The Port Said Orphan Scandal of 1933

Colonialism, Islamism, and the Egyptian Welfare State

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On the morning of June 7, 1933, a fifteen-year-old Muslim orphan girl named Turkiyya Hasan refused to rise for the headmaster of the Salaam School in Port Said. This school was an enterprise of a nondenominational and internationally staffed Protestant mission that was originally known as the Swedish Mission, because its first leaders and many of its missionaries were Swedish or Swedish-speaking Finns, but which became commonly known as either the Swedish Salaam Mission or simply the Salaam Mission (from the Arabic word salaam, meaning peace). A resident in the mission’s Home for Destitutes, which was an orphanage associated with the school, Turkiyya Hasan may well have felt enervated by the extreme heat that day and frustrated by the missionaries’ relentless pressure to convert to Christianity. Some of her friends had already done so, persuaded by the message or the possibility of employment with the missionaries. The matron did not take Turkiyya’s refusal to stand for prayer lightly and reprimanded her. When that did not work, the matron hit her with a stick, resulting in a ruckus, as the girl screamed and the matron rebuked her. What happened next is not exactly clear: the girl fled the school and was taken to the police or the police later came to the school and removed her. In any case, news of the beating of the orphan girl spread like wildfire from the port city to the capital, unleashing a firestorm.1
The caning of Turkiyya became a national scandal, generating a long paper trail of press stories, confidential consular reports, government circulars, and missionary accounts. Combined, the different accounts create a general picture of what happened that June morning. Juxtaposed, they show the contrasts in various understandings of the event, as multiple versions of the “Port Said Missionary Incident” or “The Criminal in the News” circulated through disparate networks. To some the matron’s response was understandable, for they saw Turkiyya as an unruly girl who deserved a little slap; but others saw the girl as the victim of a brutal beating that constituted a crime. “Saving” Turkiyya thus had very different connotations to the missionaries who were concerned about her soul and the Egyptians who intervened to extricate her from the orphanage and safeguard her religion. The affair provides an unparalleled opportunity to examine the encounter between missionaries and Muslims in Egypt and the issue of conversion.

Some scholars claim that missionaries to the Middle East quickly abandoned the effort to convert Muslims because the social barriers (notably, attitudes informed by Islamic doctrines of apostasy) were too steep. Instead, they argue, missionaries turned most of their energies to running schools and hospitals, modernizing and not proselytizing to their protégés or clients. The consensus seems to be, at least for regions such as Anatolia, Lebanon, and Palestine, that missionaries focused their efforts on Eastern Christians. Yet missionaries in Egypt attempted to convert Muslims as well as Copts, whether stealthily or in the open, and were given great leeway to do so under the British occupation. Many justified their proselytizing by citing the Egyptian Constitution of 1923, which affirmed freedom of religion and belief, as grounds for changing religions. Muslims often took freedom of religion to mean freedom to practice, not freedom to change.

This study accepts the definition of Lewis Rambo, who identifies conversion not merely as an event but as a “process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic force field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations.” In early twentieth-century Egypt (as in countries like India), conversion was never just a matter of a
transformed personal conviction. Rather, it remained a practical matter of law, for religious identity had consequences for public legal identity or “personal status” with regard to matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and so on. In Egyptian Islamic society, the prevailing assumption was that non-Muslims could convert to Islam but that Muslims could not convert out. By challenging this precept, Christian missionaries undermined a foundational assumption. The fact that Christian missionaries were able to evangelize among Muslims like Turkiyya Hasan with such impunity led many Muslims (and Copts) to perceive Christian missionary activity as an extension of Western imperial aggression in the lands of Islam.

Here then were the major unexpected consequences of the Port Said orphan scandal of 1933. The Turkiyya Hasan affair touched a raw nerve among Egyptians who were weary of half a century of British colonial presence. Lively press coverage forced the Egyptian government to take action, articulating and implementing a plan for a welfare state that would guarantee the well-being and cultural integrity of vulnerable groups such as orphans. Public outrage was fueled by and in turn energized an organization known in Arabic as Jam‘iyat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun, and variously known in English as the Society of Muslim Brothers, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Muslim Brethren (henceforth called here “the Muslim Brothers”), which had been founded five years earlier to rejuvenate Islamic practice in a modern context. The Muslim Brothers grew to become the heart of a Sunni Islamic mass movement, spawning branches throughout Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and elsewhere in the Middle East and beyond.

Prelude: The Brewing Storm

Turkiyya Hasan was born toward the end of World War I, in about 1918, the year the Salaam Mission in Port Said moved to its new home in the Arab district on the edge of the prostitutes’ quarter. Press accounts give her name variously as Turkiyya Hasan, Turkiyya Hasan Yusuf, and Turkiyya al-Sayyid Yusuf, and government documents transliterate her name alternately as Turkia, Turkya, and Turkiya. The founder of the orphanage, Maria Ericsson, refers to Turkiyya’s mother and sister in correspondence
in 1932, though a mother is nowhere in evidence in the summer of 1933.\textsuperscript{8} Under Islamic law, a girl with a mother but without a father would in any case have been considered an orphan. Confidential sources in the United States refer to a sister and brother, but no male relative appeared in any other sources.\textsuperscript{9} Little is known of Turkiyya’s early years or when exactly she entered the mission’s Home for Destitutes. It might have been as late as 1928, at about the age of ten, for a reporter in the newspaper \textit{al-Siyasa} mentioned that in five years the missionaries at Port Said had failed to convert her.\textsuperscript{10}

A storm had been brewing for some time at the Salaam Mission, for Turkiyya was not the only girl pressured by missionaries to accept Christianity. A case involving four siblings—three females named Aida, Nabawiyya, Fathiyya, and a male named Abduh Niman—created an uproar. Aida had converted to Christianity in 1931 on a visit to Zaytun, a town outside Cairo where missionaries kept a refuge for those female converts who could not return to their own homes and families or did not have them.\textsuperscript{11} She became a teacher and urged her sisters to follow her path in order to have a means to earn a steady income. When the sisters refused, the siblings were separated: Nabawiyya was sent by the missionaries to the Salaam School in Dikirnis; Abduh was shipped to the Qalyub Orphanage for Boys, which fell under the auspices of the American Mission of the United Presbyterian Church of North America; and Fathiyya was consigned to the Salaam Mission’s Home for Destitutes in Port Said.

Fathiyya faced heavy pressure to convert in this “home” and its associated school. She later reported that one of the tactics used by the missionaries to undermine the Muslim girls’ faith was to place a Qur’an in the girls’ bathroom. “We took it, but next day we found another one.”\textsuperscript{12} Despite such tactics and beatings, Fathiyya continued to resist appeals to convert and asked Turkiyya to help her escape. Fleeing the Home in May 1931, she took refuge in the police station, where she met Muhammad Effendi Khalil. A hastily arranged marriage gave the young woman protection and the young man a bride (without having to pay a high dowry).

The relentless appeals to Turkiyya to convert increased after Fathiyya’s flight. Her recalcitrance reached the Salaam Mission founder Maria Ericsson, who was then fundraising in North America. The onetime surrogate
mother used her moral authority to try to persuade Turkiyya from half a world away to accept Christ. In a letter penned in Flint, Michigan, and dated September 8, 1932, Maria recalled the youthful Turkiyya, who “used to try to teach visitors to say words in Arabic” and was “so earnest in making them repeat the words.” Maria, who had left for North America in the summer of 1931, flattered the girl by saying, “What a joy it would be to me to see you. I suppose that you have grown so that I would not know you,” and let her know that “my heart is with you all the time.”

After the warm opening, Maria got down to business, pressing her former ward: “My dear Turkya, will you be among those who are washed in the BLOOD of the LAMB? Are you ready when the Lord your Saviour comes? He is coming soon. It was for me that Jesus dies on Calvary, that is what my heart sings, can you join me in this song?” In her effort to convince the teenage girl to accept Christ, Maria Ericsson moved from images of singing to cries of agony, urging the teenager to believe in Him, to learn to love Him, not to fight against Him any longer. “Do not try to silence His voice speaking in your heart. The dear Lord is coming back very, very soon, and oh, what cries of agony there will be from all who rejected HIM.” Shifting from persuasion to fear as a tactic, she continued, “For then the great day of HIS wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand? . . . even the might[y?] kings on earth shall not know how to escape from His judgement.” She pointed Turkiyya to several specific passages in the Bible—every girl in the orphanage would have been given one to study—and then ended her letter with images of joy and love, signing as “your praying motherly friend.”

Not persuaded, Turkiyya tucked the letter away, along with a subsequent one from Finland, home of Anna Eklund, cofounder of the Salaam Mission, which had congratulated her on her new Christian name, Louisa. But Turkiyya refused to go to Zaytun during Easter in 1933 to be baptized and take the name. She also refused to join in prayer at the dining table, causing a cutback in her servings of food. In the meantime, she watched a battle unfold between missionaries, Muslims, and residents in Port Said over one of the older converts.

Like Turkiyya, Nazla Ibrahim Ghunaym had a mother but no father. She had attended a missionary school in Zaytun, and after graduating she
took up work as a teacher in the Salaam School in Port Said. A convert from Islam to Christianity, she joined the Evangelical Church (which was the largest Protestant church in Egypt, and one founded by American Presbyterian missionaries), and married an Egyptian evangelist. Although she was now pregnant, her Muslim relatives (or mother) demanded her return, claiming that her conversion had been forced and her marriage invalid. The case pitted the authority of Islamic courts against those of religious minorities, Islamic prohibitions against apostasy against the notion of religious freedom, and a government seeking to prove its nationalist credentials against the colonial British presence. Whatever the merits of the case and differences in the dispositions of the two young women—Nazla chose to convert and Turkiyya chose not to—the Salaam School and Home in Port Said came under close outside scrutiny. Under attack, the missionaries went on the offensive to save the girls in their care.

The Government Investigates

Competing accounts circulated about events that took place in the Salaam Mission School in Port Said on the morning of June 7, 1933, between Turkiyya Hasan and Alzire Richoz, the Swiss matron left in charge that day while the acting school director was away. News that the matron of the Salaam School had beaten an orphan girl in an attempt to convert her to Christianity spread quickly from the Mediterranean port city to the capital, sparking an investigation by the police and the Parquet (as the public prosecutor’s department was known). The press buzzed: *Al-Jihad* took credit for breaking the story and positioned itself as the vanguard of the journalistic corps investigating missionary abuses. Reports in *Al-Jihad* on June 12 claimed that a woman missionary had attempted to force a Muslim girl of fifteen to convert to Christianity. The next day, Turkiyya Hasan’s picture appeared on the front page of *al-Ahram*, the Egyptian Arabic daily with the largest distribution, showing her standing near the desks of members of the Parquet. Articles in the newspapers *al-Balagh*, *al-Siyasa*, *al-Jihad*, *Kawkab al-Sharq*, and *al-Wadi* attacked the government for leniency in dealing with missionaries and negligence in defending the official religion of the state. *Al-Sha’b*, a government organ, retorted that
The government was taking measures, and that the press might do better to advise Muslim parents not to send their children to such schools and to encourage wealthy Muslims to establish alternative educational institutions. The paper added that in the absence of proof of coercion to embrace Christianity, the government could not close missionary schools.22

The government had faced a series of missionary scandals in the early 1930s and had promised results, but had little to show for the effort. It claimed its hands were tied by the Capitulations, the set of legal and fiscal privileges enjoyed by foreign nationals and their protégés, and by the post-1882 British occupation of Egypt, which protected missionary activity. Although Prime Minister Isma’il Sidqi had abrogated the 1923 Constitution, the protection of freedom in religion still held; missionaries could proselytize in Egypt, just not with force. The government had a rough time cracking down on missionary activity, but it also had little desire to do so, for missionaries provided a range of social services on the cheap. But the Egyptian government wanted to resolve the Turkiyya Hasan affair quickly before it spun out of control.

The letters that Turkiyya had saved became crucial evidence in the investigation and critical in persuading government officials about the need to rein in the Salaam Mission. The Egyptian minister of interior pointed to the letters in a conversation with A. W. Keown-Boyd, the head of the European Department in the ministry, saying, “You have told me often that the missionaries do not press or incite Moslem children to change their religion. Here are documents which prove that they use both cajolery and intimidation.”23 Keown-Boyd then turned to George Swan, head of the Inter-Mission Council, a group comprised of representatives of many (but not all) of the evangelical organizations in Egypt that acted as a liaison between missionaries and the government. Keown-Boyd told Swan that the Ericsson letter “has done your cause more harm with responsible and reasonable Egyptians than any of the calumnies published against you.”24

Turkiyya testified in the inquiry that the head of the orphanage had beaten her for refusing to embrace Christianity. Physicians examining her found bruises and scratches that required observation in the hospital for three days. The matron of the orphanage, Miss Richoz, and the director
of the school, Alice Marshall, admitted that Turkiyya had been beaten. Yet they asserted that it was because she had acted “ill-behaved and impolite” and had been justifiably disciplined. They denied that they pressed her to embrace Christianity and maintained that they gave her and other students a choice in religious beliefs. When cross-examined on these statements, Turkiyya admitted that she had made a scornful remark to the headmistress, but insisted that the matron’s desire to convert her was one of the reasons for the beating.25

The missionaries pushed for an interpretation of events that emphasized Turkiyya’s unruly behavior and not their own. But either way, the matron was in deep trouble, for both forcible conversion and physical punishment in schools by those not authorized (in this case only the headmistress was authorized to use force) were illegal, though the latter was a less serious charge. The accusation of forcible conversion undermined the entire missionary enterprise and had broad ramifications, threatening the work of missionaries throughout Egypt and beyond.

An accommodation was quickly reached between the caretaker government (at the time Sidqi, the prime minister, was abroad receiving medical treatment) and the missionaries. After interviewing Turkiyya Hasan, Alice Marshall, and Alzire Richoz, the Parquet concluded that this was a case of school discipline rather than force in religion. Keown-Boyd then presented the Inter-Mission Council, of which the Salaam Mission was a member, with a choice: either the matron would leave the country or she would stand trial for having contravened the laws against corporal punishment in schools. The executive committee of the Inter-Mission Council advised her to leave but had no power to enforce its recommendation. The government gave the missionaries a few hours to decide whether to fight the charges or leave the country. With the clock ticking, Richoz packed her bags and proceeded to Palestine, taking refuge in the Swedish mission there, hoping perhaps that when the storm died down she could return to her post.26

A week after the “missionary incident,” on Wednesday, June 14, the Minister of Interior, Mahmud Fahmi al-Qaysi, responded to questions in the Chamber of Deputies of the Egyptian Parliament. He reported that
the government had come to an agreement with the relevant authorities that the matron of the school should leave Egypt and that she had left. He also announced that the remaining Muslim girls in the Salaam Mission orphanage would be sent immediately to government institutions or Islamic associations to be maintained and educated at government expense. And, with great pleasure, he reported that the government had allocated seventy thousand pounds for new institutions and refuges to provide orphans and destitute children with a sound upbringing.27

The government’s plan—getting the matron out of the country, promising to extract the other Muslim girls, and setting aside funds for new orphanages—aimed to quiet the affair. But with the caning of Turkiyya, the missionaries had overreached, and the Egyptian public, already incensed over earlier missionary scandals, was not placated so easily. Rather than bring the matter to closure, momentum continued to build, and Turkiyya became the poster child for the growing antimissionary movement. Overnight the spirited fifteen-year-old girl became a hero. On the evening of Wednesday, June 15, after the minister of interior had delivered his parliamentary remarks hoping to quiet dissent, Turkiyya addressed a large assembly at the home of one of her Port Said supporters. She discussed the methods of missionaries, urging her listeners to intercede on behalf of the young and calling upon them to build refuges and schools. Those gathered donated 300 pounds to the cause and formed a committee to establish a Muslim orphanage.28

A week later Turkiyya traveled to Cairo with an escort to be feted by the press. A large crowd sent her off from the train station, presenting her with bouquets of flowers to celebrate her resistance to the missionaries’ entreaties and threats. In the capital, she visited the offices of al-Balagh, al-Siyasa, and al-Jihad, the triad of papers that had covered the story most closely and reported her visit in articles on June 22 and 23.29 At al-Siyasa, she explained her reasons for rejecting Christianity: she could not believe that Jesus was the son of God, for as the Qur’an said, God is one, and she was ready to die for her beliefs.30 At al-Jihad, she gave details of her life in the Salaam Mission and the cruelty she experienced to force her to convert.31 The press kept the affair alive.
Although the Salaam Mission had Swedish founders, it evolved into an interdenominational and international Protestant operation with a strong American component. The mission’s founder lived in the United States, four Americans resided in the compound, and American funds kept the mission afloat. American Presbyterians, whose mission was the single largest missionary enterprise in Egypt, but who provided no funding for and had no institutional connection to the Salaam Mission and its enterprises, kept a close watch on the affair, concerned about its widening repercussions. They stood to lose the most if the antimissionary movement mushroomed. “I am writing to give you some account of a storm of an anti-missionary agitation through which we are at present passing,” C. C. Adams, the head of the American Mission in Egypt, wrote to Presbyterian officials in Philadelphia on June 26. He recounted the version that had reached him of events in the school. “One of the Muslim girls, named Turkiyah, refused to stand up as usual to join in the daily prayers of the school.” American missionaries, like the Swedes, mandated that all students regardless of their religious backgrounds participate in Christian prayer sessions, and Turkiyya had contravened the rules. “When the head mistress, a Swiss lady, a member of that Mission, remonstrated with her the girl became unmanageable and broke out into disrespectful language and screaming and created such a scene that the missionary, perhaps in exasperation, used a small rattan cane on the girl’s legs.” Here a naughty girl exceeds the bounds of good behavior, and a matron, pushed to her limits, uses minimal force. “The girl struggled to get possession of the cane and in doing so received some scratches.”

Adams’s account of the incident diverges from the one recounted by Turkiyya to the police and circulating in the Egyptian press. The head of the American Mission emphasized the girl’s responsibility for the punishment and minimized the extent of the inflicted damage to the girl. Like other missionaries, he argued that the “discipline which was administered for disobedience and insubordination was thoroughly deserved,” while admitting that, “the manner of it was unwise.” Adams had little
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problem with the disciplining of the girl (all the missionaries occasionally faced insubordinate children), but admitted that the situation was complicated. “And the unfortunate part about it was that it all arose because of the refusal of the girl to take part in Christian religious exercises and has given color to the charge which is now being broadcasted indiscriminately against all mission work of an attempt at forcible conversion.” In short, he objected to the spin that Egyptian observers put on events, linking the discipline to forced conversion.

Throughout this episode, American and other missionaries were keen to distinguish between required school activities, which included prayer and Bible study, and compulsion in religion, which they denied. They maintained that they gave students a choice in religion, exposing them to the gospel but not forcing them to accept it. Missionaries stressed the difference between illegitimate attempts to forcibly convert and legitimate discipline. At the same time, they sidestepped the parameters set on corporal punishment in Egyptian schools, under which only designated personnel had permission to cane students. The principal had the authority to cane Turkiyya; Alzire Richoz did not have this privilege.

Two weeks after the incident in the Salaam Mission school, and in light of continued media furor and public outrage, the U.S. Legation in Cairo sent a request to the American consul in Port Said to report on the “so-called missionary incident.” Through one of the American missionaries affiliated with the Salaam Mission, the American consul, Horace Remillard, asked Alice Marshall, the acting principal and a British national, for a written statement. She would not give one, for the Swedish Legation in Cairo had “bound the Mission to secrecy,” but she offered to meet with Remillard to answer questions, providing that the account be kept confidential. They met on Monday, June 26, nineteen days after the caning.

In Marshall’s narrative of events, as recorded by Remillard, Miss Richoz reprimanded Turkiyya “for not standing up in the presence of visitors as she had been taught to do and as was done by the other pupils with her at that time.” The response to the reprimand was “violent, abusive and blasphemous language,” at which point Richoz threatened corporal punishment. The girl “dared her teacher” (knowing perhaps that she was not authorized to cane her), “refused to hold out her hand to receive the
blows,” and struggled with Richoz, who struck the girl “with the stick over one shoulder while holding her wrists.” This account deletes any religious context, such as an obligatory morning service or prayer, for the caning.

Marshall reconstructed events for Remillard’s report that she herself had not witnessed, but she was on hand for the follow-up. Marshall noted that Turkiyya’s brother and sister “called for an explanation” but “seemed to be satisfied that the punishment had been justly administered.” (This is the only time we hear of a brother, who may have been a brother-in-law.) The evening following the caning, Thursday, June 8, a police officer came to the mission to take the girl away. Two days later, the chief of police notified Marshall that the matter was being taken up at the national level with the Departments of Interior and Justice. After giving testimony to the Parquet, Turkiyya traveled to Cairo, where June 13 she met in the Ministry of the Interior with Keown-Boyd, Swan, and Judge Booth, who gave her the ultimatum about Miss Richoz.

Remillard’s own assessment was that assertions that the girl was beaten “because she refused to be baptized” were without foundation. But he admitted that the mission “appears embarrassed” and saw Richoz’s actions as “unwise.” As a result of “inflammatory” articles in the press, the mission received veiled threats, which it reported, and the police assigned the compound protection. The credibility of the missions in Port Said had definitely suffered as a result of the affair. Muslim attendance at Sunday service of the American Peniel Mission (another small, independent, and interdenominational mission active in Egypt) was down drastically, from fifty or sixty to two or three. Still, the incident might not have drawn attention, according to the Mission, “had it not been for a certain Doctor Soliman . . . who is inimical to the Mission for reasons of personal jealousy.” He had been behind the “secret influence” used to propel the event into a national and religious issue. But Remillard reported that Marshall was anxious about divulging Dr. Soliman’s name, for “it would lead to certain trouble, with the Mission at a disadvantage from lack of tangible evidence.” In spite of credible proof, the story made the rounds, and was the lens through which the Salaam School missionaries understood the affair.
The Swedes, the Mysterious “Dr. S,” and the Muslim Brothers

Keeping Turkiyya in the news fueled anger over an affair that Egyptian government officials, British colonial officers, and Americans consular and missionary observers all hoped to quickly put behind them. They saw the affair as unfortunate but isolated. However, those affiliated with the Salaam Mission saw the whole event as staged and part of a larger conspiracy. “The members of the Swedish Mission now suspect that the girl may have been instructed by parties outside to make such a scene in order to bring about what has happened,” Charles Adams wrote to the head of his board in the United States, the same day that Remillard wrote to the head of the American Legation something along the same lines. Although Adams dismissed the suspicion as farfetched, his British counterpart, Swan, head of the Inter-Mission Council and the Egyptian General Mission based in Zaytun, supported the claim. “There is before us abundant [sic] evidence to show that the incidents at Port Said were originated and continued by a malicious and evil-minded man, who was seeking to satisfy thereby his own personal aims, and have since been exploited for political purposes.”

A history of the Salaam Mission written by Helmi Pekkola in the wake of the orphan scandal and published in Finnish in 1934 refers to a mysterious “Dr. S.” Pekkola’s history draws on a Swedish manuscript by Erica Lindstrom, a teacher in the mission; Maria Ericsson’s short book, The Swedish Mission Story, published earlier; and letters, stories, and presentations by the mission’s cofounder, Anna Eklund. According to Pekkola, Dr. S had been deeply implicated in the controversy surrounding Nazla, which had set the stage for the Turkiyya Hasan affair. He had been married to a German woman who had left him and saw Nazla, who with her husband Zaki had rented an apartment in a building he owned, as a replacement. In spite of Nazla’s pregnancy, he had sought “to charm” her for “he wanted to have Nazla for himself.” In this version of events, Dr. S conspired with Nazla’s mother and informed the police that Nazla was underage; the authorities subsequently brought her in for questioning. After pressure and a few sleepless nights, she signed a paper “not knowing
what she did,” renouncing her faith in Jesus Christ. This voided her marriage, since a Muslim woman could not marry a Christian man. Nazla quickly sought to reverse this and turned to the missionaries for help, taking refuge at the Salaam Mission. She later fled to Cairo, where she gave birth (possibly in the American Presbyterian Mission’s Fowler Orphanage), but the baby did not survive more than a few days. In the words of Pekkola, the “distress and strain experienced by the mother had left its marks on the baby, making it too weak for this evil world.” Later Nazla and Zaki were spirited out of the country where “in their new homeland they are able to continue the service of their Lord and Master.”

Seen another way, Dr. S could have been trying to save Nazla and return her to her Muslim faith, not to seduce her, as the missionaries asserted. “Doctor S’s plans with regard to Nazla hadn’t worked out,” wrote the Finnish mission historian, “and in his rage he decided to bring down the whole hated Mission.” According to Pekkola, Dr. S found an ally in trying to bring down the Salaam Mission. “One of the pupils at the Salaam Mission girls’ orphanage was to become a very helpful henchman to him.” That pupil, “T,” as the mission historian called Turkiyya, had apparently visited Dr. S frequently in the spring of 1933. And “with his advice she secretly collected photographs and letters that her friends had received from the missionaries,” placing these in a suitcase for safekeeping.

In hindsight, the missionaries saw T as a “difficult-to-educate bad-mannered girl,” who had always been “a source of grief and sorrow to the Mission.” In this version of events, T provoked the matron in a pre-meditated act. One day in early June, “she organized a scene/had a fit. She got mean, and got even more upset from the scolding, until she was physically punished.” The context of the “fit” is not mentioned, but the consequences are: “That is when she ran away, taking with her the photographs and letters she had collected, that she in advance had stuffed in a suitcase and hidden.” She ran to Dr. S and with him “went to the other enemies of the Mission and told that she had been hit because she did not let herself be forcefully baptized.” The evidence in Turkiyya’s suitcase had a large impact on the court of public opinion, for the letters were published. The Egyptian press carried photographs of students and teachers alongside letters from missionaries such as the one from Maria Ericsson to
Turkiyya—which the mission chronicler described as “heartfelt words of advice and consolation to the young Christians.”

The press accused the Salaam Mission of hypnotizing children, kidnapping them, and taking them to Finland, where Anna Eklund was born and many of the mission supporters lived.

Nordic missionaries focused on a plot with twists and turns that ultimately missed the main point. This was more than the story of a despondent husband or jilted lover trying to destroy a foreign institution in revenge, a tale that made the rounds of foreign missionaries in Egypt and reached Keown-Boyd. He warned Swan “not to think in terms of Dr. Mohammed Suliman who plots and plans the destruction of the Salaam School partly from bitterness of soul caused by the light morals of his German Christian wife and perhaps partly to fill his clinic.”

Keown-Boyd wanted Swan to focus on defusing the crisis instead.

Dr. Muhammad Sulayman, who was disparagingly called “Dr. S” by the Finnish mission historian, headed the delegation that escorted Turkiyya to Cairo and took her on a tour of daily newspapers. His political affiliations rather than his romantic inclinations provide the key to understanding the scandal. Sulayman was a member, among other organizations, of the Port Said branch of the Muslim Brothers, a society founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna in the nearby canal city of Ismailiyah to strengthen Islam in the face of British occupation, Westernization, and missionary inroads. The origin and spread of the Muslim Brothers is closely linked to missionary activity in the Suez Canal Zone and Egyptian Delta region, for it became the main grassroots organization trying to combat Christian evangelizing. The Muslim Brothers in Port Said and nearby towns had placed the Salaam Mission in its sights and watched the place carefully for opportunities to rescue girls. Gossip about an Egyptian notable’s marital distress missed the main point and the genuine concern of Muslims about the conversion of minors.

The Salaam Mission historian acknowledged that Sulayman was a member of a league started to support and defend Islam and that “[t]hese kinds of leagues of the most zealous Mohammedans have been forming everywhere in the last few years.”

She was probably referring to the League for the Defense of Islam, an organization that was founded June
23 as a result of the Turkiyya Hasan affair, but was oblivious of his links to the older organization. Most of the foreign missionaries in Egypt did not link evangelical activities to the rise of Islamist organizations such as the Muslim Brothers and see the larger picture.

The Muslim Brothers went under the radar of British and other foreign officials, as did publications sympathetic to their cause, such as *al-Fath*. Edited by Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, an Islamic activist from Syria and Muslim Brothers member, *al-Fath* gave a dramatic account of the events of June 7. In this version, under the headline “Criminal in the News” (a reference to the school matron), Miss Richoz picked a quarrel with Turkiyya, hit her with a bamboo/rattan cane, and humiliated her in front of her friends. Then “she threw her down on the big bench, leaned over her back, pulled her hair taut and banged her head.” What for the Americans were a few scratches looked to many Muslims like “evangelical brutality.” When asked for the reason for her actions, Richoz replied that she did this because Turkiyya deviated from the routine. Turkiyya claimed that the matron perpetrated these offenses “to kill the devil” that stood between her and Jesus.55

According to *al-Fath*, under this pressure Turkiyya feigned acceptance of Christianity, and when the missionaries tried to appoint her as a nurse in a missionary hospital, she escaped. Dr. Sulayman was “in a position to learn of her story” and “had the merit to lift the curtain” on the crimes committed under the name of “peace” at the Salaam School. Earlier, another girl had tried to flee from “that hellish place” and asked Dr. Sulayman for help; but he was unable to aid her legally because she had no family with whom he could intercede and the state intimidated her to stay in the home. The Muslims of Port Said started an organization, the Society of Islamic Awakening (*Jamʿiyat al-Nahda al-Islamiyya*), to rescue poor Muslim boys and girls from missionaries like the unnamed girl who solicited help from Dr. Sulayman. The group requested guardianship of orphans “like that victim”; in the wake of the Turkiyya Hasan affair, the government decided to build its own refuge.56

Upon her return from the press circuit in Cairo, Turkiyya began working in the Ophthalmic Hospital in Port Said. But the town was simply not big enough for her to avoid chance meetings with missionaries and
converts form the Salaam Mission. When they attempted to woo Turkiyya back into the fold, her sister Amina (who had not figured prominently in the story until then) complained to the Parquet. She asked to have contacts between the missionaries and Turkiyya severed completely. Government officials moved Turkiyya from Port Said to Cairo, where she was enrolled in a nursing course at the King’s Hospital at their expense. Her handlers in the Ministry of Interior hoped that upon completing the course she would take up employment as a nurse in the same hospital.

**Conclusion**

There are numerous holes in the story of the Turkiyya Hasan affair and contradictions in the reports: Was Turkiyya beaten badly? Was she beaten to force her conversion or her compliance with school regulations? Did the beating occur during prayer or a school visit? Did she accept Christianity only to later recant? Did she flee the Salaam Mission or was she taken out by the police? We may never know exactly what happened in the Salaam Mission in Port Said that June. It is clear, however, that the contradictory versions reveal a wide gulf in the way foreign missionaries and Egyptian Muslims perceived aims, activities, and agendas.

In Cairo, Turkiyya disappeared almost completely from the public eye and the historical record. But the caning in the Salaam Mission continued to reverberate, setting in motion a train of events that had consequences way beyond Port Said and the set of actors involved in the scandal. The affair that Turkiyya had sparked spurred the spread of Islamist societies in Egypt, undermined the privileges of missionaries, and toppled a government. This was no small feat for a fifteen-year-old girl.

The missionaries were tone deaf and did not hear the concerns of the Muslims they had come to “enlighten” and “save.” Those affiliated with the Salaam Mission saw some good emerge from the affair. As with past persecutions, this one generated “testimonial of Jesus Christ” for governments, heads of states, and “all the people to hear.” The missionaries believed in an ultimate victory, that God, “in his grace,” would “let the light of gospel shine in the darkness of Islam for the salvation of many.” They certainly believed in their good intentions of enlightening and
saving those in darkness. But those in the “darkness of Islam” did not see matters in the same way. They mobilized under the banner of the Muslim Brothers and similar associations to fight the missionaries, rescue their victims, and strengthen Islam.

The missionaries’ good intentions produced unintended and unforeseen consequences that would have a lasting impact on Egyptian society and politics. The effort to convert Turkiyya Hasan set off an antimissional antimissionary movement that reached a crescendo in the summer of 1933. The affair was the beginning of the end for American and other missionaries in Egypt, who slowly retreated from most of their outposts in Egypt, leaving in their wake a vibrant Islamist movement, which was born in large part in opposition to them and in their image.