

Beth Baron discusses the role of women and gender in the formation of nationalism in Egypt following the colonial period. “Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics” explains the role of women and gender in the formation of Egypt’s national identity.<sup>1</sup>

Baron explains the position of Women in Egyptian society and how it related to the image of a “Motherland” that was key to nationalist movements.<sup>2</sup> The book explains the differences and similarities of Egyptian nationalism to that of other countries at the time. Every aspect of society was projected onto the national stage especially the familial unit and its structure.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to conventional nationalist features, the new technologies of the time were contributing to the formation of a national identity. Photography and the press made it easier to portray an image of a “national family” that the population could relate to.<sup>4</sup> For women, this image relied on their portrayal as creators and vulnerable people in need of protection.<sup>5</sup>

Due to the limited position of most women in society, the continued use of the woman as a representation of the nation led to the emergence of activists like Labiba Ahmad. Baron covers the role of women like Ahmad and how their activism influenced the direction of nationalism in Egypt.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics* (University of California Press), 3

<sup>2</sup> Baron, 57

<sup>3</sup> Baron, 57-58

<sup>4</sup> Baron, 82-83

<sup>5</sup> Baron, 40

<sup>6</sup> Baron, 189-190

As Baron points out, the emphasis of activism and movements spearheaded by women often put more focus on anti-colonial efforts than advancing the position of women in society.<sup>7</sup> Though women remained marginalized, their efforts often progressed the country in ways that the political landscape controlled by men could not.<sup>8</sup>

Baron uses several primary and secondary sources including articles and books that cover the colonial period and the political climate of the region during that time. The secondary sources provide an outline of the information in the book and the primary sources are used to reinforce what the secondary sources outline.

An important historiographical question that is presented in “Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics” is: how did women affect nationalism in Egypt even as a marginalized group? Another question would be: What were women able to achieve politically and socially that men could not?

Beth Baron offers insight to these issues in a style that is easy to understand for a reader who might not have any background or familiarity with the topic. The sources are used in a way that provides a solid reinforcement for its thesis.

This book has covered several of the readings that we have previously had in class including; colonialism, nationalism, family, women and gender. It covers the influences of Europe and the importance of family and regional allegiances. Much like the effects of Women’s fashion covered in Onar Inal’s reading, women played an important but far less celebrated role in the influence of their society.

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<sup>7</sup> Baron, 218-219

<sup>8</sup> Baron, 220