

ARTICLE

# “Like Seeking out a Lost Friend”: Reconsidering “Pioneer” Arab Feminists and Their Networks as Part of a/the First Wave

Roxanne Douglas 

Lecturer in English Literary Studies, 1800 to Present (Education and Scholarship), University of Exeter, Queen’s Building, BG24, Faculty of Humanities, Art and Social Sciences, Exeter, EX4 4QH, UK.  
Email: [r.douglas@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:r.douglas@exeter.ac.uk)

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## Abstract

Contemporary Arab feminist writers such as Margot Badran and Mona Eltahawy describe their personal discovery of Arab “pioneers.” This label positions “pioneers” as exceptional figures, which untethers their legacy from contemporary Arab feminists, and from one another. Drawing on the Warwick Research Collective’s concept of “combined and uneven development,” this essay rethinks how we understand the first wave to account for the feminist histories in *al-mashreq*, and therefore reimagines the feminist wave model to account for waves of transmission, of emotion such as inspiration drawn from solidarity with other women. Through analysis of Anglophone scholarship and biographies, translated autobiographical writings of “pioneers,” and analysis of *L’Egyptienne* magazine, this article offers a new way of framing the work of “pioneer” feminists as part of a wide network of collaborators, and a wave of feminist activism that is locally and globally imbricated. This paper examines women’s journals and salons which contribute to a period of “invisible feminism” from 1860 to the early 1920s. The endeavors of three “pioneer” figures, Huda Sha’rawi (Egypt, 1879–1947), Anbara Salam Khalidi (Lebanon, 1897–1986), and May Ziadeh (Palestine/Lebanon, 1886–1941) are then discussed through the lens of their influential friendships with other women.

In the preface to *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the making of modern Egypt* (1995), Margot Badran recalls her personal discovery of early Egyptian feminist activist Huda Sha’rawi (Egypt, 1879–1947). After a friend mentioned Sha’rawi to her, Badran remarks that she had “no idea how to go about researching this feminist leader except by ‘asking around,’” as one would seek out a lost friend” (1995, ix). While many scholars in the Anglophone academy such as Marilyn Booth, Ellen Fleischmann, and miriam cooke have written in detail about Sha’rawi, Badran’s account is notable because her account signals the importance of women’s networks and friendships to the production of feminist histories beyond one “pioneer.” Badran recounts how, by “seeking out a lost

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friend,” she came across Sha’rawi’s “lifelong feminist associate Saiza Nabarawi” who became part of “a long chain ... many women unlocked their memories, shared their personal papers, and opened up their private libraries to me” (1995, ix). Sha’rawi was a founding member of the Egyptian Feminist Union (1923–), she founded the Egyptian feminist journal *L’Egyptienne* (1925–40), wrote many public lectures on women’s status in Egypt which were attended by European and Egyptian women, and in 1919 led Egyptian women in protest through the streets of British-occupied Cairo (Badran 1988, 13; Hatem 1992, 37). Sha’rawi is often discussed in the context of her 1923 public unveiling at Cairo train station after attending an International Woman Suffrage Alliance meeting in Rome (Eltahawy 2016, 33; Hanna 2017, 1). For some scholars, her unveiling marks a significant turning point for women’s public life in Egypt (Badran and cooke 1992, xviii; Badran 1995, 20; Hanna 2017, 1). But what led Sha’rawi to that moment?

Ellen Fleischmann points to the singularity of a figure such as Sha’rawi, who “unlike her more anonymous and unrecognised peers in other parts of the Middle East ... ultimately [embodies] the quintessential historic ‘pioneer’ of Middle Eastern feminism” (2018, 89). This singularity in the way we narrativize Levantine feminism, I argue, diverts our attention from the collaborations Sha’rawi had with other women, and does not acknowledge that her legacy is available to us now because of her interpersonal relationships and collaborations. More importantly, however, casting early Egyptian feminism as a series of discrete, individuated actors renders their activism not as something from which contemporary feminists might inherit praxis and identities, but instead positions figures like Sha’rawi as an exception, whose achievements cannot be replicated.<sup>1</sup> This has left generations of contemporary scholars, such as Badran, to independently rediscover figures like Sha’rawi.

This paper intervenes in how Anglophone feminist scholarship might rethink the “long chain” to which “pioneer” figures such as Sha’rawi might belong in local histories, and how this may also reframe our understanding of early Levantine feminism as part of a globalized awakening to women’s rights around the turn of the twentieth century. I open a reconsideration of how Western scholars usually periodize the first wave of feminism as the advent of US and British suffrage (Bailey 1997; Laughlin et al. 2010; Hewitt 2012), to instead develop a new first wave narrative which centres around a globalized, networked, awakening by integrating feminist analysis and a World Literary Systems theoretical approach. Fleischmann suggests that by the 1930s “a number of regional and international women’s conferences [were] attended by Middle Eastern women,” and that “during crises ... women from all over the [Middle East] region expressed solidarity and support for their ‘sisters’ through demonstrations, telegrams, and various protest actions” (2018, 97–98). Such a network suggests a global system of information exchange and solidarity that is rarely acknowledged as part of first wave feminist history, local or otherwise, which I argue has seen Sha’rawi and her contemporaries untethered from contemporary feminist efforts in the Levant which build on this legacy, and, indeed, draw from one another.

This article, through analysis of Anglophone scholarship, translated autobiographical writings of “pioneers,” and analysis of *L’Egyptienne*<sup>2</sup> (“The (female/feminine) Egyptian”) magazine, offers a new way of framing the work of “pioneer” feminists as part of a wider network of collaborators, and ultimately a wave of feminist activism that is locally and globally imbricated. Additionally, the materials and data that we might have on unknown or lesser known collaborators or activists that Fleischmann mentions are, by definition, scarcer. Therefore, I propose that a way of thinking through these archival gaps could be to adapt the feminist wave periodizing model to account for the

unaccountable: waves of emotions such as inspiration, and acts of friendship and solidarity. As Fleischmann points out, “a feminist consciousness or ‘awareness’ ... was not necessarily a preexisting [sic] condition ... Consciousness is developed through experience ... their very act of organizing—constituted feminism” (2018, 92). This paper therefore challenges the understanding that the first wave should be primarily defined by the success of the Western suffrage project by following Nancy A. Hewitt’s (2012) rethinking of feminist waves as waves of transmission akin to radio waves or oceanic waves, here by foregrounding waves of emotion, particularly of affection, inspiration, courage drawn from, and in solidarity with, other women.

This paper suggests that reconsidering the singularity of “pioneers” and how Western feminist scholarship periodizes the first wave are interconnected intellectual endeavors. The women’s journals and salons which emerge in a period of what Margot Badran and miriam cooke call “invisible feminism” from 1860 to the early 1920s are part of a network where women were encouraged by other women, both at home and internationally (1992, xxi). This paper reinstates Levantine feminism’s place as part of the global story of the first wave, showing that the international contact and solidarity between feminists represented a feminist encounter with globalization, and the flow of ideas through print media such as *L’Egyptienne* might be reconsidered through the lens of a “combined and uneven approach to feminist cultural capital” (WReC 2015, 7), which has consequently led to the erasure of the history of support between Occidental and Levantine first wave efforts. Then, this paper focuses this lens further to reinstate how individual “pioneers,” who had an eye to the global feminist awakening of this period, were themselves not isolated actors in their local contexts. The endeavors of three “pioneer” figures, Huda Sha’rawi (Egypt, 1879–1947), Anbara Salam Khalidi (Lebanon, 1897–1986), and May Ziadeh (Palestine/Lebanon, 1886–1941) are discussed here through the lens of their friendships and collaborations with other women: Sha’rawi’s friendship with Saiza Nabarawi<sup>3</sup> (Egypt, 1897–1985), Salam Khalidi’s with Julia Tu’ma Dimishqiyya (Lebanon, dates unknown), and May Ziadeh’s friendship with Bahithat al-Badiya<sup>4</sup> (1888–1918). Finally, I explore how feminists might reimagine the first wave if we included these histories of interpersonal and transnational feminist solidarity. In so doing, this paper honors and highlights the women’s networks which contributed to the “pioneering” efforts of individuals, to show that there was a collaborative wave of endeavor towards women’s emancipation in *al-mashreq* at the turn of the twentieth century that saw itself as in solidarity with Western feminisms, but was not an attempt to replicate these feminisms in their local contexts.

To do this, I am implementing a World Literary Systems analysis approach, informed by the Warwick Research Collective’s (WReC) *Combined and uneven development* (2015). The WReC argue that an approach which considers “combined and uneven development” of a global system “pushes intrinsically in the directions of commerce and commonality, linkage and connection, articulation and integration, network and system” (WReC 2015, 6). Here they are discussing questions of comparisons in literary studies by drawing attention to capitalism’s impact on writing, publishing, and translation, arguing that all literature can be understood as part of a singular, though unequal, system of modernity. This theory is not typically used to assess feminist histories, yet their reconsideration of the “coherence of the disciplinary object of study itself” (WReC 2015, 3) echoes feminist reconsiderations of wave periodization, and indeed discussions about the coherence of the term “feminism” itself (Bailey 1997; Scott 2002; Laughlin et al. 2010; Hewitt 2012). Using this frame offers a way to

approach feminist outputs such as conference attendance, activism and crucially writing—including letter writing and public correspondence—as part of a wider ecosystem of feminist activity at the turn of the twentieth century. Just as the WReC envision modernity as a “combined and uneven” outcome of capitalism and globalization (2015, 7), the outcome of women’s intellectual contact (through letters, journals and other publishing), and real contact through travel between the Levant and the West has been largely undertheorized as part of a whole system of feminist awakening at that time. What is more is that, according to the WReC, these analytical principles can be applied to “non-literary ... cultural forms” (2015, 6, 16). Here I include feminist writings and activism as such cultural forms; this model is especially useful when considering Egyptian women’s journals such as *L’Egyptienne*, which were circulated in a modernizing, globalizing print market. Likewise, the question of feminism is often tied up with questions of development, modernity, and westernization in parts of the Levant (Eltahawy 2016).

The impact of globalization on feminism, specifically in the Levant, requires further consideration in order to undo the idea that women and feminists in *al-mashreq* are hermetically sealed from Western feminist approaches, that they are so “other” that they could not possibly share points of contact in history or aspects of an approach to feminism with their Western counterparts. What the WReC’s approach offers to us is a way of seeing publications such as *L’Egyptienne* and instances of activism as part of a feminist encounter with modernity that, due to the knowledge and interactions that were available between Western and Levantine feminists, was part of a “world system,” whose inherent “inequality” has seen “pioneers” divorced from their local and international contemporaries alike (WReC 2015, 7), an approach which today frames Arab feminists as exceptionally “other” in the Western imagination. Indeed, Joumana Haddad once wrote an intervention to this, stating “we [Arab women] look a lot like you [the Western reader], and our lives are not that different from yours ... We look a lot like you, yet we are different ... Not because you’re an Occidental, and we are Oriental ... We are different, because all human beings on the face of this Earth are different” (2010, 18–19). This echoes the WReC’s understanding that “simultaneity” within a singular world system “does not preclude unevenness or marked difference” (2015, 14). It is from this analytical vantage point that I aim to recuperate a history of international exchange and collaboration during periods that we currently consider to be around the first wave of feminism. Marilyn Booth argues that “we can further destabilise paradigms of antinomy by looking at lateral relationships and connections across borders, ways that modes of resistance were mutually constitutive or inspiring, an ethos of *conversation* ... seeing ‘Europe’ not always as a model yet often as a talking point relevant to local debates in complicated ways” (2019, 187; emphasis in original). This paper will highlight interpersonal, local, and international networks in the history of Levantine feminism in order to situate them properly in an account of a global feminist awakening at the turn of the twentieth century, or the first wave, not as a copy of feminist approaches from the West, but as agential collaborators within a pluralized “combined and uneven” first wave (WReC 2015, 6).

At present, figures such as Sha’rawi, Salam Khalidi, and Ziadeh are discussed as “pioneers” or as being “pioneering” (El Saadawi 1980, 169; Ahmed 1982, 161; Badran 1988, 11; cooke 1986, 212; Hatem 1992, 40). In 1977, in the second issue of *Al-Raida*,<sup>5</sup> Ziadeh was profiled as a “Woman pioneer writer” (Ghurayyib 1977, 3). *Al-Raida*’s title itself means “the pioneer,” and its earliest issues had a section on “pioneers” which featured profiles of early feminist figures (Ghurayyib 1977; *Al-Raida Journal* 1978; Stephan 1983). Ziadeh was profiled in Lebanon’s *Al-Raida* and American journal *Signs* at

around the same time (1977 and 1979, respectively, both pieces by Rose Ghurayyib).<sup>6</sup> Although they were courageous and ground-breaking, I argue that the exceptional status of “pioneers” separates them from other women and from other feminists and feminist techniques, including collaboration. It should be noted that this paper does not reject the self-determination that Arab feminism has “pioneers” in favor of first wave terminology. Rather, I am proposing that the wave model is one way of conceptualizing how “pioneering” women belong to a complexly constituted movement of collaboration on national and international scales, thus we must pursue the question of the Western wave model and “pioneer” exceptionalism at the same time.

## Contexts

This paper focuses on parts of *al-mashreq* region—namely Egypt, Palestine, and Lebanon, sometimes referred to as “Levantine” areas—and focuses on the feminist activities of upper- and middle-class women, such as lectures, interpersonal correspondence, journal writing, and conference participation. Mervat Hatem points out that the pioneers of Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt, although from not a homogeneous culture, were “actively involved in the ongoing debates” about women’s position in society together since there were many Lebanese and Palestinian women who had “settled in Egypt” (1992, 37). Likewise, Fruma Zachs has written on the contributions of Syrian and Lebanese women in the establishment of women’s magazines in Egypt (2014). These sites within *al-mashreq* have been selected due to their geographical and political proximity.<sup>7</sup> Further, *L’Egyptienne*, the Egyptian women’s journal founded by Sha’rawi and edited by Nabarawi, regularly printed a section titled “Echos d’Orient” (“Echoes of the Orient”) which detailed the achievements of women across *al-mashreq* and the Global South.

In the October 1929 issue, this section describes “un exemple encourageant” (“an encouraging example”) in one Madame Ehsan Ahmed el Koussi, a Syrian woman who was one of the founding members of the Egyptian Feminist Union, who completed her degree at the American University in Beirut in Lebanon. The bulletin describes feelings of “joie et de fierté qu’elle est la première musulmane orientale qui ait eu le courage d’entrer dans une Université” (“joy and pride as she is the first Eastern Muslim woman who had the courage to enter a University”) (*L’Egyptienne* 1929, 48). The article goes on to describe how the leaders of the Syrian feminist movement wanted to acknowledge el Koussi’s achievement, as well as an emotive sense of solidarity with Syrian feminists, referring to “nos sœurs et nos frères syriens” (“our Syrian sisters and brothers”) (*L’Egyptienne* 1929, 48). This bulletin also describes how the Egyptian Feminist Union “est spécialement émue de toutes ces marques de solidarité orientale et féminine et remercie chaleureusement les associations féministes de Syrie” (“is especially moved by all these marks of oriental and feminine solidarity and warmly thanks the feminist associations of Syria”) (*L’Egyptienne*, 1929, 48). It is clear that the editorial team, the Egyptian Feminist Union, and possibly the readers of *L’Egyptienne* saw their own fights for political participation and equality as encouraged by the feminists and feminist activities of other places, including nearby parts of *al-mashreq*.

It is worth briefly pausing here to clarify what “feminism” means in a variety of cultural and linguistic contexts. To remain with Sha’rawi as an example, she spoke French as her “social language”, but she also spoke Turkish and Arabic (Badran 1987, 1). According to Badran “*Nisa’i/yah* is an ambiguous term in Arabic that can signify

anything pertaining to women; sometimes it denotes ‘feminist’ and sometimes ‘feminine.’ The term *féminisme* was originally coined in France in the 1880s but was not widely used until the early 1890s, after it had come into use as ‘feminism’ in England” and that by 1920 “nisa’i began to be used to signify ‘feminist’ in Egypt” (1995, 19).

It seems that even the history of the term “feminism” across language traditions is shaped by a world system, that between the 1880s and 1920s women’s claim for “modernity” operated on a “singular” but “uneven” global system of information exchange (WReC 2015, 7). According to Badran and cooke, “a term connotating feminism first appeared in the Arab world in 1909 when ... Bahithat al-Badiya ... published a collection of articles and speeches in a book entitled *Al-Nisayat* ... *nisaiyat*, conventionally signifies something by or about women” (1992, xvii). Conversely, Marilyn Booth suggests that “the first airing of the word *féminisme* publicly and in print in Egypt” was via a lecture series by French woman A. Coureur at the university of Cairo around 1909, which was later printed in 1910 (2019, 183–84). In any case, “by 1923, Egyptian women belonging to the Egyptian Feminist Union began to use the term, *nisai*, unambiguously as feminist,” yet Badran and cooke acknowledge that “in Arabic *nisai* remains ambiguous and is clarified only by context. To this day there is no unambiguous term for feminist in Arabic” (1992, xvii). Contemporary feminist scholars such as Jean Said Makdisi still grapple with this in modern discussions (2014). However, this is not to say that the “pioneers” and their peers did not understand their own struggles as distinctly feminist: in French-language publication *L’Egyptienne* the term “*féministe*” is used regularly throughout its 1925 to 1940 run.

Yet, Sha’rawi and Nabarawi’s use of French is not without complication, being the language of colonial forces. In a 1929 article for *L’Egyptienne*, Nabarawi reports that when she and other Egyptian feminists, including Sha’rawi, attended an international feminist conference in Berlin, they were “reproché de faire paraître ‘L’Egyptienne’ en français au lieu de la publier [sic] dans notre propre langue” (“reproached for making *L’Egyptienne* appear in French instead of publishing it in our own language”) (1929b, 6). To this, Nabarawi reports that she and Sha’rawi drew attention to the number of high-quality Arabic-language publications in Egypt, retorting that none of them had reached wide European circulation. Nevertheless, Nabarawi highlights that this criticism took place during “une époque où l’interpénétration des peuples est la base de leurs rapports amicaux” (“a time when the interpenetration of peoples is the basis of their friendly relations”), and that therefore “il était tout à fait nécessaire que la voix de l’Egypte se fit entendre par l’intermédiaire de ses véritables enfants” (“it was absolutely necessary that the voice of Egypt was heard through the intermediary of its true children”) (1929b, 6). Nabarawi was relaying to the readership of *L’Egyptienne* that publishing in French offered “utile propagande” (“useful propaganda”) which helped to foster solidarity with their European “sisters.” Likewise, Booth proposes that

in the years when the term [“feminism”] was becoming familiar to readers in Europe and North America, *féminisme* was part of a shared cosmopolitan lexicon for French and Egyptian elites “in conversation” in Cairo even if this was, to use Shu-mei Shih’s term, an “asymmetrical cosmopolitanism.” (2019, 184)

This is to say that the language of feminism at the turn of the century belongs to the middle- and upper-classes in *al-mashreq*, due of course to colonial histories which rendered French an “elite” language, but also exemplifies the WReC’s theorization of

“combined and uneven” international exchange through centers of economic and social power (2015, 6).

Of this, Joan Scott argues that our understanding of feminism as “global/local, even with those two-way directional arrows, doesn’t quite capture it. There may be a recognizable core of meaning, but feminism (like any such concept) needs to be understood as if in translation” (2002, 11). This does not mean that feminism in *al-mashreq* is a translation of Western feminism, but rather this paper posits the opposite: that these were feminists in *al-mashreq* who saw themselves and their struggles “reverberated,” as Scott would put it, in the struggles of other nations.<sup>8</sup> “Feminism,” although Euro-Anglo in its linguistic roots, even in its emergent stages, has never been a concept that solely belongs to Western women.

### On waves

Badran notes that “it is also illuminating to open the analytic lens to view feminism through a wide angle, consciously blurring internal distinctions across various divides such as those of class and ethnicity to see the wider culture of feminism” (1995, 20). This paper is an attempt to open up what the “pioneers” illuminate how we periodize and narrate first wave feminism if we account for “reverberations” such as international communication, solidarity, and shared endeavor. Mona Eltahawy, an Egyptian feminist journalist who publishes in English and Arabic, points out that Egyptian feminism was “not imported from the ‘West’, as opponents of women’s rights sometimes claim. There was Huda Shaarawi, a feminist who launched Egypt’s women’s rights movement and who publicly removed her face veil” (2016, 20). Eltahawy also lists Doria Shafik (1908–75) and Nawal El Saadawi (1931–2021), claiming that “they gave me a new language to describe what I was seeing all around me” (2016, 21). The use of the term “first wave” in this paper is an offering to the critical language that Eltahawy describes here.

Historians typically understand the first wave as the period in which there were organized efforts to win (white) women the vote, primarily defined through efforts in the US and Britain from around the 1880s to the 1920s (Dulan 1996, 350; Laughlin et al. 2010, 76; Hewitt 2012, 658; Reger 2017, 194). Challenges that feminist historians have made to the wave model of periodization rightly include how it erases women of color from feminist narratives, as well as problematizing how the wave “metaphor ... entrenches the notion that feminist politics only occurs in dramatic waves of revolutionary activism,” which I would argue is also a foible of the “pioneer” model (Laughlin et al. 2010, 77). The wave model is long overdue a methodological overhaul that retains its useful aspects, such as being a way of summarizing a legacy of feminism, but should be opened up to reassess “international reverberations” (Scott 2002, 12–13), by opening “the analytic lens to view feminism through a wide angle” (Badran 1995, 20).

This paper recharacterizes the first wave to include geopolitical sites where feminists were grappling with different kinds of questions about statehood, citizenship, and tradition. If such efforts were to be understood as a constituent part of a globalized first wave, and if the elites of *al-mashreq* have their own first wave awakenings, then we can decolonize the notion that feminism “belongs” to the West and was exported elsewhere, especially in examples where Levantine women saw their own struggles as part of a globalized movement for peace and women’s liberation. An example of this understanding can be found in Nabarawi’s reportage of the 1926 International Suffrage Alliance conference held in Paris: she describes how the delegates gathered under “la

cause commune” (“the common cause”) of feminism, and specifically “dans le but d’aider les femmes françaises à obtenir le droit de suffrage” (“with the aim of helping French women to obtain the right to suffrage” (Nabaraoui 1926b, 165). It is clear that Nabarawi saw her own efforts as contemporaneous with, though not identical to, the struggles of first wave French feminists, and clearly did not see her own feminism as a tutee of her French counterparts, but indeed that she was there to actively assist them in the attainment of their rights. Nabarawi saw herself and her feminism as in agential collaboration with her French “sisters.”

Likewise, Sha’rawi, in an address to this congress, notes her happiness that “femmes d’Egypte, prendre part à la plus noble et la plus imposante des manifestations féminines pour l’égalité des droits” (“we, women of Egypt, take part in the noblest and most imposing women’s demonstration for equal rights”) in aiding “nos sœurs de France” (“our French sisters”) in obtaining suffrage (Nabaraoui 1926a, 187). Sha’rawi and Nabarawi in no uncertain terms express their solidarity with, and call for support from, their European counterparts. Nabarawi’s calls for support from the Alliance were not explicitly concerned with suffrage, but rather a woman’s rights within marriage and divorce as they saw their route to citizenship and emancipation as different to that of their European sisters (Nabaraoui 1926a, 190). Therefore, encoding “pioneer” *al-mashreq* feminism as part of a first wave of feminism must strike a careful balance between its place as a constituent part of the global feminist struggle—where women did indeed have international contact with one another, as well as relate to and aid in one another’s successes and struggles—as well as encoding its differences within a “combined and uneven” modernizing world (WReC 2015, 6).

Hewitt argues that the feminist wave model is flawed due to the habitual erasure of the feminist struggles of women of color, and suggests that “our best strategy then ... may be to recast the concept of waves itself in order to recognize the multiple and conflicting elements that comprise particular periods of activism,” and suggests that “radio waves provide a useful model” (2012, 659). Hewitt writes that “if we imagine the lecturers, organizers, writers, newspapers ... and so on as transmitters, then it is possible to expand significantly the richness and complexity of each phase of feminism” (Hewitt 2012, 660). Likewise Olga Castro and Emek Ergun point out that highlighting the plural and intersectional understandings of feminism in translation studies allows for greater understandings of

the interlocking nature of local and global systems of oppression, as well as the cross-border interdependence of discourses and movements of resistance against oppression. In doing so, it distances itself from a narrow, fixed understanding of feminism that is based solely on (Eurocentric or west-centric) gender politics, expanding feminisms’ political and epistemic agenda to a more inclusive and “holistic” agenda of justice and equality. (2017, 2)

What we might call the first wave of feminism in *al-mashreq* comprised a number of these kinds of transmission activities, such as literary salons, letter writing, journalism, lectures, and women’s organizations, all of which built a sense of feminist solidarity locally and internationally which, crucially, may have encouraged and emboldened individual “pioneers.” At the same time, Booth points out that there were “not only overt translations but also works rooted in Arabic writerly traditions translated concepts and rhetorics of European provenance into local debates” (2019, 188). Feminists in *al-mashreq* engaged with feminist struggles in the West, not as an opposition, but as



a constituent part of the global struggle for women's place in political life, which they "transmitted" back through internationally recognised journals such as *L'Egyptienne* and participation in international conferences.

The ebbs and flows available in the oceanic waves metaphor or the radio waves metaphor aligns with the way scholars such as Fleischmann engage with Middle Eastern feminist histories, using similar terms to describe "stages overlapping, coinciding, preceding, and following one another, at times obscuring the demarcation among" women's movements (2018, 96). Baron bemoans that a "preoccupation with tracing the origins of feminism, however broadly defined, has led to an approach which treats the idea like a baton, passing from one thinker to the next" (1994, 4). On the one hand, this does suggest a linearity of progress which no feminist movement has ever enjoyed, however, the question of continued legacy is also important. For instance, Eltahawy discusses how she sees advice that she got from the late Nawal El Saadawi that she in turn got from her grandmother, as a "baton": that "I did not understand the magnitude of what she was gifting me: a baton passed from an Egyptian woman who was born in the 1800s to Nawal who was born in 1931 who then passed it to me, who was born in 1967" (2021). Eltahawy's sense of feminist inheritance echoes Badran's personal discovery of Sha'rawi. If theorized using radio or oceanic waves as Hewitt suggests, the wave model could help consolidate a sense of lineage with crosscurrents of familiarity and solidarity, of overlap and inspiration, without rigidity.

Identifying first wave *al-mashreq* feminism as a narrative of fluid inheritance is important because it is not just the purview of scholarship, but it is often revisited in creative, and especially (auto)biographical, works. For instance, Said Makdisi in her intergenerational autobiography *Teta, mother and me* (2005) traces her grandmother's and her mother's lives alongside her own. Said Makdisi comes to discover her female predecessors', and by turns her own, place in history and details much of what I call *al-mashreq's* first wave in the biography's pages (2005, 205–12, 282–85). She imaginatively links her own family to Sha'rawi's activism, that her "Auntie Emilia established her connection with Huda Shaarawi [sic]," but Said Makdisi is uncertain if "she was one of those women who participated in the famous marches through the streets of Cairo in defiance of the armed British soldiers. Somehow I feel she must have been" (2005, 205). While Said Makdisi's family connections to these events and figures may be uncertain, it is important to note that Said Makdisi holds an emotive, intuitive connection to such a history, and her ability to "feel" such a history fills an archival gap using emotion (2005, 205). Said Makdisi also integrates stories from Salam Khalidi and Sha'rawi's education to imagine what her grandmother's education may have been like, locating her own heritage as parallel to "pioneering" women, outright stating that "I have come to recognize that I have inherited my notion of womanhood as much from Huda Shaarawi, Anbara Salam, Julia Tohmeh ... as I have from my grandmother" (2005, 209–10, 212). The wave model here, I propose, is one way of exploring this kind of feminist heritage in *al-mashreq* feminism: Laughlin et al. point out that "the homogeneous, univocal wave does not exist in nature. Up close, the ocean is full of cross-currents and eddies ... it is hard to separate one wave from another" (2010, 87). If used carefully, the wave metaphor opens up analysis of *al-mashreq* feminist histories to acknowledge and theorize how writers such as Said Makdisi reach back, that there is a sense of fluidity between personal histories with broader feminist ones, that there are indeed overlaps and unseen undercurrents, which in turn remind us to conceptualize these personal, emotive histories as a constituent part of wider feminist wave narratives.

Offering “first wave” as a conceptual term in the discussion of feminism in *al-mashreq* is an attempt to emphasize the “diversity, heterogeneity, and multiplicity of women’s activism” throughout history and across contexts (Laughlin et al. 2010, 87). Fleischmann notes how “women in each Middle Eastern society that experienced this phenomenon [an organised women’s movement, usually around the 1920s] perceived their efforts as part of a broader whole, however ill-defined,” going on to say that “the emergence of women’s movement in the Middle East during this period was not an isolated occurrence but was part of a broader global phenomenon in almost all parts of the world, including India, the United States, Europe, Latin America, and parts of Africa and Asia” (2018, 97). Fleischmann offers the term “Awakening” to describe the initial throes of Middle Eastern women’s movements (2018, 96–97). However, for the purposes of this discussion, which is concerned with social relationships between women and how these defined the activities of the “pioneers,” the wave metaphor allows us to consider the disparate and diverse nature of feminist interventions in *al-mashreq*, but also how they may share crosscurrents with other histories.

I will now explore how women’s salons and journals can be understood through the lens of friendship, encouragement, emotion, and solidarity. This foregrounds my examination of the three pairs of friends and collaborators, to highlight the role of the network and solidarity to first wave *mashreq* feminism. Finally, I consider the legacy of these networks and friendships, and the implications of this for future study.

### A first wave network: lectures, salons, and journals

Badran and cooke characterize the period of the “1860s to the early 1920s” as “the evolution of ‘invisible feminism’ ... by middle and upper class women” (1992, xxi). However, I take issue with the term “invisible feminism”: invisible to whom? Feminist collaborations took place in women’s spaces—albeit in private due to a gender segregated society—such as salons and lectures, and women’s networks through journals and other writings. Booth details an early example of this, where Hanna Kasbani Kurani (1870–98) and Zaynab Fawwaz (c.1850–1914), held a “heated exchange” in the summer of 1892 on the topic of women and politics, in response to the women’s suffrage debates happening at the same time in England (2019, 189). Badran writes that Kawrani “attacked women’s suffrage, then being debated in England, in the newspaper *Lubnan* (‘Lebanon’), Fawwaz responded, upholding women’s struggle for political rights in *Jaridat al-Nil* (‘The newspaper of the Nile’) in 1892” (1995, 15). This was more than “two women [who] battled in the press on opposing sides of the issue” as Fleischmann argues (2018, 98), but the debate happens in the “transmission” sites of newspapers. This public exchange may have, at least in part, inspired Hind Nawfal to set up *al-Fatat*, in which both would go on to publish, as a venue for such debates that same year. Early *mashreq* feminists were at the very least were visible to one another through media such as women’s journals.

Badran describes that through her discovery of Sha’rawi that she “discovered a cache of women’s magazines and newspapers from the 1890s” in the Dar al-Katub (the Egyptian National Library) (1995, ix). First wave emancipatory efforts in *al-mashreq*, in its alleged “invisibility,” took the shape of consciousness raising through writing and women’s spaces.<sup>9</sup> Bouthaina Shaaban argues that, although “little record remains of these societies and activities ... we cannot doubt the closeness of the connection between women’s writing and the beginnings of women’s organizing” (2003, 11). Likewise, Badran argues that

we know [feminism] was underway in the last third of the nineteenth century, if not before, from women themselves, from their memoirs, the journals they founded and to which they contributed, their books and oral histories. Women had already been engaged in their feminist exploration for at least a decade when Qasim Amin's book, *Tahrir al-mar'a* (The Liberation of the Woman) commonly credited with the start of feminism in Egypt was published in 1899. (1988, 12)

Therefore, briefly sketching the network of journals, letter writing, as well as salons and lectures here is crucial to understanding that the first wave in *al-mashreq* was built on women's relationships with one another.

To move away from Egypt, according to Akram F. Khater in Lebanon, "women's names did not appear on books or articles. We have no record of women making any public speeches or demanding a greater role for women within society" before the 1890s (2001, 148). However, Khater does not discuss the semi-public lectures that were possible in salons. For example, "the intellectual Salma Salameh (1883–1949) ... opened her salon in the city of Zahleh, Lebanon. She was the first woman from Homs to ... address a general audience" (Mardini 2003, 12). *Al-nahdah*, the nineteenth-century period of intellectual reform in *al-mashreq*, saw the rise of literary salons:

women were not able to frequent coffee shops to sit openly with men and debate ideas ... so they opted instead to open their own homes to the writers and intellectuals of their time ... they were able to choose their own guests and direct the topics of conversation and debate. (Mardini 2003, 12)

Women's salons would take place in private homes, where women had already been "deriving strength from bonds with other women, they found ways to subvert the system that denied them access to education and intellectual society," and thus began "forming their own literary societies and establishing salons and journals" (Zeidan 1995, 5). According to Badran and cooke, "books produced by middle- and upper-class women ... were circulated in harems and in women's journals" (1992, xxi), representing a double opportunity for "transmission" and the exchange of ideas by women present in the room and those much further away.

According to Mardini, "the tradition of literary salons in Syria started with the return of Mariana Mrash (1848–1919) from her travels abroad," specifically she "based her salon on the models she had seen during her repeated travels to Europe" (2003, 12). Europeans in Egypt also hosted women's spaces to which Sha'rawi and Ziadeh were connected:

by the 1890s in Egypt, Eugenie Le Brun Rushdi, a Frenchwoman who had married an upper-class Egyptian ... held a salon which served as a forum for upper class women to meet ... The women's salon of the 1890s paved the way for other collective intellectual activities such as women's lectures. In 1914, Huda Shaarawi, supported by princesses of the Egyptian royal family, spearheaded the founding of the Intellectual Association of Egyptian Women. May Ziyada was a member. (Badran and cooke 1992, xxx)

Such "invisible" networks also took place in the literary realm through journals, "transcending the highly segregated and secluded world of the nineteenth century that even cut women off from each other" (Badran and cooke 1992, xxix).

There is a rich history of feminist journal writing and publication in *al-mashreq*, preceding women's organizations and lecture series where women would meet in person:

between 1892 and 1940, Arab women writers concentrated their efforts on printing their own journals, in which they published poetry, fiction, and criticism, as well as essays aimed at promoting women's role in society. Any assessment of Arab (or, for that matter, global) women's literature cannot be done without evaluating the Arab women's press. (Shaaban 2003, 10)

Fleischmann details how women's publications appeared "first in Egypt and Turkey and then in Iran and Syria," including the aforementioned first Egyptian periodical "*The Young Woman (al-Fatah)*, founded by Hind Nawfal in Alexandria in 1892 ... Damascene Mary Ajami founded *The Bride (al-'Arus)* in 1910; Lebanon's first women's journal was *Girl of Lebanon (Fatat Lubnan)*, introduced by Salima Abi Rashid in 1914" (2018, 101). This is of course followed by Sha'rawi's *L'Egyptienne* in 1925. First wave feminism of *al-mashreq* developed networks from these journals: Fleischmann points out that "the press in the Middle East played a major role in facilitating communication and the spread of information through its coverage of the activities of the different women's movements throughout the region, as well as feminist movements elsewhere" (2018, 98). Shaaban details how "articles about the position of European, American, Chinese, Indonesian, and Indian women appeared regularly ... as well as biographies of great women, both European and Arab ... Most of these articles stressed the necessity to benefit from the experiences of other women without losing sight of Arab history, culture, and religion" (2003, 11). Shaaban's observations suggest that, in its early iterations, feminism in *al-mashreq* was indeed not imported from the West, but that women saw themselves as sharing some struggles with their Western contemporaries, which they heard about and discussed in their own press.

Lectures hosted by European and Levantine women, salons where women could openly discuss their position in society, and journal publications all demonstrate that the first wave in *al-mashreq* was about women sharing knowledge and ideas with one another. To return to Booth, she reflects:

Couvreur in Egypt, *féminisme* in 1909 Cairo: "translations" that remind us how prevalent the tendency has been to think feminisms through or from Europe and in its languages; to think of feminism as always elsewhere, borrowed or ever belated, rather than as coevally produced across locales, in the sense of "coeval" established by Johannes Fabian—that is, as a recognition of existing and communicating in a shared time-space, a refusal to countenance the imperial notion of belatedness in a doctrine of civilisationally differential "progress", a notion of contemporaneity that recognises difference but does not hierarchise it. (Booth 2019, 185)

This, I would argue, positions early feminists of *al-mashreq* simultaneously as a specific localized first wave, which we can use to constitute how we might understand a global first wave. This recognition of common goals between Arab and Western feminism may be what led Sha'rawi to participate in the International Women's Suffrage Alliance in Rome in 1923.

### Huda Sha'rawi and Saiza Nabarawi

Much is made of Sha'rawi's public unveiling when she returned from Rome, that it "represented a symbolic and pragmatic announcement of the rejection of a whole way of life built on hiding and silencing women" (Badran and cooke 1992, xviii). However, her feminist consciousness, exemplified by a radical act, did not emerge spontaneously. Nor did Sha'rawi's feminist consciousness emerge solely from the meeting in Rome. Sha'rawi's feminism was emboldened over a number of years and experiences, such as her nationalist activism against British rule in Egypt, having already broken harem convention when she led middle- and upper-class women through the streets of Cairo to march in protest against the British in 1919 (Ahmed 1982, 160). In early 1922, Sha'rawi "opened her house to a mass meeting of women" to oppose British rule: The groups that emerged from this salon were instrumental in the boycott of British goods and services (Sha'rawi 1987, 125). Indeed, "the women used their own networks to execute their economic boycott" (Sha'rawi 1987, 125). It is important to understand that Sha'rawi, although a prominent figure, was not a lone actor.

Having established a network of women who were active in Egyptian politics, in 1923 she attended the International Women's Suffrage Alliance meeting with Nabaawiyya Musa and Saiza Nabarawi as delegates of the Egyptian Women's Union. Nabarawi removed her veil alongside Sha'rawi at Cairo train station.<sup>10</sup> Although Nabarawi is often only briefly mentioned in scholarship, and sometimes not at all, one wonders if Sha'rawi would have had the courage to unveil without her friend by her side? This question is not meant to undermine Sha'rawi's convictions, but rather to highlight the importance of women's solidarity in activism and feminist histories: how are we to know that Sha'rawi's act was emboldened by her time in Rome (as is sometimes implied), but not by the assurance of friendship in that moment, that Sha'rawi and Nabarawi were taking a risk in public, made possible because they did so together? The wave of excitement, adrenaline, and perhaps even fear that Sha'rawi and Nabarawi may have felt at that moment may have been assuaged by their encouragement of and solidarity with one another. After this, the two women continued to collaborate: Sha'rawi founded feminist journal *L'Egyptienne*, and Nabarawi edited it for its entire 1925 to 1940 run. As well as attending "international feminist conferences, [she] spoke widely and campaigned tirelessly for women's liberation, national liberation and peace until her death" (Badran and cooke 1992, 279). Badran, in the epilogue to her translation of Sha'rawi's autobiography, discusses the slow process of entering public life for Sha'rawi and Nabarawi, who pushed boundaries together such as attending parties unchaperoned.

Their "transmitter" to other women in *L'Egyptienne* was characterized by a sense of solidarity: from terms like "nos sœurs" ("our sisters") used regularly, alongside "mes chers confrères" ("my dear colleagues") when addressing international audiences (Nabaraoui 1929a, 31), to the inside of every issue's front cover ("Hors-texte") containing a portrait and short profile of people who were inspirational to *L'Egyptienne*'s readership, such as British suffragette Margery Corbett Ashby (1882–1981) in the July 1926 issue. The waves of encouragement between one another and their time in Rome is perhaps reflected in Sha'rawi's own reflections upon the magazine's fourth anniversary, noting how *L'Egyptienne* has been "encouragée et appréciée du monde entier" ("encouraged and appreciated the world over") (1929, 2). She also takes the opportunity to name and thank friends and collaborators, including Nabarawi:

Aussi je profite de l'occasion qui se présente pour rendre un hommage reconnaissant, et ému à la clairvoyante sagacité et l'énergique activité de notre charmante

rédaCTRICE en chef Mlle Céza Nabaraoui, ainsi qu'à la haute capacité et au dévouement sans borne de notre chère et fidèle aime notre collaboratrice Mlle Jeanne Marquès. Enfin, à l'aimable concours de tons nos collaborateurs qui depuis la fondation de la revue ne nous ont jamais abandonnées.

(I take the opportunity that presents itself to pay a grateful and moved tribute to the far-sighted sagacity and energetic activity of our charming editor-in-chief Mlle Céza Nabaraoui, as well as to the high capacity and to the boundless dedication of our dear and faithful friend our collaborator Mlle Jeanne Marquès. Finally, [*L'Égyptienne*] has the kind assistance of all our collaborators who since the founding of the journal have never abandoned us.) (1929, 2)

Sha'rawi speaks highly of Nabarawi publicly, describing her as wise and charming. In public outputs such as these, the role of admiration, collaboration, and friendship is evident, and one wonders if this reflects the values and non-memorialized forces which encouraged Sha'rawi on that oft-cited day at Cairo station.

### Anbara Salam Khalidi and Julia Tu'ma Dimishqiyya

Anbara Salam Khalidi (1897–1986) was a champion of the women's movement and girls' education in Lebanon and Palestine in the early twentieth century. Like many others of her class she was multilingual and well-travelled, having studied in England in the mid-1920s. Salam Khalidi, like Sha'rawi before her, publicly unveiled in 1928 when giving a lecture at an event in celebration of Professor 'Abdullah al-Bustani's teaching career. Salam Khalidi's courage to subvert patriarchal norms, like Sha'rawi's, did not emerge spontaneously at this event. She had already written numerous articles in Lebanese newspapers calling for women's emancipation, and "in March 1914 Anbara Salam and a group of enthusiastic young women formed one of the first Arab Women's Associations ... to encourage bright school-girls to continue their higher education" (Stephan 1983, 2). She was also a member of the Union of Arab Women, and like Sha'rawi, her feminism was rooted in her nationalism (Stephan 1983, 3). She was an organizer for the "first Women's Conference held in Beirut from April 18–20, 1928", which she describes as the beginning of "feminist conferences" in Lebanon (Salam Khalidi 1978, 117). Whether through personal friendships or formal women's organisations, it is clear that Salam Khalidi was encouraged and emboldened by other women, and in turn herself facilitated women's spaces. In her autobiography, Salam Khalidi describes how she was influenced by a (quite mysterious) letter that she received when she was 15, "asking me to join the movement for women's liberation ... I felt honored by that invitation and felt I had a responsibility to serve the cause of women" (Salam Khalidi 1978, 45). Whether this episode is a real memory, or an invention to narrativize her feminist awakening, Salam Khalidi credits her induction to the women's movement to other women, alongside an emotive sense of camaraderie.

She is later particularly inspired by her teacher Julia Tu'ma Dimishqiyya.<sup>11</sup> Salam Khalidi describes Tu'ma Dimishqiyya, her "teacher and friend," as a "pioneer" (1978, 118). Tu'ma Dimishqiyya was a champion of women's education in Lebanon and Palestine, and Salam Khalidi makes frequent and fond reference to her throughout her recollections of her early life in her autobiography, including how Tu'ma Dimishqiyya founded *al-nahda al-nisa'iyya* magazine.<sup>12</sup> According to Said Makdisi, this magazine founded in 1924 alongside Ibtihaj Qaddura, was "radical even from

today's feminist perspective" (2005, 284). Tu'ma Dimishqiyya fostered private and public women's and spaces, as well as publicly debating the status of women in Lebanese society in her writing. Salam Khalidi writes warmly of her, that "she was instrumental in founding the Union of Lebanese Women, and rented a clubhouse which was the meeting place for all women's societies that had no meeting place of their own," in addition to hosting literary and social gatherings (1978, 118–19). It is clear that her efforts to lead a public life, her calls for women's emancipation, and her tutelage doubtless encouraged and emboldened Salam Khalidi.

Wafa Stephan remarks that Salam Khalidi's autobiography "abounds with stories about her friendships with outstanding women" (1983, 3). Salam Khalidi enthusiastically describes the efforts and literary talents of a number of her other friends in her autobiography (1978, 119–22). Salam Khalidi much admires each woman's personal "tenderness" alongside their artistic and intellectual achievements: Of Salma Sayigh (1889–1953), for example, she writes that she was "like ... a caring mother" (1978, 119). In Salam Khalidi's recollections, the evocation of a "mother–daughter" bond characterizes intellectual and activist solidarity, including the care and affection that *al-mashreq* first wave women may have felt for one another.

Although Salam Khalidi never met Sha'rawi, she describes the waves of encouragement that Sha'rawi's work in Egypt solicited in her and her peers, that "we in Beirut followed news" of Sha'rawi's 1919 demonstrations against the British: "our hearts filled with pride in their achievements ... These actions also served as a sort of beacon, lighting the way for women throughout the Arab world" (1978, 121). To cast these "pioneers" and their peers as first wave feminists is to invite consideration of the wave model to account for waves of emotion, here affection and solidarity, into feminist histories. Women's emancipatory and political efforts were very much visible to one another, both within and beyond *al-mashreq*, which as we can see were relatable and evocative. Salam Khalidi's autobiography attends to female friendships and international solidarity as crucial aspects of how she understands the feminist movement to which she belonged.

### May Ziadeh and Bahithat Al-Badiya

May Ziadeh (1886–1941) "was a prominent intellectual figure in the early part of the century in Egypt. A writer of prose and poetry, a sought-after public speaker and hostess of a salon which gathered together many of the leading intellectuals of the day, she was active in promoting women's access to education and employment outside the home" (Badran and cooke 1992, 239). Like those already discussed, Ziadeh carved out intellectual spaces for women and encouraged women's public participation. Her salon, according to Ghorayeb, from around 1912 was successful for "about twenty years ... modelled on those which Western women had created in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" showing a crosscurrent of women's emancipatory efforts between France and Lebanon (1979, 376).

Ziadeh famously "wrote biographies of Bahithat al-Badiya (1920), Aisha al-Taimuriya (1924) and ... Warda al-Yaziji" (1924), and, according to Badran and cooke, "was one of the first Arab women to eulogise women colleagues" (1992, 239). When al-Yaziji died, "a group of Lebanese women wrote her obituary" and raised funds for a portrait of her to hang in Beirut's public library alongside male poets: "it was the first time," suggest Badran and cooke, "that women had publicly acknowledged another woman in this way" (1992, xxx). This is to say that Ziadeh

eventually becoming “one of the first women to evoke a self-conscious sense of literary sisterhood” did not emerge, as we have also seen with Sha’rawi and Salam Khalididi, spontaneously or hermetically, but was encouraged by experiences of collaboration to ensconce a sense of feminist legacy (Badran and cooke 1992, xxxv). Ziadeh’s legacy of eulogizing and writing biographies of female predecessors has found resonance in the contemporary period, with Darina Al Joundi’s *Prisonnière du Levant: La vie méconnue de May Ziadé* (2017). Al Joundi reflects on her own confinement in a mental hospital, relating this to Ziadeh’s own confinement, and from here addresses many passages to “Ma très chère May” (“My very dear May”) (2017, 139).<sup>13</sup> She “décidé d’écrire l’histoire de May pour m’aider à accepter la mienne, un peu comme une thérapie... Un siècle sépare nos internments respectifs, et pourtant, en plongeant dans le passé de May, je suis revenue à la vie” (“decided to write May’s story [‘l’histoire’] to help me to accept mine, a bit like a therapy... A century separates our respective internments, and yet, by diving into May’s past, I came back to life” (Al-Joundi 2017, 11). The feminist techniques that Ziadeh used to relate to and retell the lives of female predecessors is seen today in the work of Al-Joundi. It is worth acknowledging the power of relating to others to feminist activism and history.

Hala Kamal asserts that Ziadeh was “introduced to feminist thought” by attending women’s lectures at the Egyptian University’s Women’s Section (1909–12) and that these talks “encouraged” her own endeavors (Kamal 2018, 269). It was five years after her arrival in Cairo that Ziadeh commenced her famed literary salon in 1912, and it seems that her salon started after the women’s lectures ceased, perhaps to replace this space for women’s solidarity and exchange (Badran and cooke 1992, xxxv).

Despite “conventional patriarchal barriers of circumscribed kin-centred female social relations ... Bahithat al-Badiya sent letters and verses to May Ziyada” (Badran and cooke 1992, xxx). Bahithat al-Badiya published a book of essays titled *Al-nisayat* (“On women’s issues”) (1909), which “advocated for the improvement of women’s lives,” including rights that al-Badiya understood to be granted to women under Islam such as a proper education (Badran and cooke 1992, xvii). Al-Badiya “in 1917 drew a list of demands that included compulsory education for women ... training a sufficient number of women doctors to fill the needs of Egyptian women, and gradual abolition of the veil” (Ghorayeb 1979, 376). In her biography of al-Badiya, Ziadeh describes “her encounters with Malak Hifni Nassif, at first through Nassif’s writings and then in person” (Kamal 2018, 270). In Kamal’s account of this relationship there is a clear trajectory where writing networks between women eventually lead to personal collaboration.

Ziadeh held correspondence, and perhaps friendship, affinity, and emotion, to be of the highest import. In her speech eulogizing al-Yaziji she states that “the most important of her prose writings was the correspondence with ... al-Taimuriya ... there was a delightful exchange of poetry and prose in which the poets competed in praising each other” (Badran and cooke 1992, 241). It is crucial to understand Ziadeh as a first wave pioneer who was subject to waves of inspiration drawn from other women, particularly in their connections to one another.

It so happens that “in 1918, Shaarawi’s first feminist speech was the eulogy she delivered at the commemoration for Bahithat al-Badiya” (Badran and cooke 1992, xxx). From here, “May collaborated with Huda Shirawi” (Ghorayeb 1979, 377), becoming active in the first wave of feminism in *al-mashreq*.



## A global first wave

This paper has modeled how we might reconceptualize the use of the term “first wave” to account for the global emergence of feminist endeavor and solidarity at the turn of the twentieth century. Some comparisons are already fairly readily drawn between British first wave feminists and “pioneers.” For instance, Leila Ahmed writes:

Mai Ziyada voiced ... “Despite my immense love for the country of my birth, I feel like a displaced person, a refugee with no homeland.”... Interestingly, Virginia Woolf reflected along parallel lines, saying that while England was the country of Englishmen, Englishwomen had no country. (1992, 187).

Hoda Elsadda also likens Taymure to Woolf (2008, 102). Yet, there has likely been no application of the wave model to “pioneer” *mashreq* feminists because it would have left them “being normed on a white, Western (read: progressive/modern) or non-Western (read: backward/traditional) Hierarchy” (Mohanty 2003, 48). Instead, I have proposed that waves of feminism themselves should be understood more fluidly, as a way of mapping crosscurrents of consciousness raising, and to account for the waves of courage, inspiration, and emotion that emerge during a contemporaneous historical moment, to expand the lens of our first wave narratives.

To return to the work of the WReC, they critique how modernity—indeed the progress of feminism is often tied up with questions of progress or of Westernization—has been recast into plural modernities, as “alternatives” to Western modernity of which sites in the Global South are late copies (2015, 14). They instead argue for an understanding that, in such systems, “simultaneity does not preclude unevenness or marked difference” (WReC 2015, 14). Using the above examples conceptualizes a first wave which does not begin and end with Western demands for suffrage, but a first wave awakening happened simultaneously on the global stage in accordance with globalization. This was locally characterized, but imbricated by international contact and exchange. Badran makes an important observation that the opening of the Suez canal not only changed the economic landscape of the Arab world, but it also meant that “Egyptian and Western women observed each other, engaging in limited exchange” (1995, 7).

These observations and exchanges were not immediately friendly, however. Recalling the 1923 international conference in Rome in a 1929 issue of *L’Égyptienne*, Nabarawi’s writes that that Egyptian feminists had been “complètement ignorées” (“completely ignored”) by their “Western sisters,” and Nabarawi reflects that “à part le voile que nous portions encore et qui faisait l’enchantement des photographes—rien ne nous distinguait des autres congressistes” (“apart from the veil that we still wore and which was the delight of the photographers—nothing set us apart from other delegates”) (Nabaraoui 1929b, 5). Despite Nabarawi’s sense of her own similarity to the other delegates, she and the other Egyptian delegates were initially met with orientalist and racist comments regarding the lightness of their skin when they attended in 1923, which left Nabarawi and Sha’rawi “mortified” (Nabaraoui 1929b, 5). However, Nabarawi reflects that “trois ans après Rome, les déléguées égyptiennes au Congrès de Paris, ne furent plus accueillies avec curiosité, par leurs sœurs étrangères” (“three years after Rome, the Egyptian delegates to the Congress of Paris, were no longer greeted with curiosity, by their foreign sisters”), in part due to the circulation of *L’Égyptienne* in France (Nabaraoui 1929b, 5). This alerts us to the importance of international contact and

collaboration that we should recall in our contemporary feminist practices. The European delegates of the 1926 conference had become educated on the Egyptian feminist movement due to the “transmissions” of *L’Egyptienne*, and all parties began to see themselves as part of a shared endeavor which was, although simultaneous and encouraged by one another, not immobilized by the differences in their aims. Fleischmann points out that, by the 1930s: “The Arab Women’s Association”, an international women’s association, “exchanged telegrams with the Islamic Union in India; women’s associations in Iran, India, Britain, and the Arab world ... they frequently highlighted their protests by publishing their telegrams to the British government press” (2018, 112).

In the October 1929 issue of *L’Egyptienne*, a speech that Nabarawi gives to a banquet hosted by the International Alliance of Women for the Berlin Press is transcribed, in which she described the progress of “l’esprit international” (“the international spirit”) (1929a, 31). In this speech, she points towards the fact that “mieux se connaître, c’est mieux se comprendre et commencer déjà à s’aimer” (“getting to know each other better means understanding each other better and starting to love each other”) (1929a, 31). Nabarawi goes on:

De notre côte, nous pouvons dire avec fierté que notre presse en Egypte, ne manque jamais à ce devoir et qu’elle accueille toujours avec empressement, pour la répandre parmi le public, toute idée de coopération et d’entente. Chaque grand évènement mondial trouve son écho en Egypte. Le mouvement féministe qui, lui aussi, est une des plus grandes manifestations sociales de notre siècle est journellement noté et suivi dans plus grandes quotidiens, nos revues mensuelles et hebdomadaires. Chaque victoire féminine est accueillie chez nous avec intérêt et sympathie. (Nabaraoui 1929a, 31)

(From our side, we can say with pride that our press in Egypt never fails in this duty and that it always welcomes with eagerness, to spread it among the public, any idea of cooperation and understanding. Every great world event finds its echo in Egypt. The feminist movement, which is also one of the greatest social manifestations of our century, is daily noted and followed in larger daily papers, our monthly and weekly reviews. Each female victory is received from us with interest and sympathy.)

What we can glean from this speech is that, around the turn of the twentieth century, feminists such as Nabarawi from *al-mashreq* did not see their feminism, their activism, or their journalism as “a series of ‘copies’ and lesser inflections” of a Western feminism, but as part of a formidable global movement (WReC 2015, 14). Nabarawi speaks fondly and emotively about the struggles and successes of other women globally, privileging “cooperation and understanding” between cultures, prioritizing an international struggle for solidarity.

Yet, this way of discussing international feminisms has not lasted, and feminists from *al-mashreq* are regularly described as copies of their Western counterparts in Anglophone discourses. For instance, in 2021 Eltahawy eulogized El Saadawi, noting “I am enraged that some refer to Nawal as the ‘Simone de Beauvoir of the Arab world.’ Do not call her that. She is the Nawal El Saadawi of the world. We are not local versions of white feminists” (2021). We have, as feminists, a history of organizing across borders and understanding ourselves as peers within feminist struggles that we could call upon. Instead, today feminists from *al-mashreq* have been examined

according to a Western measure of modernity, which my use of the WReC's theorizations has aimed to illuminate, and western accounts of what constitutes feminist progress. I say that we should reframe first wave narratives to include international feminist awakenings such as I have sketched here. This is not a question of squashing *al-mashreq* histories into a Western framework, but rather expanding that framework to recuperate real moments of contact, familiarity, and solidarity across contexts. Such organizing was of course never free from racism and orientalism, as Nabarawi reported, however we have lost sight of the fact that Nabarawi and her peers did not see themselves as "local versions of white feminists" (Eltahawy 2021), but as peers who could, for instance, actively help French women to achieve their goal of suffrage (Nabaraoui 1926b, 165). Feminist histories of solidarity like the ones sketched here continue to be erased in favor of singular moments of exceptionality.

It is important that we attend to this history, which leaves us with a tradition of working together, of being freely inspired by one another but with respect the differences in feminist goals. I hope that this paper will aid in decentralizing the West in what we understand first wave feminism to be, and perhaps encourage future scholarship on first wave histories and legacies which examine the contributions of heretofore unrecorded or unacknowledged networks of solidarity, both local and international. To end, here is what Salam Khalidi wrote of her feminist friends whom she so admired:

I cherish a special affection for all of them. May God give them long life and ease their difficulties so that the torch can be passed on to new generations, a torch burning brightly, and a march forward without setbacks. I am certain that the future will bring them justice and fairness, and that history will not fail to record their achievements. (1978, 123–24)

It is time to record the achievements of globalized first wave in its diversity and fluidity, and bring this legacy forward in our own scholarship and activism.

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## Notes

**1** While there are narratives about "pioneers," we can see the collective dearth left by having no language of heritage for the praxis, techniques, and traditions of the feminist movement in the Levant beyond Badran's own recovery of Sha'rawi. For instance, in May 1995 Foundation Rene Moawwad and Friedrich-Naumann Stiftung sponsored a workshopon "The Women's Movement: The Second Wave" in Lebanon (El-Cheikh 1995, 8). El-Cheikh in the two-page report for *Al-Raida* states that

the various groups were first asked to define what they understand by the expression "The Second Wave." ... What seemed to be a straight-forward task soon proved to be much more complicated ... Much time was spent on discussing various concepts and terms, agreeing on the basics, and trying to reach least common denominators in the various aspects and facets concerning fundamental issues. In retrospect, this preliminary and un-planned session was the most revealing and productive. (El-Cheikh 1995, 8)

One wonders what this group deemed crucial key terms, or how they defined “Second Wave” for themselves without a preceding critical language of periodization that represented their own history, and their place in global feminist endeavors.

2 *L’Égyptienne* is used as a primary resource for this research, partly because it was the journal that Huda Sha’rawi founded and of which Saiza Nabarawi was editor-in-chief, thus it is of particular interest to their relationship, activities, and ideas about solidarity. Likewise, *L’Égyptienne* is notable in its international reach, with commentary in the journal about how it has been received by the Parisian elite, for instance. This is a reach that many Arabophone journals did not have beyond Arab diaspora readership. It would also be remiss not to note that it is also used here because it has been digitized and is freely available online (<https://heritage.bnf.fr/bibliothequesorient/en/egyptienne-magazine-art>). The reason that this particular journal is so well preserved and is (globally) accessible speaks to Sha’rawi’s exceptional legacy, and also to the politics of French-language publications in the Arab world. Beth Baron’s excellent book on turn of the century women’s periodicals, *The women’s awakening in Egypt*, explains how an estimated “two weeks” of archival research in Dar al-Katub (the Egyptian National Library) “turned into months” (1994, ix). I would direct interested readers to Baron’s research for more details on these Arabic-language periodicals. According to Baron, by the 1920s Egypt alone had around 30 women’s periodicals, but selecting the work of lesser-known “pioneers” from these represents a selective practice that is not at the heart of this argument. The focus of this paper is not the periodicals themselves, but rather the way that they can be understood as a vector of a globalized feminist “First Wave” awakening.

3 Saiza Nabarawi’s name is spelled “Ceza Nabaroui” in French, and thus appears this way in the bibliography items that refer to her work in *L’Égyptienne*.

4 Bahithat al-Badiya (meaning “Searcher in the Desert”) is the pen name of Malak Hifni Nasif.

5 A feminist journal produced at the Institute of Women’s Studies at the Lebanese American University.

6 Rose Ghurayyib’s name was anglicized in *Signs* as ‘Rose Ghorayeb’, I have retained both spellings in the bibliographical matter of this paper (Ghurayyib 1977; Ghorayeb 1979).

7 Badran and cooke also note that “Egypt was the first country to establish *de facto* independence from Ottoman control early in the nineteenth century, only to be occupied by the British in 1882 ... the Mashriq excluding Egypt, remained under direct Ottoman rule until after the First World War. In the 1920s the territory was broken up into the states of Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Transjordan under French and British mandates” (1992, xxiv).

8 The feminism of *L’Égyptienne* was internationally acknowledged and respected. Sha’rawi’s name is spelled “Huda Charaoui” in French, and thus her writings in *L’Égyptienne* are cited using the Francophone spelling. Commemorating the fourth anniversary of the journal, she writes (Charaoui 1929, 2):

N’est-elle pas devenue pour l’Europe la messagère fidèle de l’âme orientale, et pour nous orientaux, la propagandiste dévouée des plus nobles idées d’Occident. Elle s’est frayée [sic] une place d’honneur dans les plus grandes bibliothèques du monde, telles les bibliothèques nationales de Paris et de Washington qui l’ont réclamée pour leurs lecteurs, ainsi que dans tous les clubs féministes et pacifistes. Ainsi encouragée et appréciée du monde entier, notre jeune revue ne pouvait faillir à sa tâche et ne pas avancer d’un pas ferme et sûr dans la voie du progrès.

(Has she not become for Europe the faithful messenger of the Eastern soul, and for us Easterners, the devoted propagandist of the noblest ideas of the West? It has carved out a place of honor in the largest libraries in the world, such as the national libraries of Paris and Washington, which claimed it for their readers, as well as in all feminist and pacifist clubs. Thus encouraged and appreciated by the whole world, our young journal could not fail in its task and not move forward with a firm and sure step in the path of progress.)

Here Sha’rawi implies the importance of international encouragement and recognition. The recognition of the journal internationally allowed the experiences of Egyptian women to be broadcast on a large scale, but likewise “des plus nobles idées d’Occident”, “the noblest ideas of the West,” were to reach Egyptian audiences, not as a corrupting influence or an instruction to feminist action, but as part of a conversation: a global, shared, feminist consciousness and endeavor. Therefore, following the WReC’s approach to world

systems, and to borrow Badran's words: "my use of 'feminist' is deliberately fluid and broad in order to be inclusive rather than exclusive, as I believe that to narrow the Egyptian feminist experience is to distort and diminish it," and that the term "feminist" in this context highlights that Egyptian feminists "did not see their feminism as derivative or as an alien intrusion" (1995, 20).

9 To take the oceanic wave metaphor here, if we must insist on early feminism in *al-mashreq* as "invisible," perhaps we might think of it as a rip tide or current that is invisible on the surface, but nevertheless is part of a network of fluid movement.

10 "Veil" here refers to the face covering veil, Sha'rawi and Nabarawi would still have covered their hair with a hijab.

11 "Dimishqiyya" is anglicized as "Dimashkieh" in Stephan's profile of Salam Khalidi, however in this paper I follow the anglicized spelling presented in Salam Khalidi's autobiography. Fleischmann spells her name differently again as "Dimashqiyya".

12 Tarif Khalidi translates the title as "*The New Woman* magazine," but Fleischmann translates it more literally to "the Women's Revival" or "awakening" (Salam Khalidi 1978, 118; Fleischmann 2018, 127 n. 38).

13 Translations of *Prisonnière du Levant: La vie méconnue de May Ziadé* are my own.

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**Dr Roxanne Douglas** is a Lecturer in English Literary Studies at the University of Exeter. She was awarded her PhD in English and Comparative Literary Studies from the University of Warwick in 2020. Her research brings together feminist theory, world-literature theories, and Gothic studies, with a focus on Arab feminist writing in translation. She is also interested in women's writing across borders, gendered history, sexuality studies, world-systems approaches, and GoHoW (Gothic, Horror, and the Weird) across literary forms. She recently co-organised the “Women in World-Literature” international, hybrid, conference, and has previously published with Bloomsbury and *Feminist Theory*.

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