Emotional Egyptian Childhood
Notions of Fear, Joy, and Anger in *al-Awlād*'s Comics

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Abstract This chapter is a study of the emotional discourses embedded in the Egyptian children's comics *al-Awlād* (1923–1932), published in Cairo by *Dār al-Laṭā'if al-Muṣawwara*. It argues that while *al-Awlād*'s illustrated satirical narratives often center on pranks, trickery, and everyday social encounters, they simultaneously enact as mechanisms of subject formation, ideological critique, and social differentiation in Interwar Egypt. Drawing on theories of emotional practice, visual literacy, and colonial modernity, the chapter explores how *al-Awlād*'s comic artists used visual and textual strategies to articulate relationships between children and authority figures—both Egyptian and foreign—in a semi-colonial context.

The chapter begins by situating *al-Awlād* within the modernising project of the Egyptian *effendiyya* and the emergence of a children's press targeting this new sociocultural stratum. It then analyzes how emotional cues are constructed through visual and textual techniques, often mediated by a narrator rather than expressed directly by the characters themselves. Through this narrative mechanism, the comics position their protagonists—often children, servants, and other marginal figures—as emotional agents capable of subverting authority figures, both Egyptian and foreign.

The chapter suggests that these emotional scripts function as counter-discourses within a colonial contact zone, articulating subtle forms of resistance while simultaneously registering adult anxieties and normative discourses surrounding childhood and social order. It concludes that *al-Awlād*'s emotional discourse, while embedded in a seemingly humorous and light-hearted format, participates in the production of a specifically Egyptian model of childhood—one that is neither wholly complicit with colonial modernity nor entirely autonomous from it.

Introduction

In February 1923, the Cairene publishing house *Dār al-Laṭā'if al-Muṣawwara*, owned by the Greek–Orthodox Syrian Iskandar Makāriyūs (1882–1952), began publishing a new (from a Cairene perspective) cultural

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product—comics, designated specifically for children, under the title *al-Awlād* ("The Children," 1923–1932).[1]

Skimming through *al-Awlād*'s volumes, one can notice that its most frequent narrative engages with pranks, frauds, and thefts—acts initiated by all members of Egyptian society against one another: children trick elderly relatives, teachers, sheikhs, and street peddlers; housemaids play tricks on landladies and male suitors; young and middle-aged men, mostly from the middle strata, scheme against each other; thieves attempt to outsmart cops, and vice versa. At first sight, these images construct a social sphere characterised by violent chaos, in which humiliating and mocking the Other is the main objective of its protagonists.

Given this social turmoil, my research draws on emotions as a conceptual framework for the analysis of childhood, subject formation, and resistance in 1920s–1930s Cairo. It seeks to examine how *al-Awlād*'s comic artists depicted and discussed emotions (through both language and images) as a procedure of subject-formation of the new modern Egyptian child in the colonial context, as Egypt at this time, although not a formal colony, was under British domination.

This paper will discuss how *al-Awlād*'s comics communicated the relationship between emotions and authority figures—whether Egyptian or British. More specifically, it will explore how *al-Awlād*'s comic artists thought which social and anti-social behaviours could elicit emotions as anger, fear, or joy, which in *al-Awlād*'s narratives are associated with resistance to the Other—whether the Egyptian or the British.

What is Emotion?

Since the end of the 19th century, emotions have been studied and defined in a range of academic fields, including linguistics, psychology, philosophy, anthropology, and, most recently, history.[2] It was generally agreed

1 Makāriyūs was the son of a Greek Orthodox family, who emigrated to Egypt from Beirut in 1884. Makāriyūs' father, Shāhīn (1853–1910), was the co-editor, together with two other Syrians, Yaʿqūb Ṣarrūf (1852–1927) and Fāris Nimr (1856–1951), of *al-Muqtaṭaf* ("The Collection", Beirut, 1876–1884; Cairo, 1884–1952), the daily *al-Muqaṭṭam* (named after the range of hills east of Cairo, 1888–1952), and the *Sudan Times* or *al-Sudan*—an Arabic-English paper founded in Cairo and Khartoum in 1903 and published twice a week. Keren Zdafee, Cartooning for a Modern Egypt, Leiden / Boston 2019, 75.

2 Most recent works in the discipline of history include Ute Frevert, Writing the History of Emotions. Concepts and Practices, Economies and Politics, London 2024;

that emotions are something people experience and do. As Monique Scheer elaborates, while some definitions focused on the experiential aspect of emotions (their "inner" side), others focused on their expression (the "outer" side), meaning the mechanical processes of the body.[3] In attempts at solving the dichotomy of "inner" and "outer" manifestations of emotions, newer research in consciousness studies and the philosophy of the mind (the Extended Mind Theory) argues that experience itself is something we do with our entire body in its environmental context.[4] In a similar manner, various sub-fields in psychological research call emotions a form of cognition and argue that "the socially and environmentally contextualized body thinks along with the brain."[5] Further research from this perspective has viewed emotion as part of the "situation" and focused on the ways that "effective responses *support* cognition, comprehension, and social ties" (italics in original).[6]

This last view is compatible with "practice theory"—an approach in history and the social sciences that Scheer utilises to bridge the science-humanities divide. Scheer views emotion as an act deeply socialised, an act executed by a mindful body as a cultural practice.[7] With "practice," Scheer refers to a nexus of "doings and sayings"—intentional, deliberate actions, habituated behaviour executed without much cognitive attention paid, as well as "learned, culturally specific, and habitual distribution of attention to 'inner' processes of thought, feeling, and perception."[8] Thus, emotional practices are "things people do *in order to* have emotions" (italics in original) or "doing emotions" in a performative sense, implying that emotions themselves are a kind of practice.[9] Hence, emotions are viewed by her as

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Helen Ahner, Planetarien. Wunder der Technik - Techniken des Wunderns, Göttingen 2023; Anja Laukötter, Sex – Richtig! Körperpolitik und Gefühlserziehung im Kino des 20. Jahrhunderts, Göttingen 2021; Margrit Pernau, Emotions and Modernity in Colonial India, Delhi 2019. Within the discipline of anthropology: Max Jack, Insurgent Fandom. An Ethnography of Crowds and Unruly Sounds, Oxford 2024; Esra Sarıoğlu, The Body Unburdened. Violence, Emotions and the New Woman in Turkey, Oxford 2022; Rukmini Barua, In the Shadow of the Mill. Workers' Neighbourhoods in Ahmedabad, 1920s to 2000s, Cambridge 2022.

3 Monique Scheer, Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion, in: History and Theory 51 (May 2012), 193–220, here 195.

4 Scheer 2012, 196–197. For references see Scheer 2012, 196, n. 16.

5 Scheer 2012, 197.

6 For references see Scheer 2012, 197–198, n. 23–24.

7 Scheer 2012, 199.

8 Scheer 2012, 200.

9 Scheer 2012, 194.

"practices involving the self (body and mind), language, material artifacts, the environment, and other people."[10]

Controversy also prevails regarding the question of how many emotions there are. Since the mid-20th century, the literature on emotion has defined between two and eighteen basic (or primary, fundamental) emotions.[11] The "basic emotion theory" proposes that human beings have a limited number of emotions, such as fear, anger, happiness, and sadness (the four emotions most proponents of the basic emotion theory agree upon), which are biologically and psychologically "basic," each manifested in an organised, recurring pattern of associated behavioural components. When neurobiology researchers started to ask the same question while examining the different brain territories that generate emotions, they ended up with the answer of four basic emotions: joy (or libido), fear, anger, and distress. The basic emotions are generally perceived by emotion researchers as universal and independent of verbal language.[12] That being said, the "basic emotions paradigm" is not shared by all scholars working in the field of experimental psychology and neuroscience.[13]

Historicising Emotions

My research does not attempt to achieve a categorisation of emotions in Egyptian Arabic culture, nor does it contribute to the debate on the theory of basic emotions. Furthermore, it will not suggest a hierarchy of emotions

10 Scheer 2012, 194.

11 As noted by Gu et al., the "basic emotion theory" started with Charles Darwin and Paul Ekman, and later Silvan S. Tomkins, followed by Ekman and Carroll E. Izard, then by many current psychologists. Simeng Gu et al., A Model for Basic Emotions Using Observations of Behavior in Drosophila, in: Frontiers in Psychology 10 (2019), 1–13, here 2. As Andrew Ortony and Terence J. Turner observe, the most common reason for proposing the "basic emotion paradigm" was to provide explanations for the fact that certain emotions appear to exist in all cultures, that some emotions are "universally associated with and recognizable by characteristic facial expressions, and that some emotions appear to serve identifiable biological functions related to the survival needs of the individual and of the species". Andrew Ortony / Terence J. Turner, What's Basic about Basic Emotions?, in: Psychological Review 97/3 (1990), 315–331, here 316–317.

12 For studies that support this hypothesis, see Khalid Elasri, Emotion Categorization in Moroccan Arabic and English. A Prototype Approach, in: Studie z Aplikovane Lingvistiky 9/1 (2018), 51–64.

13 For alternative approaches, see George Mandler, Mind and Body. Psychology of Emotion and Stress, New York 1984; Ortony / Turner 1990; Ruth Leys, The Turn to Affect. A Critique, in: Critical Inquiry 37 (2011), 434–472.

in *al-Awlād*, even assuming that some of the emotions that appear in its narratives are in some way more fundamental than others. Having said that, reading through *al-Awlād*'s comics reveals that the emotions prevailing in its narratives are those perceived as "basic" or "culturally common," to use Ortony and Turner's terminology;[14] specifically, fear, joy, anger, shame, and humiliation.

Following Catherine Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod, I wish to trace the emotional discourses embedded in *al-Awlād*'s comics in the particular Egyptian semi-colonial context of the 1920s and early 30s.[15] For Lutz and Abu-Lughod, the focus on discourses of emotion and emotional discourses allows insight into how "emotion, like the discourse in which it participates, is informed by cultural themes and values," as well as "how it serves as an operator in a contentious field of social activity, how it affects a social field, and how it can serve as an idiom for communicating [...] diverse matters [such] as social conflict [...], gender roles [...], or the nature of the ideal or deviant person."[16] Hence, discourses on emotions and emotional discourses are a form of social action that has affective content or effect.

Drawing on Scheer, Lutz, and Abu-Lughod, rather than focusing on what is said in the emotional discourses of *al-Awlād*, this paper will look into the ways *al-Awlād*'s comic artists use emotions, through the emotional performances of their illustrated protagonists, as an ideological tool. Hence, reading the emotional discourses embedded in *al-Awlād* is meant to explore the relationship between emotions, social life, power, and the ideological functions of emotion attribution—mainly the labelling of the Other. Seemingly, as performative social *act*s, the emotional discourses in *al-Awlād* could expand our understanding of the "emotional style" prevailing in Interwar Egypt. However, as will be discussed, these visual-textual performances are read here as counter-discourses and as a means of resistance. Hence, *al-Awlād*'s emotional discourses allegedly constitute a subversive emotional style.

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14 Ortony / Turner 1990, 317, 325.

15 Lutz and Abu-Lughod foreground ethnopsychological works on emotion from the last three decades, which began relativising, historicising, and contextualising emotions as a social practice tied to relations of power within diverse ethnographic contexts. Through these works, emotions came to be perceived as socio-cultural phenomena and constructs that differ cross-culturally and achieve their meaning and force from their location and performance in the public realm of discourse. Catherine A. Lutz / Lila Abu-Lughod, Introduction. Emotion, Discourse, and the Politics of Everyday Life, in: Lutz / Abu-Lughod (eds.), Language and the Politics of Emotion, Cambridge 1990, 1–23.

16 Lutz / Abu-Lughod 1990, 11.

Emotional Literacy

The representation of emotions in English literature is a well-researched area, as is the study of young and adult readers' responses to literature.[17] Studying picture books designated for children, Maria Nikolajeva highlights the ability of their images to engender emotional engagement, as engagement with picture books can endorse empathy—the capacity to understand how other people feel.[18]

Images, combined with text (or not), can convey a wide range of emotions, which "practice theory" encourages us to read. When reading images that convey emotions (whether intentionally or unintentionally), we look for their recognisable signs—mainly centred on the eyes and the mouth.[19] However, a full reading of the emotional state of an illustrated character (or of an actual human being) also involves body language and its placement in the composition since, as noted above, emotions are experiences that involve the whole body.

As Scheer emphasises, emotions involve different and varied bodily gestures and actions: "facial expressions, firings of neurons, thought processes, production of tears or sweat, expletives, changes in heart rate and breathing, blushing, trembling, gestures, postures, and movements."[20] Most of these are illustrated in children's literature through different visually recognisable signs and recognisable bodily gestures. Some of Nikolajeva's examples are worth mentioning in this regard: "characters crammed in corners or pushed into the background" are read as unhappy, lonely, or scared, while "characters foregrounded and placed in the center of an image" can be read as "happy and content."[21] To these, Nikolajeva adds the convention

17 See, for example, Patrick Colm Hogan, What Literature Teaches Us about Emotion, New York, NY 2011; Blakey Vermeule, Why do We Care about Literary Characters? Baltimore, MD 2010; Janet Evans (ed.), Talking Beyond the Page. Reading and Responding to Picturebooks, London 2009; Lisa Zunshine, Why We Read Fiction. Theory of Mind and the Novel, Columbus, OH 2006; Peter Stockwell, Cognitive Poetics. An Introduction, London 2002.

18 Maria Nikolajeva, Reading Other People's Minds through Word and Image, in: Children's Literature in Education 43/3 (2012), 273–291.

19 Simplistically, the upturned or downturned corners of the mouth reflect happiness and sadness, respectively; wide-open eyes can signal surprise or fear.

20 Scheer 2012, 207.

21 Although this aspect of the composition is not unambiguous and should be determined in combination with facial and body gestures. Maria Nikolajeva, Picturebooks and Emotional Literacy, in: The Reading Teacher 67/4 (2013), 249–254, here 252.

of emoticons, such as a zigzagged mouth, which implies anger or fear. However, as these expressions do not occur in real life, their reading is a matter of "visual literacy" and must be taught.[22] Artistic conventions that are not body- or face-related, such as motion lines and the use of colour, also play their part in communicating the emotional state of the characters.[23] Hence, as Scheer rightly emphasises, "reading emotion[s] in faces, gestures, vocal patterns, bodily postures, or manifestations such as tears, changing skin color, or heavy breathing is a complex process [...] and involves different modes of knowledge."[24] Interpreting a visual emotion "correctly" in imagery, with no textual reference but the visual conventions, requires additional knowledge. There is no guarantee that the message will be read as intended—either in live communications or in literary ones.

Comics, like picturebooks, use wordless or nearly wordless images that convey strong emotions, such as fear or grief. As in picture books, the textual and the extratextual emotions interact. Readers of comics can react to frightening characters and circumstances or laugh at funny ones, or the emotional experience can remain restricted to that of the characters themselves. That is, the reader "should be able to read the character's fear [sadness or joy]," even if he does not experience it himself, while looking at the images and reading the text.[25]

As opposed to picture books, in which text is scant, comics combine text and image in a more balanced way. Meaning, the images themselves are not sufficient to *read* the story, nor do they play an illustrative role in relation to the text. Accordingly, the emotional discourse can manifest itself in the images alone or else be specified in the textual narrative while the image accompanying it focuses on another element of the story. In some cases, the text can be literal, specifying that the character "is sad," "was frightened," or "is boiling with anger" and thus help communicate unfamiliar artistic conventions and develop emotional literacy. Nuances such as "upset, melancholy, pensive, miserable, gloomy, unhappy, anxious, and so

22 Nikolajeva 2013, 252.

23 That being said, there are researchers, such as Ortony and Turner, who claim that the idea that the display and recognition of facial expressions are universal is problematic. To follow their discussion of the facial expression of anger—the furrowed brow, square mouth, compression of lips, and raised eyelids, which are all widely interpreted as prototypical expressions of anger—Ortony and Turner claim that there seems to be no necessary connection between each of these four facial expressions and the existence of anger and that each can occur apart from anger and in other emotions. Ortony / Turner 1990, 322.

24 Scheer 2012, 214.

25 Nikolajeva 2013, 251.

on" will be conveyed mainly through the text.[26] Social or higher cognitive emotions, such as love, guilt, shame, or pride, are culturally dependent and hence also need to be communicated through language and a commonly recognised system of visual signs. In comics, as in picture books, symbols (rather than icons) are used to convey social emotions. These require preliminary knowledge.

Egyptian Emotions

As Orit Bashkin illustrated, the development of the debates on civilisation in the Arab print market, from the beginning of the 19th century, set the ground for discussions connecting ideas about civilisation to perceptions about emotionality.[27] These debates were part of a secular civilising project, echoying European discourses on civilisation, cultural development and race, which was meant to be accomplished through education, aiming, among other pedagogical objectives, at character formation.[28] The creation of virtuous emotions was placed at the heart of it. Through this project, individuals were civilised mainly for the sake of civilising the community at large, and hence, allowing it to overcome its disadvantages and rise to a higher echelon of civilisation.[29]

Egyptian writings on the need to modify codes of behaviour and emotions in an attempt to improve Egyptian society first appeared in the writings of Rifāʿa al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801–1873).[30] As Bashkin elaborates, they were followed throughout the 19th century by numerous articles and columns in the print media that praised Western sciences and knowledge and highlighted the need to borrow systems of knowledge originating in Europe in order to reform local society.[31] Through this reformist discourse, and in light of exposure to Western child-rearing norms, the Egyptian notion of

26 Nikolajeva 2013, 252.

27 Orit Bashkin, Journeys between Civility and Wilderness. Debates on Civilization and Emotions in the Arab Middle East, 1861–1939, in: Margrit Pernau / Helge Jordheim / Emmanuelle Saada (eds.), Civilizing Emotions. Concepts in Nineteenth Century Asia and Europe, Oxford 2015, 126–145.

28 Margrit Pernau / Helge Jordheim, Introduction, in: Margrit Pernau / Helge Jordheim / Emmanuelle Saada (eds.), Civilizing Emotions. Concepts in Nineteenth Century Asia and Europe, Oxford 2015, 1–22, here 8.

29 Pernau and Jordheim discuss how civilising the individual and the national community overlapped the idea of creating the global order, or to phrase it differently, how civility was a marker of global order in the West. Pernau / Jordheim 2015, 4–6.

30 Rifāʿa al-Ṭahṭāwī, Taḫlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talḫīṣ bārīz, Cairo 1834.

31 Bashkin 2015, 128.

childhood was being reshaped, as children were perceived as important in their own right to the future of the nation. Consequently, the state started to interfere with the role of parents in raising children[32]—a cross-cultural modern phenomenon.

Throughout the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century, the discourses of educated Egyptian elites on reform and modernisation concentrated mainly on the behaviour of the masses (women, tribesmen, peasants, and the urban poor) and highlighted their uncontrolled emotionality.[33] The main emotion that needed to be reformed was apathy (meaning the inability to feel), as apathy became an obstacle in the path of national revival.[34] Emotions that were discussed in the context of national solidarity as the opposite of apathy include mercy and compassion.[35] As Bashkin notes, mercy and compassion in local discourse were portrayed as virtues of Easterners that differentiated them from their colonisers; however, writers also cautioned that compassion could lead to excessive generosity.[36]

Other emotions discussed in the print media were fear and fearlessness—mainly in writings on the Bedouins, which were perceived by some authors as closer to the spirit of authentic Arab Islamic culture.[37] Romanticised writings about Bedouin life highlighted their fearlessness and their ability to resist and fight their enemies, and hence they were perceived as models for the contemporary Arab / Egyptian, who needed to confront those who oppressed him (whether European colonisers or local tyrants, who were also blamed for the present condition of Egyptian society).[38] On the other hand, writers advocating territorial nationalism, which glorified the pre-Islamic Pharaonic civilisation, framed the Arabs as emotional savages.[39] As the masses were characterised by a variety of contradictory emotions (passion and indifference, bravery and cowardice, forgiveness and vengefulness), educational initiatives during the period were meant to construct a

32 Heide Morrison, Childhood and Colonial Modernity in Egypt, Houndmills / Basingstoke / Hampshire 2015, 13–20.

33 Bashkin 2015, 134.

34 The writings of Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid (1872–1963) can be mentioned in this context, as he criticised Egyptians' excessive tolerance and their fatalism, manifested in the phrase *maʿalish*, "never mind"; also important are the writings of Qāsim Amīn (1863–1908) criticising the apathy of the Egyptian peasant. Bashkin 2015, 135, 139.

35 Bashkin 2015, 135.

36 Bashkin 2015, 135.

37 Bashkin 2015, 135–137.

38 Bashkin 2015, 135–137.

39 As Bashkin notes, the writings of Tawfīq al-Hakīm (1898–1987) should be noted in this context. Bashkin 2015, 138.

well-mannered and civilised subject whose emotions were to be disciplined and corrected.[40]

As Bashkin emphasises, in response to Western colonialism, this reformative discourse was quickly challenged with a critique of Western civilisation.[41] In this context, Muslim writers, emphasising the need for Muslim unity, encouraged a Muslim cultural revival through literature, in which "emotions had a new role [...], to 'move frozen hearts.'"[42] Heide Morrison highlights that this counter-literature focused on improving children by providing them with moral education, as writers equated the future of Egypt with personal behaviour as taught in childhood.[43]

Given this Egyptian modernising project, and its discourses on emotions and emotionality, my research attempts to look at *al-Awlād*'s emotional discourses as a lay, unscientific discourse, which interacted with and challenged (whether intentionally or not) the secular civilising mission of constructing the modern self undertaken by Egypt's elite.

An Egyptian Children's Press and Its Readership

The initial interest in Egypt in a children's press began in the last decades of the 19th century, as this press was geared toward the educated elites. However, it was only after the 1920s that it became a truly commercial enterprise. As Morrison elaborates, three genres of children's literature appeared in Egypt at the beginning of the 20th century: books, poetry, and periodicals.[44] All were highly didactic and were part of primary school curricula. All were seeking to educate children and promote values related to the civilising mission and nation-building project of the Egyptian intellectuals.[45]

Other publications beginning to be published at the turn of the 20th century were dedicated to political, social, and cultural themes. The appearance of these cultural products and their proliferation reflected the ongoing

40 Bashkin 2015, 140.

41 Bashkin 2015, 128–131.

42 Bashkin 2015, 130, quoting Muhammad ʿAbduh / Jamāl al-Afghānī, Naṣīḥa fī al-adab, in: al-Sayyid Hādī Khusrū Shāhī (ed.), Al-ʿUrwa al-wuthqa, Tehran 1417AH, 118–134.

43 Morrison, looking into memories of childhood as articulated in autobiographies written from the 1930s to the 1960s, found that many writers highlighted childhood feelings of fear and humiliation in discussing their adult political endeavours. Morrison 2015, 16–18.

44 Morrison 2015, 49.

45 Morrison 2015, 48–52.

changes in the construction of childhood in Egypt, initiated by the modernisation processes of the 19th century. As symbols of future generations, children were becoming a means for social change, while the Egyptian intelligentsia "reconfigured notions of childhood in order to produce and reproduce new class identities, gender norms, and state apparatuses."[46]

As a new form of cultural production, children's periodicals (comics included) could be classified as popular culture. However, in the Egyptian context, it was not a popular culture for the masses but rather a product for the new social and cultural formation of the *effendi* (pl. *effendis* or *effendiyya*).[47] Of Turkish origin, the term means "sir." However, in the Egyptian context of the late 19th century, the *effendiyya* came to designate groups of men who approximated a cultural bourgeoisie to the extent that they could not be considered peasants, workers, or aristocrats.[48] Simply put, they were the products of modern Egyptian education, later to become those "who ran the day-to-day institutions of the state," while the modern state was "the largest producer of *effendis* (as students) as well as their principal consumer (as bureaucrats, teachers, and other professionals)."[49]

However, as Lucy Ryzova's research has shown, the *effendi* was a socio-cultural concept signifying a stance towards modernity in the particular historical, colonial context.[50] That is, the *effendis* presented and believed themselves to be the only force in society capable of solving the country's problems, as they were the only ones in possession of the right cultural and scientific tools to be its reformers. As they gradually became full participants in the political arena, they constructed a political, cultural, and social discourse, distributed through newspapers, journals, pamphlets, and books, which spread their world view and caused it to dominate the public sphere. This discourse constructed a model for the *ideal* modern Egyptian citizen. This model sought to reform children through a Western-style paradigm (thematically and visually).[51] Hence, for men from lower-class backgrounds, becoming an *effendi* (through higher education or through adopting the visual signs associated with this socio-cultural construction) was a strategy and performance that allowed them upward mobility.

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46 Morrison 2015, 6.

47 Morrison 2015.

48 Robert Mabro, Alexandria 1860–1960. The Cosmopolitan Identity, in: Anthony Hirst / Michael Silk (eds.), Alexandria, Real and Imagined, Aldershot 2004, 247–262, here 248, n. 2.

49 Lucie Ryzova, The Age of the Effendiyya. Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt, Oxford 2014, 19.

50 Ryzova 2014, 19.

51 Ryzova 2014, 18.

The children's press should be viewed as a collection of cultural products designed by the *effendiyya* and targeted mainly at the children of this socio-cultural construction as part of the Egyptian nation-building project. Through this project, the *effendiyya* presented themselves as the sole guardians of children, indicating that parents and the village were no longer sufficient as the main caregivers of children.[52]

Al-Awlād: Structure, Text, Language, and Readership

Al-Awlād was the first children's periodical in Egypt to be published by a private publishing house and not under the patronage of an educational institution. It was also the first periodical designated specifically for children aged 6–16. Published on Thursdays, it was a black-and-white eight-page weekly with seven pages dedicated to original comics and one page devoted to the publication of an illustrated foreign tale translated into Arabic. Apart from the comic strips, it also published various illustrated and textual contests, advertisements for *Dār al-Laṭāʾif al-Muṣawwara*'s other publications (such as *al-ʿArūsa* ["The Bride," n.d.]), and photographs of its readers—a practice which, as Morrison highlights, would be adopted by all future Egyptian children's periodicals.[53] Later, in its last few years of publication, it dedicated a page to what the periodical defined as "useful information"—columns containing practical everyday information.

In contrast to the government-sponsored children's periodicals, which set out to educate their readers, *al-Awlād*'s objective was first and foremost to entertain its readers, as advertisements in its volumes declared.[54] From *al-Awlād*'s marketing advertisements, one can learn that its editors thought its narratives would entertain children and adults alike—a claim that raises the question of whether its narratives were actually written and targeted at children in the first place.

The actual language used in the comics—a mixture of the spoken Cairene dialect (*al-ʿāmmiyya*); the standard Arabic (*al-fuṣḥa*); and transliterations of Italian, Greek, and French words—is another aspect to be taken into account with regard to its readership.[55] That is, its audiences needed to be familiar with the Westernised Weltanschauung of the *effendiyya* or of

52 Morrison 2015, 14–15.
53 Morrison 2015, 50.
54 See, for example, *al-Awlād* 103, 29.1.1925, 2.
55 In this context, *al-Awlād* does not differ from the satirical imagery (caricatures) published in the Egyptian press in the Interwar period. Zdafee 2019.

Cairo's and Alexandria's cosmopolitan communities.[56] In this context, the identity of *al-Awlād*'s artists, as well as their social-cultural capital, should also be taken into account. However, attempting to trace the identity of those who drew the comic strips proved futile, as they are not signed, nor did the periodical publish in its volumes the names of any of its contributors. I was also unable to determine whether the images and text were written and drawn by the same person.[57]

As was typical of comics outside the United States throughout the 19th century and in the first three decades of the 20th century,[58] the text itself usually took the form of narrative captions placed underneath the images. Although the words could have a graphic substance (as in the use of different forms, colours, or layouts), they were not treated graphically. They were merely accompanying the imagery with a purely "verbal" meaning. That being said, the captions do not necessarily describe the illustrated frames, and there are occasions when text and image do not coincide, as when the text provides information absent from the imagery or vice versa.

In the vast majority of the narratives, the text is not presented as monologues or dialogues "spoken" by the characters themselves. Rather, it is placed in the "mouth" of a narrator. Occasionally the narrator recounts that "the sergeant said [...]" or "the dog said [...]." However, such indications of speech are always given in the third person. The use of a narrator, rather than speech balloons, was typical of most comics outside the United States throughout the 19th century and in the first three decades of the 20th century.[59] This literary mechanism creates a gap between the narrator and the protagonists, and hence between them and the reader, as if they are actors and actresses on a stage, performing in front of the narrator and the reader alike. In a way, they are all the narrator's Others. There is no emotional identification of the narrator with the characters described; only rarely

56 These cosmopolitan communities were made up mainly of immigrants who arrived in Egypt, many of them seeking economic opportunities, during an extended period of immigration from the late 19th century to the 1940s. Zdafee 2019, 7.

57 With regard to the caricatures of the Interwar period, there are testimonies from the period specifying that artists drew the images while editors wrote the texts. Zdafee 2019, 132. This lack of information regarding *al-Awlād*'s editorial board and the working relationship between artists and editors is not unique within the Egyptian press. Most caricaturists working in Interwar Egypt failed to leave behind written documents describing their working processes.

58 Federico Zanettin (ed.), Comics in Translation, London 2008, 2.

59 As Zanettin observes, "speech balloons began to appear only later in the twentieth century outside the United States and can thus be considered a distinguishing feature of comics as an American form of visual narrative." Zanettin (ed.) 2008, 2.

is empathy for their misfortunes expressed. Accordingly, all emotions are mediated through the narrator and through the bodily gestures that perform those emotions. One can see in this narration mechanism an analogue to the model constructed by social anthropology, the task of which is to supply expert knowledge about its subjects of observation.[60] This literary mechanism also enhances the socio-cultural differentiation of the narrator / creator of *al-Awlād*'s comics from their observees.

Although many of *al-Awlād*'s narratives ended with a promise to further discuss the future occurrences of their protagonists, the vast majority were "self-contained narration[s]," to use Zanettin's phrasing, that were meant to be read on a weekly basis.[61] That being said, many of the characters performing in *al-Awlād*'s volumes appeared repeatedly, though not in a consistent and systematic manner, and one did not need to have read previous volumes to be able to understand and enjoy subsequent ones. Each strip was self-conclusive, as it focused on a specific situation and ended with a final jest.

Letters from readers, published in its volumes, praised *al-Awlād*'s ability to exhilarate the "tormented heart."[62] These letters could have been used as a testimony to the comic's reception amongst its readers; however, the vast majority are generic verses of praise in the form of *ghazal*s—love songs.[63] In any case, the question of the reception of comics in Egypt in general, and those of *al-Awlād* in particular, is not an easy one to answer, as testimonies from the period discussing aspects of reception are scant. Therefore, I will not attempt to speculate upon how these narratives were read by their intended audiences and what emotional literacy they actually achieved.[64]

60 I am drawing here on Clare Bradford's approach to the dynamics between narrator and characters in colonial and postcolonial children's books. Clare Bradford, The End of Empire? Colonial and Postcolonial Journeys in Children's Books, in: Children's Literature 29 (2001), 196–218.

61 Zanettin (ed.) 2008, 7.

62 *Al-Awlād* 104, 5.2.1925, 4.

63 See, for example, *al-Awlād* 106, 19.2.1925, 8.

64 One of the comic strips did blame *al-Awlād* for teaching small kids to behave in an unacceptable manner (*shaqāwa*). The comic strip presented a confrontation of a father with his child, who was cought smoking. The father blamed the the journal's anecdotes, which he refers to as tricks (*ḥiyal*), for corrupting children's behaviour. *Zakhārī affendī, wa al-ḥikāya illy intahit bi siǧnihi. Al-Awlād* 134, 3.9.1925, cover.

Al-Awlād: Joy, Fear, Anger, and Humiliation

Turning our attention to the comic strips themselves, I would like to stress first and foremost that the self which arises from the different narratives of *al-Awlād* comics is not necessarily Muslim. It is Egyptian. That is to say that although the Muslim religion is present in some of *al-Awlād*'s narratives (as in the contextualising of certain occurrences in the month of Ramadan), it can be considered as a present absentee, as it does not define the protagonists' performances or their emotional responses. In other words, I am not trying to reconstruct here the Muslim emotional style of the Interwar period in Egypt or Muslim emotional discourses. In this aspect, *al-Awlād*, like other cultural products of the period, constructed in a way a broader sense of a collective, which, to follow Deborah Starr's theorisation of Egypt's cosmopolitan era, avoided homogenisation while acknowledging and portraying the differences between Egypt's diverse socio-cultural communities and strata.[65]

The most prevalent emotion in *al-Awlād* (text and image) with regard to authority figures is fear. Fear is mostly expressed by or attributed to such authority figures as cops, sergeants, and police chiefs who are being outsmarted by various thieves and crooks. Occasionally, feelings of shock, humiliation, embracement, and confusion accompany the emotion of fear. All of these, which are pronounced in the captions, are also enhanced by the imagery: eyes wide open, tears, sweat splashing from the horrified subject, legs trembling, headdresses flying over heads, and motion lines.

The most common character in this context is that of sergeant ʿAṭiya, occasionally accompanied by a dog. ʿAṭiya is portrayed as lazy, reluctant to do his job, despicable, and vile, while his dog serves as his contrast: determined, proactive, resourceful, and occasionally the one making the decisions. For example, in the comic strip published in February 1925 (Fig. 1), ʿAṭiya is being outsmarted by the boy al-Zanati, whose actions cause ʿAṭiya to be embarrassed and humiliated in front of his superior officer. While his facial expressions vary and change from excitement to anger to astonishment and then embarrassment, the text only refers to feelings of shame and fear.

ʿAṭiya's traits characterise stereotypical European Orientalistic descriptions of "typical" or "average" Egyptians. The scope of this chapter will not allow us to elaborate here on the entire Orientalist perceptions of the

65 Deborah A. Starr, Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt. Literature, Culture, and Empire, London / New York 2009.

Figure 1. "The traitorous al-Zanati, Sergeant ʿAṭiya, the cookie seller, and the assistant." *Al-Awlād* 104, Cairo 5.2.1925, cover.

Orient—Europe's "cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the other," to use Eduard Said's definition of Orientalism in Western literature.[66] Said's highly influential work illustrated how the images of the non-Western subjects (mainly the Middle Eastern ones) were constructed through the gaze of Westerners, which was biased, condescending, and misrepresenting. It defined the Oriental as "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'"; while the European was constructed as its absolute opposite: "rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'."[67] This "knowledge about and knowledge of Orientals, their race, character, culture, history, traditions, society, and possibilities,"[68] manifested itself in a variety of academic and official documents to non-academic and popular products—from anthropological, historical, and sociological studies, to poems, paintings, movies, and caricatures. Through time and volume of works, these images of the Oriental Other became an imagined idea of the real Orient, from the European perspective.

Generally speaking, the cosmopolitan gaze echoed Orientalist knowledge of the Orient in these communities' cultural production of the Interwar period (as, for example, in movies and literature). The same phenomenon is traced in Egyptian intellectuals' (*effendiyya*'s) writings of the period, as discussed above, regarding the civilising mission Egypt shouldered and the reforms that needed to be initiated in order to construct the modern national community. In this aspect, *al-Awlād* asserted the "*effendiyya*'s subjectivity," to use Ryzova's terminology (as well as the British colonial perspective)—meaning that the reformist discourse that sought to repair the country, which in the *effendiyya*'s perspective needed to be rebuilt from scratch.[69] Through this discourse, the lower strata of Egyptian society were portrayed as in need of reform—a deficiency which ʿAṭiya's laziness and reluctance to perform his duties symbolised.

Fear is also expressed by teachers, mostly foreign ones, reacting to pranks initiated by children who belonged to the *effendiyya* (as their attire indicates). As *misyū Foks* ("Monsieur Fox"), which shared with ʿAṭiya feelings of frustration and embarrassment as he faced the resourcefulness of school children (Fig. 2). In the current example, Monsieur Fox himself acknowledges in the captions he feels ashamed (as opposed to other narratives in which the narrator communicates the protagonists' feelings).

66 Edward Said, Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient, London 1978, 9.
67 Said 1978, 48.
68 Said 1978, 38.
69 Ryzova 2014, 20.

Figure 2. Untitled comic strip. *Al-Awlād* 102, Cairo 22.1.1925, 2.

In this context of school dynamics, one can note that autobiographies from the period contextualise fear in the colonial circumstances of Egypt. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, for example, recalls his elementary school days, when he was overwhelmed with fear every time a foreign inspector arrived in his classroom.[70] For Morrison, the fear experienced by the boy Haykal in his 1925 autobiography was an expression of nationalism and a form of resistance, as fear and humiliation were emotions Egyptian intellectuals described in their writings as instilled by the British to maintain

70 Morrison 2015, 103, quoting Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, Fi awqāt al-farāgh. Majmūʿat rasāʾil ʾadabiyya tārīḫiyya aḫlāqiyya falsafiyya, al-Qāhira 1925, 330.

control.[71] The writers' awareness of this colonising mechanism is further described as shaping their nationalist aspirations and political activism as adults. Returning to the comic strip in which Monsieur Fox is being beaten by his pupils (Fig. 2), one can see in this imagined narrative a means of children's agency—exerting their wishful thinking. I will return to this proposed reading below.

Foreigners, identified as such by the use of the term *khawāga* or *misyū*, also express emotions of fear in encounters with wild animals.[72] In this context, it is worth mentioning that in more than one narrative, their saviours are black African boys (referred to as *al-zang* or *al-zing*, a collective noun for black people). In these cases, their Otherness is defined by the colour of their skin as well as their age. In one of these narratives (Fig. 3), the role reversal between the saviour and the one in need of salvation is enhanced by the fact that the narrative begins with *khawāga* John being served by two black boys—Tut and Hut—who build a bed for him. This act frames them as subordinate to the *khawāga*, only for them to be reframed in the last act as the reason that the *khawāga* was still alive, as he himself admits in the text. In other words—and although in the example mentioned and based on the imagery alone fear of the wild animal is also expressed by both children—fear is also constructed in *al-Awlād* as a subversive racial emotion, challenging cultural hierarchies as they were constructed in the colonising West.

As argued above, one can see in the expression of fear by foreign authority figures a challenging mechanism of power or status. That is, *al-Awlād* comics can be read as a medium of childhood agency whereby, to use Supriya Goswami's phrasing, "fictional children [and fictional narratives] are shown to be able to effectively exert their will upon their environment" and challenge the authority of their Others.[73] Goswami suggests viewing colonised children's literature as enabling children to exercise their will in and through literary forms, which "empower children (both real and fictional) by celebrating them as active colonial and anti-colonial agents."[74]

However, one may question whether children's literature does serve as a platform for children's agency—especially given that it is rarely about

71 Morrison 2015, 103.

72 Egyptian dialect refers to Egyptian men as *sayyid*, *hagg*, *effendī*, *bāy*, or *pasha*. Foreigners were addressed as *khawāga* (pl. *khawāgāt*). *Effendī*, *bāy*, and *khawāga* are all of Turkish origin, all meaning "sir." However, as Mabro indicates, although the term *khawāga* is used respectfully, the distinction reinforces boundaries between communities. Mabro 2004, 248–249.

73 Supriya Goswami, Colonial India in Children's Literature, New York 2012, 3.

74 Goswami 2012, 4.

Figure 3. Untitled comic strip. *Al-Awlād* 113, Cairo 9.4.1925, 6.

children or for them, as it written by adults and hence reflects adult agency. In other words, children's literature provides children with values and with images of themselves that have been approved by adults or with which adults feel comfortable.[75] Perry Nodelman suggests that children's literature is a form of colonisation in essence, based on the fact that it constitutes a representation of those who cannot see or speak for themselves and hence "must always be engendered by outsiders—those who

75 This perspective was reflected in various works, most prominently Jacquelin Rose, The Case of Peter Pan. Or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction, London 1984; Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, Children's Literature. Criticism and the Fictional Child, Oxford 1994; Perry Nodelman, The Other. Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature, in: Children's Literature Association Quarterly 17/1 (1992), 29–35; and Joseph Zornado, Inventing the Child. Culture, Ideology, and the Story of Childhood, New York 2006.

can see and speak" (italics in original).[76] Some of Nodelman's observations can be applied to *al-Awlād*, such as its inherent distortion, meaning its lack of objectivity regarding its ability and claim to represent childhood; the fact that it is inherently adult-centred—primarily for the benefit of adults; and its silencing and inherent silence—as it is written by adults who choose what will be discussed in it.[77] As a genre of children's literature, *al-Awlād* should have, on the one hand, provided children with models of childhood behaviour and, and on the other, taught children how to be adults and what kind of adults to be. However, as it depicts conflicts between characters based on misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and misdirection of emotions and actions, it clearly did not enhance and provide training on emotional literacy. Teaching empathy was not its main objective. Joy is expressed in the face of the Other's misfortune, while his grief becomes a source of schadenfreude. Skimming through the publication's volumes, one might suspect that empathy was not meant to be felt for any of its unfortunates.

The expression of fear by *al-Awlād*'s protagonists is generally accompanied by the expression of joy, or rather schadenfreude, by their opponents in the scene—whether schoolboys, thieves, animals (usually dogs), or housemaids. Regarding this last socio-economic stratum, it should be noted that two types of female characters appear in *al-Awlād*. One is represented by the image of Louisa, obviously not of Egyptian origin, as her name indicates.[78] Louisa is described as sophisticated, resourceful, and sharp but also vindictive. A typical example would be a strip in which Louisa hypnotises sargent ʿAṭiya—further proof of ʿAṭiya's incompetence (Fig. 4). The strip begins in a frame in which Louisa observes ʿAṭiya pouring out his rage on two children. The text doesn't give the context of ʿAṭiya's action, other than mentioning him being punished last week by his officer in light of his encounter with the cookie seller (Fig. 1). The text mentions that Louisa scolds the children (without specifying why) and then turns to hypnotise ʿAṭiya in order to humiliate him as she orders him to perform her job, only to receive a shower of tar afterwards and then be forced to jump rope. Readers are encouraged by the narrator to feel happiness in light of the spectacle—a feeling which is also attributed to the kids watching the spectacle in the frame itself.

76 Nodelman 1992, 29.

77 Nodelman 1992, 29–31.

78 She was also referred to as *al-Kamarīra*—a transliteration of the Italian term *cameriera*, "maid."

Figure 4. “Sergeant ʿAṭiya al-Bilbeisi and Louisa and the Hypnosis.” *Al-Awlād* 105, Cairo 12.2.1925, cover.

Figure 5. "Zarbiha, when she didn't wake up she did a trick better than an alarm clock." *Al-Awlād* 113, Cairo 9.4.1925, 5.

The other type of housemaid common in *al-Awlād*'s strips is a lower-ranking servant of Egyptian origin who is characterised as lazy, occasionally heavy-set, and foolish. As opposed to the image of Louisa, we do not meet the same character each time, but rather a group of housemaids with similar physical and behavioural characteristics. In the next example (Fig. 5), Zarbiha prefers to mobilise all her inventive abilities to be able to continue sleeping while she boils tea for her landlady. The punishment that hangs over her head if she does not wake up would be a deduction from her salary as well as from her food ration—a direct reference to her body measurements and passive character.

Both types of housemaids express joy in light of successful tricks performed behind the backs of their landladies. Joy is also expressed by male servants, mainly in restaurants, in response to occurrences resulting in the

Figure 6. Untitled comic strip. *Al-Awlād* 113, Cairo 9.4.1925, 6–7.

humiliation of *effendis*, as for example in a comic strip published in April 1925 (Fig. 6), in which the *effendi* is described in the text as yelling until he losses his senses (*ṣawābihi*),[79] meaning until he losses control over his emotions. In these narratives, joy can be read as a subversive emotion employed to challenge the Egyptian socio-economic hierarchy.

In this context, it could be added that some narratives describe the joy of boy thieves in light of successful acts of theft, questioning the very immorality of the act itself. In one of these narrativs, the boy Dardir tricks a bagel seller (Fig. 7), to whom the text refers to as lacking insight (*aʿmā baṣīra*)—a

79 It should be noted in this context that *al-Awlād*'s narratives reinforced gendered differentiations. Male servants were depicted in public spheres, such as restaurants, whereas female servants were depicted indoors. Louisa, on the other hand, as a non-Egyptian character, was depicted both indoors and in the public realm.

Figure 7. "Look at the story of the boy Dardir with the cookies' and fatir's Seller." *Al-Awlād* 106, Cairo 19.2.1925, 6.

deficiency that characterises him, as he himself admits, as one tending to leave Allah as responsible for his well-being. This last note can be read as further proof (from the *effendiya*'s perspective) of the deficiencies of lower-strata Egyptians—deficiencies that required the *effendiya*'s intervention with regards to their moral and pedagogical education.

Lastly, anger, although abundantly present in the images themselves and apparently felt by all characters performing in *al-Awlād* in response to their unfortunate encounters with the pranks, thefts, and frauds initiated by their counterparts in the scenes, is ascribed in the text itself mostly to foreigners—whether teachers, housemaids (such as Louisa), or landlords.

I would like to suggest that the expression of anger is perhaps constructed here as a loss of control over one's emotions—that is, an uncivilised emotion. As such, anger can also be interpreted as a subversive racial emotion, challenging the cultural hierarchies of the West / Britain, the presence of which in Egypt until the early 1950s was meant, at least theoretically, to bring progress and improvement to the lives of the Egyptians, as expressed in the phrase "the white man's burden."

Conclusion

The nature of *al-Awlād*'s comics—mocking, disparaging, and laughing at its protagonists and reducing them to objects of ridicule—accorded it an agency to subvert British and Egyptian power structures within Egypt and outside of it. In this context, *al-Awlād*'s narratives can be characterised as what Mary Louis Pratt refers to as the "contact zone," the "space of colonial encounters," where colonisers and those colonised meet and negotiate relations of power and influence, from the colonised perspective.[80]

As Morrison proclaims that the model of childhood that developed in Egypt in the first half of the 20th century had its roots in colonial resistance and Islamic heritage, *al-Awlād*'s narratives offer a somewhat different construction of childhood.[81] Egyptian, but not necessarily Muslim; resisting, but not solely the colonial Other. Its emotional discourses (in text and image) reveal the adult interests they served and how *al-Awlād*'s comics were a means for adults / authors to express emotions they might otherwise have hesitated to lay claim to or be identified with. In the process, they were labelling the socially, culturally, and nationally Other as Other while differentiating him from "us"—whoever that was.

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