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Overcoming 'Simply Being': Straight Sex, Masculinity and Physical Culture in Modern Egypt

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> Dear Cupid:
> I am a young man twenty-three years of age who is a foreigner in these lands. I began my working life at sixteen, that is, at puberty, and I used to think a lot about increasing my knowledge of the second sex at that time. Since then, sexual feelings have been raging through me. However, I was so shy my heart would start beating rapidly at the thought of speaking to a girl, even if it were just polite conversation. I slept in my own room and after my parents locked all the doors I'd spend the nights staying up. Some nights I'd stand at the window after midnight hoping to find women passing by alone or accompanied by a young man. If my wish were fulfilled, then I'd curse them both for their freedom and for enjoying [their] love safe from the eyes of censors. Then my blood would boil and I'd become like a madman. I sought freedom. Not much time had passed with me in this state before I was struck with fits of coughing, my body grew thin, and my eyes became hollow. I attracted pity from the family. I was always nervous about doctors prescribing too much medication with no benefit, so I travelled to Cairo with its renowned doctors and stayed for nearly six months.[1]

These are the first tortured lines penned by 'A.Y.D.' (*alif ya dal*) in a long letter dispatched from 'the extreme western border of Sudan', sent to the Egyptian magazine *Physical Culture* (*al-Riyada al-badaniyya*) and published in March 1936.[2] The young man's epistle, titled 'A Voice from Unknown Africa', occupied more than three full pages of a letters section called 'What Would You Do in this Situation?'[3] *Physical Culture* began publication in 1929, continuing until the early 1950s.[4] A.Y.D.'s letter was one of hundreds from readers with similar concerns about love, sex and intimate relationships published in the magazine during the course of the highly unstable decade of the 1930s. Indeed, during different phases of its lifespan, the magazine featured multiple letters sections in the same issue; for example, appearing alongside 'What Would You Do in this Situation?' was a 'Health Advice' section fielding questions on exercise, masturbation and venereal diseases, where answers were proffered by none other than 'Hippocrates'.

This article considers *Physical Culture* as an artefact of colonial modernity, as a watermark of an ineffable style of performing gender and sexuality that has been in emergence all over the world since the second half of the nineteenth century.[5] Accordingly, and ignoring its own protestations to the contrary, the magazine's national

character is not explored here except to indicate the extent to which 'Egypt' appeared to contemporaries as a problematic limit to the materialisation of a universal subject of physical culture.[6] In other words, that the actual cultivation of healthy and desirable bodies was constrained by Egypt's asymmetrical location in a global economic and political order constituted by colonialism was a well-established fact of social life by the end of the 1920s; consequently, the problem of the modern subject in Egypt was posed in terms that were not exclusively nationalist and examined in terms that were keenly attuned to the circulation of global cultural forms and discursive practices. Thus, precisely because many of the trappings of capitalist modernity and national sovereignty were absent from the Egyptian landscape, *Physical Culture* contributed to the vibrant public culture of the interwar period a forum in which the fantasy of the modern sovereign subject could be expressed in myriad ways that most frequently centred on a proper conception of sex and masculinity.[7]

Three interrelated themes are examined here, all of which directly or indirectly address the problematic of deploying gender and sexuality as analytical categories across time and space, the special theme of this volume. I argue that *Physical Culture* constituted a virtual community of Arabic-speaking bourgeois subjects simultaneously inhabiting national, colonial and diasporic spaces; that sex was the grounding discourse tacking together these otherwise non-contiguous locations; and that gender formed the problem space of modernity as a civilisational norm. In a more speculative manner, this article also considers the point at which gender and sexuality as modern discourses confront their 'pre-modern' others, life forms that defy the terms of intelligibility of those discourses. To that end, I question this cultural medium shaped under the terms of colonial modernity about its silences: what was suppressed or subtracted in order thereby to produce an intelligible subject of the modern world, and do the exclusive terms of that discourse unwittingly repeat themselves in the historical narrative, which is itself a cultural form of a similar genealogy?

Between pedagogic and performative modernity: the subject of *Physical Culture*[8]

Time for a new magazine

In late 1927, the lawyer Muhammad Fa'iq al-Jawhari and his brothers, Mukhtar and Ra'uf, opened the Physical Education Institute (*ma'had al-tarbiyya al-badaniyya*). In the same year, the Young Men's Muslim Association, with its own athletic facilities, was established not far from their location at 28 Sharia Fuad in Cairo.[9] The following year, the brothers launched the monthly magazine *Physical Culture*. Its main focus was the care of the body – the literal translation of the Arabic expression *al-riyada al-badaniyya*. Under this rubric, the editor, Muhammad al-Jawhari, made it the magazine's mission to educate the Egyptian reading public about sex, love and physical beauty. Although the figure of the nation certainly made regular appearances as a legitimising trope, the magazine was part of a much broader modernist project and was intensely conscious of its role as a 'technology' in the process of self-fashioning.[10]

That consciousness was long in the making, the product of a complex apparatus of physical culture that had begun to take shape in the late nineteenth century and was by the mid-1920s a normal part of Egyptian social life serving as a marker of the

emergent *effendiyya* class. The members of this class were professionals, government civil service employees, students, those occupied in the new business trades, and their spouses, sons and daughters.[11] Physical culture was a story of the *effendiyya*'s formation as a gendered site of bourgeois culture as much as it was a story of colonialism and nationalism.[12] It took root in the 1880s and 1890s, as anti-colonial nationalists and reformers diagnosed the weak and sick bodies of Egyptian men as the cause of their subjugation by another power, and saw in physical culture a panacea for all the nation's ills.[13] From the start, the engagement with practices and ideas associated with physical culture had a dynamic of its own apart from its ideological deployments, which ensured its proliferation and popularity.[14] Indeed it was at its height after Egypt was granted nominal independence in 1922. While it would be easy to attribute this expansion of the field of physical culture to the rise of new social forms that were an outcome of the intersection of global capitalism and colonial modernity, an analysis of the magazine *Physical Culture* demonstrates the need for caution when explaining its determinations exclusively in terms of the social.

While there are no circulation figures available, the provenance of the magazine's letters to the editor suggests an impressive distribution.[15] The intended audience was quite clearly the *effendiyya* and its cognates in other global locations. It was read in every major city and several smaller towns throughout Egypt. Beyond Egypt, the letters to the editor suggest that it had readers in Sudan, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Bilad al-Arab (Arabian peninsula). The magazine may have circulated even among the Arabic-speaking diaspora in far-flung places like Brazil, Gambia, Sierra Leone and India.

Within Cairo (the most historically verifiable segment of the magazine's readership), the urban geography that was the proximate setting for the birth of *Physical Culture* had changed dramatically. The street on which the Jawharis established their institute in 1927 was a major artery in the heart of modern Cairo. By the First World War, the city had already experienced significant growth in terms of built space due to the expansion of habitable land through the construction of the first Aswan Dam in 1902 and an extensive tramway system by 1917. But it was after the war that Cairo truly became a major city in terms of population and geography. The demographic expansion of Cairo's population, matched by a startling expansion of its built space, created new administrative and policing concerns as well as new ways of imagining the city, which I explore extensively elsewhere.[16] Significant additions to the urban landscape and urban culture included new kinds of spaces – the department store, the movie theatre, the theme park – and an expansion of the number of cafes and night-clubs. The tramway system enabled the geographic growth of Cairo and transformed physical movement within the city into an entirely new practice for all classes; by the end of the war, the system served 75 million passengers a year.[17]

A self to call modern

How did the modern fantasy of a self-governing body within colonial space appear in a place like Egypt? From the evidence provided by *Physical Culture*, one could use labels like masculinist, patriarchal and heterosexist – not to mention classist and racist – but these should be avoided for now in order to bypass the conventional referent of such signifiers: the history of a Euro-American social order. This is easier said than done

given the magazine's self-conscious mimicry of the terms, logics and vision deployed by metropolitan social-scientific discourses.

The last issue that I have of the magazine dates from October 1940, although in that issue the editor set forth his plan to launch an expanded version of the magazine in 1941. Arguably, the longevity of this 'sports' magazine – at a time when the lifespan of a new periodical often did not exceed a few months – was due precisely to its treatment of a controversial subject like sex. The magazine was organised into scientific sections presenting articles on health, sports and sex (*abhath sihhiyya*, *abhath riyadiyya* and *abhath jinsiyya*) and into fictional/autobiographical sections presenting stories and letters from readers concerning love and marriage. Photographs of readers and of luminaries in the physical culture domain were often printed alongside articles and letters as illustrations of exercises, examples of achievement of goals and so forth.

The majority of the articles that pertain to sexuality, including the letters and stories, can be grouped along an axis that spans the distance between permissible desire and correctable deviance. In the letter with which we began this article, A.Y.D. continued by elaborating for the readers of *Physical Culture* the depths of his moral depravity and the resultant physical suffering he endured.[18] Indeed the young man averred that he was only able to find his way back to the straight and narrow when he started reading *Physical Culture*. A concerned friend had mailed him some back issues of the magazine from 1933 and 1934, while he was hospitalised for a lengthy period after contracting a severe case of gonorrhea:

> I started to read through it and quickly fell in love with it. When I could finally leave the hospital, I was filled by this truthful idea [*al-fikra al-sahiha*] about life. I read a lot about harmful habits and the excesses of sexual relations; I found in front of me a guide to show me the way – through honest information about the second sex, which I had been yearning to learn. I left the hospital in better health, and I made the issues of *Physical Culture* my first priority. I used to read it every day, mastering the exercises. I got used to showering in cold water daily followed by a massage and sunbathing in the nude. My health improved and my weight increased from 122 pounds to 134 in less than two months. I also made friends who would play sports and take long walks with me.[19]

Although the author of this letter appeared to have resolved his sexual crisis through the ingestion of new knowledge about sex and the practice of alternative physical activities, he remained in an ethical dilemma. Before becoming ill, he believed he had impregnated a woman he was in love with and with whom he was having a sexual relationship. After an initial period of confusion and as the news of her pregnancy began to spread, they agreed (according to the author it was a mutual decision) to maintain a distance. In fact, the author claimed his lover insisted that he move on and that he seek another companion. And being ever so compliant, this was how he found himself in the hospital with gonorrhoea. However, after leaving the hospital, he learned that his lover had delivered a black (*'abd*) baby who had 'a broad nose like the uncircumcised (*qalalif*) and eyes like the devil' – most definitely not his son:

> Here is where I ask you for the answer, Mr Cupid, or the honourable male readers – not females – to the [question]: Is it correct to subscribe to Schopenhauer's philosophy, mentioned in the November 1935 issue of your magazine, on women, their wiles, short-sightedness and ignorance – that all that was given to women in terms of talent are cunning and deception in order to be wooed and courted; she does not strive for the capacity to benefit humanity [*al-insaniyya*], rather to extract from a man an expression of interest in her so that she can reign over him. I ask you for a reply to this problem of mine. It will determine what I will do with this woman. Present [the problem] to them. Tell them

> that I haven't forgotten that my relationship with her was illicit, but they need to overlook whether it was licit [*mashru'a*] or illicit [*ghayr mashru'a*] and look at the issue from the perspective of a purely sexual relationship, which, if it takes hold of a young man leaves him no room to think about what is licit and illicit. So, does a woman deserve all of our respect and reverence and does she deserve that we submit our hearts to her in love and trust her with this love or with our offspring? Answer this question dear sir for it is the source of my problem, my confusion, and my misery.[20]

Normally the responses of the readers and Cupid's own evaluation of the situation would appear in the following issue of the magazine. Unfortunately, I did not have access to a copy of *Physical Culture* from April 1936, so the reactions to A.Y.D.'s situation must remain a mystery for now.[21] Nevertheless, it is safe to say that compared to others, the richness of this letter in terms of detail must have provoked a massive response from readers. There were nearly a thousand responses to another situation that was far less interesting, a case of marital infidelity in which the wife wanted to know from the public if she should stay with her cheating husband who her family was pressuring her to leave. The majority (790) enjoined 'Mrs S' to persevere and patiently reform her husband's ways by making herself more attractive to him! It is perhaps important to note that 185 respondents did encourage her to leave her husband.[22] Readers' letters came from far and wide; one Abu al-Abbas Ahmad al-Attar from Bombay was awarded fifth prize for his opinion. First prize went to an unnamed male reader who confessed to having been in her husband's shoes; he advised her to remain the devoted wife and to try to obtain a transfer for her husband so they could move to another town.[23]

It was Cupid's role as the forum moderator to select the best solutions or analyses of the preceding month's problem and to award their authors prizes, ranging from one Egyptian pound for first place to various publications relevant to physical culture for second, third and so on. When this letters format was introduced in 1931, for the first few issues the magazine's editors ran the following explanatory note about the new forum which they labelled 'A Parliament for Readers': 'Do the people . . . around you understand you and do they provide you with compassion and support when you need it? If your answer was in the negative then you are in need of Cupid. He is ready to serve you in times of confusion, pain, and unhappiness'.[24] Mrs S, like numerous others, certainly felt that her family did not understand her and turned to this virtual community of strangers for 'compassion and support'. According to the editors, Cupid answered most of the letters privately, and only the most 'complicated' problems were published. Indeed, the problems were sometimes too complicated for this 'parliament' to resolve.

In the same issue in which A.Y.D.'s letter was presented to the *Physical Culture* audience, the readers responded to a young woman's problem from a previous issue. Very briefly, this young woman had developed intense feelings for a classmate during their school years together. When the classmate went on to get married, she discovered that her feelings must be love since she had never been attracted to any of the boys she knew and since the thought of her friend betrothed to a man appeared to her as a loss that was utterly devastating. In this case, which Cupid billed a 'psychological problem deserving study and analysis', none of the responses were deemed to be a 'useful solution' and most were dismissive of her situation, although Cupid does add that several young women wrote in indicating how they could 'understand her psyche' and offered their consolation.[25]

Experts: talking sex and gender

A primary concern – it would not be an exaggeration to say an obsession – of the magazine evident in practically every issue was the problem of abnormality and the possibility of straight sex. In general, the domain of 'sexual deviancies' was delimited according to *Physical Culture*'s mission to promote sex education (*al-tarbiyya al-jinsiyya*), hence the targets were most often masturbation and venereal diseases.[26] Unsurprisingly, medical expertise – foreign and Egyptian – was regularly marshalled to demonstrate the harms of sexual activity outside the legitimate bonds of marriage. In the interwar period, scientific knowledge established itself as both the legitimate mode of inquiry into matters of concern for the nation and a means of legitimation: at times for nationalist politics but perhaps more importantly, in the long term, for the constitution of the social as the location of private problems ranging from agricultural techniques to reproduction.[27] It is against this backdrop and through the frequent appearances of their articles and interviews in popular forums like *Physical Culture* that figures like Dr Fakhri Faraj and Dr Sabri Jirjis became familiar household names and images.[28] The space that these figures occupied was at once a new public sphere of expanding media forms (print, radio and cinema) and a contested terrain of truth claims in which once hegemonic Islamic modalities of knowledge production were forced onto the defensive, muted or pressed into the service of modernist projects like *Physical Culture*.[29]

In a 1932 interview with Dr Faraj, he was presented to the readers as a pioneer in Egyptian medicine who had long called and worked for sex education.[30] He launched his crusade in 1921 with a lecture at the Egyptian University, which apparently was not well received. For years after, the only venue that allowed him to lecture about sexual health issues was Ewart Hall of the American University in Cairo.[31] However, he was not prevented from publishing extensively before he became a regular contributor to *Physical Culture*. He had written several volumes on female sexuality, reproduction, prostitution, venereal diseases, the woman question and sexual impotence.[32]

When the interviewer asked whether his efforts had made a difference, he admitted that both at the government and popular levels only limited progress had been made. In a report on the spread of prostitution and ways to combat it, which he had submitted to King Fuad and to the first parliament in 1924, he recommended sex education programmes in government schools. His plan was partially implemented by the Ministry of Education: lessons on plant and animal reproduction were added to the primary school curriculum but the human reproduction component, which was meant for secondary schools and university, was not incorporated. Although he performed what he termed his 'civic duty' (*wajibi al-ijtima'i*) through his public lectures delivered at the American University, he acknowledged that the audience was not the mass of the population.

For the masses, especially the young, cases of sexually transmitted diseases were on the rise.[33] According to Dr Faraj, this was commensurate with their total ignorance about sex: 'I am probably not exaggerating if I said that they don't know any of its details except for what is [necessary] to fulfil their sexual cravings. They are not different in this respect from their companions – wild animals'.[34] Despite this state of sexual ignorance inhabited by the majority of Egypt's (peasant) population, Dr Faraj expressed his abiding confidence that 'the spirit of Egypt's intellectual renaissance'

and 'the spirit of [its] leap forward' could not but address this problem too. He cited anecdotal evidence of doctors in the provinces imbued with this spirit, who were undertaking on their own initiative programs to educate the people about sex and sexually transmitted diseases.

Although the politics of sex education was not addressed directly in this interview, it did rear its head when Dr Faraj mentioned in passing opposition from 'the guardians of public morals'. According to the editor, the magazine was constantly subjected to erroneous charges of encouraging immorality.[35] Muhammad al-Jawhari introduced his editorial comments a few months after the interview with Dr Faraj by reflecting on the historical case of the European Wars of Religion as an example of fighting for a cause – of the principled assault. He contrasted this to the attacks on the magazine, which he deemed hypocritical because of their intentional misrepresentation of its educational mission to enlighten people about the dangers of abusing their bodies sexually. It is when one wonders who was doing the attacking – since they go unnamed – that the example drawn from European history becomes intelligible. Unlike the Wars of Religion, wherein questions of belief were ostensibly at the heart of conflict, the editor of *Physical Culture* was suggesting that his magazine was being attacked in the name of religion by people who should and did know better. In other (unuttered) words, Islam was being twisted to meet ends that were not necessarily Islamic.[36]

Even the American University was not impervious to the reach of the 'guardians of public morals'. Dr Faraj was taken to court for a lecture he delivered there (presumably) in 1931 about the need to revise personal status codes to reflect the advances of modern civilisation. Although I was unable to discover the specific charges, it is likely from the context that he was accused of offending the 'revealed religions'. After the court acquitted him, the lecture was serialised in *Physical Culture*, with a preface emphasising the good doctor's courage in carrying out his civic duty.[37] The radical aspect of Dr Faraj's lecture seemed to lie in his criticism of the 'Eastern Christian authorities' for their antiquated approach to divorce and inheritance rights. Although only the Catholic Church was named in his critique, his call for a unified civil code on personal status issues implicated Copts and Muslims as well.[38] This was a position that was sure to stir up controversy as the religious establishments were struggling merely to hold ground lost over the preceding decades to an interventionist state, but it did not necessarily correspond to a belief in gender equality.[39] His major concern, as an expert on venereal disease, was the consequence to society of women who became prostitutes or bad mothers simply because of insufficient legal safeguards that did not prevent their impoverishment in cases of death or divorce.[40]

On the issue of equality between men and women, he expressed indignation at those who would even pose such a question and accused them of living in a 'fantasy world'. Ostensibly, the little political responsibility women already had was a burden too heavy for them. Echoing the late nineteenth-century discourse on motherhood, Dr Faraj pointed to Egyptian men marrying foreign women as a sign of the failure of Egyptian women in their nationalist duty to raise sons with good nationalist values.[41] In any case, according to Faraj, nature and biology had already invalidated the very possibility of equality. For motherhood was a natural right given only to women, through which they had power over others: children, husband, family. Men could never possess this right, thus denying them that route to power.

The other regular contributor to the magazine's pedagogic mission, Dr Sabri Jirjis, offered his expert knowledge on abnormal and deviant sexuality. He was first introduced to the readers of the magazine in August 1931 as a new 'volunteer' member of the '*Physical Culture* family'. Dr Jirjis practised at the VD clinic in Bani Suwayf, south of Cairo. The editor described him as a 'young sportsman' (*shab sbur*). A letter from the good doctor followed the introduction. He praised the magazine for its dual mission of bringing physical culture and sex education to the youth of Egypt. About physical culture, he wrote:

> Its share in the prosperity of European states is well known, and its influence in moulding the character of [their] youth is evidently clear. We perceive it every day when we read the news of pilots, swimmers, and athletes. It has, thanks to God and serious effort, begun to penetrate the hearts of boys and girls in this country.[42]

Dr Jirjis, it turned out, was extremely well read in contemporary European theories on sexuality and sexual disorders. Indeed, one of the reasons behind his desire to join *Physical Culture*'s 'virtual family' was his search for a venue to present his Arabic translation of the oft-cited 1905 study by the Swiss sexologist August Forel, *The Sexual Question* (*al-Mas'ala al-Jinsiyya*).[43]

Jirjis noted the resistance to sex education in Egypt and commended *Physical Culture* for staying the course:

> Sex education, despite the newness of research on it in Europe, has taken major strides in the last few years such that today it has become a science with its [own] rules and principles. However, in Egypt, tradition – or say a false shame – has prevented us from producing a reformer, an intellectual, or a parent who would discuss with his children sexual matters scientifically and truthfully.[44]

The effect of this pedagogic neglect was utter 'moral chaos'; that is:

> Until you [*al-Riyada al-Badaniyya*] advanced onto the field – [where] previous weak attempts were crushed and died in their cradles without anyone noticing – and continued fighting and struggling in an environment [*wasat*] not acclimated to revolting against tradition [*al-thawra 'ala al-taqalid*], until you emerged victorious through the force of the truth, the conviction of the believer, and the steadfastness of the confident. Meanwhile, the columns on sex education in your magazine became the principle [source] that a young man can read and benefit from rather than just be entertained. That, I swear, is a major victory in a short time.[45]

Aside from the blatant self-serving flattery, Jirjis's letter points to the emerging relationship between medical science and social reform. His contributions over the years would illustrate the quest for a scientific cure for the persistent sense of uncertainty about the future of the national community. With the progress of time, ambiguities surrounding Egypt's political and cultural identity only seemed to proliferate; hence securing a proper order in the domain of gender and sexuality became all the more important. Through the course of the 1930s and especially in the 1940s, better theories and better science were seen as the key to resolving protracted social and political crises.[46]

Jirjis supplemented his medical knowledge with a critical social-scientific lens for better viewing the relationship between sex-gender and social progress. The intellectual tools available to Dr Jirjis were revealed in a very interesting article titled 'On Politics and Political Economy'.[47] He began by explicating the difference between the two:

> Power and wealth were always the two objects targeted by politics. However, political-economy [*al-iqtisad al-siyasi*] is a science that studies the different conditions of [groups of] people, and

> all of its theories are based in history, statistics, and observations. Its aim is to determine laws for organizing production and distribution of products, for the division of labour, and for the social regulation of peoples in terms of public health, population (over or under), and rates of birth and death (increase or decline).[48]

He proceeded to identify a significant absence in political economy, which he labelled 'natural history' – by this he meant the history of the body and psychology as they related to sex and reproduction. It was this lacuna that undermined the ability of political economy to produce solutions for the imminent population crisis. His next move was to trace the roots of eugenics to Malthus and theories of rational selection, agreeing with the current view that people like the Chinese posed a threat to humanity's future if they continued to breed like rabbits. It was on a Social Darwinist basis that Dr Jirjis advanced his support for sex education and women's rights.[49]

He rejected what he termed the traditional tendency to explain any strange or extraordinary social developments with an injunction to 'examine women' (*ibhath 'an al-mar'a*). Women were not left out of the equation altogether, but the starting point, according to Dr Jirjis, should be to 'examine the sexual impulse' (*ibhath 'an al-dafi' al-tanasuli*). Such an investigation was warranted, he maintained, since desire and emotion (*ahwa' wa 'awatif*) were more common determinants of human action than reason and logic, with the sexual impulse being the most powerful. The 'role of women' was essential here in connecting sex to the social and political. Only through the liberation of women (*tahrir al-mar'a*) would society advance. Reversing Faraj's argument, Jirjis maintained that by making women equal partners with men in social life through encouraging their participation in work and granting women the right to vote and be elected, the sexual relationship would necessarily be transformed as women's object status was eliminated. Moreover, as the sex act became elevated from the depths of selfish lust and was redirected at smart reproduction, it would be aligned more with the social good.[50]

Dr Jirjis's writing on sexuality and deviance exemplified the work of *Physical Culture* towards the normalisation of heterosexuality as a key to Egyptian modernity. Essential to this goal was the scientific constitution of society as an object that could be acted upon; conversely, the localisation of social problems in the individual human body, in this case in the male sex, made possible the administrations of *Physical Culture*.[51] As noted, the male subject of Egyptian modernity had been problematised since the late nineteenth century as lacking the proper qualities of masculinity. After a lull in the discourse around the revolutionary years following 1919, Egyptian masculinity returned in the pages of magazines like *Physical Culture* facing a new endangered future, sapped by excessive masturbation and the contraction of venereal diseases.

The magazine mainly concentrated its critique on forms of deviance (*al-shudhudh*) resulting from what it considered a lack of masculine self-control or willpower; that is, the individual exerting excessive sexual energy, either upon himself or with a partner of the opposite sex (making prostitution a favourite object of criticism). More monstrous forms of deviance were left lurking in the shadows. For example, the figure of the cross-dressing male performer, the *khawal*, who still seemed to have made appearances even at elite wedding parties as late as the 1930s, was never treated explicitly by this discourse.[52] One possible explanation for this absence is that the

scientific tools available to Egyptian social commentators were not calibrated to deal with this form of home-grown difference. Thus it appeared only as a passing unnamed reference.[53]

Dr Jirjis, however, did write about homosexuality as a form of sexual deviance. His article 'Homosexuality' (rendered as *'ishq al-jins*) from March 1933 was part of a series he did on 'Psychosexual Illnesses' in which he presented translated excerpts of Dr Forel's *The Sexual Question*.[54] In fact, he seemed to have coined the expression *'ishq al-jins* to capture the scientific significance of 'homosexuality' as an illness deserving public sympathy and serious medical attention and care.[55] He also addressed the desire for same-sex marriage in his article on 'Prostitution and Civil Marriage'.[56] His objective here was to advocate for the legal recognition of a system of heterosexual marriage based on love between two 'companions' (*rafiqan*). In the case of those 'afflicted with same-sex desire', for whom there was no marriage provision at all within law, he ventriloquised Forel's argument, that as long as there was no injury to a third party and as long as neither of the partners was 'normal', then the law should simply overlook them; in other words, let them live out their (literally sick) fantasies as long as they did not spread their disease.[57]

In short, sex education and a rational regime of caring for the self were prescribed as the way to achieve proper gender relations and a healthy sexuality. Even homosexuality, a deviation from the person's nature, could be averted through this programme.[58] The magazine was, however, ambivalent in its advocacy for the prohibition of prostitution, mainly because it recognised that demand created supply in this instance. This also explains why the problem of prostitution was often routed through the discourse on marriage and sexuality. In 'Prostitution from a Medical Perspective', an unnamed expert on venereal diseases disagreed with those calling for a ban on official prostitution arguing on the one hand that there was no correlation between rising numbers of STDs and prostitution, and on the other that a sudden prohibition would cause more harm than good.[59] Another article blamed misogyny inherent in the laws for the failure to curb prostitution; it attacked as 'social cowardice' the implementation of laws that only punished one partner and highlighted the complicity of male lawmakers with male clients of prostitutes.[60] Ultimately the magazine's position was one of self-help; the resolution to these social problems lay in the process of cultivating properly disciplined subjects.

What may appear as striking about these engagements with contemporary European theories on sexuality was a blatant disconnection from Egyptian social and sexual realities. The absent presence of the multitude of labouring bodies – women, *khawal*, peasant – in this 'modern' discourse is only one, perhaps 'extreme', indicator of how the emergence of the *effendi* as a representative masculine subject depended on the suppression or erasure of other disruptive figures. However striking it may be, this pattern of exclusion/inclusion was not specifically Egyptian and neither was the lack of fit or distorting distance between categories of knowledge, their subjects and objects. This was the work of colonial power in the constitution of the modern subject the world over. The difference of metropole and colony was surely a matter of political-economic asymmetry, but that alterity had to be figured somehow in the prevailing liberal discourse to effect its own historical legibility as unique to one civilisation while simultaneously keeping open the possibility of universal emancipation into, and identity with, the modern.

Beyond pedagogic and the performative modernity: the limit of *Physical Culture*

On the one hand, *Physical Culture*'s assemblage of texts – of letters, articles, stories and photos (not discussed here) – points to a pedagogical project that sought to normalise a global bourgeois conception of heterosexuality and its attendant gendered subject for a national project; on the other hand, read critically, it may illustrate a 'creative adaptation' of that discourse to the local conditions of colonial modernity.[61] The hybrid nature of *Physical Culture*, however, as a material object between the pedagogic and the performative becomes intelligible only when desire, the colonial and the modern are situated as a part of and apart from the Egyptian social reality of the interwar period. In other words, this object – as magazine with pages, text and images and as a particular discourse of sexuality and self – existed in tension with both the 'local' and the 'foreign', stood for and against normative sexuality, circulated in spaces that were colonial, national and diasporic at once, and produced a virtual (and, somewhat anachronistically, transnational) field of desiring subjects and discursive engagements with unpredictable outcomes. Accordingly, the discourse of gender and sexuality that took shape in and around the pages of *Physical Culture* was not willed into existence solely through the interests of the editors and authors of the magazine. Furthermore, the full significance of that discourse would be missed if viewed exclusively as the product of economic and political change, wherein the latter is conceived as a reality prior to discourse. Neither can its emergence be explained through ahistorical psychological states of 'anxiety' or 'crisis'. It was through continuous repetition in forums like *Physical Culture* and movement through various social and spatial networks that the terms of a new corporeality, gender and sexuality overlapped, producing by the 1930s an ostensibly seamless normative sphere of heterosocial and heterosexual life.[62]

Despite the complex history enabled by this polyvocal source, the possibilities for imagining Egypt's past as plural and its history as open-ended only emerge when its privileged subject – *effendi*, nationalist, masculine, modern and so on – no longer appears as a historically foregone conclusion.[63] For example, the historical translation of desire into respectable heterosociality and sexuality, which came to define *effendi*-national culture of the interwar period, might be made legible historically without eliding the fact that it was only one possible representation of sexual desire, one possible worlding of love – albeit the ultimately dominant one. Indeed it was in the very slippage between moral and immoral (acts, images and thoughts) that *Physical Culture* managed to stake its claim on Egypt's modernity. Scantily clad foreign cover girls and bare-chested local muscle men were juxtaposed with narratives and epistolary tales of libidinal excess, all of which were used in a pedagogic mission – perhaps sincere, perhaps not – to produce the necessary bodies for a sovereign Egypt of the future. Yet, the charges of immorality levelled at the magazine for its sexual rhetoric also hint at the 'unanticipated' use of the magazine as a masturbatory aid.

Physical Culture might still reveal more than the existence of this somewhat obvious space between modernist intentions and acts, pedagogy and performance. Another question to this source could have been about the fantasy it organised around a silence – a silence that was perhaps ironically the outcome of a boisterous colonial programme to police homosexuality. Was the discourse of physical culture serving as a 'masquerade that has screened away something more'?[64] The supplement here

might be represented in shorthand as the impossible subjects of colonial modernity, the suppressed history of which was, and is, contingent on reading this moment exclusively as a struggle between the norm and *its* deviation.

The realm of bourgeois masculinist fantasy represented by *Physical Culture* conforms to and confounds Judith Butler's rearticulation of the relationship between gender and the norm in terms of the emancipatory 'work of fantasy' which attempts 'to rework the norms by which bodies are experienced'.[65] The performativity of gender reads quite differently and is at cross-purposes in a colonial context.[66] The discourse of physical culture in Egyptian colonial modernity was a bodily investment in advancing a broader claim to humanity that was paradoxically both more inclusive *and* more exclusive than in the preceding era. The new national public sphere of citizen-subjects was indeed informed by a universality that at least promised another world from the previous 'religio-political' order with its paternalistic and patriarchal hierarchies. However, the burden of producing the human central to realising this modern order was compounded and consistently deferred by the colonial.[67]

Within this constellation of figures – coloniser, colonised, citizen, universal human – the particular histories of Egyptians that neither fit within this 'system' nor within the construction of the prior order of despots and aliens was subject to erasure. An example of the historical repetition of modernity's silences is my own marginalising to a footnote of the fragmentary sighting of the *khawal* (alluded to above). Indeed, in this case, the *khawal* did not even bear its proper name but was rather subsumed under the category of *'awalim*: female entertainers who sang, danced and played instruments at weddings and other ritual occasions.

The occasion for this appearance was a monthly advice column, 'The Tales of Venus', in the August 1932 issue of *Physical Culture*. The special topic for this month was 'The Wedding Night' (*laylat al-dukhla*). 'Venus', using a highly satirical and bourgeois moralistic tone, set out to expose the vanity and excessive folly of all classes – but specifically of women – when it came to marriage celebrations. The potential for disorderly conduct of various kinds was persistently underscored. After narrating a series of untoward happenings at weddings that Venus had attended over her lifetime, ranging from the competition among women to be the best-looking to fights breaking out over trivial matters, she arrived at the most scandalous and most prevalent wedding phenomenon: the *'awalim*, in her own ironic words, 'the most important group upon which a wedding celebration depends'.[68] Venus cautioned against inviting this lowliest of life forms into respectable homes because of the *'awalim*'s foul language and their even fouler deeds, the most brazen of which could be the seduction of the groom. Venus went on:

> But the strangest of all was when I attended a wedding where I happened to be seated near the *'awalim*. My gaze landed on one of them with her ambiguous [*munakkara*] shape and unpleasant face. She ended up talking to me without pause about one thing or another until she asked me about the gown I was wearing and just as I was about to answer her, with all politeness of course, one of my acquaintances whispered in my ear advising me to distance myself from this woman because she was . . . watch out . . . a man! I was stunned by her words and left him angrily. I went to the hostess and told her that it was absolutely improper of her to allow a man entry into a gathering of women. I was beyond shock when I saw that she was bemused by what I had said and then replied that there was no need for all this anger since the *'aalima* or the *'aalim* that I was talking about although biologically differed completely from the biology of our sex, he was closer to [being] a woman than he was to a man.[69]

In spite of Venus's apparent shock and indignation, it is telling that no memory of men dressed as women in performance could be recalled bearing its proper name, that her language could not accommodate this difference. Was this because *khawal* as signifier had already undergone its second semantic transformation: first, from slave and servant as it appeared in the medieval lexicon *Lisan al-'Arab* to male performer in drag by the nineteenth century; then to faggot, as the term is derogatorily deployed in Egypt today?[70] Perhaps. But how may we historicise and critically grasp this specific failure of language beyond its own dominant signifying practices?

One might begin by regarding the rigid divisions between gender and sex established above as heteronormative and by contrasting it with the more fluid understanding allowed by a 'religious' figure like Rifa'a Rafi' Tahtawi in the nineteenth century. The latter described the androgyny of boys that made them attractive to men during the pre-pubescent stage (*mabda' shabubiyya*) without any apparent sense of disapproval. Indeed, at least three major new works using a variety of sources demonstrate that pre-colonial Islamic societies were practically if not juridically more tolerant of deviances such as pederasty and gender crossings.[71] Given Dr Jirjis's approach to homosexuality as an illness in the same way it was treated in Europe, it seems that the object field for gender normativity had begun to crystallise in interwar Egypt as medical practitioners and others earnestly advocated a relatively protestant approach to sex and marriage. Indeed between the rare discursive deployment of homosexuality and the frequent performative reiterations of heteronormative masculinity and femininity, the spectral presence of the cross-dressing *khawal* as late as the 1930s sheds light, however faint, on another terrain of gender, sexuality and sociality that was in the process of rapidly receding.

In the exchange above between Venus and the host of the wedding, we might, if we strained, hear a whisper of the unspeakable of colonial modernity: otherwise gendered lives that were seemingly intelligible but were in the process of being moved from the domain of the real to the unreal, indexing perhaps the loss of their purchase on communal norms that had ensured their persistence in the past. Additionally, rather than producing the conditions for a resignification with the aim of expanding the purview of the human, the colonial genealogy of gender as a norm conditioned and reproduced by the apparatuses of modern regulatory power has consistently narrowed the confines of the subject and foreclosed possibilities for subjective proliferation.

Put this way, the disappearance and return of the *khawal* in twentieth-century Egypt pushes to the forefront the imperial context in which norms of gender and sexuality were constituted in both metropoles and colonies, First and Third Worlds and presently in the global north and south. One should be attentive to the historical specificities of the moments mapped by these loose spatial designations, but conceiving the relational dynamic of gendered subject formations across these spaces can productively complicate performative theories and extend the range of history. It does so by inquiring into the asymmetries of power that effect the material conditions for the iterability and potential resignification of norms governing the subject. The affect of colonial modernity in Egypt – overcoming simply being – was implicit in the vanishing sociality of the cross-dressing *khawal*, but the category was not extinguished altogether. Indeed, following Butler, there occurred a resignification that momentarily allowed the posing of a question that cannot be answered: who are you? Although it is only in the interstices of questions and answers that were intelligible, in penumbral

corners, for fleeting moments, and between the lines of a quintessentially modern text that one might virtually dwell with the silent other, that possibility, however much a chimera, might bespeak other beings and other dwellings in time.

Conclusion

Physical Culture was essentially a 'sports' magazine and significantly a site of fantasy. Its broad condition of possibility in either incarnation was colonial modernity, the material and discursive frame with no originary location and within which the world was made singular and plural at once. It marked a specific moment in the historical trajectories of culture as a form of nationalist pedagogy and as site of global performances, wherein a particular national horizon was constituted and exceeded. Thus, the subject of Egyptian colonial modernity as inscribed in the pages of *Physical Culture* was contingent on multiple and polyvalent sources for its formation.[72] However, the stakes of producing such a subject – sovereignty and freedom – required submission to the modern terms of gender and sexuality which, even though coming from everywhere, appeared originally western, rendering their translation and authorisation within the Egyptian context a fraught process by the interwar period.[73]

In this article, rather than erasing the tension between originals and copies of modernity, which the benefit of hindsight and sophisticated historical methods have exposed as narrative fictions, I have tried to redeploy it as a technique for reading the ambivalences of the physical culture discourse in Egypt. That is, rather than resolve the problem of authenticity, which became a crucial issue in cultural debates from the second half of the 1920s, I have tried to read along the grain of those linguistic performances, regarding what they did in what they said or could not say. Hence, on the one hand, by the interwar period, the legitimacy of physical culture understood as sports and fitness was no longer in question; on the other hand, the concerns of the magazine *Physical Culture* demonstrate that expanding its bailiwick to include sex education was a problematic move. The reproduction of beautiful bodies was easily assimilated to a nationalist horizon, whereas the problem of sex, even when elaborated in terms of public health and the collective good, stirred up opposition. Perhaps even more telling, however, was the less active form of resistance to *Physical Culture*'s normalising project that was silently present as an absence, in unnameable forms of deviance. It would be tempting to explain the latter problem as being a result of poor translations. That however presupposes an original which, under the terms of colonial modernity, was an impossibility, since gender and sexuality were shaped globally through repeated encounters within the imperial social formation. In fact, the coeval proliferation of sexuality around the globe was contingent on a process of diagnosing and documenting pathologies and perversions which, as the example of Dr Jirjis demonstrates, was familiar terrain for *Physical Culture*.[74]

Thus, colonial modernity as an explanatory instrument reaches a similar impasse to that reached by *Physical Culture* in the 1930s in the face of the unintelligible subject. Although thinking through the joining of the colonial and the modern are historically and theoretically generative, especially in the study of gender and sexuality, colonial modernity is intrinsically incapable of envisioning its outside. While re-conceptualisations of the colonial encounter in terms of interaction, mutual constitution, creative adaptation and so on have been crucial for debunking Eurocentric

historical models of cultural creativity and diffusion, the modern subject stubbornly retains its libratory inscription that belies particular liberal notions of sovereignty and freedom. Accordingly, the subject presupposed or mapped in studies of colonial modernity tends to resemble the desirable subject figured in *Physical Culture* to the extent that they inhabit similar positions in relation to the future. That future of human being is exclusively narrativised as a movement from bondage to freedom driven by a dynamic of domination and resistance, or subjugation and resignification in a poststructuralist register.[75] Other forms of political and ethical life remain invisible or impossible to theorise. That the modern subject would run up against limits is by itself a banal point. However, for the historiography of gender and sexuality, considering the limit and its implications is crucial for giving an account of life forms such as the *khawal*, that are marked by a temporality and conception of the self which seem to exceed the bounds of intelligibility in colonial modernity. Thus, approaching the past as plural and envisioning a broader horizon for the human in the present would require critically attending to colonial modernity as a history of overcoming simply being.

Notes

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1. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
2. Henceforth, when it appears in the body of the text, the name of the magazine will be rendered only in its translated form. In notes, it will appear as *RB*. Titles of articles and other sources that were in Arabic in the original appear only in translation, unless they are deemed major texts, in which case the Arabic and its translation are both provided.
3. *RB*, March 1936, pp. 333–6.
4. I am uncertain as to when exactly its run came to an end, but it seems not to have survived long past the Second World War. Walter Armbrust has located issues of the magazine from 1951.
5. Colonial modernity is used here in a specific manner to indicate a mutually constitutive space/time, not an alternative modernity that is colonial. For an elaboration of this point, see Tani E. Barlow, 'Introduction: On "Colonial Modernity"', in Tani E. Barlow (ed.), *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 1–20.
6. Due to space constraints, rather than elaborate 'the subject' (of discourse) here, it is hoped the intended meaning will become clear through usage in context. For a fuller discussion of the modern subject as a discursive formation and of its Egyptian historical context, see Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working Out Egypt* (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming 2011).
7. Fantasy, as it is used here, does not index a realm absolutely separate from reality; rather, following Judith Butler's elaboration of subject formation in language, it is conceived as a performative space in which the real and the unreal are mutually constitutive and distinguished through a relation to norms, which cohere and are potentially destabilised through their repetition. In this formulation of fantasy, the subject does not exist prior to its expression in language but only in and through its enactment. See e.g., Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
8. 'Performative' is used here in the sense of a formation (social and linguistic) whose determinations and outcomes are not fixed even as its pronouncement simultaneously produces a reality in fact. 'Pedagogic' is used in the sense of instruction but with an allusion to regulatory discourses in general. Performative modernity, unlike pedagogic modernity, cannot be located in originary moments, places, or persons and remains open to resignification through repeated acts.
9. This was the address of the institute in 1938; I was not able to establish whether it was always in the same location. Interestingly, the YMMA continues to exist and operate in the same location while the *ma'had* has disappeared entirely, even from memory.

10. There are obvious echoes here of the process of subject constitution that Foucault critically elaborates on in Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), see esp. 'The Deployment of Sexuality', pp. 124–6.
11. *Effendiyya* may be read loosely to signify 'middle class' or 'bourgeois' in the cultural sense, and an *effendi* is a male member of the class. There is no female equivalent. To some extent, an *effendi* in the interwar period was any male (and theoretically, female) who could effect the proper style and possessed the right repertoire.
12. In *Working Out Egypt*, using the rubric of '*effendi* masculinity' I map the formation of Egypt's desired subject in performances of physical culture that range from early textual elaborations of its nationalist benefits to its manifestations in activities such as competitive sports and the Scouts.
13. Egypt, which had been a province of the Ottoman empire since 1517, was occupied by the British in 1882, ostensibly with the intention to leave once European financial interests had been secured (they ended up staying for seventy years).
14. Early translations index physical culture's mode of circulation across the imperial social formation and show that its ideas, practices and objects were all of interest to the *effendiyya*. So, one may find expositions on the best use of weights for exercise alongside the biography of English strongman performer Eugen Sandow alongside Frenchman Edmond Demolins's widely disseminated assessment of British public school education (which included a rigorous programme of physical training) as the secret to their imperial success. See Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*, chapter 3.
15. This information was culled from the 'letters to the editor' and the magazine's own statements about its distribution. By 1937, *RB* had formal arrangements with agents in Luxor, Khartoum, Port Sudan, Mecca, Jaffa, Akka, Gaza, Damascus, Aleppo, Tripoli, Basra and Baghdad.
16. Wilson Chacko Jacob, 'Eventful Transformations: Al-Futuwwa between History and the Everyday', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49 (2007), pp. 689–712.
17. André Raymond, *Cairo*, tr. Willard Wood (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 324.
18. The author of the letter explicitly requested that Cupid, the mediator of this epistolary forum, only solicit advice on his problem from male readers of *Physical Culture*.
19. *RB*, March 1936, pp. 335–6.
20. *RB*, March 1936, p. 336.
21. Although unsatisfactory, one could speculate based on the reactions to analogous situations about the solutions readers may have offered A.Y.D. Answers would for the most part have been very pragmatic, in which A.Y.D. would have been told to move on, to forget the traitorous woman, to have his parents find him a proper partner, and to remain vigilant on his new path to good health and virtuous living.
22. These numbers indicate letters received; only a handful of letters were ever published. Even if the figures were highly inflated by the magazine's editors, the claims of the existence of an interested public with differing opinions about intimate issues in a stranger's life is not only intrinsically interesting but also points to an important aspect of the discursive constitution of 'the public'.
23. *RB*, May 1932, pp. 120–24.
24. *RB*, May 1931, p. 108.
25. *RB*, March 1936, p. 333.
26. This very same source has been read through its visual images of women as peddling soft-core porn in the guise of exercise and health. See Lucy Ryzova, '"I Am a Whore But I Will Be a Good Mother": On the Production and Consumption of the Female Body in Modern Egypt', *Arab Studies Journal* (2004/2005), pp. 80–122. While this may well have been true, and might indeed partially account for the longevity of the magazine, the textual evidence suggests a very different reality closer to its stated goals of promoting smart, modern and healthy sexuality. That said, if the male images were read along the same erotic lines, then there was a definite subversion of these stated goals and the ideology of heteronormativity. Nevertheless, these transgressive 'readings' would reinforce the point that norms of gender and sexuality needed to be reconstituted as a condition of possibility for a 'modern' Egyptian subject.
27. Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007). The publicity of private issues was not in itself new. Matters of sex and reproduction had been of central concern to Islamic society for over a millennium, as attested to in laws and customs surrounding gender roles, marriage and inheritance. What was new was the partial displacement of the regulation of sex and gender onto a reconstituted social body (in and for which laws were discerned by modern science) while paradoxically predicating the private individual as the condition of possibility for the social.
28. Other contributing medical experts included Dr Husayn 'Izzat, Dr Muhammad Kamil al-Khuli, Dr Muhammad Abd al-Hamid Bey, Dr Husayn al-Harawi and Dr Muhammad Shahin Pasha.

29. On the development of a mass culture during this period through popular magazines and cinema, see Walter Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
30. 'Sex Education: An Hour with Dr Fakhri Faraj, The Famous Doctor of Venereal Diseases', *RB*, May 1932, pp. 6–12.
31. Bruce Dunne discusses the role of the AUC and Faraj's lecture series in the dissemination of knowledge about sexual health as part of colonial and national efforts to 'civilize' Egyptians in chapter six of his thesis 'Sexuality and the "Civilizing Process" in Modern Egypt' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Georgetown University, 1996).
32. Fakhri Faraj, *al-Mar'a wa falsafat al-tanasuliyyat* (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-'Asriyya, 1924); Fakhri Faraj, *Taqrir 'an intishar al-bagha' wa al-amrad al-tanasuliyya bi al-qutr al-misri wa ba'd al-turuq al-mumkin itba'uha li- muharabatihima* (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-'Asriyya, 1924). I could not locate the following works by Fakhri Faraj: *al-Tanasul fi al-hayawan wa al-insan wa al-nabat; Hal tatasawi al-mar'a bi al-rajul fi al-huquq wa al-wajibat?; al-Amrad al-tanasuliyya wa 'ilajuha; al-Du'f al-tanasuli fi al-dhukur wa al-anath wa 'ilajuhu.*
33. Given the absence of much statistical data related to sexually transmitted diseases from this period, it is very difficult to corroborate this claim. Making it his life's work suggests at least that it was a major concern for Dr Faraj and not solely a rhetorical device.
34. *RB*, May 1932, p. 9.
35. Muhammad Fa'iq al-Jawhari, 'The Honourable Attack', *RB*, October 1932, pp. 4–5. Interestingly, criticism also seems to have been launched against the magazine from a third position that found the magazine's message of chastity puritanical and outdated. For a defence of their philosophy on sex education, see 'Girls and Diminished Morals', *RB*, February 1935, pp. 113–14. Essentially, the magazine maintained that knowledge about sex would encourage self-control, which was what distinguished humans from animals. An important component of their philosophy was the belief that there was a causative element to sex-knowledge and the outcome was ultimately empowerment.
36. This reading is supported by the magazine's inclusion of religious experts alongside the medical experts to opine on issues related to sexuality and the right to research and discuss them publicly. Another likely proposition is that the editor was manipulating religion just as interestedly as his opponents in order to enhance magazine sales that depended on 'sexual' content.
37. Fakhri Faraj, '[Part I] Why Women Have Revolted?' *RB*, December 1932, pp. 33–8; '[Part III] Motherhood and a Social and Intellectual Life', *RB*, February 1933, pp. 43–8; '[Part IV] The Duties and Rights of Women', March 1933, pp. 65–71. I was not able to obtain the January 1933 issue of *RB* and thus could not consult Part II of Dr Faraj's lecture.
38. *RB*, March 1933, pp. 65–71.
39. The gradual transformation of the law in the nineteenth century, from a hybrid of Islamic and western forms to one based predominantly on the Napoleonic Code, relegated 'religious' law to the domain of personal status issues. For the possible repercussions of voicing too loudly a call for equal inheritance rights, see Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 134.
40. For another angle on this problem, see Mukhtar al-Jawhari, 'Prostitution and the Problem of Orphans: How We Can Overcome [the Problems] through Proper Sex Education', *RB*, November 1932, pp. 6–9.
41. Hanan Kholoussy, 'Stolen Husbands and Foreign Wives: Mixed Marriage, Identity Formation, and Gender in Colonial Egypt, 1909–1923', *Hawwa* 1 (2003), pp. 206–40.
42. *RB*, August 1931, p. 122.
43. Forel's text was originally composed in German; Jirjis based his Arabic translation on an English edition by C. F. Marshall (which edition however is not clear). August Forel, *The Sexual Question: A Scientific, Psychological, Hygienic and Sociological Study*, tr. C. F. Marshall (1905; New York: Medical Art Agency, 1911). It may be noted that 1905 was also the year in which Sigmund Freud's first rendition of *The Theory of Sexuality* appeared.
44. *RB*, August 1931, p. 123.
45. *RB*, August 1931, p. 123.
46. On the science of population, see Omnia El Shakry, 'Barren Land and Fecund Bodies: The Emergence of Population Discourse in Interwar Egypt', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37 (2005), pp. 351–72. For a broad survey of the place of social science and its practitioners in discursively producing and practically managing Egypt, see Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). See also El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory.*

47. Dr Sabri Jirjis, 'On Politics and Political Economy', *RB*, March 1934, pp. 15–21.
48. Jirjis, 'On Politics and Political Economy', p. 15.
49. The major figure propounding Social Darwinism during this period was Salama Musa, whose work Jirjis must have read. See Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 128–41.
50. Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, pp. 20–21.
51. The use of the body as a social and political metaphor was of course already quite old by then. Its modern use to describe national communities in Egypt can be traced to at least as far back as Rifa'a Rafi' Tahtawi's *al-Murshid al-Amin lil-banat wa al-banin* [*The Trusted Guide for Boys and Girls*] (1872; Cairo: Supreme Council for Culture, 2002). One of the most explicit and extended treatments of the 'organic body' (*jism 'udwi*) as both a metaphor for and constitutive of modern society was Ahmad Amin's *al-Akhlaq* [*Morality*] (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa al-Tarjama wa al-Nashr, 1920).
52. This point is elaborated below. See Venus, 'The Wedding Night', *RB*, August 1932, pp. 81–4. Evidence of the *khawal* as a historically important figure on the Egyptian sexual landscape at the end of the nineteenth century appears in the memoirs of Ibrahim Fawzi. See Wilson Chacko Jacob, 'History and the Masculine Subject of Colonialism: The Egyptian Loss of the Sudan', in Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell (eds), *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 153–69.
53. For a survey of expanding state powers and the policing of sexuality from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, see Dunne, 'Sexuality and the "Civilizing Process"'. For a treatment of how the disavowal of sexual difference constituted an Arabic canon, see Massad, *Desiring Arabs*.
54. *RB*, March 1933, pp. 30–37.
55. On the complexity of sexual terminology in pre-modern and modern Arabic, see Everett Rowson, 'The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Arabic Vice Lists', in Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (eds), *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 50–79; Frédéric Lagrange, 'Male Homosexuality in Modern Arabic Literature', in Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb (eds), *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (London: Saqi Books, 2000), pp. 169–98.
56. *RB*, November 1933, pp. 14–22.
57. It is hard to tell whether Jirjis believed this or was 'simply' acting as a translator. These are Forel's words from *The Sexual Question*, p. 378.
58. 'Sexual Deviance', *RB*, October 1934, pp. 19–21.
59. *RB*, March 1935, pp. 18–21.
60. *RB*, November 1936, pp. 1008–09.
61. Dilip P. Gaonkar, 'On Alternative Modernities', in Dilip P. Gaonkar (ed.), *Alternative Modernities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 1–23.
62. The emergence of a discourse on monogamous marriage and the proper household has been traced to the 1870s, which tentatively can serve as the birth date for the ideology of bourgeois heteronormativity that silently subtended the physical culture discourse of the 1930s. See Kenneth M. Cuno, 'Ambiguous Modernization: The Transition to Monogamy in the Khedivial House of Egypt', and Mary Ann Fay, 'From Warrior-Grandees to Domesticated Bourgeoisie: The Transformation of the Elite Egyptian Household into a Western-style Nuclear Family', both in Beshara Doumani (ed.), *Family History in the Middle East: Household, Property, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 247–70, 77–97 respectively. See also Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing and Liberating Egypt, 1805–1923* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2005), p. 44.
63. Of course, in a sense, it was never the case anyway. The desire for a resolution to the instability surrounding the future of the *effendi* marked and formed the condition of possibility for new cultural productions such as *Physical Culture*. But locating the ambivalence in its discourse of gender and sexuality – that on the one hand acknowledged the deviance of Egyptians and on the other refused its colonial implications – is a critical move in their resignification.
64. This is from Afsaneh Najmabadi's formulation of how the standard narration of Iranian modernity as the simultaneous and conflicted struggle to secure cultural authenticity and progress figures gender exclusively within this tension – usually marked geographically between east and west – and consequently writes out the particularities of gender's ambiguity in Iran's 'pre-modern' history. In other words, histories of gender in Iranian modernity that leave untroubled the assumption of heterosexuality as a natural occurrence reproduces the 'historical erasure' of figures like the *mukhannas/amradnuma* and the *amrad*. Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 141.

65. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 28.
66. For a critique of Butler's theorisation of performativity from a slightly different perspective, see Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
67. For a brilliant new study that interrogates the colonial production of the human in modern law as a moment of rupture in Egyptian history, see Samera Esmeir, 'The Work of Law in the Age of Empire: Production of Humanity in Colonial Egypt' (unpublished doctoral thesis, New York University, 2005).
68. *RB*, August 1932, p. 82.
69. *RB*, August 1932, p. 84.
70. Lagrange, 'Male Homosexuality in Modern Arabic Literature', p. 197 *n*. 58.
71. Tahtawi, *al-Murshid al-amin*, p. 39. See also Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*; Khaled el-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
72. From a different context, Lisa Duggan has made a similar argument in terms of the subject of lesbianism. Lisa Duggan, 'The Trials of Alice Mitchell: Sensationalism, Sexology, and the Lesbian Subject in Turn-of-the-Century America', *Signs* 18 (1993), pp. 791–814.
73. Khaled Fahmy has insisted on the different dynamics involved in borrowing ideas and practices from Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century, when it was a less loaded question (personal communication with author). Samia Mehrez has noted the difficulties in the present of translating gender into Arabic by contrasting the ease with which *jins* (genus, ethnicity, and later sex and nationality) was directly borrowed from ancient Greek during the establishment of the Islamic empire. Samia Mehrez, 'Translating Gender', Keynote Address at 'Gendered Bodies, Transnational Politics: Modernities Reconsidered' Conference, American University in Cairo, 12–14 December 2003; an expanded version was published in the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 3/1 (2007), pp. 106–27.
74. Attempts to intervene positively in that discourse were subject to increasing repression from the late nineteenth century, accelerating in the 1930s. Indeed one of the first major book burnings organised by the Nazis targeted the collection of the Institute for Sexual Science, which had been established in Berlin in 1919 by Magnus Hirschfeld. Further highlighting the global dimension of the sexuality discourse during the interwar period, one of the anonymous reviewers of another version of this article noted that Hirschfeld visited Egypt during the winter of 1931–32 and delivered lectures at the AUC. I am grateful to the reviewer for drawing my attention to this fact.
75. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*.