, no. 11, November 1953; “Id al-Su‘ada,” no. 7, July 1953.

⁷⁷Amina Qutb’s story was criticized by the renowned Lebanese translator Munir al-Ba‘albaki for portraying human life as an illusion and irony; al-Ba‘albaki, “Qara‘tu al-‘Adab al-Madi fi al-Adab,” *al-Adab*, no. 12, December 1953. Muhammad Qutb imputed this criticism to *al-Adab*’s hostility to Islam; Muhammad Qutb, “al-Fann wa-l-Mujtam‘,” *Majallat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, no. 2, 27 May 1954.

⁷⁸Sayyid Qutb, “Manhaj al-Adab,” *Majallat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, no. 1, 20 May 1954. The article was republished in the posthumous collection of Qutb’s articles, *Fi al-Ta‘rikh* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2001), 11–21. The question of whether Qutb’s Islamic approach to literature was the same or different from literatures produced in Muslim regions following the Qur’anic revelation was discussed in the debate sparked by Qutb’s article “Manhaj al-Adab.” That debate lasted until July 1954, and involved a number of journal columnists including ‘Abd al-Mun‘am Shumayyis, Rashad Muhammad Khalil, and Qutb’s younger brother, Muhammad. The latter continued to reflect on the Islamic method of literature in his book *Manhaj al-Fann al-Islami* (Cairo: Dar al-Qalam, 1963).

⁷⁹For a detailed description of the controversy, see Di Capua, “The Fall of the Udbā’.”

⁸⁰See Qutb’s critique of Husayn’s literature in *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, no. 3, 15 January 1948.

⁸¹Qutb, “Manhaj al-Adab.”