

The Egyptian Women's Movement
Identity Politics and the Process of Liberation
in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the advent of the Egyptian women's movement from the late nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth century. Continuous negotiations for control between the secular and the religious institutions of Egypt led to the state's domination over the public jurisdiction and the Islamists maintaining a grip over the Egyptian private sphere, which includes family laws and matters of the home. The Egyptian women's movement contested and resisted against the secular nationalists (the state) and conservative Islamists for just and equal society in general, and political rights, and educational, marriage, and divorce reform specifically, which were assurances made to the women's movement by both. Groups formed within the movement joined together and converged to collaborate on key concerns that involved Egyptian women as a collective group such as education and political rights. Using the written works of scholars and leaders of these movements, this study investigates and observes the unique unity achieved through the diversity and disunity of the Egyptian women's movement; as well as explores the individual activism of significant leaders and pioneers of the movement in the midst of cultural encounters resulting from imperialism, political revolutions, and other major societal and political developments of nineteenth and twentieth century Egypt. It explores the ideas and actions of the Egyptian women as they emerged from a veil of silence which shadowed women's existence in Egypt's crucial years of nationalization eventually leading to a unique emergence of an incorporation of Islamism and feminism.

DEDICATION

To my grandmother Khadeeja Rammal and my aunt Nadia Jazzar

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PREFACE

For the sake of clarity, terms, translations, and transliterations of women's ideas, Arabic words, and names must be explained. The word "feminism" has little relevance in the Egyptian case, as it is a word generally bound to western culture. Therefore in its place, I have used the phrase "women's movement" as it is a more accurate transliteration of the Arabic, "*al-haraka al-nisa'iyya*." Also, women's movement concisely describes what these women considered themselves to be: women in search of their place in the emerging modern Egyptian nation. Many women of this movement rejected the term "feminist," which was a concept that signified an infiltration of European ideas into Egypt and the presence of colonialism. However, when quoting an author or a leader of the women's movement, I will use the word "feminist." I will also use the term "feminist" to describe women that did not overtly renounce the term, but when it comes to the women as a whole, I refer to them as the women's movement. It is important to note that "feminism" represented different things to different women. There was no unanimous understanding in existence. What consolidated and strengthened the Egyptian women's movement were the common demands for equal access to education and the public sphere for women, family law reform, and the general improvement of women's situation and rights in Egyptian society made by all sectors of the women's movement. Therefore, the terms I used to categorize the different factions or offshoots within the women's rights movement

are: nationalist feminists, women Islamists, and liberal feminists as a way to distinguish between these groups.

In the case of names of organizations or individuals, I avoided traditional and often inaccurate English translations or transliterations from Arabic and utilized more precise usage. For example, with regards to the Islamist organization founded by Hasan al-Banna in 1928, “*jam‘iyat al-ikhwan al-muslimeen*,” it is traditionally translated to the “Muslim Brotherhood.” I have used the more exact “Muslim Brothers.” Another example is in the case of an Islamist group founded by Zainab al-Ghazali, in many academic works referred to as the “Muslim Women’s Association” or “Muslim Women’s Society.” I have used the more accurate translation of “*jam‘iyat as-sayyidat al-muslimat*,” which is “Society of Muslim Ladies.” Aside from the word “ladies” being a more appropriate translation of “*sayyidat*,” it also reflects the bourgeois nature of the organization. Finally, I consistently used more proper spelling for names according to their Arabic pronunciations, such as “Muslim” in the place of the inaccurate “Moslem,” “Durriya Shafiq” as opposed to “Doria Shafik,” or “Jamal ‘Abd al-Nasir” instead of “Gamal Abdel Nasser.” Consequently, any words associated with the former president of Egypt such as “Nasserism” and “Nasserist” have been changed to “Nasirism” and “Nasirist.” Any spelling in the main text, footnotes, or bibliography, contrary to the mentioned above, is a result of my use of direct quotes from authors that have used another spelling for the same word.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Al-Haraka an-nisa'iyya, Arabic for the women's rights movement enjoyed a long and rich history in Egypt dating from the late nineteenth century and flourished during the first half of the twentieth century. Constant bargaining for control between the secular and the religious institution of Egypt, al-Azhar, resulted in the government's monopoly over the public jurisdiction as the Islamists maintained a hold over the Egyptian private sphere. In both instances, women were excluded from partaking in this process that affected their lives most directly as they were subjugated by men in both realms of Egyptian society. The women's movement in the Egyptian or an Islamic context was quite different from women's movements in non-Islamic parts of the world. Islam stipulated specific rights to Muslim women since the seventh century. Therefore, by the late nineteenth century and twentieth century, the Egyptian women's movement was cultivated in a culture that already guaranteed women legal, financial, and marital rights under Islam. In this environment, activists in the women's rights movement often fought for just and proper application of these rights in addition to reform.

Simultaneously, nationalist and Islamist movements were gaining momentum in the emerging Egyptian nation. Although the women's movement garnered genuine support from men from both the nationalist and Islamist movements, often it was in order to gain women's backing and collaboration to

their respective organizations and causes. Another emergent movement was the left in Egypt, with examples such as Salama Musa, Inji Aflatun, and Latifa al-Zayyat. Although communists and members of the larger leftist movement contributed greatly to discourses regarding reform and women's rights, the Egyptian left never reached the popularity or the dominance of the nationalists or the Islamists. Early in the development of the movements, both nationalists and Islamists claimed to espouse women's rights, and social justice to a certain extent. Qasim Amin, known as "the father of the Egyptian feminist movement,"¹ believed Islamic law, *shari'ah*, did not require women to wear the veil. Indeed, he argued that the law should be removed in order for Egyptian society to become part of the modern world. Muhammad 'Abduh, a reformer, argued that Muslim men and women did not need to abandon their piety in order to become modern, in fact a Muslim could be devout as well as modern. Both men, embraced as leaders by opposing sides, were influential when it came to women's rights and education within their respective movements. Despite their political and religious incompatibility, the actions of both the secular and religious activists were similar in call for women's support and action. Both groups also disappointed female

¹ Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805-1923*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, 153. However, others such as Albert Hourani and Leila Ahmed are hesitant to use the term feminist when describing Amin. Hourani wrote: "He is scarcely what a later generation would call a feminist. He does not, for example, suggest that women should have political rights." See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 166; and Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, 163.

activists by not honoring their pledges to encourage women's participation in Egypt's modernization process. In the agendas planned out by each movement, there was no room for a feminist movement and it was continuously left behind. The Egyptian women's movement fought and struggled against the secular nationalists, conservative Islamists, as well as the state for political freedoms and rights, especially in educational, marriage, and divorce reforms, which were the specific promises male activists made to the women's movement. Although women gained reforms and rights, they were slow in coming and required generations of bold resistance and advocacy on the parts of determined members of the Egyptian women's movement.

The movement, with all its diversity, cooperated and stood up to obstacles and unfairness that were either suddenly hurled at them or firmly rooted in society or politics. One should not have the impression that the relationships between groups within the women's movement were harmonious, on the contrary, internecine conflicts or rivalries existed. However, all groups acknowledged the necessity of unity. These groups collaborated on major issues, such as educational and political rights, that affected the Egyptian women as a whole. The differences according to modern Middle East historian, Beth Baron, between groups were "more in emphasis than in substance."² As Egyptian secular and religious leaders, writers, and reformers were often at odds so too were factions within the women's rights movement. But the women were willing to blur the

² Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, 111.

lines of controversy and find points of agreement, because they advocated many of the same reforms. This study does not attempt to claim that the Egyptian women's movement was divided into clear cut groups. Like any large movements within a diverse society, it is difficult to place each group or leaders into precise categories. However, this study does attempt to clarify differences among these groups that make up the women's movement by examining divisional lines and common patterns that brought community-minded women together to form charitable societies and social activist organizations. The women's rights movement during the twentieth century was comprised of three main factions, the moderate nationalist groups led by Huda Sha'rawi, the conservative Islamist group headed by Zainab al-Ghazali, and the more politically aggressive and liberal group headed by Durriyah Shafiq. The nationalist group was in full swing by 1908, when Egyptian women were greatly involved in the written press, began entering the university, and attending and giving lectures. The conservative faction was epitomized in the group founded by al-Ghazali in 1937. The third faction was comprised of the generation that began graduating from universities in Egypt and Europe in the early 1930s and entered the workforce. The following study covers the history of the relationship between the differing groups and how cooperation and unity were practiced more often than not to bring about reform and change to society, politics, religion, and education. Chapter 2 opens with a review of the literature and sources that were utilized in this study and the definitions of the terms that explain the categorizations and

explanations of groups and individuals. Next is a chapter devoted to women and *shari'ah*, the body of law that determined the status of women in Egyptian society, and it is focused on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Chapter 4 investigates the earliest groups of women activists and feminists as well as the leading figures who came from it such as Huda Sha'rawi, Nabawiyya Musa, and Malak Hifni Nassef. This chapter also includes a section on how Sha'rawi and Musa in their own ways resisted society's restrictions on women. Descriptions of their ideals, actions, and achievements offer insights into women's values and defiance of patriarchy in the early twentieth century. The fifth chapter is the backdrop to the Egypt's political situation following British domination to give context to the Egyptian women's movement and how it was caught in between or lost in the struggle between nationalism and Islamism. This chapter provides the context for two of the more visible activists Zainab al-Ghazali, an Islamist, and Durriyah Shafiq, a liberal feminist. Both women made significant contributions to the overall movement making it both effective and accommodating to historical circumstance.

The women members of the secular and religious movements in twentieth century Egypt demanded from the Egyptian government the equal rights, protections, amendments to laws, and women's participation in their nation's nationalist and anti-colonialist principles. Members of both sides of the movement frequently found themselves at odds with the reigning authorities under British rule as well as Nasirist Egyptian rule. When necessary, women of

both sides of the movement were encouraged to join forces to show solidarity and sisterhood. Their shared goals were clear: social justice, marriage, and divorce reforms, the right to vote, and education for women.

Each faction of the movement fought in this struggle and resisted in different and separate ways, yet interestingly under the umbrella of unity. Their major goals were common and they relied on Islam as a basis for their argument to implement these changes. The activists in the women's movement collectively espoused the same goals, however as separate movements sought different means or paths. Moderate and secular women encouraged women to unveil,³ come out of seclusion, and embrace Islamic traditions that taught that women and men were equals. The Islamist women practiced Islam and demanded the government to follow Islamic laws, which would consequently set up an ideal and just society in Egypt, meaning that women had the right to be men's equal. Both movements were anti-imperialist and called for the removal of British influence and control over Egyptian government and society. However, the difference between the moderate feminists and Islamist women is that the former wished to take on European standards for shared responsibilities between women and men in creating a modern state. The latter, on the other hand, were influenced by the idea that it is possible to be modern and still a pious Muslim, which countered the moderates' slant toward secularism.

³ In this case, "unveil" refers to removing the veil from the face, and not to remove *hijab*, the headscarf.

The convergence, despite divergence, was a common theme in the development and history of the Egyptian women's movement and was demonstrated repeatedly. Frequent cooperation between both groups of women demonstrated how it was possible to join ranks for their causes, which was not the case for their secular and religious male colleagues. A marriage between the progressive Islam the women Islamists espoused and the secular women's agenda to elevate and liberate women was achievable. By uniting with the feminists to put pressure on the government to educate women, reform marriage laws that permitted polygamy, and divorce that disallowed men to abandon wives and children for no reason, leaving them destitute and despised. In these endeavors, Islamist women did not in their view compromise their faith as these reforms were sanctioned by Islam. If Islam were administered properly, they argued, an ideal and just society would flourish. Likewise the secularists did not compromise their beliefs; they came together with the Islamist group for their mutual benefit. However, at different points of time, each group has taken its turn being the more popular or the more prevalent voice over the other.

By 1910, Egyptian women began to remove the *hijab*, once a social marker, until it was uncommon to see women in *hijab* in the 1970s. Today, the strong resurgence in *hijab*, and the perception that this resurgence is a setback to the women's movement by some Egyptian feminists warrants a look into the history of Egyptian women's complex and culturally determined history. According to the weekly program "Everywoman" airing on the international news

channel, Al Jazeera English, on May 16, 2008, the majority of today's women and young girls in Egypt wear *hijab*, the headscarf covering their hair or *niqab*, the face covering. This phenomenon is seen as the result of a shift in Egyptian society towards conservatism.⁴ This is an important trend to be examined in Egypt, once the beacon of secular Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s. This development reflects in part the derailment of Egyptian society from the Nasirist direction to Islamism beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This trend also exemplifies a post-1967 reaction to the defeats and failures of secular societies in the Middle East. The importance of this particular study is to suggest that despite the coalition between the secular and the religious women that will be discussed; the religious portion of society has gained more influence and momentum in today's Egypt. This is a movement that seemingly flourishes in other parts of the Muslim world as well along side feminism. It is also indicative of a legacy left by the interaction and evolution of movements in the 1950s and 1960s, feminism and *hijab* are not mutually exclusive as it was in the past. On the other hand, authors Nemat Guenena and Nadia Wassef, argue that: "Renewed appeals urging women to retreat to the private sphere and appearance of the Islamic attire (*al-ziy al-Islami*) reflect the blurring of boundaries between the 'secular' and the 'religious.' We argue that this threatens to negate many of the gains acquired by Egyptians

⁴ Al Jazeera English, [http:// english.aljazeera.net/programmes/everywoman/2008/05/2008615_05937_967261.html](http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/everywoman/2008/05/2008615_05937_967261.html) (Nov. 5, 2009).

women throughout the past century.”⁵ To recognize and appreciate the achievements of the Egyptian women, the following chapter examines the major players of the social, intellectual, and nationalist movements in Egypt, which had major influence over women, how they were perceived and their position in society.

⁵ Nemat Guenena and Nadia Wassef, *Unfulfilled Promises: Women's Rights in Egypt*. Population Council, 1999, 1.

Chapter 2

DEFINING TERMS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Before delving into this topic, definitions of the categories in this study of Egypt will be clarified; the terms used in this study, “feminist” and “woman Islamist” in the twentieth century Egyptian context must be defined. In doing so, this study will describe the circumstances, social standing, and occupations of the founders and leaders of these groups that became colleagues, partners, and sisters in the name of a common cause. It will describe each movement separately to understand the origins and development of the movements. In each description a brief summary of major players in each movement, such as Huda Sha‘rawi from the feminist movement, and Zainab Al-Ghazali from the women’s Islamist movement will be given. This study will also discuss both movements in relation to each other. Describing the goals of the women’s movement in Egypt will give a picture of the legal, social, and political conditions of Egyptian women during the twentieth century and will be necessary to appreciate the accomplishments of these movements, whether they were achieved separately or by a unified effort. Moreover, it will analyze and explain the reactions and positions the groups held towards the situations women lived in Egypt using their actions and resistance to specific events in Egyptian history. Finally, this examination will determine whether the occasional joining of both groups, perceived as opposing forces, left a lasting legacy or tradition in the Egyptian feminist and women’s Islamist movements.

For the purpose of historical background, sources examined for this study include works about and by organization leaders, major thinkers, and advocates of social reform in Egypt, active during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that contributed to the discourse on the major issues of the day women's rights, education, nationalism, Islamism, and modernity. Such reformers are Rifa'a Badawi Rafi' al-Tahtawi, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, Muhammad Rashid Rida, Qasim Amin, Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb. Another significant person of interest to this study was the statesman Jamal 'Abd an-Nasir. These men represent the voices of reform in their respective times that influenced future generations of men and women activists and reformers during the modernization process. They informed the intellectual, cultural, Islamic, and anti-colonial discourses that drove the modernization movement. I will distinguish between conservative, Islamic thinkers interested in modernization and the preservation of Islamic principles and nationalist socialist thinkers who viewed the separation of religion and the state necessary for modernization; I will categorize and explain them in a later chapter. In this work, al-Tahtawi, al-Afghani, 'Abduh, Rida, and Amin represent the reformers from the 1830s to the early 1900s. Al-Tahtawi, al-Afghani, and 'Abduh reflected on reason and progress for Egypt through Islam in the writings examined here. Rida and Amin were disciples of 'Abduh. Therefore, the ideas and subsequently the writings of these reformers were passed down throughout Egyptian generation of activists, constantly shaping religious, cultural, Islamist and feminist discourses as each

reformer added their own touch or adaptation to their teachers' ideas. Rida is best known for his position of editor of *al-Manar*, the Lighthouse, an Arabic journal he established in 1898 and dedicated to 'Abduh's teachings. Rida was also known as 'Abduh's conservative disciple. His conservative view of women is reflected in his work *Huquq an-Nisa' fi al-Islam: Nida' lil-Jins al-Latif* (1931), *Women's Rights in Islam: A Call to the Gentle Sex*, and writings in *al-Manar*. Amin, 'Abduh's liberal disciple focused on the Egyptian woman in *Tahrir al-Mar'a* (1899), *The Liberation of Women*, and *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* (1900), *The New Woman*, in the chosen sources for this work.

The writings of Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Jamal 'Abd an-Nasir appeared throughout the 20th century. Hasan al-Banna was a leader in the Islamist movement and an admirer of al-Afghani and 'Abduh. He gave his own opinions on reform, Islam, colonialism, and on emergent roles of women. His and Sayyid Qutb's reformist writings represented Islamist discourse on women's rights in Egypt from the first half of the twentieth century until the time of Qutb's death in 1966. I include al-Banna and Qutb's work because female activists with Islamist tendencies aligned themselves both formally and informally with al-Banna's movement. The women also joined the Islamist movement against nationalist and socialist ideologies prevalent in Jamal 'Abd an-Nasir's 1953 new state campaign. I study the works by and about Nasir to give further insight into the political and historical backdrop of the later half of the twentieth century, the years when the

women's rights movement matured and divided along clear cut, ideological lines. Also, many reforms on the status of women occurred during the Nasir years.

Rifa'a Badawi Rifa' al-Tahtawi (1801-73) a writer and translator, was a significant contributor to Egyptian modernization. As religious education was a tradition in his family, he graduated from al-Azhar University. *Al-Murshid al-Amin lil-Banat wal-Banin (The Trusted Guide for Girls and Boys)* is a book on education, and *Manahij al-Albab al-Misriyya fi Mabahij al-Adab al-'Asriyya (The Paths of Egyptian Hearts in the Joys of the Contemporary Art)* discusses Egyptian society.⁶ Shaped by an educational delegation he directed in Paris and his traditional Islamic views, al-Tahtawi wrote of Egyptian patriotism and how it is not contrary to *shari'ah*, as well as the need for girls to receive the same education as boys. Muhammad 'Ali, who began modernization and the promotion of the modern state in Egypt,⁷ sent a student delegation to Paris and appointed al-Tahtawi its imam. Al-Tahtawi's five years in Paris left a permanent impact on his writings that had a wide circulation. He even learned French, translated about twenty French books into Arabic, and later became the head of the school for languages.⁸ According to Middle East historian Albert Hourani, al-Tahtawi "managed to make precise observations of the modern world as well as

⁶ Hourani, 72.

⁷ Appointed by the Ottomans, Muhammad Ali was governor of Egypt from 1805 until 1848, and established a dynasty which ruled Egypt until 1952. Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot, *A Short History on Modern Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 53.

⁸ John J. Donohue, John L. Esposito, eds, *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, 9.

the ancient, and acquired a wide knowledge of the institutions and customs of the greatest and most flourishing society of his day.”⁹ Education to al-Tahtawi was integral to *hubb al-watan*, patriotism, or translated literally, love of country.¹⁰ According to woman’s studies professor, Leila Ahmed “his work was the first work to appear in Arabic associating reforms in social mores affecting women with social and technological reforms for national renewals.”¹¹ The Educational Council of Egypt, of which he was a member, recommended in the late 1830s that women receive public education, because it was “impressed by women’s important contribution to the progress of civilization in modern societies,”¹² Ahmed continued.

A major intellectual and reformer that influenced the modernization of Egypt was Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897), he believed in reforming and reviving Islam from defenselessness and ignorance which resulted in Islamic lands becoming victim to Western hostility.¹³ The remedy for this weakness, he argued, was for Muslim societies to reform from within, to acquire modern sciences, to adjust to modern demands of the world, and finally to unite. Although Nikki Keddie, a scholar on Iran, writes that al-Afghani demonstrated

⁹ Hourani, 70.

¹⁰ Ibid., 78.

¹¹ Ahmed, 133-34.

¹² Ibid., 134.

¹³ Ibid., 139.

“hostility to any ties to women,”¹⁴ his disciples and his disciple’s disciples were proponents of elevating the status of women and their education within al-Afghani’s ideas. According to John Donohue and John Esposito, al-Afghani was an interesting man who is considered “the father of modern Muslim nationalism, proponent of pan-Islam, and the main inspiration for the reform movement in Islam.”¹⁵ He was also a philosopher, writer, orator, journalist, and political activist who traveled from countries such as India, Afghanistan, Turkey, Egypt, France, and England, where he awakened Muslim awareness of their achievable strength against colonialism.

One of al-Afghani’s most prominent students and collaborators was Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905), who became a “more systematic thinker than his master and [had] a more lasting influence on the Muslim mind, not only in Egypt but far beyond,”¹⁶ explained Hourani. From 1869 to 1877, ‘Abduh was a student at al-Azhar University. After he received his degree of ‘*alim*¹⁷ in 1877, he became a teacher at al-Azhar and Dar al-‘Ulum, what Hourani called “a new college established to provide a modern education for students of the Azhar who wished to become judges or teachers in government schools.”¹⁸ In this new

¹⁴ Nikki Keddie, “Sayyid Jamal al-Din ‘al-Afghani,’” in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, Ali Rahnema, ed., Malaysia: Strategic Information Research Development, 2008, 22.

¹⁵ Donohue and Esposito, 13.

¹⁶ Hourani, 130.

¹⁷ ‘*Alim* translates to scholar, and usually refers to a religious scholar. ‘*Alim* is singular of ‘*ulama*’.

¹⁸ Hourani, 132.

position, he used the opportunity to lecture and write about political and social issues, and he paid particular attention to national education. A year later, his controversial mentor al-Afghani was banished from Egypt and as a result ‘Abduh, guilty by association, was removed from this position and forced into retirement. In 1880, by appointment of the Prime Minister, he became most influential in molding public opinion as the chief editor of the official Egyptian Gazette, *al-Waqa’i’ al-Misriyya*.¹⁹ Two years later, in 1882, ‘Abduh was exiled for three years as a result of his involvement with the nationalist movement.²⁰ ‘Abduh lived in Beirut during this time, and in the next few years travelled to Europe. While in Paris, ‘Abduh edited a review with al-Afghani and helped his mentor organize a secret society for a short time. As nothing came of al-Afghani’s political plans, ‘Abduh returned to Beirut where he remained for three years to teach.²¹ His exile was a pivotal period in ‘Abduh’s life and career, as it was entailed his detachment from al-Afghani and his contact and involvement with French thought of the nineteenth-century.²² Eventually, after being allowed to return to Cairo in 1888, he became the Mufti of Egypt in 1899.²³ According to Donohue and Esposito, ‘Abduh is the originator of the modernist school in Islam

¹⁹ Yvonne Haddad, “Muhammad Abduh: Pioneer of Islamic Reform,” in *Rahnema*, 32; Hourani, 133.

²⁰ Hourani, 134.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 157.

²³ *Mufti* translates literally to “one who gives the *fatwa*,” which is a religious decree. Hourani, 134.

as a result of his “desire to reform Islam and put it in harmony with modern times by return to primitive purity,”²⁴ which consequently motivated him to reflect and write on theological matters. Very importantly, ‘Abduh was an advocate of women’s education, marriage reform, and the overall improvement of the status of women.

Muhammad Rashid Rida al-Husayni al-Hasani was born in 1865 Syria. After migrating to Egypt, he became a devoted follower of ‘Abduh. He was a leading intellectual in the modernist movement and a conservative social and political reformer. In 1898, Rida began publishing the Arabic journal *al-Manar*, the Lighthouse.²⁵ With his new journal, Rida’s wished for the journal to be a beacon of knowledge to light the path for Egypt’s new moral, intellectual, and spiritual orientation. According to Rida, the world had entered a new era of progress, and Egypt along with the rest of the Middle Eastern region was being left behind. In February 1898, Rida wrote, “Oh Easterner so deep in his dream, excited with the sweetness of his reverie, beware, and take heed! For with your sleep you have surpassed the confines of rest, it is quite possibly a loss of consciousness or a swift death. Awake from your slumber and wipe the sleep from your eyes, and look at this new world, for the earth is a different earth, and the human race has entered another phase which has subdued the whole world.”²⁶

²⁴ Donohue and Esposito, 20.

²⁵ Ali Rahnama, *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed., Malaysia: Strategic Information Research Development, 2008, 3.

²⁶ *Al-Manar* 1 (1898): 1. My translation.

Yet, Rida did not think that the westernization of Egypt offered appropriate solutions for the somnolent Islamic civilization to awake and engage in the secular modern world. He disapproved of the spread of Europeanization occurring in Egyptian society.²⁷ He stressed Islamic principles to guide progress. He addressed the issues of families and the home often in *al-Manar*. Lisa Pollard explained that Rida wanted to reform Egyptian home life and frequently discussed the role of women.²⁸ Fundamentally, Rida's writings dispensed the teachings of al-Afghani and 'Abduh.

At the end of the nineteenth century, discussion about the role of women in Egyptian society was a major component of intellectual debate. At the forefront of the debate was Qasim Amin, a disciple of Muhammad 'Abduh and opponent of the situation women were subjected to during his time. Expanding on the ideas of his mentor, Amin "gave the argument a more radical social orientation,"²⁹ as scholar on modern Middle East politics Selma Botman put it. Many of the women activists discussed in this work hailed Amin as one of the leading champions of women's rights. Usually Amin's strongest opposition came from the Islamic clergy and even the Islamic-leaning reformers such as fellow 'Abduh disciple Muhammad Rashid Rida. He aimed at bringing attention to the low status of Egyptian women in society and urged the reform of this situation,

²⁷ Ahmed, 142.

²⁸ Pollard, 144.

²⁹ Selma Botman, *Egypt from Independence to Revolution, 1919-1952*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991, 115.

which he described as being “overlooked” by intellectuals.³⁰ According to Amin, contrary to what his opposition claimed he did not publish heresy against Islam in any of his publications, but he readily admitted to publishing heresy against tradition and social dealings.³¹ In *The Liberation of Women* (1899), Amin concluded that the oppressed status of Muslim women was unpardonable and in opposition to the laws of Islam which presented men and women as equal under *shari‘ah*. Amin claimed that the deterioration of men’s power led to the low status of Egyptian women. In *The New Woman*, Amin discussed his idea that the household was a woman’s realm; it was her obligation to improve herself in order to fulfill family obligations. Amin’s major concerns were education for women, a departure from seclusion in Egyptian harems, the removal of the veil, and the overall improvement of women in Egyptian society.

In 1928, Hasan al-Banna established the first Islamist movement in the Arab world, the Muslim Brothers, and while he only wrote one essay on women,³² he aspired to connect economic, social, political, philosophical, and moral issues to Islam.³³ He used the ideas of ‘Abduh, al-Afghani, and Rida³⁴ to mobilize his

³⁰ Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women & The New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism*. Cairo, Egypt: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005, 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³² Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, *The Idea of Women Under Fundamentalist Islam*. Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003, 21.

³³ Shehadeh, 10.

³⁴ Al-Banna came into contact with Muhammad Rashid Rida and his ideas by way of *al-Manar* while he lived in Cairo.

followers and establish a grassroots organization.³⁵ Al-Banna encouraged women to join the Muslim Brothers' cause, as it was the only way to liberation. Al-Banna criticized what he viewed as blind imitation of the West, and especially Muslim women following a Western model. Yet, it was a Western model that triggered this awakening to the fact that in order to modernize men and women must be educated, which is an international model.

Al-Banna preached that a woman's chief purpose in life was to concentrate on her home and family. The Muslim Brothers voiced support for women to receive educations and enter professional fields, but within the boundaries of modesty. This meant that women were allowed to be educated and work outside the home if it did not interfere with her main priority: the home. Al-Banna and the Muslim Brothers also supported strict segregation of the sexes to deter adultery. Al-Banna acknowledged that women played important roles in Egyptian society and claimed that the home was where Egyptians first learned religious doctrine and nationalist principles. Also, women sculpted new generations of Muslims as mothers. As a result, women needed to be educated in order to advance their teaching skills to benefit the *ummah* as a whole. Therefore, any subjects of learning that do not contribute to the advancement of teaching future Muslims are of no use to women, such as law and sciences. Al-Banna was definitely a conservative reformer and even after his death in 1949, he, for several decades, continued to influence Islamists across the Middle East.

³⁵ Shehadeh, 17.

Sayyid Qutb Ibrahim Husayn Shadhili was another prominent Egyptian writer and Islamist thinker of the later half of the twentieth century with far reaching impact throughout the Islamic world. Qutb was Egypt's foremost Islamist activist who went beyond even al-Banna. He was a prolific writer, who published over twenty-four books as well as articles and poems. Works by Qutb reflect a steady move to a radical activism that promoted a new Islamic order. His was a deep remodeling of social custom and a restatement of Islamic principles. Lamia Rustum Shehadeh categorized Qutb's writing in the following manner: poetry and literature, *Qur'anic* aesthetics, philosophy of social justice, sociology of religion, *Qur'anic* exegesis, and Islam and the West.³⁶ Due to the ease and precision of his writing, Qutb appealed to traditionalists as well as the Western-educated elite.

Qutb transformed from a Western-minded, secular liberal to the most renowned Islamist of the second half of the twentieth century. To observe the educational system in the United States, he traveled there in 1948 and stayed until 1951. According to the writer and researcher Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, this trip was pivotal in leading to Qutb's "departure from the literary and educational career he had pursued so far and his adoption of Islam as his religion and political order. He became disenchanted with the West and looked elsewhere for sense of identity and moral purpose that he and others in the Arab Muslim world lacked."³⁷

³⁶ Shehadeh, 50-51. His works have been translated to English, German, French, Turkish, Persian, and Urdu, as well as more.

³⁷ Ibid., 53.

He found it in Islam. Qutb was a forceful opponent of the Nasirist Egyptian government and believed that: “All nationalistic and chauvinistic ideologies which have appeared in modern times, all the movements and theories derived from them, have also lost their vitality. In short, all man-made individuals or collective theories have proved to be failures.”³⁸ The solution he claimed was to revive the Muslim community from the wreckage of what he called man-made traditions.³⁹ All governments not committed to the Islamic order were denounced by Qutb, and the Nasirist regime was a prime example of secular failure to build a great and enduring civilization. He epitomized opposition to the West as well as Muslim leaders leading Muslims as off track, and claimed that these Muslims were living in the state of *jahiliyyah*, or the state of ignorance.⁴⁰ In order to abolish *jahiliyyah* and found an Islamic state, the constitution should return to the *Qur’an*, and the government should be guided through *shura* (consultation).

Furthermore, Qutb wrote that Islam instructs equality among all men and women given that there are physical and biological differences. Qutb stressed the regulation of gender relations in order for a society to flourish. According to him, the family was the foundation of society and the “basis of the family [was] the division of labor between husband and wife.”⁴¹ He went on to say that: “The upbringing of children [was] the most important function of the family, then such

³⁸ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*. New Delhi, India: Islamic Book Service, 2008, 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁰ *Jahiliyyah* refers to pre-Islamic revelation Arabia and means time of ignorance.

⁴¹ Qutb, 97.

a society [would be] indeed civilized. In the Islamic system of life, this kind of a family provides the environment under which human values and morals develop and grow in the new generation; these values and morals cannot exist apart from the family unit.”⁴² Women’s main responsibilities were the protection of morality and raising children. As other Islamists wrote before Qutb and with whom he agreed, liberated Islamist women enjoyed rights that were new to Western women in the 20th century, and these rights were found in religious texts that were fourteen centuries old.

Jamal ‘Abd an-Nasir was president of Egypt from 1952 until his death in 1970. Nasir was the leader and face of the revolution that swept Egypt in 1952. As a young man, Nasir was caught up in the nationalist fervor of the 1919 uprisings. Like many Egyptian students of the first half of the twentieth century, Nasir sympathized with the struggle against British imperialism. According to him the: “1919 Revolution failed to reach the results it should have. The ranks designed to meet oppression were scarcely formed before they dispersed, engaged in strife fighting among themselves, classes and individuals. Ignominious failure was the result... Thus the hope faded that was expected to be realized by the 1919 Revolution.”⁴³ He explained that there were two types of revolutions in Egypt: a political revolution and a social revolution. Furthermore, he continued: “all people on earth go through two revolutions—a political revolution that helps them

⁴² Qutb, 97.

⁴³ Gamal Abdel Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution*. United Arab Republic: Ministry of National Guidance State Information Service, 1954, 25.

recover their right to self-government from the hands of a despot who [has] imposed himself upon them, or free themselves from the domination of alien armed forces which [have] installed themselves in the land against their will; and a social revolution—a class conflict that ultimately ends in realizing social justice for all inhabitants of the country.”⁴⁴ After the first type of revolution in Egypt on July 23rd in 1952 by the Free Officers,⁴⁵ came the social revolution. The political agenda of the revolution did not have an obvious ideological dimension or focus other than the removal of the British from Egypt and especially from the Canal Zone. On the domestic scene, their objective was to replace the monarchy with a republic and to establish drastic agrarian reform. In 1954, a constitutional assembly was created to approve or decline a new constitution. Notably, there were no women involved in this assembly and the newly proposed charter did not mention women’s rights. This omission caused protest and a hunger strike.⁴⁶ Two years later, women were granted the right to vote in the new constitution, however, with the stipulation that they must ask to vote.⁴⁷ Before the 1952 revolution, in March women attempted to run for parliamentary elections, but

⁴⁴ Nasser, 23-24.

⁴⁵ The Free Officers were a secret group within the Egyptian military that carried out the coup in 1952.

⁴⁶ Durriyah Shafiq was among the leaders of the hunger strike. Chapter 4 discusses Shafiq and her feminist activism.

⁴⁷ Ahmed, 204-205. I could not find whether a woman asked her husband or asked the state to request to vote.

were met with strong resistance.⁴⁸ Under the 1956 constitution, women were allowed to run for political office. Rawiya 'Atiyya ran for parliamentary elections in 1957, and became deputy for the governorate of Cairo in 1957 and Amina Shukri also ran in the 1957 parliamentary elections for deputy for the governorate of Alexandria.⁴⁹ Another change to women's position in society was their increased attendance in schools and universities.⁵⁰ These changes, instituted under the Nasir regime and embraced by the egalitarianism of the new Arab socialism, were standards of progress and integral to Nasir's leadership in Egypt and the Arab world.

Besides the progressive male leadership of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this study will explore the writings and biographies of the leaders of women who led the feminist and women's Islamist movements. Huda Sha'rawi's and Nabawiyya Musa's memoirs and Malak Hifni Nassef's, Zainab Al-Ghazali's, and Durriyah Shafiq's treatises are fundamentally important primary sources to any study of the woman's movement in Egypt. Huda Sha'rawi's memoir, which was translated by Middle East historian Margot Badran, provides an excellent inside view of the closing stages of seclusion of women in Egyptian society and the departure from the harem that she pioneered

⁴⁸ Hind Wassef and Nadia Wassef, *Daughters of the Nile: Photographs of Women's Movements, 1900-1960*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001, 111-112.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

⁵⁰ Ahmed, 210. A governmental decree from 1952 made primary education free and obligatory to both sexes from the ages of six to twelve. Education on all levels, even the university level, was declared free in subsequent years.

and helped initiate in the early twentieth century.⁵¹ In her writing, Sha‘rawi, an early leader in the Egyptian women’s movement, personalized the struggle of upper- and middle-class women, who, like her ventured beyond the strict limitations of the harem toward self-determination through education. Drawing upon her own experiences in the harem, education, marriage, and as an active participant in the Egyptian nationalist movement, Sha‘rawi’s memoir is an authentic testimony of the cultural and religious boundaries women had to cross to exert authority in their own lives. Another activist in the woman’s movement, Nabawiyya Musa, herself one of the first women in Egypt to advance in education, advocated sending girls and women to school. In her autobiography, she detailed her personal and professional life during what she referred to as her *jihad* (struggle) for equality as a woman and as an Egyptian in a British colony.⁵²

A very useful book is *Women and Gender in Islam* by Leila Ahmed, which gives detailed accounts of several women of the period who contributed greatly to the feminist and Islamist movements.⁵³ Other secondary sources that are extremely insightful and were of great use, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press* and *Egypt As A Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and*

⁵¹ Huda Sha‘rawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*. Edited and translated by Margot Badran. New York: The Feminist Press, 1986.

⁵² Sha‘rawi and Musa were both vocal in the Egyptian nationalist movement, as were many women activists from all factions of that period.

⁵³ Ahmed, 1992.

Politics by Beth Baron⁵⁴ and *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* by Margot Badran.⁵⁵ *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing* edited by Margot Badran and Mariam Cooke is a collection of lectures and essays written by many of the women observed in this study such as Sha'rawi, Musa, Nassef, and Shafiq among many others.⁵⁶

When the women's movement began to diversify, Zainab Al-Ghazali emerged as an activist in the Islamist and women's movements. She wrote of her demands for reform and her call to return to Islamic teachings under which men and women were and are equal. As her predecessors stood firm against the British occupation of Egypt, Al-Ghazali found an enemy in the Egyptian nationalist government of the mid-twentieth century and wrote of the persecution she endured as an Islamist woman in *Return of the Pharaoh: Memoirs in Nasir's Prison*,⁵⁷ another primary source. Her memoir is an illustration of her opposition to the secular post-colonial government and the deception that led to her activism that she identified as her duty. Saba Mahmood's *The Politics of Piety* describes

⁵⁴ Baron, 1994; *Egypt As A Woman: Nationalism, Gender, Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

⁵⁵ Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009.

⁵⁶ Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

⁵⁷ Zainab al-Ghazali, *Return of the Pharaoh: Memoirs in Nasir's Prison*. Translated by Mokrane Guezzou. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1994.

and analyzes al-Ghazali, the Islamist women's movement, and its history in Egypt in depth.⁵⁸

Durriyah Shafiq and Munira Husni, activists from the liberal faction of the movement, articulate their alienation from the more aristocratic moderates and represent another divide in the women's movement. Latifa al-Zayyat and Inji Aflatun were members of a more aggressive, leftist, and populist faction of the women's movement that will also be discussed. Other primary sources include writings by activists such as Malak Hifni Nassef⁵⁹, Inji Aflatun⁶⁰ and Munira Husni,⁶¹ and scholarly works such as books and articles by authors such as Beth Baron, Deniz Kandiyoti,⁶² Azza M. Karam,⁶³ Nikki R. Keddie,⁶⁴ Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot,⁶⁵ Lisa Pollard,⁶⁶ Lamia Rustum Shehadeh,⁶⁷ and Selma Botman⁶⁸ among others that specialize in these fields.

⁵⁸ Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, New Jersey: The Princeton University Press, 2005.

⁵⁹ Malak Hifni Nassef, *an-Nisa'iyyat*. Egypt: Women and Memory Forum, 1998.

⁶⁰ Inji Aflatun, *Nahnu an-Nisa' al-Misriyat (We, the Egyptian Women)*. Cairo: Matba'at as-Sa'ada, 1949.

⁶¹ Munira Husni, *Ayam fi al-Hay'at an-Nisa'iyya (Days in Women's Organizations)*. Giza: Matba'at al-Miligi.

⁶² Deniz Kandiyoti, ed, *Women, Islam and the State*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.

⁶³ Azza M. Karam, *Women, Islamisms, and State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt*. London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1998.

⁶⁴ Keddie in Rahnema, 2008.

⁶⁵ Marsot, 1985.

⁶⁶ Pollard, 2005.

⁶⁷ Shehadeh, 2003.

This thesis will examine the political, social, religious, and cultural contexts that together defined the crucial moment of Egypt's national liberation and experimentation with socialist solutions to underdevelopment. During this period of political daring and creativity, women and men from all sectors of the political spectrum such as conservatives, communists, and intellectuals from the left contributed to the intellectual and social construction of the new state. Names such as Salama Musa, Taha Husayn, Latifa Zayyat, and Nawal as-Sa'dawi made their influential literary contributions to the cultural and political debates of Egyptian society during the twentieth-century. This work attempts to capture the essence of the climate of the political, cultural, and social change where often the "Woman Question" was an integral component to the path to modernity.⁶⁹

This work showcases the background to the women's rights movement by examining activists and their major ideas and the events that led to the movement's emergence, organization, and reforms. It also explores the firmly rooted tradition of the compromise between the state and specifically al-Azhar, which were at odds over the extent of state control over private life. That is,

⁶⁸ Botman, 1991; *Engendering Citizenship in Egypt*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

⁶⁹ An integral segment of the social reform movement was the arts. Poetry, novels, and art were produced by leaders such as Ihsan 'Abd al-Quddous, Najeeb Mahfooz, Taha Husayn, and Inji Aflatun. In the twentieth century with the Egyptian film industry and movies such as "*Du'a al-Karawa*," "Prayer of the Nightingale" and "*Uridu Hallan*," "I Want a Solution," played important roles which brought about awareness to social ills which concerned women. "*Du'a al-Karawan*" and "*Uridu Hallan*" go up against honor killings and unfair divorce laws respectively.

under the interpretation of the modern state, *shari'ah* determined family, gender, marriage, and divorce, while the state could govern as a secular institution. This provoked a controversy because secular laws could be reformed to suit contemporary circumstances, while religious and family laws could not evolve. The secular/religious divide permitted clerics to misinterpret the *Qur'an* and ignore its historical message of compromise between government and religious edicts. This work corresponds within the works by experts and historians of nineteenth and twentieth century Egypt, the Egyptian women's rights movement, and the role of *shari'ah* in Egyptian society and particularly in regard to women, by using their works as guides through the journey of the intertwined nationalist and women's rights movement in that significant, innovative and unique segment of Egyptian, Middle Eastern, and Islamic history. Yet, this work is set apart from those very works by concentrating on the convergences and divergences among differing fragments of the larger women's rights movement that facilitated a uniquely viable relationship of unity despite the mentioned disunity.

The distinct aspect of this work lies in my ability to read the primary sources in their original Arabic iterations. The sources written in Arabic by the subjects of this analysis were carefully examined and translated directly. Second hand translations were avoided as much as possible in this study. In circumventing translations of sources and the reliance on my proficiency in the Arabic language, I avoid possible misinterpretations or ideas lost in translation.

Before advancing any further into this topic, classification of the categories used in this study of Egypt will be explained. The terms used in this study, which are “feminist” and “woman Islamist,” must be clarified and defined in the twentieth century Egyptian context.

Feminism in the Egyptian Context

In this study, the use of the term “feminist” will pertain to middle- and upper-class Egyptian women that were Westernized in the sense that their families had cultural, social, and often financial contact with Europe, and were the first generations of formally educated women in Western-system schools established for girls in the early and mid-twentieth century.⁷⁰ This social class benefited from British occupation, which began in 1882 and emulated European lifestyle and travel as opposed to Turkish traditions. (Turkey was the previous colonizer.) The upper-classes were often taught to speak and read European languages by European women. Children, and later adults, mixed socially with European women living or visiting in Egypt. Through colonialism, the cultural encounter between European men and women and Egyptian men and women occurred. The cultural encounters and interactions helped facilitate the mobilization of the eventual nationalist and in turn the women’s movements in Egypt.

⁷⁰ Later during the middle and late twentieth century as more women joined and became active in the movement, more leftist, political, and vigorous organizations of younger leaders emerged.

These women were involved in the literary, medical, intellectual, political and social spheres. Activism emerged during this time and their contributions to society became a vital part of what Ahmed phrased as the “educated person’s consciousness.”⁷¹ According to Ahmed, “Over the first three decades of the [twentieth] century feminism became visible intellectually, then organizationally and politically.”⁷² Gradually, unveiling coincided with this visibility, first by variations of the *hijab* from thick to delicately light, then to the significant escalation of unveiling by 1910 with Muslim and non-Muslim women. Unveiling was encouraged by feminists, as it was considered a form of suppressing women, a sign of backwardness, and a means of holding women back from progress and modernity.⁷³ Another objective of the feminists was to end segregation of the sexes and seclusion of girls and women, which was seen as harmful, because it maintained the inferior status of Egyptian women.

Qasim Amin was a strong advocate of unveiling and argued in 1898 that Islamic law, *shari’ah*, “does not stipulate the use of the veil in this manner,” meaning the covering of the whole body except for the hands and face, and used passages from the *Qur’an* to uphold his argument.⁷⁴ He argued that: “Covering the bosom is part of Islamic law—there are clear admonitions about this—but

⁷¹ Ahmed, 172-73.

⁷² Ibid., 174.

⁷³ Ibid., 155, 176.

⁷⁴ Amin, 37.

nothing about covering the face.”⁷⁵ As for covering the face with veils, Amin argued this actually increased temptation for onlookers to “discover more of what is concealed.”⁷⁶ Both Ahmed and Amin discuss the fact that veiling had been passed down from ancient traditions that came before Islam.

On March 16, 1923, the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) was founded by Huda Sha‘rawi with the purpose of fighting for woman’s suffrage.⁷⁷ Ahmed reveals that the constitution of the EFU was drafted with the following aims: “To raise Egyptian women’s ‘intellectual and moral’ level and enable them to attain political, social, and legal equality. Specific goals included obtaining access to education at all levels for women, reforming marriage laws, in particular laws relating to polygamy and divorce, and setting a minimum marriage age of sixteen for girls.”⁷⁸ Whether or not feminists held pro-Western or anti-Western stances, anti-imperialism was a common theme among feminists. British dominance was resented and the feminist movement, especially under Sha‘rawi and her support of the Palestinians, took on nationalistic undertones and initiated the establishment of the Arab Feminist Union in 1944.⁷⁹ Later on in her career, she reached out to Arab feminists as opposed to her initial and early associations with Western feminists.

⁷⁵ Amin, 43.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁷ Ahmed, 176.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 176.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 178.

Conservative elements of society accused feminists of corrupting or destroying Islamic culture and identity. Present day criticism of these early Egyptian feminists charges them as being unwitting pawns of the colonizer, since the British spoke out against the Islamic custom of veiling. It was, westerners claimed, a means of oppressing women. Colonial and patriarchal men setting an androcentric agenda for these feminists to remove *hijab* depicted them as a movement dominated by the colonial power, which automatically made them suspect in Arabs' perspective and accused of being allies of the colonial interests. Yet, Egyptian feminists across the wide spectrum particularly during the twentieth century rejected colonialism and actively and enthusiastically participated in the 1919 Revolution. The women's movement coincided with British colonialism and major European presence in Egypt, and although the cultural encounter that occurred is significant, it was not the driving force of the movement. However, some women within the movement were growing weary of the West and its influence.

Women Islamists

The other group discussed in this study is women Islamists that emerged as an offshoot of the feminist movement in the late 1930s.⁸⁰ The feminist movement as described above did not suit all Egyptian women. The feminist (and Western) focus on *hijab* and its removal alienated some women in Muslim societies. The alternative voice to the dominant upper, upper-middle, and middle-

⁸⁰ Botman, 1999, 41-42.

class secular Western oriented feminism was a voice, as Ahmed wrote, “wary of and eventually opposed to Western ways. These activist groups searched for a way to articulate a rejection of female subjectivity and an affirmation of their worth within a native, vernacular, Islamic discourse. Typically they spoke in terms of a general social, cultural, and religious renovation [...] to be regenerative for the entire society, not just for women, hence the rights of women were not the sole nor even any longer the primary object of reform, but one among several.”⁸¹ According to Ahmed, the activist Malak Hifni Nassef best represents the embryonic stage of this particular divergent voice. However, her untimely death and the organizational and political triumphs of Huda Sha‘rawi and her EFU overwhelmed the nativist women and secured the dominance of the “westernizing” voice of feminism during the early decades of the twentieth century.

The internalization of Western values and the veneration of the West did not interest women such as Zainab al-Ghazali (who had originally looked to Sha‘rawi’s feminism for leadership as a teenager.)⁸² The Islamist women sought to form “a feminist path—or a path of female subjectivity and affirmation—within the terms of the indigenous culture,”⁸³ as Ahmed put it. According to Ahmed, they believed “feminism was only relevant to Western women and that

⁸¹ Ahmed, 174-5.

⁸² Ibid., 197. At the age of eighteen, after leaving the EFU and Sha‘rawi for disagreeing with their path, she established the organization Society of Muslim Ladies.

⁸³ Ibid., 179.

the pursuit of female affirmation for Muslim women should come in other terms.”⁸⁴ Al-Ghazali went on to become the leading voice in the Islamist women’s movement and was a trusted ally by her male counterparts in the Islamist movement. They opposed unveiling, in Malak Hifni Nassef’s case it was not out of conservative reasons: “She neither believed that religion dictated anything specific on the matter to women nor that women who veiled were more modest than women who did not, for true modesty was not determined by the presence or absence of the veil,”⁸⁵ Ahmed explained. Both women were highly educated, Nassef as a teacher and al-Ghazali in religious doctrine by her father, an al-Azhar graduate and advocate of female education. Nassef argued that the problems Egyptian women faced was not whether they wore *hijab* or not, but oppression and injustice by men, and the lack of education they received. Both Nassef and al-Ghazali were against removing *hijab* as a way to liberate and advance Egyptian women.

According to al-Ghazali, woman’s first priority is her home and her children; however, this priority and Islam do not forbid her from being educated and having a professional life or participating in public life. In Islam, women are not prohibited from active participation in public life. They are not prevented from seeking employment, participating in politics, voicing ideas, or from becoming anything, only if, however, it does not impede the most important duty which is being a mother. Mothers are the first to teach their children in the

⁸⁴ Ahmed, 195.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 180.

Islamic way of life.⁸⁶ Islamist women, the marginal voice of the women's rights movement, agreed that their objectives were education and marriage reform. Ahmed described Nassef as a strong opponent of "the evils of polygamy and men's unrestricted license to divorce their wives, early marriage for girls, and marriages with too great a disparity in age between spouses."⁸⁷

Yet, the women Islamists and the moderate nationalist feminists very often faced the same obstacles from society or the state and found themselves fighting on the same side for the same reforms and rights, as is demonstrated in the next section.

Divergence and Convergence in the Women's Movement

Viewed through the lens of philosophical orientation, the women Islamists and the nationalist feminists would appear to be irresolute enemies. Yet, overlap between the two sides occurred often and meaningfully. The feminists at first abandoned traditional customs for valorized Western culture and ideas whereas the Islamists rejected this practice but did not reject everything Western, just emulation or glorification of Britain's colonial hold and secular principles. The women Islamists were entrenched in the Arabic language and culture. Women Islamists considered it a mistake to discuss "liberating" woman, since they believed women in Islam did not need to be liberated. Islam guaranteed women freedom and economic, political, public, private, and social rights, they argued.

⁸⁶ Ahmed, 199.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 182.

Therefore, Islam must be learned and implemented in order to rise from the backward state of society.⁸⁸ For feminists, Islamic society meant seclusion, veiling, and polygamous marriages, in short what Ahmed called “a return to the harim.”⁸⁹ Using the EFU and the Society of Muslim Ladies (al-Ghazali’s organization) as examples, it is apparent that they shared a commitment to modernization, the true implementation of women’s dignity under Islam, and the right of women to be educated so that they might determine their futures.

More importantly, especially to this study, the secular-nationalist groups that far outnumbered the women’s Islamist groups never repudiated religion nor recognized secularism as an implication of atheism. The EFU, for example, stayed away from the type of secularism that would cut off all ties with religion. Despite having left the EFU, al-Ghazali was not against the EFU activities, and her group the Society of Muslim Ladies and the EFU continued a recurring collaboration.⁹⁰ According to sociocultural anthropologist Saba Mahmood, “the histories of Islamism and secular liberalism are intimately connected, a connection that is, nonetheless, saturated with tensions and ambivalences.”⁹¹

However, all women regardless of their beliefs and affiliations whether they were activists or not, secular or Islamist, nationalist or pro-British, feminist or non-feminist, lived and experienced the same destructive system towards

⁸⁸ Ahmed, 198.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 194.

⁹⁰ Mahmood, 69, note 72.

⁹¹ Ibid., 70.

women. Ahmed has pointed out that: “Characteristically their writings and social activities, the charitable institutions they founded and to which they dedicated their energies, bear the mark of an impassioned desire to resist injustice, right wrongs, survive and assist others to survive, and serve others whom that system had crushed or destroyed.”⁹² They were often in positions that opposed their male colleagues in the wider Islamist, nationalist, or secular movements. It is evident they built a support network through mentorship, female friendships, and literary friendships. For example, Nassef and Sha‘rawi supported each other despite their slightly different outlooks, were mentors to many contemporary activists, as well as connected to future generations of activists. Nassef’s funeral gathered the top feminists and women Islamists of the time, and at the seven year anniversary of her death Sha‘rawi supervised the proceedings for the event that commemorated her.⁹³ It seems as though there were no substantial differences between the goals of Sha‘rawi and Nassef, they both promoted facilitating the pursuit of education by women to the height of their abilities in addition to essential reforms regarding marriage and family laws.

Political protests and demonstrations by women date back to the early decade of the twentieth century. Other methods used by women activists was writing and lecturing to push for support or reform. The EFU was founded by Sha‘rawi after the new 1923 constitution restricted suffrage to males. In response to objections from the EFU, the Parliament in 1923 ratified a law establishing the

⁹² Ahmed, 183.

⁹³ Ibid., 184.

minimum marital age for girls at sixteen years old and for boys at eighteen years old. When it came to other family laws, that was the only progress made. In terms of education, the 1923 constitution declared education a priority, in 1925 primary education became compulsory for both sexes. The Egyptian government set up secondary schools for girls, and universities began admitting female student in the late 1920s. The year 1933 witnessed the first female university graduates, although they were not the first in Egypt (many graduated from England and America), they were the first to graduate from an Egyptian university.⁹⁴

Female enrollment increased dramatically in primary, secondary and university education, despite the fact that the government did not have the resources to make education more available. However, illiteracy was still high, and middle- and upper-class families objected to women joining the work force (even after they were educated), and the government's educational expansion could not keep up with the population growth of the early twentieth century. Not until the pressures of World War II did increased numbers of women join the work force and utilize their training and education, and it became socially acceptable for women to work. According to Ahmed, the sweeping reforms of the 1952 Egyptian Revolution brought "massive expansion and transformation" to

⁹⁴ Ahmed, 176-177.

the roles of women in society.⁹⁵ In 1956, the state granted women suffrage and the right to run for public office.⁹⁶

After 1952, the new National Charter espoused “Arab socialism” and social egalitarianism. Women entered all fields of professional occupations such as engineering, aeronautics, big business, and politics by becoming, among other things, members of parliament. By this time, activist women increasingly made their presence known and their voice heard in society. Women and organizations from both branches of the movement began to be shut down and imprisoned for their activism or vocal opposition to the status or neglect of women’s affairs. Women activists of this generation expressed their concerns more overtly than with the previous generation, and they delved deeper into “explorations and exposés of the sexual politics of domination and the victimization of women in the informal and personal realms of life,”⁹⁷ explained Ahmed. As regards to wearing *hijab*, many women of the Nasir period – activists and non activists alike – had largely abandoned this tradition.

After the sweep of nationalist and reform politics of the middle- to the late-twentieth century and the tragic and devastating failures and defeats of Arab nationalism on the world stage and Arab socialism at home, the Islamist movement espoused by al-Ghazali became the dominant voice and the secularist

⁹⁵ Ahmed, 208.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 210. Two women were elected to the national assembly by 1957, and in 1962 President Nasir appointed Dr. Hikmat Abu Zaid minister of social affairs.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 216.

westernizing voice of Sha‘rawi became what Ahmed called the “marginal, alternative” voice.⁹⁸ In part, the masses of Egyptians lost faith and abandoned the secularist ideology of the state, and returned to Islamism. They reasoned that God had abandoned Egypt because Egypt had abandoned God.⁹⁹ As the condition of the state deteriorated from poverty, war, and corruption, Islamism gained ground. Here, *hijab* reemerged. It first appeared among university students and took on a modern makeover. One element of the makeover was the acceptance of non-traditional, western-style clothing such as pantsuits or ankle length skirts worn in a modest way with a scarf to serve the Islamic purpose of women wearing *hijab*.¹⁰⁰ This trend in universities and among young people was also popular among the emigrant middle-class in urban areas with lower-class rural backgrounds. Accounts of affiliations with the Islamist movement commonly explain the sense of community and the ease it brought to the members. Also, as women became more visible in public, their *hijab* and declared Islamism indicated that their presence was in “no way a challenge to or a violation of the Islamic sociocultural ethic,”¹⁰¹ Ahmed revealed. Criticism of this “return to the veil” by older feminists was indicative of a class division between the old elite of the upper- and middle-classes as well as the new urban middle-class.

⁹⁸ Ahmed, 197.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 216.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 221.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 224.

In sum, the new transition feminist period marked the reconvergence of women's rights and Islamism. Ahmed explains that the new "Islamist feminist" modified Western ideals and dress to fit their notions of propriety, thus "signaling entrance into, and determination to move forward in, modernity."¹⁰² As a result of drive, effort, and success of the generations of secular feminists and Islamists (often in collaboration) before them, they are able to venture into academia and the professional world and have chosen do so in a modern Islamic way. The legacy of the twentieth-century feminists and Islamists is that they left behind an environment and precedents in which unification and collaboration were possible. Together both factions of the woman's movement brought changes in education for women, and marriage and divorce laws.

One thesis in this study is that because of the coalition between secular and religious women, the recent return of Islamism has not silenced the female voice. Today's Egypt has allowed for the confluence of modern and traditional values as regards women. A symbol of the alliances of women's organizations and reforms of the past is that feminism and *hijab* are no longer mutually exclusive and that activist women of both sides have found common ground around which they can unite to redefine women's rights in the area of education, suffrage, and reform of family law.

In conclusion, the legacy of the collaboration and joint effort of these perceived opposing forces has proven to be a lasting one on the Egyptian

¹⁰² Ahmed, 225.

women's movement. Today, both groups are effective together on a different level than the early twentieth century as the lines that were between them have blurred with the formation of Islamic feminism. A closer look into the women's movement in the context of Egyptian history requires an examination of class and *shari'ah* in relation to Egyptian women of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in which the conditions for this unity were created.

Chapter 3

WOMEN, CLASS, AND SHARI'AH IN NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY EGYPT

The women's movement that emerged during the nineteenth century was amongst the middle- and upper-class women of Egypt. Although Egyptian women were separated by social class they shared what Botman called "a common subordination to men."¹⁰³ In tandem with the feminist movement, the nationalist movement surfaced to free Egypt from the imperial rule of Britain that exploited their resources and hindered Egyptian self-governance. Nationalists, as a way to direct the activism of feminists into the anti-colonial movement, pledged advancement of the Egyptian women's situation with independence. British imperial control involved all Egyptians; therefore the national cause was a priority, they argued, while the subjugation of women only concerned some Egyptians. From the 1920s on, the Egyptian nationalist movement and feminist movement were linked.¹⁰⁴ According to historian Bonnie G. Smith, unpredictably, debates over women contributed in a major way to anti-colonial ideas were employed as the basis in the call for independence. One debate was that imperialism was thought to make women very Western, and liberation would facilitate the "return to the safety and seclusion of the home," explained Badran. On the other hand, in other independence seeking areas, Badran elaborated that:

¹⁰³ Botman, 1999, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Margot Badran, "Competing Agenda: Feminists, Islam, and the State in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Egypt" in Bonnie G. Smith, ed. *Global Feminisms Since 1945*. London: Routledge, 2000, 13.

“The Westernization of women was the center of anti-colonial movements. The modernization of women in such areas as literacy would improve the general condition of the people and allow them a stronger position in the world of free nations.”¹⁰⁵ So as to fully appreciate the activism of Egyptian women during this critical moment in Egyptian history, as well as pivotal time in Egyptian *feminist* history, this chapter is divided into sections. The first, discusses social classes and its relevance in the women’s movement. The next, briefly conveys the different views on women and their position in society held by some key figures such as al-Tahtawi, ‘Abdu, Rida, al-Banna, and Qutb who possessed intellectual clout in Egyptian society and within various reform movements. Finally, the chapter ends with a section on *shari‘ah* and the Egyptian Islamic institution, and its stance on women during the end of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century.

In order to grasp the context of the women’s movement during its inception, there must be discussion of the social change occurring in Egypt as well as class hierarchy, specifically during 1882, the beginning of the British military occupation. During British colonial rule, the expanding power that used to be focused in the hands of the elite in the countryside shifted to growing urban areas, which marks the expansion of producing cotton to the capitalist world

¹⁰⁵ Badran in Smith, 13.

system as absentee rural landlords ventured into banking and commerce.¹⁰⁶ Also, another group to move to the urban areas was the landowners that lost their land and joined the new service sector forming what Middle East historian Juan Ricardo Cole called the new “urban petty bourgeoisie.” This new class was situated in between laborers and workers, and the upper middle-class and large landowners.¹⁰⁷ Cole provided a brief summary of the economic situation of the time:

By the turn of the century, Egypt was firmly intermeshed with the world market and possessed all the features of the dependent economy.

Indigenous and foreign capitalist landowners raised cash crops, especially cotton, to be processed in the core economies and, to a greater or lesser extent, sold back to the periphery at a profit. The whole economy, including the infrastructure, was oriented to the needs of Britain and other core economies. This relationship of dependency was formalized by the British occupation, which guaranteed the security of European loans, investments, and other interests.¹⁰⁸

British rule hindered any Egyptian wishes to diversify its economy and industrialize. The core economies were resolute in refusing to allow Egypt to be an industrial competitor and continuing to keep Egypt the periphery for raw

¹⁰⁶ Juan Ricardo Cole, “Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (Cambridge University Press) Vol. 13, No. 4 (Nov., 1981), 388.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 389.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 390.

material. This secondary position Egypt was forced into on the world market helped mold the domestic socioeconomic composition and development, therefore, significantly influencing the situation and status of groups disadvantaged usually, such as women.¹⁰⁹ Cole takes the argument further by stating: “The middle class feminist movement in the early twentieth century therefore seems to have arisen in protest of a situation that was in part the result of modern developments. This would alter the standard view of Egyptian feminism as a struggle between ‘modern’ Western values and ‘ancient’ Islamic ones.”¹¹⁰ The fortunes of women were tied to their social class, and the changes in the socioeconomic landscape in Egypt such as the abolition of tax-farming and state capitalism and the harmful effects both had on women tax-farmers and woman merchants led to the rise in seclusion of middle-class women and confining them to household management as opposed to vigorous professions in tax-farming and commerce.¹¹¹ The new agrarian capitalists were a distinct class from the Turko-Circassian elite early in the nineteenth century, however, by the turn of the century both groups shared the same class interests and the lines between them began to blur by means of marriage and political partnerships.¹¹² The education and manners of Europe were embraced by the new agrarian capitalist class in the

¹⁰⁹ Judith Gran, “Impact of the World Market on Egyptian Women,” *MERIP Reports*, 58 (June 1977), 3-7.

¹¹⁰ Cole, 390.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 390.

¹¹² Eric M. Davis, “Bank Misr and the Political Economy of Industrialization in Egypt, 1920-1941,” Ph.D. dis., University of Chicago, 1977, 173-174.

last quarter of the nineteenth century, and women were educated as well, however, in foreign languages. With the increased power this new class acquired, Cole reveals that “the responsibilities of their new wives grew.”¹¹³ With the women of the lower middle-class, the contact with the professional lives of their husbands was gradually reduced and they were demoted to the domestic sphere.¹¹⁴ And with regards to education, there was a split on the question of education for women. The older petite middle-class supported preserving the traditions of the Turko-Egyptian elite of veiling and seclusion, while the new petite middle-class advocated education for women; however they still maintained the tradition of veiling and seclusion. Once an indication of high standing, the Turkish life-style was forsaken by the new upper middle-class and was replaced by the European life-style. Naturally with the background of British colonial dominance and the dependent nature of this relationship in which southern Mediterranean economies were downgraded, the “cultural trappings of high status,” as Cole phrased it, stemmed from London and Paris as opposed to Istanbul.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, the new petite middle-class according to political scientist and scholar of the Middle East, Eric M. Davis, took over “status symbols like the seclusion of women from the Turko-Egyptian elite was one way of asserting their own cultural identity in a

¹¹³ Cole, 391.

¹¹⁴ Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, “The Revolutionary Gentlewomen in Egypt,” in Nikki Keddie and Lois Beck, eds. *Women in the Muslim World*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1978, 261-276.

¹¹⁵ Cole, 391.

situation where they were in danger of becoming alienated from their Egyptian heritage.”¹¹⁶

The fundamental distinction between the positions taken by upper middle class reformers and the lower middle class thinkers was “their evaluation of Europeans, who were the ruling class in Egypt,” according Cole.¹¹⁷ The upper middle-class thought highly of the European achievements and was aware of the advantages of British rule to their class. To the lower middle-class, Egyptian values and conventions were threatened by imperialism and capitalism; European influence caused the decay of Muslim society. In addition to this vital difference, Cole points to: “Internal tensions between men and women and changing roles at the turn of the century [produced] a sharp contradiction in the ideologies of the new upper middle class and the petite bourgeoisie concerning the rights of women in Egyptian society.”¹¹⁸ Elite women were at the forefront and leaders of nationalist and feminist efforts, however, according to Botman, when it came to the Egyptian 1919 Revolution, women from all sections of society were active participants in marches and mass demonstrations: “School girls distributed leaflets, upper-class women met to protest, and more humble women joined the protests with their husbands.”¹¹⁹ Even in protesting British encroachment and colonialism, the lower middle-class was conservative, and women were

¹¹⁶ Davis, 141.

¹¹⁷ Cole, 404.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Botman, 1999, 36.

extensions of their husbands' opposition. Whereas women of the upper middle-class or the elite met without their husbands and often organized as groups on their own to protest and be active in the nationalist cause.¹²⁰ Upper middle-class women usually confined to seclusion, rarely ventured outside the home without their husbands, male relatives, or a trusted male member of the household staff, usually a eunuch.¹²¹ The 1919 Revolution was a turning point in Egyptian women's history and their emergence unto the public arena.

Middle East and women's historian, Cathlyn Mariscotti, dissects the activities of the upper- and ruling-class (landed aristocracy) and managerial or professional-class (formerly "bazaar merchants, shopkeepers, the *'ulama'*, and artisanal professions," the late nineteenth century witnessed the growth of new as she put it "Western style professionals, physicians, lawyers, clerks, civil servants, teachers, university professors, social workers, journalists, and entertainers (singers, theater actors and actresses) resulting in the establishment of this new class with more social status, but without the influence of the ruling class).¹²² Cross-class alliances, or convergences, were a common occurrence amongst the upper-class and professional-class. Women from the professional-class looking to expand their fortunes often joined forces with women from the elite landowning

¹²⁰ Often their husbands were put in prison or exiled.

¹²¹ Such was the case with Huda Sha'rawi.

¹²² Cathlyn Mariscotti, *Gender and Class in Egyptian Women's Movement, 1929-1935: Changing Perspectives*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008, 24-26. The managerial or professional-class desired to assert itself as an "effective middle-class" in Egypt after the 1919 Revolution. *Ibid.*, 26.

families and commercial and industrial elites to back the women's movement's agenda. The reverse is also true; the elite sought out the lower-class in a cross-class alliance when they ventured into the public space in 1919 during the revolution to further the women's rights agenda.¹²³ Non elite women realized the necessity of making cross-class alliances and converging as a way to advance their agenda. They were aware of the influence of the ruling-class and recognized that they would be able to achieve more progress with their assistance.¹²⁴ The women of the ruling-class in turn participated in a unification of power in Egyptian civil society with the men of the ruling-class. They shaped a feminist discourse, a concept of woman that was integrated into the culture of the new Egyptian state which, however, was not included into secular state law.

According to Mariscotti, by that time, elite women in the nineteenth century had been implementing "Some control over the institutions of civil society, including schools, the media, philanthropic venues, and social work from their private space of the harem. Through these institutions, they could persuade lower-class women and men to consent to their image of Egyptian womanhood. Cultural feminism, as an institution, provided them with the ability to continue these activities in public space outside of the harem after 1919."¹²⁵ Despite being united with men of the elite in their hegemonic stance in Egyptian civil society, their female counterparts were continually disappointed by the implementation of secular laws

¹²³ Mariscotti, 25.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 26.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 38.

for men alone. Women were denied rights under secular laws and were responsible to *shari'ah*.¹²⁶ So, elite women were caught between being and preserving hegemonic power in society alongside the elite men as well as sharing a comparable situation to lower-class women in regards to secular laws. The realization of the situation of their class and their lowly status as women led to the utilization of their concept of woman and their feminist discourse as a way to sustain the new state and their hegemonic role in civil society, while simultaneously resisting the elite men that denied women access to secular law. Both classes of women joined forces to persuade the elite men of Egypt to put forth women's issues into laws. The 1920s detail many other examples when both classes of women united. The more elite women situated themselves in their leadership role in the public space, the more they were anxious to renovate the public space to standards they approved of. According to Mariscotti, this attitude led to "more direct control of the people in that space, including other women. They reached out to lower-class women in the form of various philanthropic activities and aided professional women's agendas and organizations."¹²⁷ However, Mariscotti elaborates: "This necessary collusion between the two classes did not prevent professional women from resisting ruling-class women on issues relating to their interest such as waged work for women or women's political participation. Neither the term *ruling class* nor *professional/managerial*

¹²⁶ Women were required to abide by *shari'ah*, which "acted as a legal means of circumscribing women's power whether positively with regard to economics or negatively with regard to polygamy and divorce..." Mariscotti, 49.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

class is rigid, reducible to a particular economic, political, cultural, or epistemological situation. The terms are fluid, as are the classes and the women in the classes. Each changes over time.”¹²⁸

A major difference between early women activists of the nineteenth century and activists from the twentieth century, particularly the late twentieth century, was that the nineteenth century women were more concerned with ending societal ills such as alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution, illiteracy, and disease, particularly those caused by unhygienic environments, as opposed to political rights and personal freedom. They were “cleaning up” the public sphere in contrast to attempting entrance into it, in order to become better wives and mothers in their own sphere, as they acknowledged men and women occupied different spheres.¹²⁹ This, however, does not mean that these women did not seek access to laws or rights, quite the opposite, Mariscotti explained that they maintained that their “liberation/conquest of hegemony” was to be found in the state’s political sphere, particularly law: “these women did not seek to move much beyond their sphere by entering politics or the economic sphere directly. Instead they sought to influence the public, male, political sphere from the female sphere, a decidedly cultural feminist response.”¹³⁰ The elite women’s call to vote was only a strategy to broaden their sphere by way of their feminist agenda into

¹²⁸ Mariscotti, 26.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

the political, secular, legal sphere dominated by the elite men.¹³¹ However, women were not the only people to challenge societal norms and call for reform regarding women's responsibilities and education.

At the end of the nineteenth and the opening of the twentieth century, reformers seeking to improve women's situation appeared in part from the educated, nationalist, male elite of Egypt. The issues reformers focused on were education, seclusion, veiling, divorce and polygyny, which corresponded with the larger agenda with regards to advancement of Egypt in addition to the agreement between Islam and modernity.¹³² Muhammad 'Abduh influenced subsequent generations of reformers such as the already mentioned Amin, Rida, al-Banna, and Qutb. These individuals were major contributors and reformers in the social, intellectual, cultural, Islamic, and anti-colonial discourses that took place in their respective times. Over all, it can be said that these men were particularly aware of the Egyptian woman's plight in society. The pro-women's rights debate emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and was portrayed by somewhat apparent class boundaries. Cole explained that women's liberation was advocated by the new upper middle-class, "members of large landowning families who had acquired a Western education or at least had some acquaintance with European thought and culture."¹³³ The reformers al-Tahtawi, al-Afghani, 'Abduh, Amin,

¹³¹ Mariscotti, 53.

¹³² Kandiyoti, 3.

¹³³ Cole, 392. A major example of an upper middle-class feminist was Malak Hifni Nassef (1886-1918), whose pen name was Bahithat al-Badiyah. See Chapter 3.

and Rida all met the requirements of this social category in one way or another. Their consciousness was reflected in their writings and calls for reform to rectify the disappointing status of women in nineteenth century Egyptian society. It is apparent that the innovative works were first composed by men and non-Muslim women; however, upper middle-class Muslim women eventually joined and led the calls for reform.

There was a general consensus among male intellectuals such as al-Tahtawi, al-Afghani, ‘Abduh, Rida, and Amin for the advancement of Egyptian society, an end to seclusion in harems, education for women to make better wives and mothers, marriage¹³⁴ and divorce reform, and take a limited part in public life. With al-Tahtawi, it came in the form of his book about education *al-Murshid al-Amin lil-Banat wal-Banin*. Al-Tahtawi spent the majority of his life in the education field and believed that teaching must be connected with the nature and dilemmas of society; it must focus on fostering emotions and values contemporary of a given country in the hearts of the youth. Furthermore, he explained elementary education should be identical for all students and universal. Secondary education, he added, must be promoted and must be of the highest quality. Boys and girls were to be educated at the same levels, which was a reflection of his times and the order he received from the Ministry of Education to introduce something appropriate to teach to boys and girls. Hourani explained al-Tahtawi’s philosophy on education:

¹³⁴ Some writers were very critical and called for “virtual prohibition” of the institution of polygamy, such as ‘Abduh. Hourani, 78.

The teaching of girls was necessary for three reasons: for harmonious marriages and the good upbringing of children; so that women could work, as men work, within the limits of their capacity; and to save them from the emptiness of a life of gossip in the harem. (He does not seem to suggest that they should come out of seclusion and take part in public life, although there is suggestive chapter on famous women rulers, including Cleopatra, but he wishes them to be better treated in the family.) Polygamy is not forbidden, he maintains, but Islam only allows it if the husband is capable of doing justice between his wives.¹³⁵

The main goal of education must be to develop a personality and not merely to convey knowledge. Education must instill the significance of physical health, of family and duties that apply to friendship and first and foremost patriotism. *Hubb al-watan*, the love of country, is the leading motivation men and women have in developing a civilized society. Al-Tahtawi was the first prominent Muslim thinker to introduce the ideas of *watan* (fatherland) and *wataniyyah* (patriotism) into Muslim and Arabic thought. Education was essential to both sexes in demonstrating *hubb al-watan*. The education of women contributed to the advancement of Egypt. His book *al-Murshid al-Amin lil-Banat wal-Banin*, was written to teach Egyptian boys and girls to love Islam and Egypt, al-Tahtawi wrote: “The quality of patriotism demands not only that a man seek his due rights from the fatherland, but also that he fulfill his obligations to it. If one of the sons

¹³⁵ Hourani, 78.

of the fatherland does not fulfill his obligations to it, then he loses the civil rights to which he had title.”¹³⁶ He combined Islam and patriotism to improve Egyptian society, and in his outlook he included the education of women as a component to his proposal. His recommendation in the late 1830s to the Educational Council of Egypt that women receive public education indicated as much.

Another major reformist of the nineteenth century was Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. Al-Afghani was very similar to al-Tahtawi in his outlook in terms of goals; however, Al-Afghani was distinct in the regards to his opinion of the West. Whereas al-Tahtawi was impressed with the West and their progress, al-Afghani was known for his anti-imperialist stance. Like the other reformers mentioned in this study, he supported revitalizing Islam as a way to reform society. The solution to this disadvantage, he argued, was reform from within Muslim societies, to obtain modern scientific fields, to modify themselves to the demands of the modern world, and importantly to unite the *ummah*. Al-Afghani was an advocate of Islamic solidarity as well as progress. He elaborated: “Let me repeat for you, reader, one more time, that unlike other religions, Islam is concerned not only with the life to come. Islam is more: it is concerned with its believers’ interests in the world here below and with allowing them to realize success in this life as well as peace in the next life. It seeks ‘good fortune in two

¹³⁶ Donohue and Esposito, 10.

worlds.’ In its teachings it decrees equality among different peoples and nations.”¹³⁷

Yet another influential reformer and early women’s rights advocate from the nineteenth century was Muhammad ‘Abduh. ‘Abduh is considered the originator of the modernist school in Islam which stemmed from his wish to adjust Islam to the modern age with a restoration of Islam’s purity.¹³⁸ He advocated education for women, marriage and divorce reform, and just treatment of women in Egyptian society. In the case of polygamy, ‘Abduh emphasized the pre-condition that a husband in a polygamous marriage must be just and equal toward every wife. The *aya*, or verse regarding this matter is: “And if you have reason to fear that you might not act equitably towards orphans, then marry from among [other] women such as are lawful to you - [even] two, or three, or four; but if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then [only] one - or [from among] those whom you right-fully possess. This will make it more likely that you will not deviate from the right course.”¹³⁹ He explained that men cannot in fact fulfill this stipulation to polygamous marriages.¹⁴⁰ ‘Abdu used another explicit *aya* from the same *sura* to prove his point: “And it will not be within your power to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire it; and so, do not allow yourselves to

¹³⁷ Donohue and Esposito, 19.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 20.

¹³⁹ Muhammad Asad, trans. *The Message of the Qur’an*. England: The Book Foundation, 2008, (4:3), 117-118.

¹⁴⁰ Hourani, 166.

incline towards one to the exclusion of the other, leaving her in a state, as it were, of having and not having a husband. But if you put things to rights and are conscious of him – behold, God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.”¹⁴¹ Baron suggests that ‘Abduh, a judge, aspired to advance women in Egyptian society out of sympathy through his court case decisions, when replying to legal questions, as well as his writings. His childhood was a firsthand account of the hardship that Egyptian women may face in the domestic sphere. His mother was separated from her children from her first marriage, and moved to her second husband’s village, where ‘Abduh was her only child from that marriage. He witnessed the pain his mother suffered from the separation from her children and later her second marriage to ‘Abduh’s father. ‘Abduh lived and grasped the complications that can face the Egyptian family. Other reforms that Baron discussed ‘Abduh hoped to implement and proposed were “that men and women be allowed to meet before marriage, that multiple marriage was not countenanced by the Qur’an except in extenuating circumstances, and that men not divorce their wives impulsively.”¹⁴²

One of ‘Abduh’s disciples Muhammad Rashid Rida was known as the leading intellectual of one of the conservative splinter groups of ‘Abduh’s modernist Islamic movement. Rida wished for Egypt to progress morally, intellectually, and spiritually and published his journal *al-Manar* to guide the public. Although he agreed with ‘Abduh and many others on issues such as

¹⁴¹ Asad, trans., (4:129), 148-149.

¹⁴² Baron, 112.

seclusion, polygamy, divorce and the education of women, he disagreed with blind imitation of the West and disapproved of Egyptian women unveiling and discarding their Islamic identities.¹⁴³ He explained that in the year 586, after much disagreement and debate, the French public came to the conclusion to categorize woman as a “human, however, she was created to serve man.”¹⁴⁴ The Prophet Muhammad was fifteen years old at that time, and twenty five years later, the message of Islam elevated Muslim women light years ahead of European women. His point was that no other religion or society has mandated rights accorded to women such as Islam and an Islamic society, and looking elsewhere for reform is fruitless.¹⁴⁵

Rida’s main argument for upholding Islamic values and principles was that it was the path to progress. Although he often tackled the issues of families and the home in *al-Manar*, he wrote a book called *Huquq al-Nisa’ fi al-Islam: Nida’ lil-Jins al-Latif* (1932-33), *Women’s Rights in Islam: A Call to the Gentle Sex*, which addressed the rights granted to women and their roles according to the conservative modernist Islamic movement. From the introduction of his book, he compared the Islamic idea of woman to European ideas to substantiate the argument that Islam guarantees women’s rights and a true Islamic society would uphold them. Rida based his arguments on the *Qur’an* and *Hadith*. He began this

¹⁴³ Cole, 393.

¹⁴⁴ Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Huquq an-Nisa’ fi al-Islam: Nida’ lil-Jins al-Latif*. Beirut: Al-Maktab Al-Islami, 1975, 6. My translation.

¹⁴⁵ Rida, 6-7. My translation.

work with describing the lowly state of women before Islam and the reform and elevation they experienced with the rise of Islam. He went on to prove that women are equal beings to men, women's faith is as strong as men's, and that women of faith are rewarded as men of faith are. With regards to collective religious practices, social and political activity, Rida explained that the *Qur'an*, allows women to pray in public, meaning the *masjid*, like men.¹⁴⁶ Women are allowed to participate in worshipping in other collective religious practices such as the *Hajj*, the yearly pilgrimage to Makkah and *Eid* prayers.¹⁴⁷ Also, more importantly, women in the *Qur'an* have the authorization as guardians or managers of social and political matters just as men do. He refers to this *Qur'anic* verse: "AND [as for] the believers, both men and women- they are the friends and protectors of one another: they [all] enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and are constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed unto God and His Apostle. It is they upon whom God will bestow His grace: verily, God is almighty, wise!"¹⁴⁸ Women, he explained, are given "complete control of this guardianship alongside men, which gives them authority based on solidarity, esteem, and cooperation in financial and social

¹⁴⁶ Rida, 11. However, it is not mandated to them to pray in the *masjid* as way to lessen her load of responsibilities. My translation.

¹⁴⁷ *Eid*, Arabic for celebration, occurs twice a year in the Islamic calendar. The first is *Eid al-Fitr*, after the month of *Ramadan*. *Eid al-Adha* is after the *Hajj*.

¹⁴⁸ Asad, trans., 306. (71:9).

matters.”¹⁴⁹ Also, women have the authority to demonstrate support militarily and politically. This responsibility Rida described, though not in detail or in depth but incredibly briefly, gives women the right to actively participate in public discourse on the well-being and condition of society. These rights give women the opportunities to take part in the management of society of which they were a part of, contribute to debates on reform perhaps through the published word, physically protesting or endorsing circumstances in a society by marching or demonstrating, or be involved in the political process through voting and running for elected offices.

Rida continued throughout *Huquq al-Nisa' fi al-Islam*, to list the religious, social, financial, inheritance, political, and marital and divorce rights of Muslim women. From birth, women are granted the right to live and be treated as human beings Rida explained. Among the other rights Rida discussed, which are relevant to a discussion about the nineteenth and twentieth century Egyptian women's movement and society, was women's right to be educated and seek an education. It is the right, almost the duty of every Muslim to seek education.¹⁵⁰ When it came to marriage rights, Rida observed that the practice of forcing women into marriages against their will was still a common occurrence of his time around the world. Yet, Islam provides that a woman must consent to a

¹⁴⁹ Rida, 12. The only exemption in this matter is that women are not obligated by *shari'ah* to physically fight in wars. He explained how women in the early days of Islam, including the Prophet's daughter, Fatimah, and his wives actively participated in battles by providing water, preparing food, treating the wounded, and encouraging and supporting the fighters. My translation.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 17-19. My translation.

marriage, and may not be married against her will. Married women are allowed to own property and have financial independence with their assets without the interference of their husbands. Although husbands and wives are equal in their marriage which must be based on respect and love, he explained, the husband is the leader of the home as he is “more aware of its welfare and is more able to protect it with his strength and money.”¹⁵¹ Wives are the administrators of the home and its duties, and husbands are obligated in Islam to provide for that home. Polygamy is allowed in Islam, and he delved into the explanation of the verses that permit it and gave examples to when it is an acceptable practice. However, he is of the same opinion of his mentor and quoted ‘Abdu that polygamy has had a negative impact on Egyptian society: “it is impossible to raise the *ummah* correctly with the abundance of abusive polygamy that must be prevented.”¹⁵² Furthermore he pointed out that it is practically impossible to be equal with more than one wife.¹⁵³ Finally, one of the other issues of his book, which was widely discussed during the nineteenth century, was the veil. He disagreed with the trend of the removal of *hijab*, however, he gave detail to the fact that the veil or *niqab* was not required of Muslim women.¹⁵⁴ Although, he agreed with many of the reforms that women of the reform movement called for, he had his reservations which he often voiced as to how liberal or how Western their direction seemed to

¹⁵¹ Rida, 37. My translation.

¹⁵² Ibid., 67. My translation.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 66. My translation.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 184. My translation.

be. One of the main reformers Rida hesitated to agree with completely for the mentioned reason was Qasim Amin, ‘Abdu’s other disciple.¹⁵⁵

The intellectual that was usually in the thick of the debate about the role of women in Egyptian society was Qasim Amin. Amin expanded on the works of his mentor on his opposition to the status of Egyptian women, which gave him the reputation of being a heretic amongst the ‘*ulama*’ of al-Azhar and other learning institutions of traditional Islamic outlooks.¹⁵⁶ However, many activist men and women applauded his efforts and writing and he was a representative hero to the cause. He was accused of publishing heresy against Islam by his opposition, and although he denied such claims, he eagerly admitted to publishing heresy against traditions which have no religious claims, such as wearing a veil to cover a woman’s face, or seclusion.¹⁵⁷ Amin explained that: “The power of tradition controls a country more than any power...evidence of history confirms and demonstrates that the status of women is inseparably tied to the status of a nation. When the status of a nation is low, reflecting an uncivilized condition for that nation, the status of women is also low, and when the status of women is elevated, reflecting the progress and civilization of that nation, the status of women in that country is also elevated.”¹⁵⁸ It was Amin’s belief that if any religion was capable of overcoming local traditions, “then Muslim women today should have been at

¹⁵⁵ Cole, 392.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 393.

¹⁵⁷ Amin, 4.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 6.

the forefront of free women on earth.”¹⁵⁹ He stressed that *shari‘ah* established equality between men and women long before any other religion or society, and based many of his arguments for education and reform for women on this premise. In *The Liberation of Women* (1899), Amin concluded that the low status of Muslim women was inexcusable and contrary to the laws of Islam which grant men and women equal rights. To a certain extent, Amin was similar to al-Tahtawi, al-Afghani, ‘Abduh, Rida, al-Banna, and Nasir in their critical outlook on despotism; however unlike them, he was not a vocal anti-British nor anti-colonial writer. His condemnation was that “despotic systems have also influenced the relationships between men and women in her weakness...When women were weak, men crushed their rights, despised them, treated them with contempt, stomped on their personality.”¹⁶⁰ According to Amin, the decline of men’s power was to blame for the low status of Egyptian women. In *The New Woman*, Amin touched upon his belief that the household was a woman’s domain; it was her duty to improve herself in order to fulfill family obligations.¹⁶¹ Amin’s

¹⁵⁹ Amin, 7.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹⁶¹ He believed women needed to benefit as individuals and benefit their families. He explained that women cannot “fulfill family obligations without first caring for the self. Likewise, knowledge that guides one toward family obligations is preferred over knowledge that supports activities related to a person’s societal obligations, since strength of human society is dependent on how well households are organized.” Ibid., 148-149. A well rounded education in these three categories was recommended by Amin for both sexes. However, he halts at the final category and does not consider political rights and privileges important to be acquired by women at that time. He believed Egyptian women were not “ready for anything. She will need years of intellectual training through both education and experience to prepare her for competing with men in public life.” Ibid., 149.

main concerns were education for women, a departure from seclusion in Egyptian harems, the removal of the veil, and the overall improvement of women in Egyptian society. According to Ahmed, while traditionalists rejected Amin's work, people of the upper- and upper-middle-classes such as Huda Sha'rawi with Western cultural association responded positively to Amin's book.¹⁶²

In the twentieth century, the discourse on reform and on women's roles in society was carrying on, and the next two activists were participants: Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. The very first Islamic movement in the Arab world, the Muslim Brothers was established in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna. He related every aspect of society to Islam, the economic, social, cultural, philosophical, political, and the moral. Like others before him and of his generation and occupation, he was heavily influenced by the ideas of 'Abduh, al-Afghani, and Rida, and used them to mobilize and organize his supporters and instituted a grassroots society.¹⁶³ While there was participation by women (usually relatives or wives of Muslim Brothers' members), the number never surpassed 5,000 members.¹⁶⁴ The Muslim Brothers was not very compelling to women. Naturally, as every reformer or activist claimed to have the solution to improve society, al-Banna encouraged women to join the Muslim Brothers cause, citing the vital role women played in the Islamic restoration he strived for and what he claimed to be true emancipation

¹⁶² Ahmed, 164.

¹⁶³ Shehadeh, 17.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 18.

for them.¹⁶⁵ The Muslim Brothers were unsuccessful in attracting members among the educated female group, most likely due to the perception that an Islamist agenda would be restrictive towards women or would be a return to the harem. Like Rida before him, al-Banna was critical of what he perceived as blind emulation of Europe, and especially of Muslim Egyptian women following this Western model.

A woman's primary objective, according to al-Banna, is to focus on her family and home. The Muslim Brothers encouraged education and professionalism for women within the means of modesty. However, only as a secondary priority that did not conflict with her role as the homemaker. By prioritizing service to her home and family, a woman is serving her community and is a benefit to the cause. Al-Banna also advocated segregation of the sexes and mandating *hijab*.¹⁶⁶ As opposed to Qasim Amin, who believed Egyptian women were not ready for political participation, al-Banna saw the necessity of women's participation. Shehadeh revealed that al-Banna's reasoning was "for propaganda purposes or when male members are in exile, imprisoned, or fighting."¹⁶⁷ Women are deemed responsible for the welfare of Egypt and its society just as much as men are. As a result, women must be involved in the "political process and consulted as citizens by the government and as wives by

¹⁶⁵ Shehadeh, 18.

¹⁶⁶ The reasoning for this was a way to curb sexual temptation and or extramarital relations. Ibid., 18.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 19.

their husbands,”¹⁶⁸ as Shehadeh put it. His acknowledgment of the importance of women’s role in society came in his claim that women were the first school in a person’s life which models new generations, and his acknowledgement that women make up half of society. However, although women were equal to men in rights and duties, natural and biological differences led to different gender roles. While men were the heads of their families, women were the heads of their homes, playing the roles of mother, wife, and housekeeper. As the natural place for women was the home, they needed to be educated in certain fields such as: reading, writing, basic arithmetic, Islamic studies as well as early Islamic history, hygiene, child rearing, and home economics. These subjects will give women well-formed moral conduct and the ability to raise children that will fit into the *ummah*. Subjects of no use to women were for example: law, foreign languages, or sciences.¹⁶⁹

Sayyid Qutb, another conservative reformist of the twentieth century was a major Egyptian intellectual. He was heavily influenced by Hasan al-Banna before him and became an inspiration to Islamists after him. In addition to being Egypt’s foremost Islamist activist to go beyond even al-Banna, Qutb was a literary critic, novelist, and poet.¹⁷⁰ Qutb’s writing demonstrates his shift from being a social observer to the radical Islamist that he became. He received mass appeal as a

¹⁶⁸ Shehadeh, 19.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 49.

result of his exactness and effortlessness from the Western-educated upper-class and traditionalists such as himself.

After 1951, he focused on his career and writings on his Islamist views, and concluded that all man-made theories such as nationalism have failed. The only answer was to revitalize the *ummah* by removing the remnants of these man-made catastrophes that have set Muslims back. Muslim men and women needed to emerge from the state of ignorance, *jahiliyyah* that they were trapped in and institute the ideal state firmly rooted in the principles of the *Qur'an* in addition to the will of the people. Unfortunately for Qutb, Islamist solutions did not appeal to many women of the time that were not Islamist, as there was fear of losing any progress or access to the public sphere they had made from any reforms up until then. However, Qutb proposed the Islamic state be based on the *Qur'an* and that the government be run by *shura*, discussion.¹⁷¹ According to Qutb, Islam teaches that men and women are equal beings yet they are different, especially physically, which is a typical Islamist perspective. A thriving Muslim community can only be, if gender relations are controlled, he claimed.

Family, according to him, is the basis of a society, and the basis of a family is the division of labor between men and women. In accordance with Islamist ideas by former major thinkers such as Rida and al-Banna, Qutb emphasized the major importance of the family and the upbringing of future

¹⁷¹ Ironically, if the teachings of the *Qur'an* were to be used as the laws of Egypt as opposed to the male interpretations of the *Qur'an*, Egyptian women would have enjoyed more rights and less social restrictions than they were.

generations, which is the woman's foremost duty. Also, Qutb as a cynical intellectual in regards to the West and what it had to offer was very ardent in pointing out flaws about the West as a way to discredit what he and some other Islamists perceived as emulation of the West by Egyptian and Muslim feminists and reformers. He reminded his readers that while Western women enjoyed rights and liberation in the twentieth century that were new to them, Muslim women had been enjoying these rights under Islamic laws for fourteen centuries. Although at varying levels, each of the scholars and intellectuals mentioned above advocated women's advancement in Egyptian society; each acknowledged the rights granted to women by Islam. Having described their ideas and works on how women should be treated by the state and *shari'ah*, the next section will describe Egyptian women's experience with *shari'ah* and how they actually were treated as these scholars were making their demands for reform.

It is true that Muslim women have experienced a long history with *shari'ah*. It was been an interesting experience that eventually shifted from being upfront and clear-cut laws that pushed women light years ahead of European women in terms of liberation and rights, to being interpretations of these laws by male controlled institutions resolute on maintaining hegemony over society and tradition, the public and the private. In Egyptian society, this was the case. One of the major disappointments to the women's rights movement was the outcome of early drafting of laws during the early twentieth century. Secular laws were used in civil, commercial, and penal codes, whereas the authority over men and

women's personal lives and matters of the family was under the rule of *shari'ah*. Hala Shukrallah explained: "...the division between secular and religious institutions went against the interests of women. Laws which regulated marriages, divorce, polygamy and child custody continued to be governed by religious laws, which had upheld male rights for centuries. The dominance of secular institutions in the public sphere led to a compromise with the religious institutions in the private sphere, a sphere which most concerned women's intimate lives..."¹⁷² The Personal Status Laws, or in Arabic *qawaneen al-ahwal al-shakhsiyya*, were issued in 1925, amended in 1929, and experienced inconsequential changes in the later twentieth century.¹⁷³ These laws are believed to be the only laws "in which discrimination on the grounds of gender is most solidly entrenched, most widely accepted and hence most difficult to modify,"¹⁷⁴ according to Jasmine Moussa. Women's rights activists pushed to reform and modernize the personal status laws and this compromise that was reached between the secular and the religious institutions regarding the family and private lives of Egyptians which proved to be the most significant obstacle that faced the Egyptian women's rights movement throughout the twentieth century.

¹⁷² Hala Shukrallah, "The Impact of the Islamic Movement in Egypt." *Feminist Review*. Vol. 47 (1994), 19.

¹⁷³ Guenena and Wassef, 20.

¹⁷⁴ Jasmine Moussa, "The Reform of *Shari'a*-derived Divorce Legislation in Egypt: International Standards and Cultural Debate." *Human Rights Law Commentary*, The University of Nottingham School of Law, 2005, Introduction.

There was an effort to regulate the Personal Status Laws in the year 1875, to collect the specifications of the *Hanafi* Jurisprudential School into a complete set of laws on personal status.¹⁷⁵ Moussa explains that the *Hanafi* school is considered the “most restrictive when it comes to personal status issues.”¹⁷⁶ This set of laws was never publicized, however, in 1897 judges were ordered by the Egyptian state to utilize the *Hanafi* personal status law when arbitrating matters on personal status.¹⁷⁷ *Hanafi* doctrine encourages a predominantly patriarchal construction of the family. In the 1920s, Egyptian lawmakers set a legal age for marriage, eighteen years old for males and sixteen years old for females. However, this law was not always enforced.¹⁷⁸ In marriage, women have less financial rights, in addition to fewer paths to be taken in order to leave a marriage. Also, for a husband’s financial responsibilities toward his wife, *Hanafi* tenets award more rights to him by increasing his control in marriage.¹⁷⁹ Husbands have the authority to divorce unilaterally, even if he is intoxicated. There were only two conditions for a woman to seek and possibly be granted a divorce by a judge under *Hanafi* personal status laws; if a wife can prove “the incapacity of a

¹⁷⁵ Moussa, 11. There are four Jurisprudential Schools in Sunni Islam: *Shafi’i* School, *Hanbali* School, *Hanafi* School, and *Maliki* School. The *Maliki* is considered the most liberal and “more favorable to the position of women.” *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Guenena and Wassef, 23.

¹⁷⁹ Lama Abu-Odeh, “Modernizing Muslim Family Law: The Case of Egypt.” *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*. Vol. 37 (2004), 1124.

husband to consummate the marriage, and his apostasy from Islam,”¹⁸⁰ according to Oussama Arabi, a professor in philosophy. However, with a husband’s consent, the *Hanafi* doctrine allows for a form of divorce called *khul’*,¹⁸¹ which is an irreversible separation¹⁸² granted by a court and initiated by the wife. In order to be granted *khul’* by a judge, the wife must compensate the husband for the *mahr*, or dowry, he gave her at the time of their marriage. A woman seeking *khul’* must also forgo any payments of alimony. According to Arabi, Abu Hanifa, the scholar that created the Hanafi School, specified that “‘*Khul’* for the wife is a sale (*bay’*), and hence allows for retraction on her part’ within a stipulated period; ‘but for the husband, *khul’* is an oath (*yamin*) and thus his retraction is not permissible.’”¹⁸³ Arabi goes on to say that, in the *Hanafi* School, *khul’* is a “transactional bargaining structure.”¹⁸⁴ It is worth noting that all four Schools concur that *khul’* does not have an effect on the wife’s right to custody over her children, nor does it have an effect on children’s maintenance rights.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Oussama Arabi, “The Dawning of the Third Millennium on Shari’a: Egypt’s Law No. 1 of 2000, or Women May Divorce at Will.” *Arab Law Quarterly*. Vol. 16 (2001), 2.

¹⁸¹ The word *khul’* means extraction in Arabic.

¹⁸² Unlike the subject to appeal judicial divorce, *khul’* is irrevocable. This is the opinion of all four Jurisprudential Schools. Moussa, 17.

¹⁸³ Arabi, 15.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁸⁵ Moussa, 17. The wife maintains custody over her children until a specific age. In 1929, the ages were extended, for boys until the age of seven, and for girls the age of nine. A judge is allowed to extend the time of custody at his discretion. However, if a mother remarried, she lost custody, while this is not the case if a father remarried. Guenena and Wassef, 22.

Another type of divorce a wife may seek under *Hanafi* legal doctrine is a woman may request a judicial divorce based on discord. Moussa explains that this divorce is derived from the demand by *shari'ah* that wives are expected to obey their husbands: "A wife is considered disobedient if she leaves the matrimonial home and refuses to return, in spite of the husband's invitation (*da'wa*) at the hands of an Officer (*mohdar*). The wife may object to this procedure before the Court, on the basis that she has legitimate reasons (*awgoh shar'iyah*) to leave the matrimonial home..."¹⁸⁶ The matrimonial home is called *bayt al-ta'ah* (house of obedience).¹⁸⁷ Guenena and Wassef state that "the origin of *bayt al-ta'ah* is the belief that a wife must remain in the conjugal home and obey her husband in exchange for his financial support."¹⁸⁸ Therefore, if a wife leaves her husband's home and does not return at his invitation to return, that is grounds for divorce by him and she is not liable for alimony.

Yet another form of divorce is called *'ismah*, delegation. The *Hanafi* doctrine allows for a wife at the time of marriage and with her husband's approval and delegation to have the right to divorce herself at her discretion. The only form of divorce that grants a woman complete and sole authority and determination on when and whether to exit a marriage was rarely observed due to

¹⁸⁶ Moussa, 15, note 72.

¹⁸⁷ There is no basis for *bayt al-ta'ah* in the *Qur'an* or *sunnah*. Guenena and Wassef, 22-23.

¹⁸⁸ Guenena and Wassef, 23.

the harsh social stigma of being divorced.¹⁸⁹ All the divorces discussed involved obstacles and hurdles for women with regards to their self-determination and marital statuses, while men enjoyed more freedom and control over their marital lives with minimal impediments. The only form that allowed women to exercise more freewill, is met with social distain, giving the strong implication and proof that a woman's decision to leave a marriage was discouraged and despised.

From the eighth and ninth centuries until the nineteenth century was a time considered the era of *taqlid*, imitation.¹⁹⁰ The emergence of this era brought with it, what Moussa described as “an era of rigidity, whereby laws were based on precedents elaborated by jurists in the Middle Ages, and left unchallenged for centuries.”¹⁹¹ Moussa portrayed this situation as a “state of coma”¹⁹² that *shari'ah* was experiencing, and it was met with the zeal of reformers of the nineteenth century and the development of Islamic legal modernism such as with the likes of Muhammad 'Abduh. Personal status laws slowly moved away from *Hanafi* doctrine, and began to adhere to a doctrine more positive toward the situation of women, the *Maliki* doctrine.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Moussa, 13.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 8-10. “...independent reasoning was no longer considered an option for Muslim jurists; they had to engage in *taqlid*, a method of reasoning or ‘imitation’ based on the precedents set by the four *Sunni* jurisprudential schools.” Ibid., 9-10.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

Since the end of the *taqlid* era, in the twentieth century, Egyptian lawmakers endeavored to diminish the severe consequences of the strict *Hanafi* School, mainly by implementing interpretations from other three doctrines, specifically from the *Maliki* School.¹⁹⁴ Arabi elaborated on what this shift in doctrinal interpretations meant for women and divorce:

In Egypt in particular, during the first part of the twentieth century, Laws No. 25 of 1920 and No. 25 of 1929 marked a substantial increase in the chance of a wife being accorded judicial divorce. Basing themselves on the Maliki wide interpretation of harm, the Egyptian lawmakers gave wives greater freedom to sue for divorce, a circumstance that was not allowed by the Hanafi family law, officially consecrated by the state in 1897, and which recognized practically just two causes for divorce dissolution: the incapacity of a husband to consummate the marriage, and his apostasy from Islam. The generosity of the Maliki inspired provisions of the 1920 and 1929 Laws toward suffering wives notwithstanding, a woman's obtaining divorce always depends on a suing wife's ability to persuade the judge that she is suffering harm or injury due to one of the following causes, her husband's (1) Systematic maltreatment, (2) Non-provision of maintenance; (3) Prolonged absence or imprisonment; and (4) An incurable disease.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Moussa, 11.

¹⁹⁵ Arabi, 2.

Under *Maliki* doctrine, such a separation would not be granted by a judge of the personal status laws court if a wife is unable to convince him that she has been harmed by her husband in one of the four mentioned categories of *darar*.¹⁹⁶ Another condition for a judicial divorce to be granted is that reconciliation failed. In the case of polygamy, the 1920 Law specifically typified the taking of a second wife by a husband as a special form of *darar*, theoretically; “however, a demonstration of the occurrence of actual harm that would convince the judge was still a prerequisite for a ruling in the first wife’s favor,”¹⁹⁷ according to Arabi. Unfortunately, the Laws of 1920 and 1929 did not offer a solid answer for the significant amount of women that were captive in undesired marriages if their husbands declined to divorce them and if a judge was not persuaded a wife was in fact harmed.¹⁹⁸

According to Arabi, *khul’* in *Maliki* doctrine shows the fundamental scope of this type of divorce’s structure in *shari’ah*. First of all, this type of divorce is commenced by the wife rather than the husband. Second, a husband is to be materially reimbursed by the wife equal to or more than the *mahr* he paid her. Third, the husband must give his approval of the separation sought by his wife.

¹⁹⁶ *Darar* is the Arabic word for harm. In 1964, the decision No. 432 of the Court of Appeal defined harm to include “the husband’s systematic maltreatment, either verbal or physical, of the wife in a manner that is not suitable to woman of her standing (*la yaliq bimithliha*).” Moussa, 14.

¹⁹⁷ Arabi, 3.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

Fourth, this divorce is final, *talaq bayyin*, therefore, a husband and wife cannot reconcile or reunite.¹⁹⁹

The modification of *shari'ah*-based laws from restrictive and harsh interpretations to slightly more relaxed and tolerant versions towards women and personal status laws briefly describes the situation of Egyptian women under *shari'ah* during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, personal status laws were so entrenched in the Egyptian legal system and were actively guarded by the conservative elements of society from reformers and modernists such as Muhammad 'Abduh and Huda Sha'rawi. Guenena and Wassef explained: "Throughout the 1920s, the governments in power avoided eliciting any change in the laws so as not to upset the imbalance between the genders. This was in direct contrast to the changes taking place for women in the realms of education and work. The entire mechanism of society could alter but the patriarchal family unit was guarded from any such change."²⁰⁰

The Islamic institution in Egypt acted as the protector of tradition, and was confronted with the problem of how to merge tradition with the latest modernized surroundings it was in the midst of. As this state of affairs resulted in a division in the Egyptian public, some sided with al-Azhar University, and some with the modernizing Egyptian state.²⁰¹ Politics professor, Ghada Hashem Talhami wrote

¹⁹⁹ Arabi, 8.

²⁰⁰ Guenena and Wassef, 21.

²⁰¹ Ghada Hashem Talhami, *The Mobilization of Muslim Women in Egypt*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996, 33.

that by the late twentieth century, under the Nasirist government, “Al-Azhar developed a dualistic response to the state to salvage its own autonomy and prestige. On the official level, the university seemed to be obedient to the state, accepting all formal responsibilities assigned to it. But on the level of intellectual thought and educational practice, Al-Azhar continued to offer a traditional and heritage-laden thought that quietly contradicted the modernistic and socialistic premise of the state.”²⁰² Talhami elaborated that this strategy guaranteed the durability of al-Azhar as a prominent establishment, as a Muslim government would never “easily oppose the teaching and dissemination of the Islamic heritage.”²⁰³ This was a main reason for the impediment of modernist Islamic thought. For example, under Nasir, al-Azhar favorably welcomed and supported controversial state policies such as neutralism, family planning, and nationalization. However, when it came to reform to *shari‘ah* regarding women’s issues, al-Azhar expressed fervent objections.²⁰⁴ Essentially, the agreement between the state and religion with regards to the jurisdiction over the public and private spheres, and the duality attained by al-Azhar, became the core of the struggle Egyptian women’s rights activists faced for the same demands for decades with very slow progress.

In summary, Egyptian women and their activism were utilized by liberal and nationalist politicians to serve their interests to the utmost, until it was no

²⁰² Talhami, 33.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 35.

longer needed. According to Talhami, “in fact, it has been noted that the liberal politicians of 1919 never intended to defy the religious establishment regarding inequalities in the *Sharia*, as has the unwillingness of the post-revolutionary regime of 1952 to tackle these issues.”²⁰⁵ This chapter explored the role class played in the women’s rights movement and the calls for reform. The first section discusses social classes and its relevance in the women’s movement. Next, the different perceptions of women and their situation and roles in society by major intellectuals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were considered. The final section was regarding *shari‘ah* and al-Azhar and their position on women at the end of the nineteenth century as well as twentieth century. The chapter and sections that follow demonstrate examples of women who labored and made strides within the environment described above, who paved the way for generations of women in the women’s movement.

²⁰⁵ Talhami, 1-20.

Chapter 4

NATIONALIST FEMINISTS: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The legacy of Huda Sha‘rawi has left its mark on the Egyptian feminist, political, and cultural stages, and paved the way for future generations of women activists to advance their cause and uplift the Egyptian woman through the public realm. However, before Sha‘rawi immersed herself into the nationalist and women’s movements, the foundation for the women’s movement was being laid out through the written word. The Egyptian women’s activism that emerged in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were due in part to imperialism and *an-nahda al-nisa’iyya*, the women’s awakening. During the 1890s, the beginning of the Arabic women’s press, a new literary culture, was born. Literary expression was a method for women to advance their cause. Baron explained that female intellectuals of the time used the term “women’s awakening” which referred to “the literary movement that they led, yet it also took on a broader cultural and social resonance. It referred to, among other developments, expansion in education, the rise of associations, and greater mobility for women.”²⁰⁶ According to Baron, the Egyptian women’s movement, that arguably imposed its presence with women’s participation in the 1919 Revolution, is a continuation of the women’s press and literary culture of the 1890s and its origins can be traced back to that time period: “the seeds that bore fruit in the 1920s and 1930s— notably the formation of women’s organizations, educational and legislative reform, and greater integration in society—were planted from the 1890s.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Baron, 2.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 3-4.

The women that made up this emerging culture were largely from the middle- and upper-classes of Egyptian society. They generated agendas for change and planned for action for their society. And although these calls for reform and this awakening are considered the Egyptian “roots of feminism,” a Western concept, these women’s advocates dissociated themselves from Western suffragettes and activists.²⁰⁸ Women in Egyptian culture, which was mainly Islamic in nature, theoretically enjoyed positions unique to that region of the world due to the specific rights for women authorized by Islam. Although the articles and issues on the rights of women, *huquq al-mar‘a*, emerged in the women’s press since its beginning, discussion on the role of women in Egyptian’s Islamic society and their rights was very old one, “A tradition of literature prescribing roles for women and criticizing behavior as Islamic or un-Islamic stretched centuries and included juristic works, behavioral guides, and biographical dictionaries, among other texts,”²⁰⁹ states Baron.

The Egyptian press circulated many outlooks on women’s rights, and Baron identifies approximately three of them. First, the secularist view, which caused the least controversy, focused on education and language, and was predominately espoused by minorities.²¹⁰ Second were the modernists, who discussed the improvement of women’s situation within their families by way of

²⁰⁸ Baron, 6.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 103.

²¹⁰ Minorities in Egypt during that time were Arabs from present day Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, in addition to Copts, Jews, and other ethnicities such as Turks, Circassians and Greeks.

modern religious understandings. And finally, the Islamists urged for a restoration of true Islam, they, in addition to religious conservatives, opposed the other two opinions and emphasized the rights given to women in Islam.

Interestingly, these viewpoints often combined, which is the reason defining and explaining the Egyptian women's movement can be difficult or complicated.²¹¹

The title that most describes the faction examined in this particular chapter is "Muslim feminist" used by political scientist, Azza Karam. Her definition of a Muslim feminist is women activists who: "use Islamic sources, like the Quran and the *Sunna* (the Prophet's actions and sayings), but their aim is to show that the discourse of equality between men and women *is* valid, within Islam. Muslim feminists also try to steer a middle course between interpretations of socio-political and cultural realities according to Islam and a human rights discourse."²¹²

In that philosophy of seeking a middle ground is the moderate view that separates the women discussed in this chapter from the Islamist women activists and more radical feminists that will be discussed in the next chapter. This chapter will discuss the nationalist feminists of the Sha'rawi age, first with an overview of the Huda Sha'rawi and Nabawiyya Musa memoirs to serve as profiles of major actors in this movement, second it dissects the philosophy of these feminists in addition

²¹¹ Baron, 7.

²¹² Karam, 11. She calls them Muslim feminists as opposed to Islamist feminist or secular feminist. The difference between Muslim feminists and Islamist feminist is Islamist feminists "are aware of a particular oppression of women, *and* they actively seek to rectify this oppression by recourse to Islamic principles." They reject being referred to as feminists or condemn the term as "an irrelevant and inaccurate Western term." Ibid., 9-10.

to briefly introducing another colleague within the movement, Malak Hifni Nassef, next it lays out the activities and accomplishments of the group that affected and benefited the women's movement as a whole. Finally, the chapter ends with analysis of the individual players on a more in depth and personal level to understand the road in which Sha'rawi and Musa reached turning points in their lives, sought to make their hopes and goals realities, and how they emerged from the dying custom of seclusion and entered the public arena confident and with nationalist pride.

Huda Sha'rawi: Mudhakkirati

In 1879, Nur al-Huda Sultan Sha'rawi was born to Sultan Pasha, her father, and Iqbal Hanim, her mother, on the estate of her family in al-Minya located in Upper Egypt.²¹³ Huda Sha'rawi grew up in Sultan Pasha's Cairo household during the late nineteenth century, while there was a culture of demanding reform brewing in Egyptian intellectual circles. For example, in his writings, al-Tahtawi called for such reforms as updating the Egyptian legal system to meet modern needs and equal education for girls almost a decade before Huda's birth.²¹⁴ *Al-nahda al-nisa'iyya*, the women's awakening of the 1890s coincided with her being thirteen years of age and a married woman. Her memoirs, *Mudhakkirati*, or *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist*

²¹³ Margot Badran, *Feminism, Islam, and the Nation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, 32.

²¹⁴ According to a timeline compiled by Nadia Wassef, by the time Huda Sha'rawi was born, girls had begun entering state run schools and notably in 1832 the School of Hakimas opened, to train female health practitioners. Nassef, 34.

(1879-1924) focused on her early life, in which she first became aware of her gender and its limitations, as well as the patriarchal nature of her class.²¹⁵ This included a section on her home and family. She elaborated on the time of her life when she, as Badran described, “expanded her world” as a single woman with a sense of freedom.²¹⁶ Badran called this time Sha‘rawi’s “period of ‘independence,’” when she lived separately from her husband.²¹⁷ She ended with her return to the harem of her husband and her relentless activism in the 1919 Revolution, which was a very pivotal moment in the life of Huda Sha‘rawi as well as the women’s rights movement.

As an indication of her family’s prominent social standing, like the majority of other feminists of the time, Huda Sha‘rawi painted distinguished portraits of her maternal and paternal family lineages in her opening chapters of her memoirs. She lovingly described her mother’s Circassian family that often visited Egypt from Turkey. Huda’s maternal grandmother sent her daughter, Iqbal, to live in Egypt, where she was a companion to the daughters of a Turco-Circassian harem of the elite. Later, girls such as Iqbal from Turkey and the Caucasus were received as concubines or brides by men of the new Egyptian elites and the Turco-Circassian.²¹⁸ Badran explained that they brought with them their own high social standing which “brought prestige to the houses into which

²¹⁵ *Harem Years* was published in Arabic under the title *Mudhakkirati*, meaning “my memoirs.”

²¹⁶ Badran, 1995, 33.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

they entered.”²¹⁹ Her mother’s guardians resolved to find her a wealthy husband, as she “grew into a striking beauty.”²²⁰ According to Huda, it was her mother’s fortuity that Sultan Pasha took her to be his wife.²²¹ However, Margot Badran reveals that Iqbal never became Sultan Pasha’s legal wife.²²² Iqbal entered into Sultan Pasha’s harem as a *durra*, co-wife, to Hasibah his first wife. Huda described her mother as being a person that kept her emotions and sadness hidden from the world, and rarely complained. This strength and silence prevented Huda from ever asking her mother of her origins, the story behind her passage to Egypt, and her marriage to Sultan Pasha. Huda’s mother was a teenager when she gave birth to her, and two years after, she gave birth to Huda’s brother ‘Umar. Iqbal Hanim’s traditional and reserved life in the Sha‘rawi harem proved to be last in that family, as Huda, gradually pulled away from the secluded lifestyle of her mother and society.

According to her memoirs, Huda’s father, Sultan Pasha, is greatly celebrated as having “played an important role in the political life of Egypt and

²¹⁹ Badran, 1995, 32.

²²⁰ Sha‘rawi, 26.

²²¹ Ibid. She said this because once her father heard of Iqbal’s story and witnessed her sadness, Sultan Pasha inquired after the man that brought her from Turkey and sent him back there to bring her family to Egypt. “The reunion changed my mother’s life,” Huda said of this experience.

²²² Badran, 1995, 32. She found that Iqbal Hanim was not a legal wife in Sultan Pasha’s *waqf* (religious endowment) that specified the distribution of his estate after his death.

rendered noble services during his long public career.”²²³ As a result, he was always traveling and was absent from Huda’s childhood. Huda’s memories of her father were very few; he died when she was only five years old. She venerated him with stories about his political career and positions and even with his daring acts against rulers at the time which led to a short exile. Also, she passionately defended him against allegations of aiding the British entry into Egypt which she claimed were a severe shock to him in his last days. In her memoir, she sought to clear his name and prove his patriotism and innocence. Another shock that saddened Sultan Pasha that Huda divulged was the death of her half-brother, Ismail. Being his eldest son, Sultan Pasha placed his hope in Ismail becoming his heir, and he died before turning four years old.²²⁴ Although she maintained that her father’s last days were shadowed by sadness, she recounted one of her happy early memories of her father with obvious love and admiration: “I used to go to his room with Ismail, my brother from another wife, to kiss his hand every morning. We would find him sitting on his prayer rug praying or meditating. After we kissed his hand and he kissed us, he would go to his cabinet to get

²²³ Sha‘rawi, 27. Throughout her life, she was in proximity to the Egyptian politics of her time. Her father was appointed Commissioner of the District of Qulusna in the province of al-Minya, her brother ‘Umar introduced her to influential people, and her husband ‘Ali was an active member of the Wafd and the 1919 Revolution.

²²⁴ Ibid. All hope was concentrated with Ismail, the son of Hasibah, Sultan Pasha’s first wife. Huda’s brother ‘Umar, a sickly child, and it was not believed he would live very long.

chocolates for us. We always left his presence beaming with joy.”²²⁵ Sultan Pasha died in Europe seeking medical treatment on August 14th in 1884.²²⁶

Her memoir recounted the living arrangement in which her immediate and extended families lived within in the harem, her education as a child, as well as her marriage at an early age. In these chapters Sha‘rawi gives insight into the boundaries and details of the harem as well as who was permitted access to enter freely such as the girls that were raised as companions to Huda and ‘Umar,²²⁷ the maids, tutors, and eunuchs in her household. Huda considered herself to have two mothers, Iqbal Hanim, her biological mother, and Hasibah, Ismail’s mother, who was affectionately called *Umm Kabira*, which literally translates to “big mother.”²²⁸ Although warm and affectionate, young Huda suspected her relationship with Iqbal Hanim “was merely an effort to cajole” her.²²⁹ As an adult she knew her mother’s affection arose from her love and kindness, however, as a child she sensed favoritism toward her brother ‘Umar and was jealous. Huda suffered from anxieties as a child to the point that if Iqbal Hanim noticed or sensed Huda was jealous and rushed to her, Huda would feel guilty for coming between her mother and brother. Her emotions of jealousy, anxiety, and sadness

²²⁵ Sha‘rawi, 27.

²²⁶ Ibid., 29.

²²⁷ Huda mentioned two girls that were raised in the Sha‘rawi harem as companions, one was Egyptian and one was Circassian. They attended daily lessons with Huda and ‘Umar. Ibid., 39.

²²⁸ Ibid., 33.

²²⁹ Ibid., 34.

led her to baseless guilt, the dramatic conclusion that she was the daughter of a dead slave girl and the truth was being hidden from her, in addition to terrifying nightmares. All that was suffered was very traumatic for a young Huda, and gave her a sense of rejection.²³⁰ She shared a close and loving relationship with *Umm Kabira*; according to Huda, “She, alone, talked frankly with me on a number of matters, making it easy for me to confide in her. She knew how I felt when people favoured my brother over me because he was a boy.”²³¹ With regards to Huda Sha‘rawi’s gradual awareness of her gender and the restrictions and inferiority of her status in her home (and later in her society), it was rooted in her early childhood and the treatment of her brothers by her household. When she was very young, she experienced the tragic losses of her brother and her father within the same time frame, the patriarch and his heir. All attention became on her frail younger brother ‘Umar to one day succeed his father; his health and education were priority. *Umm Kabira* explained this to Huda one day: “I once asked *Umm Kabira* why everyone paid more attention to my brother than to me. ‘Haven’t you understood yet? She asked gently. When I claimed that as the elder I should receive more attention she replied, ‘But you are a girl and he is a boy. And you are not the only girl, while he is the only boy. One day the support of

²³⁰ Sha‘rawi, 35. One such nightmare involved Huda being attacked by beasts and then being rejected by her mother when she sought protection from her, “she had taken my brother in her arms and turned her back on me. ‘I am not your child!’ I would scream, ‘You have lied to me! Tell me the truth! I am not your child! I am not your child!’” Ibid., 35.

²³¹ Ibid., 34. Huda often spent nights at a time with *Umm Kabira* venting to her until she fell asleep. She truly enjoyed her time with *Umm Kabira*, she slept peacefully and woke up refreshed.

the family will fall upon him. When you marry you will leave the house and honour your husband's name but he will perpetuate the name of his father and take over his house.”²³² She described an instance when she was sick, and while a doctor was summoned, days later groups of doctors arrived to a chaotic household when ‘Umar became ill. Huda witnessed this first hand, as she and her younger brother shared a bedroom. Although Huda's distress over the situation worsened her condition, doctors casually checked up on her on their way out from assessing her brother's condition. Also, in their education she felt the obstacle due to her gender, even as an adult the memory of how she felt as a child being deprived of the education she craved was painful to her. Denying Huda the education she desired caused her to hate “being a girl” as she understood that to be the only reason keeping her from it.²³³ Even though she came to resent her household due to feeling neglected by them and became a recluse, her jealousy of ‘Umar never led to animosity. On the contrary, she loved him and bonded with him throughout their childhood in the harem.²³⁴ Yet, his very presence in the harem and the preferential treatment and status he received contributed to her anguish as a child, and led to her consciousness of the barriers her gender faced.

Huda's household was made up of her two mothers, her brother, and the companions that were being raised alongside her and her brother. Besides her

²³² Sha'rawi, 36.

²³³ Ibid., 40.

²³⁴ As adults they were close as well, and his death as a young man devastated her.

family, the people allowed access into the harem were maids, teachers, and eunuchs. The maids were the women that attended to the domestic work in the house and assisted the women of the house. The teachers that taught Huda and ‘Umar, were both men and women. For example, men taught them Turkish grammar and calligraphy and an Italian woman taught Huda French and piano. The eunuchs ran the household from managerial positions and accompanied Huda and ‘Umar during their lessons and play time with watchful eyes. When it came to the house and the rest of their father’s estate, it was overseen and managed by their cousin and guardian ‘Ali Pasha Sha‘rawi, as Huda and ‘Umar were very young.

The guardian and cousin of the Sha‘rawi children, Ali Sha‘rawi, was old enough that they were taught to, as Huda put it, “fear and respect” him as a father or older brother.²³⁵ So, Huda was greatly distressed when she discovered that Iqbal Hanim secretly arranged her daughter’s marriage to ‘Ali in order to avoid an unwanted marriage proposal. Her continuous crying intensified an existing illness.²³⁶ Although Iqbal was not thrilled with the idea of Huda marrying a man so much older with a wife and children, she saw that it was the only option for her

²³⁵ Sha‘rawi, 55. When they were younger, and their older cousin visited them, he also showed ‘Umar preferential treatment, and with Huda “he was especially abrupt and curt,” which alienated her.

²³⁶ It was rumored that the proposal was coming from the royal palace. If true, such a proposal cannot be refused. Iqbal quickly arranged with her husband’s nephew for him to marry Huda to ward off whoever sought her hand from the palace. ‘Ali Sha‘rawi was three decades Huda’s senior and his three daughters were older than she was. This arrangement also guaranteed that the estate Huda inherited from her father would be maintained within the family. Badran, 1995, 35.

daughter at that time. Even though it seemed Huda was following in her mother's footsteps by entering into such an arrangement, her situation differed from her mother's in that Iqbal was diligent in negotiating the terms of the marriage to be legal unlike her own. The terms were that 'Ali Sha'rawi was never to take another wife and to discontinue his relationship with the mother of his children throughout his marriage to Huda, and contact with her would be a violation of this agreement invalidating his marriage to his cousin.²³⁷ Iqbal was adamant in guaranteeing these legal conditions for Huda, ensuring her daughter better marital position and status than she herself had with Huda's father. She negotiated for Huda to be her husband's only wife, legal or concubine. Not yet fifteen months after the wedding, upon the discovery that 'Ali had returned to his concubine and was expecting a child from her, Huda happily left 'Ali and even congratulated him on his new child. She thought she was divorced and resisted attempts at reconciliation and 'Ali's pleading for her to return. However, she was not divorced; a document 'Ali gave Huda after they married was only his declaration of relinquishing his right to take another wife other than Huda.²³⁸ Regardless, Huda lived a separate life from 'Ali for seven years and went about her life with a new sense of freedom and described it as "a time for new experiences and for

²³⁷ Huda recalled her cousin 'Ali visiting them in Cairo more often, and spent many hours in discussion with her mother at this time. Also, she recalled hearing anger in her mother's voice during these sessions. Sha'rawi, 52. At first 'Ali refused to sign any such document, however, Huda recounted he later signed a declaration "freeing his slave-concubine upon his marriage to me and committing himself thereafter to a monogamous union." Ibid., 60.

²³⁸ Ibid., 61.

growing into adulthood.”²³⁹ After feeling stifled as a daughter, sister, and later wife, this period in Huda’s life laid the foundation for her activism in politics, the Egyptian Feminist Union, and in society at large. In 1900, when she was twenty one years old and hesitantly returned to her husband, she had been exposed to intellectual circles,²⁴⁰ travelled extensively within Egypt, indulged in lessons and shopping, and gained over-all independence. She even placed conditions for her return, which ‘Ali accepted. She described her reconciliation and return to the harem: “After my return to my husband, I was overwhelmed with his consideration and respect. I gave birth to a daughter, Bathna, and a son Muhammad.”²⁴¹ As a mother, Huda was completely devoted to the health and welfare of her children, going to all lengths such as traveling abroad for treatment of her daughter who was born sickly. Her absolute attentiveness towards her children and to her daughter especially, caused to her to be isolated from her friends and her social life. Even her husband was irritated by what he thought was Huda’s neglect towards him. However, as soon as her daughter’s health became stronger, Huda immersed herself in public lectures, charities, and intellectual salons. She was involved in coordinating one of the earliest public women’s lectures in Egypt. It was given by a French woman comparing “the lives of oriental women and western women” at the Egyptian university’s lecture

²³⁹ Sha‘rawi, 62.

²⁴⁰ Qasim Amin had published his controversial book *The Liberation of Women* in 1899.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 86. Bathna was born in 1903 and Muhammad was born in 1905.

hall.²⁴² From that point on, more lectures were scheduled as the royal family sponsored these events and it generated a decent turn out.²⁴³ Huda's social status and consequently her intimacy with the royal family led to her involvement in charities such as *Mabarrat* Muhammad 'Ali, a dispensary. A princess divulged to Huda that she believed it to be a shame that Egyptians were not assuming projects such as the dispensaries established by European women in Egypt; she explained it was their duty as Egyptians to take charge of charitable works in Egyptian society. The princess asked Huda to help her accomplish this objective and assist in efforts "that will serve the nation and humanity," and Huda promised her support for the project.²⁴⁴ Many princes and princesses, as well as the Khedive and his wife backed this endeavor and eventually once this dispensary advanced, Huda became head of the executive committee, which supervised and raised funds. The executive committee was made up of princesses, the wives of Pashas, and a Frenchwoman. The *mabarra* was administered by an Irish woman who was a childcare specialist and was assisted by several Egyptian women, and attained the volunteered services of Egyptian and European doctors.²⁴⁵ Huda acknowledged what she called the intellectual awakening of upper-class women produced by women's salons and lectures, and recognized the necessity for "an

²⁴² Sha'rawi, 93. In 1923 this university was expanded and named Fuad the First University. Later it was called Cairo University after the 1952 revolution. Badran in Sha'rawi, 144, note 8.

²⁴³ Ibid., 93.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 94.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 97.

association to bring women together for further intellectual, social, and recreational pursuits.”²⁴⁶ With support from various princesses, and Egyptian as well as non-Egyptian women, the Intellectual Association of Egyptian Women was founded April 1914, the year the British declared Egypt a protectorate.²⁴⁷ Although the goal was to gather women to join in an intellectual setting, they did not dare call this association a club, *nadi*, “as our traditions would not allow it. At that time it was still not acceptable for women to have a place of their own outside private houses.”²⁴⁸ The remainder of her memoir described the years leading up to 1924. Her memoir concluded with her description of her first trip to Europe with her family on the eve of World War I, the painful losses she experienced in 1909 with the death of her mother, Iqbal Hanim, and the death of her brother, ‘Umar in 1917. After ‘Umar’s death, she and her husband ‘Ali were at a point in their lives where they were only brought together by the nationalist cause, otherwise she was sure they would have separated due to strains ‘Ali’s son Hasan caused, which she did not care to elaborate on. ‘Ali died in 1922. Finally, she recounted the events that led to the nationalistic Revolution in 1919, the public

²⁴⁶ Sha‘rawi, 98.

²⁴⁷ Mai Ziyada and Labiba Hashim were among the members of this association, pioneers in the women’s awakening. Badran in Sha‘rawi, 99. For information on Ziyada and Hashim, see Baron. According to author Nadia Wassef, Nabawiyya Musa and Malak Hifni Nassef along with Huda were founding members of *al-Ittihad al-Nisa’i al-Tahthibi*, The Women’s Enrichment Union in 1914. Nassef, 38. My translation.

²⁴⁸ Sha‘rawi, 100.

demonstrations by women young and old, and her full-fledged plunge into the Egyptian political and women's movement scene.

Despite the obstacles or restrictions Huda and women of her class faced, the women's awakening was in progress by the middle of the twentieth century, and she was an active participant once she joined. By 1832, there was a push for women's education with the opening of state run schools such as The School for Hakimas, to train women to become health practitioners and midwives. Women entered the school system and consequently entered fields such as writing and teaching. From 1879 (the year Huda was born) forward, women had ventured into writing books and establishing women's journals. After 1882, the year Britain occupied Egypt, women's activism took shape in the written word; journals and books by and about Egyptian women became more common.²⁴⁹ In 1899, Qasim Amin, whom Huda Sha'rawi described in her memoir as 'The Defender of Women,' published *Tahrir al-Mar'a*. That same year Muhammad 'Abdu, became the Mufti of al-Azhar. There was an atmosphere of reform brewing in Egyptian society. In the year 1901, education in Islamic oriented schools became free for girls. Also in that year, after a century of sending men, Egypt sent women teachers abroad to be trained. Women were breaking barriers by accomplishing academic successes and entering the public such as graduating from secondary education institutions, and occupying jobs in teaching and

²⁴⁹ The first women's journal was the monthly *al-Fatah, The Young Woman*, was founded in November, 1892, and was published in Alexandria. Nadia Wassef in Nassef, 35. My translation.

writing. In 1908, the Egyptian university commenced teaching women in a separate branch. By that time, women were lecturing in public and attending lectures. For example, such as the lecture Huda helped organize at the university, and Malak Hifni Nassef spoke to hundreds of women at the *Hizb al-Ummah* club.²⁵⁰ *Mabarrat* Muhammad ‘Ali was another example of how Egyptian women took more active roles in their society, and specifically in helping women that were less fortunate. The decade that followed the year 1910 experienced an upsurge in lectures by women, books, journals, and magazines written by women, and the introduction of women’s associations. Although many women and of various backgrounds were major components of this overall awakening, Malak Hifni Nassef and Nabawiyya Musa stood out as significant contributors with their activism. Although the women partook in both teaching and writing, Musa stood out for her lifelong devotion to teaching and Nassef, also once a teacher, was unique in her many fiery writings.²⁵¹

Nabawiyya Musa: Tarikhi Bi Qalami

Nabawiyya Musa’s achievements spanned activism in Egyptian education, women’s rights, and her passionate nationalism; she devoted her life to these causes. An independent and strong-willed person from a very young age, she reached significant heights in education as an Egyptian woman, and like many of her colleagues in the women’s movement, led the way for future generations of

²⁵⁰ Wassef in Nassef, 37. *Hizb al-Ummah* was opposition to the British.

²⁵¹ Nassef retired from teaching once she married in 1907. That was the year she began writing with her pseudonym *Bahithat al-Badiyah*, seeker in the desert.

Egyptian women. The story of her life was documented in her magazine *al-Fatah*, which was established in October of 1937. After giving readers glimpses into her life story in her articles, she later collected them in chronological order and published her autobiography, which she appropriately titled *Tarikhi bi Qalami, My History Told by My Pen*. Nabawiyya described her autobiography as: “...a psychological analysis of a girl who spent her life in a continuous *jihad*. And she herself does not know until now if the reason for this continuous *jihad* and resistance were a mistake by her or a mistake by fate. For this reason, I recount my history in detail and I leave to the generous reader afterwards to judge me or judge in my favor. In addition, I will convey the truth in what I write in order for the reader to base his opinion on what he holds as clear truth.”²⁵²

Nabawiyya’s use of the word *jihad* to describe her life is indicative of how she viewed her journey through her personal and professional life in Egyptian society. Coming from a middle-class Egyptian family she faced the restrictive obstacles that most women in her class confronted since their childhoods. However, she challenged these hurdles head on at a young age, which set her apart from many women of her time and class, as well as allowed her to be thrust not only into the public domain but into the struggle with other pioneering women of both the nationalist and women’s rights movements. Born on December 17th 1886, Nabawiyya’s upbringing was less rigid and structured than others from her

²⁵² Musa, 21. My translation.

class, in terms of the restrictions and expectations.²⁵³ When girls of her class were learning to play the piano, paint, sing, and do needlework, Nabawiyya had free reign on her childhood and was left to pursue her own fun playing with children and building playhouses. In her own words: “I was not created for such a life,” she enjoyed and preferred solving mathematical problems.²⁵⁴ Her mother did not have a structured arrangement in terms of some sort of an education for Nabawiyya’s life in their home, adding to her streak of independence. Also, her father died before she was born; therefore she never experienced life with a father. She did, however, have the presence of an older brother and her mother’s male relatives that attempted to set limits in her life, such as attempting to block her from access to a formal education. Despite the occasional opposition she received from her family when she expressed her interests in learning to read, to enter school, or even remain single, in addition to the impediments from society and imperialism when it came to her education and profession, her strong sense of autonomy lead to a path of resistance and perseverance to reach her goals. Her strong personality and independent lifestyle may be attributed to the fact that compared to other women of her class, Nabawiyya did not experience as much repression in her home; the major hurdles she encountered throughout her life were from society at large and the colonial system put in place in Egypt. She entered school in the year 1901 and in the year 1906 she earned her teaching diploma and began her pioneering professional career as a teacher.

²⁵³ Musa, 8. My translation.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 56. My translation.

Nabawiyya grew up while historic transitions in the intellectual, cultural, and political spheres of Egypt were taking shape. She was aware of her status in her colonized country: she was an Egyptian woman, doubly oppressed because of her nationality and sex. Yet, her rejection of this situation, what she called her *jihad*, and her disdain for authority, demonstrated her confidence and pride in being both. As a student at al-Saniyya school, Nabawiyya found an enemy in the headmistress, and after graduation the tensions between them caused the British headmistress to refuse to offer Nabawiyya a teaching position at al-Saniyya.²⁵⁵ Nabawiyya resented the British for being in her country and it was quite apparent from her writing. This resentment and refusal to conform carried on into her professional career and throughout her lifetime. She was frequently relocating jobs throughout the country as a teacher, a headmistress, or a teacher's instructor. Nabawiyya's rebellious attitude extended to her teaching style. As a teacher she did not always take what the ministry mandated they teach students in schools at face value and scrutinized material to determine if it was deemed suitable. She based her teaching philosophy on the idea of learning "with common sense and not rules."²⁵⁶ Her critical and unwavering stances often resulted in the attempt to exile or distance Nabawiyya from the education system, such as the time she was appointed the head inspector of education in ministry of education. According to her, the English did not appreciate her efforts as the first Egyptian headmistress of

²⁵⁵ This school was a state run primary school in Cairo that was attended by the daughters of the upper and middle classes. Baron, 128.

²⁵⁶ Musa, 249. My translation.

a teacher's college the ministry had appointed. She also contended that in the short time that she was at her headmistress position, her college had been the top college that year. As a result, in order for the English headmistress of another teacher's college, who had been at her position for many years, to not be compared to Nabawiyya and seem inadequate, it was decided to relocate her to the ministry in a more behind-the-scenes position. This way she would have very limited amount of influence and visibility.²⁵⁷ Her new job with the ministry was to visit schools and inspect them and report her findings. She visited hundreds of schools and advised and critiqued male and female teachers verbally, as opposed to written reports for the ministry to later analyze and possibly inflict pay cuts to teachers if they received negative reviews. Musa was convinced that she was placed in that position by the ministry knowing her thorough style and critical opinions in her reports would cause such pay deductions and schools would specifically request for Musa not to be their inspector and therefore her efforts in education would not be appreciated but detested.²⁵⁸ In a further attempt to restrain Nabawiyya and keep her away from education, she was given new instructions by the ministry. She was instructed to still visit schools, but this time she was to report her findings to an English colleague, and based on these findings told Nabawiyya how to write the report in a way that was more suitable

²⁵⁷ Musa, 253. Musa also attributed her transfer from the teacher's college to conflicts she had with men from the ministry both Egyptian and English. My translation.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 254. My translation.

and more acceptable to the ministry.²⁵⁹ For six months she did nothing at the ministry.²⁶⁰ However, she eventually “wrote for the newspaper *al-Ahram* articles criticizing the educational system.”²⁶¹ After her superiors became aware of these articles and Nabawiyya admitted to being the author, she was ordered to stop. She expressed her frustration with being imprisoned at her ministry office with a restrictive job that did not fulfill her. Finally, she was given permission to go and do as she pleased and would be considered to be on an indefinite and paid vacation. The next day she left Cairo for Alexandria.²⁶² Once again she was free to commit to what she believed to be a duty: to teach. By this time she had been in close contact with women’s groups and leaders of the movement such as Huda Sha’rawi. The Girl’s Advancement group raised money and voted for Nabawiyya to be administrator of a school for girls of the same name.

In Nabawiyya Musa’s autobiography it is safe to say that the three most important themes in her life were: education, nationalism, and gender equality. There was no specific order or priority to these themes as they were interdependent on each other. According to her, through education, Egypt would be liberated and Egyptian women would achieve gender equality. In 1907, Nabawiyya became the first Egyptian woman to earn a Bachelor’s degree, and the first Egyptian woman to become an Arabic language teacher and later the first

²⁵⁹ Musa, 255. My translation.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. My translation.

²⁶¹ Ibid. My translation.

²⁶² Ibid., 256. My translation.

Egyptian headmistress.²⁶³ Nabawiyya's motto was equality of the sexes. Earning half the pay of a male teacher for the same work disturbed her.²⁶⁴ She went on to earn her Bachelor's degree to compete with the male teachers with higher degrees.²⁶⁵ Her awareness of the lack of equality between the sexes led her to strive to control all aspects of her life such as her decisions to never marry as well as her career. In 1910, she began giving lectures at the women's branch of the Egyptian University, which were entitled "Modern Subjects." The next year her lectures were titled: "Ancient and Modern Egyptian History with Special Mention of Famous Women."²⁶⁶ What is very evident from Nabawiyya's writings, teaching, and activism is that she considered her career a national duty. In this sense, she was active in the nationalist movement. To Nabawiyya, education was the tool to liberate Egypt from ignorance, moral corruption, and imperialism. Although other schools announced they would go on strike during the 1919 Revolution, as a headmistress, Nabawiyya refused to allow her teachers college to follow suit. She told her teachers that it was more harmful than anything and continuing to teach was in fact more patriotic and beneficial to the Egyptian nationalist movement. In defense of her position after being criticized and accused of being unpatriotic, she said: "My patriotism compels me to not participate in the strike, because I want to remove my *ummah* from this ignorance

²⁶³ Musa, 12-13. My translation.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 82. My translation.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 85. My translation.

²⁶⁶ Wassef in Nassef, 38. My translation.

that has obscured its minds.”²⁶⁷ Education, nationalism, and equality made up the essence of her priorities and what she chose to include in her autobiography.

However, what she did not delve into was her significant involvement in the women’s right movement and particularly the Egyptian Feminist Union. She was a member of the union as well as a member of the delegation that attended the women’s conference in Rome in 1923. Another way she was involved was her contributions to the press with her writings about her stances and ideas, which was a common way for women to express their opinions. Besides her own journal *al-Fatah*, she published work in *al-Ahram*, *al-Jarida*, and *al-Balagh al-Ushbu’i*. She also published a text book for children that specifically addressed girls in 1911, and another book entitled “Woman and Work” in 1920.²⁶⁸

When it came to veiling, Nabawaiyya admitted to reading Qasim Amin’s writing and liking his work. However, she did not write about this matter at the time, she wrote about it in her autobiography in retrospect. She believed in practicing unveiling as opposed to using words to bring changes in that arena. She unveiled and dressed modestly in Eastern tradition only showing her face and hands, which she pointed out is how *hijab* is mandated to be worn in the *sunnah* and the *Qur’an*.²⁶⁹ Nabawiyya was very critical of the veil; first of all that it was not required by Islam, second that it had the opposite effect of modesty with the type of material that was used and the way women were wearing them, and third

²⁶⁷ Musa, 236. My translation.

²⁶⁸ Wassef in Nassef, 38-39. My translation.

²⁶⁹ Musa, 78. My translation.

it was a hindrance to women that worked. She hoped women would follow in her style of modesty and *hijab*.²⁷⁰ Finally, a major issue that Nabawiyya also weighed in on was marriage. She held an extremely negative view of marriage. Her exact thoughts were: “I hate marriage and I consider it filthy. I resolved to never pollute myself with that filthiness.”²⁷¹ Any marriage proposals she received, she refused, even if her brother tried to convince her to reconsider. Marriage to her, particularly in Egypt at that time, was unfair and humiliating to women. For example, aside from loathing marriage, she rejected one suitor because his salary did not suit her. She believed a marriage should at least maintain or elevate a woman’s status for it to be a sensible one.²⁷²

An Egyptian nationalist, a woman’s rights activist, and beyond a doubt one of Egypt’s most dedicated educators, Nabawiyya Musa lived until 1951 to the age of sixty-six. She blended her nationalism, activism, and teaching into mutually dependent elements of her life. She was devoted to teaching her students in order to liberate Egypt. She associated with women’s organizations, was a founding member of the Egyptian Feminist Union, wrote books and articles, gave lectures, and established a journal geared towards women. Her teaching symbolized the duality that was her life: an Egyptian *woman, liberating* her people. Another woman that was a passionate teacher, writer, and colleague

²⁷⁰ Musa, 78-81. My translation.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 87. My translation.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 88. My translation.

of both Musa and Sha'rawi in the women's movement was the eloquent Malak Hifni Nassef.

Malak Hifni Nassef: An-Nisa'iyyat

A discussion of Egyptian women and their history cannot be complete without mention of Malak Hifni Nassef. Of the many significant Egyptian and non-Egyptian men and women involved in the Egyptian women's rights movement of the twentieth century, Malak stands out with her eloquent words and strong positions on political, religious, and social issues. The Egyptian intellectual and reform circles lost a passionate and brilliant voice with her untimely death in October 1918.

Malak Hifni Nassef was born in the year 1886 in Cairo.²⁷³ Her parents were great supporters of education, her father Hifni Nassef, a product of al-Azhar and Dar al-'Ulum, was a litterateur and lawyer.²⁷⁴ Unlike Huda Sha'rawi and Nabawiyya Musa, Malak grew up with a strong father figure in her life. She shared a very close relationship with her father and he was the main source of encouragement in her life. As the oldest of her six siblings, she often cared for her family and home, especially since her mother was often ill. She attended primary school and graduated in 1901 as a teenager. In the introduction to her

²⁷³ Malak and Nabawiyya Musa were born the same year; however, despite being the same age, they were not in the same level academically. Nabawiyya entered al-Saniyya the year Malak graduated from primary school and became one of the first Egyptian girls to do so. Also, to put this year in context of the histories of all three women in this chapter, in 1886 Huda Sha'rawi was seven years old.

²⁷⁴ Badran, 1995, 54.

book *an-Nisa'iyyat*, her brother Majd al-Din Nassef, related that in 1903, she received her diploma to teach and was hired as a teacher in 1905.²⁷⁵ According to Majd al-Din, his sister loved her profession, and used to visit the homes of the elite to persuade mothers to enroll their daughters in al-Saniyya and assured them she would pay special attention to their girls if they did. As a result, the school experienced a significant rise in girls from these homes, where as prior to that the school only consisted of girls from poor families. Moreover, he credited her efforts for the consequent increase in teachers.²⁷⁶ Although she refused many marriage proposals to complete her education and later was a dedicated teacher, she married in 1907 and resigned from her teaching position at al-Saniyya.²⁷⁷ After the wedding, she traveled to Fayyum which is west of Cairo, where her husband 'Abd as-Sattar al-Basil was chief of a bedouin tribe, al-Ramah. Her arrival to her new home in Fayyum was the moment her life suddenly and unexpectedly altered significantly and influenced her work in a major way. In fact, that is where she named herself Bahithat al-Badiyah, Seeker of the Desert, and began using it as a pen name. Upon arrival to her new home, Malak was shocked to find that her husband was already married and was a father to a young

²⁷⁵ Majd al-Din Nassef in Nassef, 47. In 1903 when Malak received her teaching diploma from al-Saniyya's teacher's college, Nabawiyya was just entering that section and later graduated in 1906. Between the years 1903 and 1905, Huda had her two children and was a few years away from her activism. My translation.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 48. He also claimed that unfortunately many of these girls left the school after she left her teaching job there. Ibid., 49. My translation.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 49. My translation. The state school system did not allow married women to teach; neither did many husbands. Badran, 1995, 54.

daughter.²⁷⁸ Although the range of topics Malak wrote about varied, such as education and politics, however, marriage reform and the evils of polygyny became a main focus in her writing, stemming from personal pain and experience.

Bahithat al-Badiyah promoted women's right in general, but the heart of her case was for women's rights within marriage.²⁷⁹ In 1910, her writings and articles from *al-Jarida*, a liberal newspaper, were collected, entitled *an-Nisa'iyyat*, and published.²⁸⁰ Her purpose in publishing the book was: "...for others to learn from incidents and experiences they have not encountered. My purpose is simply the common good and to defend the broken-winged Egyptian woman..."²⁸¹ Like many reformers of Malak's time, such as al-Tahtawi, 'Abdu, and Amin, she dealt with the question of how to care on modernity while maintaining Arab and Islamic culture and identity. The most unique aspect of Bahithat al-Badiyah and her work was she could not be categorized in a clear cut group such as traditionalist Islamist, or feminist. However, she often expressed opinions that were espoused by reformers from both groups. For example, she disagreed with Qasim Amin's promotion of unveiling, which many people from the liberal camp viewed as backward or conservative thinking. However, she was attacked by the traditionalist conservatives for writing articles on the evils of polygyny and as a result, her belief in Islam was brought into question. Although

²⁷⁸ Badran, 1995, 54. Malak was expected to tutor his daughter.

²⁷⁹ Badran and Cooke, 134.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 134.

²⁸¹ Nassef, 41. My translation.

she was attacked on several fronts such as questioning her attachment to her culture and her sincerity, she never withdrew from openly and freely voicing her opinions on all the issues she cared about. She refused to adopt a contrived way of thinking, or to remain silent on an opinion or position simply as a way to appease one group or the other.²⁸² In 1911, she sent the demands she made in *an-Nisa'iyyat* to the National Congress in Heliopolis.²⁸³ The reigning Egyptian modernist thought on the backward state of Egyptian society was dependent upon the state of women. She shed light on the role men played in this situation taking away the sole responsibility from women. Another topic she explored was her argument of the importance of women making their own decisions and planning their own fates in all aspects of life, emphasizing how critical education was, without it women would not be liberated. For example, she believed women should make the decision whether to unveil or not, and should not be mandated by men or others. Also, Malak delved into her contention that assigned gender roles were not natural, but historic; a woman's connection to the home and child rearing was not a perpetual natural role. However, during a particular time in history women were purposely eliminated from public life and restricted to the life of the private sphere.²⁸⁴ In a section entitled "Men's Flaws, Contempt for Women," she describes her opinion on a solution for better relationships between married couples:

²⁸² Huda al-Sudda in Nassef, 19-20. My translation.

²⁸³ Badran and Cooke, 134.

²⁸⁴ al-Sudda in Nassef, 24-28. My translation.

...And in my opinion if a man reduces his pride slightly and realizes that his wife is his equal in all common laws, and he treated her in an equal manner, or at least the treatment of a guardian and ward and not the treatment of slave and master, he would not see the stubbornness he complains about. She will abide by him out of love for him and not fear. It is not a secret that tyranny has the opposite of the desired effect...so how do our men hope for reform and to raise our children to love freedom and a constitution with this tyranny!²⁸⁵

Malak was among the first women to give public lectures; she spoke at the Egyptian University's Women's Section as well as in the office of *al-Jarida*. The main points of her speeches were calls for elementary and higher education for girls as well as work opportunities. She also addressed the shifting style of dress from the restrictive covering of the whole body that emerged during that time among upper class-women. Finally, she discussed "the most sensitive social issues of the day for women and men alike [...] pointed to class differences in behaviors and introduced a gender dimension to the nationalist debates,"²⁸⁶ according to Badran and Cooke.

In 1918, Malak fell victim to the Spanish flu and died soon after at the age of thirty two.²⁸⁷ Although the women's rights movement suffered a great loss with the tragic and sudden death of Malak, her funeral was attended by leaders

²⁸⁵ Nassef, 105. My translation.

²⁸⁶ Badran and Cooke, 227.

²⁸⁷ Ahmed, 183.

from the government, the minister of education, and members from the typically conservative '*ulama*' to pay their respects and praise her in speeches.²⁸⁸

However, more importantly, this event brought together high-ranking women's rights activists and feminists to celebrate and praise the life of Bahithat al-Badiyah, a woman who dedicated her life to the advancement of the Egyptian woman, in a gesture of solidarity and unity between women of differing ideas. Even in her death, Malak continued to contribute and influence the movement. Malak's funeral also marked the first time Huda Sha'rawi made a public address in the eulogy she delivered.²⁸⁹ Leila Ahmed categorized Huda Sha'rawi and Malak Hifni Nassef as leading developing divergent voices within the women's rights movement, Huda representing the westernizing direction and Malak the alternative native voice. With the death of Malak, this voice, cautious of Western ways, remained an established yet a minority voice of feminism in the Arab perspective during the early years of the twentieth century. However, Ahmed also wrote that:

²⁸⁸ Ahmed, 184.

²⁸⁹ Huda on this experience wrote: "I felt the dead more steadfast in seeking their right than the living. The departed want us to take every opportunity we have to carry out the sacred mission they have placed on our shoulders. When I saw men honor the memory of Bahithat al-Badiyah and praise her virtues, I cast away my selfishness in sorrowing over my brother and called upon my sisters to perform their duty to Bahithat al-Badiyah. We conducted a eulogy for her at the Egyptian University. The women requested that I lead it, and thus I took to the rostrum for the first time in my life. How difficult it was to be in her place and not see her next to me. Later in the difficult days we passed through during the 1919 revolution and afterwards, I used to look to her whenever I felt the need for her unique patriotism and courage. I used to talk to her inside myself. I heard her voice in my conscience." Badran, 1995, 73.

Sha‘rawi and Nassef both advocated that society enable women to pursue education to the limit of their abilities, and both pushed for fundamental reforms in the laws governing marriage. Indeed there appeared to be no substantive differences between their goals. Nassef was no less committed to fundamentally altering the position and rights of women in society, even though she was cautious towards the West, comfortable within and well rooted in the universe of Arabic language and Arabic culture, and disposed to seek reforms in terms internal to the indigenous culture. A member of the upper-middle class, Nassef was raised firmly within the native culture—perhaps unusually among the upper and middle classes—where as Sha‘rawi was raised to be bicultural, with French culture, at least from her teens forward, receiving more emphasis and valorization than the Arabic.²⁹⁰

Therefore, it is difficult to place Malak Hifni Nassef in one straightforward grouping as she can easily be placed within the conservative camp or the dominant liberal category. Also, in the context of this study, the cultural upbringings of Huda and Malak, and Nabawiyya for that matter, did not influence or change their common goals as colonized Egyptian women, enough to differentiate between them in a major way.²⁹¹ On the contrary, Malak’s activism and writings symbolized the common ground between conservative and liberal, as well as traditional and modern, and even years later her legacy and struggle

²⁹⁰ Ahmed, 184.

²⁹¹ Nabawiyya and Malak both learned English and French in school.

continued to bring Egyptian women together. The annual commemoration of the anniversary of Malak's death united as well as reminded women of the journey still ahead. Aside from this commemoration, among other things, Egyptian women were also brought together by their similar life and social experiences. Next is a look into the comparable life experiences of both Huda Sha'rawi and Nabawiyya Musa, and how they actively contended with restrictions or obstacles in their paths.

Paths of Resistance: Sha'rawi and Musa

In the late nineteenth century, the upper- and middle-classes of Egyptian society considered reading an essential skill for women to be taught. Before then, women were restricted to learning to read only religious texts. With the advent of the twentieth century, women began reading secular texts and the increasing number of women's journals that were being published in the women's press was to "build moral character and domestic expertise,"²⁹² Badran explained. During the early twentieth century, when women gained more mobility and access to the public and education, they were no longer forced or limited to read what was available at their house, they began to borrow, buy and eventually go to public libraries. The growth in women readers led to publishers catering to women in their publications. As these women had been formerly limited to remaining in their homes, peddlers no longer were their only source for new books.²⁹³ This is

²⁹² Baron, 81.

²⁹³ Ibid., 88.

an important outcome in relation to this study as Huda Sha‘rawi and Musa Nabawiyya, contemporaries and colleagues in the women’s movement during the first half of the twentieth century, were avid readers and were driven by a love to learn and to further their education as young children. Huda Sha‘rawi recalled in her memoirs that as a child she bought books from peddlers that came to their door despite the fact that she was “strictly forbidden” from doing so.²⁹⁴ Both women had a shared love for the Arabic language at early ages and immersed themselves in classical poetry and literature. Sha‘rawi was educated in Turkish, the language of the Turco-Circassian upper-class, the royal family, and Huda’s mother. She was also educated in the French language, the social language of the elite in Egypt.²⁹⁵ When the books she read no longer satisfied her, she began to turn to her father’s extensive collection of Arabic poetry and literature, despite not being completely literate in the language.²⁹⁶ Nabawiyya Musa began to appreciate Arabic poetry and literature as well. At the early age of six, Musa learned Arabic songs and poetry from listening attentively to her brother recite, which he memorized for school. Before Musa could read or write, she had developed a fondness and appreciation for the Arabic language.²⁹⁷ Soon she

²⁹⁴ Sha‘rawi, 41.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 1.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 41. She was familiar with Arabic. She wrote in Ottoman Turkish, which was so similar to the Arabic alphabet. She took from her father’s library the *Diwan* of Abu-Nasr (collected poems) and the second volume of *Al-Iqd al-Farid* (The Unique Necklace) by Ibn Muhammad ‘Abd al-Rabbih, which according to Margot Badran is “an encyclopedia of knowledge for the well-informed man.”

²⁹⁷ Musa, 25. My translation.

began to branch out and from the books in her house, and sought books from relatives' homes.²⁹⁸ Aside from indicating their love for learning and reading, it can signify the roots of their nationalism, by embracing their native language in a time Egypt was occupied.

Both Sha'rawi and Musa actively sought to formally advance their education in the Arabic language. Tutors came to the Sha'rawi household daily to give Huda and her younger brother 'Umar lessons from the early morning until noon. Of this time of the day, Huda said: "I was devoted to my studies and became completely absorbed at lesson time."²⁹⁹ Her favorite subject from her morning lessons was Arabic, although it was limited to only teach her the *Qur'an*, which was uncommon for a girl's education in the harem, usually a few *ayat*, or verses were memorized.³⁰⁰ She was unique in that sense; however she still made mistakes reading the *Qur'an*, which was due to her limited education in the Arabic language and most importantly in Arabic grammar. The focus of her education was in French, Turkish and Persian calligraphy and poetry, and later on she had piano lessons. When she learned of her lack of knowledge in Arabic grammar, she asked the tutor responsible for that subject to help her improve her Arabic. On the day she was to begin her Arabic grammar lessons, Sa'id Agha, the man that was entrusted with overseeing the house, servants, and tutors; as well as accompanying Huda and her brother even during their lessons, prevented the

²⁹⁸ Musa, 26. My translation.

²⁹⁹ Sha'rawi, 39.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 40, note 6.

lesson.³⁰¹ His reasoning was: “The young lady has no need of grammar as she will not become a judge!”³⁰² That incident saddened her and from that day on, Huda began to neglect her studies. The memory of the disappointment she felt remained vivid to her even as an adult. She realized the obstacle that confronted her, the incident made her hate “being a girl because it kept me from the education [she] sought.”³⁰³

In the case of Nabawiyya Musa, she was not educated at home in European languages and finer arts such as music and painting like other upper- and middle-class girls. When Nabawiyya was six and her brother Muhammad was sixteen,³⁰⁴ she listened as he read poetry and literature aloud to memorize for school. She would help him study as he would recite to her and soon she knew the material by heart. Although she was never discouraged from learning literature by helping her brother, she was not being encouraged to be educated either. Her mother and her mother’s uncle never commissioned tutors to teach her at home, nor did they send her to schools that were available for girls her age.³⁰⁵

³⁰¹ Agha means “eunuch, guardian of women in the household.” Sha‘rawi, 153. The men allowed access in the harem were eunuchs, usually Sudanese or Ethiopian men. In this case, Sa‘id Agha “was ‘master of life and death’ over the servants and tutors” according to Sha‘rawi, 39.

³⁰² Ibid., 40.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ In Margot Badran’s *Feminists, Islam, and Nation* (1995) on page 38, she states that Nabawiyya’s brother is two years older than her. However, on page 25 in *Tarikhi bi Qalami* by Nabawiyya Musa, she described her brother as being ten years older. My translation.

³⁰⁵ Usually run by European women. Baron, 124.

While Nabawiyya's brother was away at military college and he came home on Thursdays, she entreated him to teach her to read and write in Arabic. He decided to help her and obtained a book that was being used in primary schools to assist her in learning the basics. Eventually, she proceeded to advance on her own and even moved on to reading fiction and poetry such as *One Thousand and One Nights*, and even wrote her own poetry. She loved it so much she often read through the nights into the next mornings.³⁰⁶ After Muhammad laughed at one of her poems' incorrect grammar, she knew she had to become more serious about learning. She lost interest and left behind fiction and poems, she learned proper grammar with the help of a male cousin.³⁰⁷ Ultimately she began reading, memorizing, and understanding the *Qur'an*, even though she was told by a male neighbor that females should not read it.³⁰⁸ Her memoir recounts an amusing incident where she shows great superiority in her grasp of the *Qur'an* over this neighbor, who was a student of al-Azhar.³⁰⁹ He showed he did not understand the true meaning of an *aya*, which she did, leaving him to be ridiculed by Nabawiyya in a rhyme she composed on the spot.

For both women, it is evident they acknowledged Arabic as their national language and expressed their longing to learn the language. In order to receive

³⁰⁶ Musa, 26. My translation.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 27. My translation.

³⁰⁸ Margot Badran refers to this person as a relative on page 40 of *Feminists, Islam, and Nation* (1995). However, Nabawiyya Musa referred to him as a neighbor on page 28 of her memoirs. My translation.

³⁰⁹ Musa, 28. My translation.

the education they desired, they turned to the men in their lives. The educations they received were in the hands and at the discretion of these male guardians, brothers, uncles, or the men entrusted with their welfare (such as Sa'id Agha, one of the eunuchs in the Sha'rawi household, and Nabawiyya's great uncle). Although Huda was provided with an education in her home, it was restricted to what was proper for a girl of her social position to learn and it excluded Arabic. When Huda's tutor was about to instruct her in grammar in order to have a better grasp of the language at her ardent request, he was ordered not to. Sometimes even males that were not guardians weighed in, such as in the case of Musa's neighbor that was compelled to advise her it was blasphemous for a female to read the Qur'an because she was not equipped to understand its true meaning. In order to learn the basics of reading and writing, Nabawiyya turned to her brother that was receiving an education in high school. When Nabawiyya asked her mother to enroll her in school, her mother consulted her uncle for his opinion. Her mother's uncle refused; therefore, her mother did as well. Musa described her mother's family as coming from the philosophy of: "*alimohon al-ghazl wa la tu' alimohon al-khat*," "teach them (females) knitting and do not educate them."³¹⁰

Sha'rawi and Musa resisted this form of control and took matters into their own hands as much as possible. Both Sha'rawi and Musa, in defiance, pursued their desires to be educated as young teenagers. Sha'rawi used her knowledge of

³¹⁰ Musa, 32. Ironically, her mother refused to teach her to knit as well. Margot Badran translated the word *al-ghazl* to "to say words of love" in *Feminists, Islam, and Nation* (1995) on page 41. However, the correct and more accurate meaning of *al-ghazl* is knitting. My translation.

Ottoman Turkish to help her learn Arabic on her own. Later on as a teenager, when she was separated from her husband and had a new sense of empowerment from leaving him, she resumed her lessons with tutors in her home. She resumed with her old subjects such as French, and employed a *sheikh* from a *masjid* to teach her Arabic grammar. Her French lessons continued, however, unfortunately the arrangement with the *sheikh* did not last long as a result of aggravation he felt with the poor treatment he received from the eunuchs of the household.³¹¹

Although her French was far superior to her Arabic throughout her life, Huda Sha‘rawi was a leading pan-Arabist feminist of her time.

Musa continued to work on her reading, writing and math in hopes of catching up with students her age and enter into the third grade, and even took on learning the English alphabet, as English was one of the subjects taught in the school she wished to attend. She took advantage of the little time Muhammad allotted himself to help her and she tolerated his endless teasing and reluctance with the whole idea of her entering school. In her memoir, Musa recounted her mother’s reaction to her determination and desire to be student: “She considered it contrary to the rules of propriety and modesty, and a deviation from etiquette and Islam...”³¹²

Since both her mother and brother disapproved of her entrance into school, she decided to take the steps to enter on her own, secretly and without their help. She registered herself by using her mother’s seal that she stole in order to sign the

³¹¹ Sha‘rawi, 62.

³¹² Musa, 32. My translation.

required applications even though, as she described it, she “was not used to writing and still had not perfected holding a pen.”³¹³ Musa at thirteen, naturally very independent, took the entrance exams in several subjects to al-Saniyya school without her family’s knowledge, and paid the first payment of tuition with money she received from selling one of the gold bracelets her mother was always adorning her with.³¹⁴ Her acceptance into the school filled her with joy, however, when she told her mother about attending al-Saniyya as a day student, her mother disapproved and told her she would have nothing to do with her daughter if she attended. Her hard work and perseverance were not to go to waste; she threatened that if her mother continued to disapprove and did not accept the fact that she was a student, she would enroll herself as a boarder at the school. She even proved to her she was capable of affording it.³¹⁵ Musa’s mother finally relented and consented on the condition that she remain a day student, and come home every day after school and to remain living at home.³¹⁶ In October 1903, she entered al-Saniyya school.³¹⁷ Despite her mother’s disapproval and her brother’s threat to never speak to her again if she attended school,³¹⁸ she defied them both and

³¹³ Musa, 32-33. My translation.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 33-34. My translation.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 34-35. My translation.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 35. My translation.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 51. My translation.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 35. Muhammad came home for a weekend and learned of Nabawiyya’s acceptance into al-Saniyya. He told her: “Have no doubt that if you attend al-Saniyya, I will disown you.” She smiled at him and said: “So then, I have lost a relative, and there is no harm in that.” He was enraged and left. My translation.

pursued her primary education and later became the first Egyptian woman to receive a secondary degree certificate.³¹⁹

Although Huda loved her brother ‘Umar dearly and they shared a special bond together, as children the preferential treatment, extra care, and overall pampering he received confused and saddened her. The limitations she faced opposed to the freedom ‘Umar enjoyed even as children, stirred the feelings Huda carried into adulthood and used as motivation to raise her voice with other women activists such as Nabawiyya Musa and Malak Hifni Nassef to advance the Egyptian woman in the home and in public. As an adult, she remembered her childhood as the beginning of her realization of the unfairness she experienced in her home; she explained: “Later, being a female became a barrier between me and the freedom for which I yearned.”³²⁰ However, she never resented her brother for the attention he received from their mother and the rest of the household, which perhaps was due to the fact that ‘Umar was Huda’s younger brother and she was an adoring older sister to him. As adults, they were both supportive of each other. On the other hand, Nabawiyya Musa’s brother Muhammad Musa was ten years her senior and seemed uninterested in his sister’s desires and unaware if his younger sister was being treated differently than he was. Her older brother’s threat to disown her was his way of trying to establish himself as the male authority in their household. Despite all of that, they were quite close, and Nabawiyya had great respect for him as an adult. As children, Nabawiyya and her

³¹⁹ Baron, 130.

³²⁰ Sha‘rawi, 40.

brother Muhammad bonded over their love for Arabic literature and poems while she helped him with his memorization, or while he helped her learn to read and write.³²¹

Both women were raised by widowed mothers and grew up in homes without fathers. Huda Sha'rawi's father, Sultan Pasha died when she was five years old, and Nabawiyya Musa was born two months after her father, an officer in the Egyptian army, left for Sudan and never returned.³²² Even though their fathers were not physically present in their lives, both Huda and Nabawiyya were constantly aware of their fathers and especially in the memoirs of both women, their fathers were glorified and were objects of their affections despite not knowing them. In her memoir, Huda described the moments she remembered of her father; the few joyful memories of her kissing his hand in the morning and receiving chocolate from him.³²³ She commended and venerated his government service portraying him as a patriot and attempted to clear his name of allegations of betraying Egypt.³²⁴ As a child she often felt neglected and unloved by her family and specifically her mother at times as a result of the special attention her unhealthy younger brother received. Her solace from the nightmares and stress she experienced was in the memory of her father:

³²¹ Musa, 25. My translation.

³²² Sha'rawi, 27; Musa, 22. My translation.

³²³ Sha'rawi, 27.

³²⁴ Ibid., 29. She used her memoir to clear her father of the accusations of assisting the British occupy Egypt, "She held the vision of her father as a fervent Egyptian patriot who had pioneered in the development of his country." For the portion of the memoir dedicated to her father's case see Sha'rawi, 148.

Childhood perplexities and self-inflicted torments increased my need for warm affection and swelled my love for the father I had barely known. If he were still alive, I knew he would not withhold his comfort. My anguish was lessened a little by my belief that the dead see us even though we cannot see them and that contact between their spirits and ours enables them to feel what we feel. Thus I strove to improve myself so that the spirit of my father would be content and remain with me always. In my dark moods I retrieved my father's picture from its secret hiding place and held it close to me, telling it my woes and believing it heard me. The face seemed to grow sad, the eyes gazed upon me with profound compassion, and immediately my soul grew quiet.³²⁵

Nabawiyya Musa also found comfort in the memory of her father. The opening paragraphs begin with a brief description of her father, his military background, and his country home. She modestly praised her father by acknowledging the difficulty of reaching his rank in the military as an Egyptian officer when the high positions were only filled with Turks and Circassians. Although she was not as descriptive and did not elaborate on her feelings of longing for a father's love or crying about missing her father, she informs her reader she was raised without a father. She used the Arabic word for "orphan," as in she was orphaned of a father. She declared simply "I have never seen my father in my life, but I have

³²⁵ Sha'rawi, 35.

seen him in my dreams.”³²⁶ Nabawiyya was constantly reminded of her father as he set up financial arrangements before he left for Sudan for herself and her family which they were completely dependent upon. When Nabawiyya became sick, she suffered a sort of anxiety as a child, her mother become quite alarmed and quickly fetched physicians to treat her but to no avail. The mother’s distress over the illness Nabawiyya explained was that: “First of all, I was her only daughter, and second she would lose my allotted portion of the fixed income, and that is why she panicked as she did.”³²⁷

Even in death, both fathers had strong presences in their daughters’ lives. It is as if they attempted to live up to the legacies of their fathers. Both men served Egypt in important ways, and so did their daughters follow. The sense of duty to ones country especially during a time of occupation, is consistent throughout Sha‘rawi and Musa’s writings and actions as women’s activists. The pride and admiration they expressed for their fathers reveals a factor in the formation of their nationalist awareness, identities, and the service they devoted to their cause and movement, whether in education, politics, or other issues in society indicative in part of a tradition they were maintaining. Sha‘rawi goes into great depth about the heritage of her family in her beginning chapters. The section on her father describes him as a caring husband and loving father, lionized his service to his country, and finally detailed his final years as being difficult

³²⁶ Musa, 22. My translation.

³²⁷ Ibid., 29. My translation.

with losing a son and the failed 'Urabi Revolution and British occupation.³²⁸ The sections on her mother, Iqbal, and her mother's family are elaborate and dramatic accounts that include courageous battles, honor, and heroics. She laid out her family background and rebel lineage in her memoirs, as an introduction before she delved into her own life, nationalism, and activism.³²⁹ Iqbal's family fled to Istanbul in order to escape the conflict between the Caucasus and Czarist Russia during the 1860s in which her father, Sharaluqa Gwatish, a well-known chief of a Circassian tribe was killed. Huda proudly described the bravery of Sharaluqa, his niece Hurriya, and the rest of his relatives and friends, and their defense of their country against the Russians.³³⁰

To conclude this section on their resistance to society and tradition, their outlooks on change and reform in their personal lives fueled their long careers in women's rights activism. Both women demonstrated perseverance, determination and strength throughout their lives and despite hardships or struggle they resisted what they perceived to be societal or cultural constraints to their advancement, free will or well-being. In their journeys and careers as revolutionary Egyptian women activists, nationalists, feminists, writers, and reformers, both women displayed a desire to progress, improve and excel as Egyptian women *in* Egypt. However, Egyptian society at the time was not so welcoming of such aspirations.

³²⁸ Sha'rawi, 27-29. On the 'Urabi Revolution see Marsot, 1985.

³²⁹ Ibid., 23-26.

³³⁰ Ibid., 25-26.

Before and during their activism and writing to change the situation of societal limitations toward women, Sha'rawi and Musa were resolute in pursuing personal enrichment and development through learning Arabic or taking an exam. They also achieved this through their nationalist activism. Huda Sha'rawi directly participated in public protest of British encroachment on Egypt, while Nabawiyya Musa indirectly participated because it was her belief that the utmost an educator could serve as a national duty is to teach and educate the illiterate and ignorant to overcome colonialism. However, what is most significant in the case of these two pioneers is their understanding of the fact that in order to create substantial change and reform, it must begin on a small scale.

According to Hourani, Jamal al-Din Al-Afghani believed that "Islam means activity." He explained that the attitude of a Muslim should not be submissive to all that he or she encounters and accepted as coming straight from God, however, the attitude of a Muslim is a "responsible activity in doing the will of God."³³¹ Al-Afghani added that all Muslims are responsible before God for all their actions, such as the health and welfare of society. This idea that Al-Afghani and his disciples frequently repeated is derived from the *Qur'an* in *surat Ar-Ra'd*.³³² The *aya* is as follows: "Verily never will God change the condition of a

³³¹ Hourani, 128.

³³² In the *Qur'an*, a *sura* is a chapter. *Surat Ar-Ra'd* is translated to the *Sura* of Thunder.

people until they change what is within themselves.”³³³ According to Muhammad Asad, who translated the entire *Qur’an*, this *aya* means: “In its wider sense, this is an illustration of the divine law of cause and effect (*sunnat Allah*) which dominates the lives of both individuals and communities, and makes the rise and fall of civilization dependent on people’s moral qualities and the changes in ‘their inner selves.’”³³⁴ Therefore, in order to successfully and effectively advance Egyptian women in Egyptian society, these women first advanced themselves as individuals and subsequently as functioning organizations in society, as is demonstrated in the next section.

Activities and Achievements

Lisa Pollard recounts that the Revolution of 1919 was the stage upon which educated upper- and middle-class women: “joined forces with the Wafd both in support of the national movement and in an attempt to bring the goals of reform (education, in particular) to fruition for women by attaining a role for them in the liberated body politic...The Wafdist women organized demonstrations and boycotts of British goods, collected money and jewelry to help finance the nationalist struggle, and dealt directly with the British authorities when male Wafdist leaders were exiled or imprisoned.”³³⁵ Likewise Badran explains that

³³³ *Ar-Ra’d*. (13:11) Online Quran Project. www.al-quran.info. http://al-quran.info/?x=y#&sura=13&aya=6&trans=en-yusuf_ali&show=both,quran-uthmani&ver=2.00 (May 2010).

³³⁴ Asad, trans., 403.

³³⁵ Pollard, 189.

Egyptian women realized that “their own advancement/liberation as ‘new woman’ to be intrinsically connected with the nation’s advancement/liberation.”³³⁶ *Al-Wafd al-Misri*, or the Egyptian Delegation, was the name of the group of men that embarked to Paris to participate in the peace conference at the end of World War I. Their sole purpose was to represent Egypt and demand independence from Britain. Some of the leading nationalist figures of the *Wafd* were Sa’ad Zaghlul and Ali Sha’rawi (Huda Sha’rawi’s husband). When the British authorities arrested and exiled two members and Zaghlul of the *Wafd* to Malta, Egyptians in Cairo and other cities and towns immediately took to the streets in demonstrations and strikes. Denouncing the subsequent violence and repression committed by British against Egyptians, Cairene upper-class women marched in the streets to protest the arrest of their nationalist leaders.³³⁷ During this time of struggle, gender rules were deferred, and Egyptian women were full participants in nationalist militancy.³³⁸ Huda Sha’rawi, who was elected president of *Lajnat al-Wafd al-Markaziyah lis-Sayyidat*, the Wafdist Women’s Central Committee (WWCC) in 1920, documented this dangerous and important time in Egypt in her memoirs:

We women held our first demonstration on 16 March (1919) to protest the repressive acts and intimidations practiced by the British authority. In compliance with the orders of the authority we announced our plans to

³³⁶ Badran, 1995, 74.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 75. There was an estimated 150-300 women who participated.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

demonstrate in advance but were refused permission. We began to telephone this news to each other, only to read in *al-Muqattam* that the demonstration had received official sanction. We got on the telephone again, telling as many women as possible that we would proceed according to schedule the following morning. Had we been able to contact more than a limited number of women, virtually all the women of Cairo would have taken part in the demonstration.

On the morning of 16 March, I sent placards to the house of the wife of Ahmed Bey Abu Usbaa, bearing slogans in Arabic and French painted in white on a background of black—the color of mourning. Some of the slogans read, ‘Long Live the Supporters of Justice and Freedom,’ others said ‘Down with Oppressors and Tyrants,’ and ‘Down with Occupation.’³³⁹

After arriving at *Bayt al-Ummah*, The House of the Nation, Zaghlul’s home, British troops surrounded the women demonstrators, “they blocked the streets with machine guns, forcing us to stop along with students who had formed columns on both sides of us,”³⁴⁰ Sha‘rawi recalled. Sha‘rawi was determined to continue the demonstration, and advanced past a British soldier despite the gun aimed in her direction. When a women attempted to pull her back, she cried: “‘Let me die so Egypt shall have an Edith Cavell’ (an English nurse shot and killed by Germans during the First World War, who became an instant

³³⁹ Sha‘rawi, 113.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

martyr),”³⁴¹ and she called for the rest of the demonstrators to follow her, however she was pulled back and persuaded not risk the lives of the young men who were unarmed students.³⁴² They remained there three more hours in the harsh sun, until more soldiers, this time Egyptian, arrived, they returned to their homes, but not without first vowing to demonstrate again.³⁴³

During the next few crucial years these women activists became more organized in the nationalist movement with more demonstrations, and in the cases of prominent figures such as Huda Sha‘rawi and Nabawiyya Musa they used the written word to campaign for their cause, Sha‘rawi with her letters to officials’ wives using her connections as a member of the Egyptian elite, and Musa published her feminist and nationalist manifesto *The Woman and Work*.³⁴⁴ Sha‘rawi encouraged school girls of al-Saniya school to become militant and to distribute pamphlets, despite the danger of increased police surveillance.³⁴⁵ However, Musa was a headmistress of the Wardiyan Women Teachers’ Training School in Alexandria and directly ordered her teachers, male and female, as well as students to abstain from joining in demonstrations as colonial authorities kept close surveillance on school. Her career would be destroyed and her school shut down. Furthermore, Musa did not believe these mass demonstrations and strikes

³⁴¹ Sha‘rawi, 113.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid., 114-15. Four days later, a second demonstration met with a comparable fate. Badran, 1995, 76.

³⁴⁴ Sha‘rawi, 118, 122; Badran, 1995, 78.

³⁴⁵ Badran, 1995, 77.

were helpful to the nation. Her explanation was that teachers had no place in a militant nationalist movement; they perform important national duties that should not be neglected regardless to what the cause may be. Badran explained Musa's belief that their teaching is critical to "an illiterate nation where ignorance is widespread."³⁴⁶ Education she believed was crucial to the nationalist movement in Egypt, however she believed education for women was needed even more so. Her belief was that expanding education for women was the ultimate form of nationalist activism and entailed the most extensive effect. As an employee of the imperialist Ministry of Education, she was restricted in the ways she could participate in the nationalist movement, however, her main objective was for more education for women, which was best accomplished through the written word and maintaining a school that is open to girls. Therefore, Musa's position was very significant; she was taking advantage of the job with her colonial employers to educate as nationalist activism, and more importantly to educate girls to increase the number of women professionals in order to take over the jobs from foreign women.

During this crucial time of change and challenges, Egyptian women had entered the public. Women had made strides in fields such as education, medicine, literature, and finally actively participated in the national struggle. As women increasingly became more active in society and potentially in politics with

³⁴⁶ Badran, 1995, 78.

the nationalist stance taken by hundreds of women,³⁴⁷ they were neglected by the male leadership of the Wafd and nationalist movement. After returning from talks in London with proposed terms of independence, the Wafd presented the proposal to several male organizations and groups, however, not the WWCC. After obtaining a copy on its own initiative, the WWCC was very critical of the proposal, and openly disapproved of it in the press. The WWCC sent a letter to the leader of the Wafd, Zaghlul, which Sha'rawi signed on December 12th 1920. The letter was as follows:

We are surprised and shocked by the way we have been treated recently, in contrast to previous treatment and certainly contrary to what we expect from you. You supported us when we created our Committee. Your congratulatory telegrams expressed the finest hopes and most noble sentiments. What makes us all the more indignant is that by disregarding us the Wafd has caused foreigners to disparage the renaissance of women. They claim that our participation in the nationalist movement was merely a ploy to dupe civilized nations into believing in the advancement of Egypt and its ability to govern itself. Our women's renaissance is above that as you well know. At this moment when the future of Egypt is about to be decided, it is unjust that the Wafd, which stands for the rights of

³⁴⁷ Badran, 1995, 75.

Egypt and struggles for its liberation, should deny half the nation its role in that liberation.³⁴⁸

In response to this letter, Zaghlul sent an apology. This was one of the first major disappointments to the women's movement, it led to as Badran put it "strained unity" between the women and men of the Wafd. However, despite other disagreements between Sha'rawi and Zaghlul, she always demonstrated her "political adroitness," and when he was deported in 1921, the WWCC protested and began to resort to more militant strategies. Sha'rawi opened her home to a mass meeting where the WWCC voted to end the Protectorate Britain held over Egypt and martial law, and to economically boycott British banks and goods, and frequently forwarded their grievances to the British government.³⁴⁹

During this time, upper-class women had developed links with middle-class women that were newly active in new organizations in towns as well as Cairo. Sha'rawi and her associates attained a wider reach in the Egyptian female population.³⁵⁰ While the Wafd leaders were detained and Zaghlul was in exile, the WWCC took on major roles on the Egyptian nationalist movement. Badran stated that they took up the significant responsibility of communication and news "between the exiled nationalists and the Egyptian people: they were often a link

³⁴⁸ Sha'rawi said on the incident, "We criticized the delegates from the Wafd for disregarding our rights and our very existence by neglecting to solicit our views." The Wafdist women believed the terms of the proposal were insufficient. Sha'rawi, 122.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 125.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 125-26.

between the men and the British: they played delicate diplomatic roles connected with the release of the Wafdists, dealt with finances, and monitored the health of the detainees.”³⁵¹ In addition, they maintained the confidence of the movement and a flow of political protest, in the midst of increased number of British troops, martial law, a ban on meetings, and censorship of letters and the press. While Zaghlul was exiled, members of the Wafd formed a government, something the WWCC was opposed to. When Zaghlul and the detainees were released, and the new government had put in effect a new constitution in Egypt, which stated that all Egyptians are equal under law.

Huda was a leading voice in the Egyptian women’s movement particularly with her leadership of the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU). The establishment of the EFU resulted in the custom of what Badran called an “independent organized feminist struggle.”³⁵² Badran briefly illustrates the transition of the feminist movement during the 1920s: “In the shift from hidden feminist activism—first embedded in new social and professional forays into society and then expressed as part of nationalist militancy—to the beginning of a highly visible organized feminist movement, three things occurred:

(1) Feminist leaders removed the veil as a political statement signaling at once a final rejection of female containment and invisibility (harem culture) and their appearance on the scene as feminists; (2) Women for the first time in a highly public and unequivocal way used the adjective

³⁵¹ Badran in Sha‘rawi, 126.

³⁵² Badran, 1995, 91.

nisa'i/yah to signify feminist instead of the ambiguous “women’s”; and
(3) Women created the structure for their new feminist movement: an
association, publications, facilities, and formal affiliation with the
international feminist movement.³⁵³

On March 16, 1923, which was the fourth anniversary of the first public demonstration by Egyptian women in 1919, Huda invited many of these women to her home in Cairo to suggest forming an association with the focus of suffrage for women, and the EFU was born. Bahiga Arafa, who recounts the history of the organization, explained that the EFU embarked on organizing an all-encompassing program seeking to reform the “Egyptian family and raising the standard of women intellectually and socially so as to render them fit to share with men all duties and rights, and to render them fit to demand their suffrage rights as well.”³⁵⁴ At its inception, aside from the resistance met from tradition and customs, the EFU was met with opposition from conservative ‘*ulama*’ who accused the members of being immoral and against Islam. The main goals of the EFU at that pivotal time in its history were:

1. to raise the intellectual and moral level of the Egyptian woman so as to enable her to realize her political and social equality with man from the legal as well as from the moral point of view.

³⁵³ Badran, 1995, 91.

³⁵⁴ Bahiga Arafa, *The Social Activities of the Egyptian Feminist Union*. Cairo: Elias’ Modern Press, 1973, 4.

2. to demand free access to all schools of higher education for girls who are desirous to continue their education.
3. to reform the customs of marriage so as to enable the two parties to get to know each other before engagement for marriage takes place...
4. to try to amend certain laws concerning marriage and divorce; to preserve the wife from the injustice caused to her by the exercise of polygyny without reason; and to protect her from the renunciation of her, often without thought or serious motive.
5. to demand a law putting a minimum age of sixteen years for the marriage of girls and eighteen years for the marriage of boys.
6. to make propaganda in favor of public hygiene and sanitation.
7. to encourage virtue and to fight immorality.
8. to combat certain superstitions, cults, and customs which do not conform to common sense.
9. to propagate the principles of the Feminist Union through the medium of the press.³⁵⁵

The EFU created a delegation to present their list of demands to the first Egyptian parliament in 1923. Four months later, the parliament passed the EFU's first

³⁵⁵ The final goal became slightly difficult to attain when Arabic newspapers declined to publish letters or articles by women for fear of the backlash from the conservative majority of Egyptians. In order to have their voices expressed they resorted to the European press. The EFU established its own periodicals, *L'Egyptienne*, and later *al Masreyya* in Arabic. Arafa, 4-5.

major success: a law establishing the legal marriage age for women at sixteen and for men at eighteen.³⁵⁶ Another success was in 1924, a year later when the Egyptian Constitution added a phrase that granted equal opportunities in education for girls and boys.³⁵⁷ These successes encouraged the members of the EFU and lead them to present demands to the parliament again in May 1926:

1. to set a limit to justifiable polygyny.
2. to put a limit to the extreme facility of divorce without plausible motive.
3. to protect the Egyptian wife from the oppression, injustice and misery she endures when obligated to return by force to “Bait el Ta‘ah,” which is conjugal home, also called “place de la submission.”
4. to prolong the period of custody in favor of the mother with whom the children can find the care and affection they need, and from whom they were usually taken when too young.
5. to annul the ministerial circular of 1924 which interprets the law for setting a minimum age for marriage in a way contrary to the spirit of the petition.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ Arafa, 9.

³⁵⁷ Prior to 1909 there was equality in education until it was taken away by the government. Arafa, 11-12.

³⁵⁸ The last demand was a result of some parents falsifying certificates to show that their young daughters were sixteen and old enough to marry even if they were not. Arafa, 11, 13-14.

The strongest ally on the EFU's side was the fact that many of their demands were clearly supported by the *Qur'an* and *sunnah*.³⁵⁹ Under the personal status laws, women were still very much oppressed. Feminists in the 1920s called for reform of divorce laws which fell under the personal status laws. According to Badran, "Divorce was a potential threat to all women, although its effects varied according to class and circumstances."³⁶⁰ According to Moussa, *Hanafi* doctrine, claimed that "*talaq* is effective even if the husband is intoxicated or under duress, and may be conditional (meaning that the husband may make the divorce effective on condition of any particular behavior on part of the wife)."³⁶¹ However, the divorce is not effective if the husband declared the repudiation out of anger, which is an irrational act. Clearly unfair to women, the right to divorce was primarily in the hands of the husband and he was granted the right to decide whether or not to divorce a woman regardless to if he was sober and of sound mind or under the influence of alcohol and of an impaired mind. The Egyptian divorce law based on *Hanafi* doctrine stipulated: "the husband has the right to unilateral and unconditional divorce (*talaq*) also known as repudiation. This type of divorce is revocable, up to the third time. However, after three divorces, it becomes irrevocable separation,"³⁶² explained Moussa. The feminists called for the law to be amended; men can only declare divorce for serious and legitimate

³⁵⁹ An example would be such as in divorce and polygyny.

³⁶⁰ Badran, 1995, 131.

³⁶¹ Moussa, 12.

³⁶² Ibid.

reasons, in addition to doing so in front of a judge, who first attempted to reconcile the couple. As maintained by Badran, the only positive to come from this demand was “the 1929 revised code simply declared that divorce pronounced by a man who was intoxicated or under duress was invalid.”³⁶³ Furthermore, according to Moussa, the law stipulated that “repudiation could not be conditional; neither could its wording be ambiguous [...] only after three separate pronouncements of the repudiation formula could a divorce be considered irrevocable. This was a clear departure from the *Hanafi* doctrine, which held that in case where the husband makes three repudiations in one statement, the divorce becomes irrevocable.”³⁶⁴

Although the Egyptian government eventually attempted to tackle polygyny and the grief that it entails, it was never close to being abolished. It was forbidden for a second marriage to be contracted to “any individual who does not have the means to take care of his children by the first marriage or the ones that will come by his second or third marriages,”³⁶⁵ according to Arafa. In 1925, the government passed a law stipulating a man could no longer divorce his wife without a reason; however the EFU still continued to push for the abolition of *bayt al-ta‘ah*.³⁶⁶ Also, in 1926, the EFU succeeded in helping pass another law,

³⁶³ Badran, 1995, 131.

³⁶⁴ Moussa, 12.

³⁶⁵ Arafa, 15-16.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

which awarded mothers custody of sons until they are seven and daughters until they are nine.³⁶⁷

Another issue the EFU tackled was licensed prostitution, since 1924. Due to the foreign capitulations in Egypt at the time, and since the brothels were owned mostly by foreigners, the Egyptian government could not carry out much control over them. Therefore, the EFU fought to eradicate foreign capitulations by campaigning vigorously at every international women's conference such as the ones held in Berlin in 1929 and Istanbul in 1935. Finally, the representatives of the countries involved in the capitulations called for the need for elimination, which each delegation demanded from their respective governments. As a result, the capitulations were ended in 1936, and with that impediment removed the EFU continued to campaign against licensed prostitution. In 1949, it became illegal.³⁶⁸

During crises, the EFU was active in participating in relief efforts. In 1940, a devastating earthquake in Turkey led the EFU to collect and donate a large sum of money to the victims. At the time of the air raids in Alexandria in 1940-1941 they offered shelter to the people that sought refuge in Cairo. During the cholera epidemic in 1947, the EFU collected money for the effected families, and also brought attention to the EFU's years of campaigning for filtered water in

³⁶⁷ However, the EFU later decided the ages should be changed, and pushed for girls to remain with their mother until she is married and boys until they are adolescents. As of 1973, the ages in the law changed to eleven years old for girls and nine years old for boys. Arafa, 17-18.

³⁶⁸ Arafa, 19-20. Later the government went along with the EFU's suggestion of establishing "homes to shelter those unfortunate women and to teach them professions by which they could earn an honourable means of living, as well as give them lessons in morals and religious teachings." Ibid., 20.

villages.³⁶⁹ Other contributions the EFU made to Egyptian society were the various committees it headed such as the Committee for Child Care, the Committee for Health Affairs, the Committee for Improving Village Conditions, the Committee for Education, the Committee for Religious and Moral Affairs, the Committee to Demand Women's Social and Political Rights.³⁷⁰ Also, the EFU ran some institutions such as a primary school, an embroidery school, a workshop, and a dispensary.³⁷¹

The betrayal by the nationalist movement and particularly by its leaders the Wafd party, initiated women to break away from their restrictive authority and create the EFU, yet still maintain its Egyptian nationalist and anti-imperialist stance. The EFU, committed to defending its independence, upheld in their regulations the edict not to belong to or associate with a political party.³⁷² In May 1923, at the International Woman Suffrage Alliance congress held in Rome, a delegation from the EFU with Huda as their leader presented their first public statement and this represented the first time that Egyptian women had been represented on an international level. Huda stated that Egyptian women demanded the reinstatement of their rights, indicating their belief that women's rights were lost over time, particularly under foreign domination and inherited

³⁶⁹ Arafa, 20-21. In 1948, the first village to receive filtered water as a result of the project to introduce it into rural areas was Tersa in the Giza province. *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 25-27.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 32-34.

³⁷² Badran, 1995, 91.

traditions. According to Badran, Huda's statement sent a message to Egyptian patriarchalists and her Western feminist colleagues with her emphasis that their movement was a "national enterprise, not an imitative one looking West."³⁷³ With the disregard of the women's movement by Egyptian nationalists after independence in the 1920s, the EFU united and sought out the international sisterhood and solidarity.³⁷⁴ Returning to Egypt from Rome, Huda and a companion carried out the most symbolic public act of the Egyptian women's movement: uncovering their faces. Upon arriving in Cairo, at the train station, Huda Sha'rawi with her companion Saiza Nabarawi in a daring yet unavoidable development, removed the veils from their faces. Removing the last cultural tradition that tied women to the harem was a natural progression after entering the public forcibly during demonstrations of the 1919 Revolution.

Eventually, Huda's activism expanded to other parts of the Arab world in the 1930s. With the increase in hostilities between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, the EFU began taking a committed role in the issue. Upon learning of the League

³⁷³ Badran, 1995, 91.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 92. In 1923, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance was renamed the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship. The EFU, well acquainted with the world divisions of the colonizer and the colonized, and this international organization experienced a complex relationship as the international feminists, largely Western and imperialists, attempted to direct and mold the global efforts of feminism and according to Badran were patronizing and "Trapped in a sense of their special mission toward women from other parts of the world, Western imperial feminists accorded themselves a tutorial role, arrogating to themselves the privilege of defining feminist goals and methods, and indeed feminism itself. Egyptian feminists who refused to be targets of remedial feminism, believed they could make international feminist solidarity work for them—furthering their feminist and nationalist agendas—while helping to shape international sisterhood." Ibid. See Badran, 1995.

of Nations' plan to divide Palestine to grant Jews a homeland, Huda, as president called for Arab women to come to Cairo to assemble the first Eastern Women's Conference in defense of the Palestinian cause in 1938. In 1944, another conference in Cairo was assembled in order to examine the situation of the Arab woman and to come to conclusions on how to advance them through social, economic, and political change. At the conclusion of the event the Arab Feminist Union was established and Huda was elected president.³⁷⁵

The Egyptian Feminist Union was a unique creation of the social, political, and cultural atmosphere of early twentieth century Egypt. The women of this organization helped establish a precedent and feminist culture for later generations and groups of women activists. With all the hardships and obstacles followed by accomplishments and successes of these women on individual levels and later as a thriving influential group, they left their mark on Egyptian history, politics, society, culture, and also education. Once active through the written word, women plunged into the public during the 1919 Revolution, never to turn back. However, as more women entered the public, and as more perspectives came to light, the later half of the twentieth century witnessed increased splintering of the women's movement and the new nationalist government and the older EFU attempting to dominate the newer generations of women activists in the women's rights movement. Soon the Egyptian state, the nationalist government led by Jamal 'Abd an-Nasir, with its state feminism, marginalized

³⁷⁵ Arafa, 24.

women who held views that differed from that of the state. An in depth view of the new Egyptian state is necessary and significant to further discuss the women's rights movement in Egypt as there was an emergence in state feminism. Under Nasir, women's groups and their activities were regulated or absorbed into state-run activities.

Chapter 5

THE NEW EGYPTIAN STATE AND NATIONALISM

By the 1940s, before the Free Officer's Revolution in 1952 and the subsequent sweeping reforms, Egypt had experienced great changes and upheavals, politically, socially, as well as culturally, and particularly for women. Politically, women's activism became major components of the revolutionary climate in the early decades of the twentieth century. Socially, they founded groups and built organizational networks across classes, and declared their presence in the public arena as educated and professional women. Culturally, women began to increasingly abandon seclusion in the home, as well *hijab* and *niqab*.

In order to further understand and grasp the situation of the women's movement, caught in the middle or often ignored by the two main warring movements nationalism and Islamism, the rise and fall of Arab nationalism and Nasirism must be recounted. The "moment" Arab nationalism collapsed is actually a series of events under a specific situation that culminated into the defeat of this ideology finally in 1967. This paved the way for Islamism, nationalism's main opposition, to fill the void left behind. Arab nationalism reached its peak in the form of Nasirism in Egypt during the 1950s and 1960s, and as setbacks and defeats plagued the doomed ideology, Islamism gained followers dissatisfied with the nationalist state. To demonstrate this argument, this section will give a brief history of Arab nationalism and the evolution it went through in the Egyptian

context to reach the development it did in Nasirism. The demise of Nasirism and ultimately Arab nationalism can be explained by several factors. One factor was the alienation experienced by the Egyptians that did not accept Nasirism. Second, major events and circumstances built up enormous amount of pressure on Nasir and in turn his philosophy. A third factor was the combination of events such as wars and corruption under foreign and domestic pressures placed hurdles and challenges for Nasir and the nationalist agenda. Also, Egyptian society was not a uniform society that adhered to the nationalist ideology of Nasir, but a diverse mix of different movements and groups with divisions, as was the rest of the Arab world. To add to these factors, was the raging global Cold War that polarized the world despite great efforts by some nations to remain neutral. Finally, a major factor in the downfall of Arab nationalism in the Arab world and specifically Egypt was the perseverance by the Islamists and the growth of their followers. To explain this argument and supporting evidence, this section will utilize the scholarly work of experts in the field of Islamism, Arab nationalism, and Nasirism, and the writings of leading figures of these movements during the Nasirist era such as Hasan Al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and naturally Jamal Abd Al-Nasir.

Nasirism: Egyptian Arab Nationalism

The life of Jamal ‘Abd an-Nasir before his days as president of Egypt in the military and as a political activist, were to influence his future greatly. Nasir was born in a small village into a middle-class family in 1918. According to

journalist Dorothy Thompson in the introduction of *The Philosophy of the Revolution* by Nasir, as a student in the Military College, he was known for his “exemplary conduct, his self-reliance, and his serious outlook; likewise he was known for his outspokenness and his rebellion against colonialism.”³⁷⁶ Although extremely modest, he commanded respect and leadership. Thompson also went on to say that Nasir’s book reflects his personality perfectly. Nasir was also a family man with a wife and five children. After serving in the Egyptian military, his professional career entailed teaching at the Military College, followed by graduating with honors from the Army Staff College. Serving in the Palestinian war infuriated him; much needed munitions were withheld from the Egyptian army by authorities and the inferior commands given by King Farouk.³⁷⁷ Thompson praises Nasir’s courage and heroism during the war, and implies it was a turning point in his life because he met and chose the members of the Revolutionary Command Council during this time. Writing two years after the coup d’état of July 23, 1952 by the Free Officers led by Nasir, Thompson optimistically described them as: “the movement which saved the country from the clutches of reaction with its attendant corruption, and launched it on the road of justice, progress and stability.”³⁷⁸

The 1950s were turbulent times for Egypt, a new republic was established and British occupation was eliminated. Political and economic ties became

³⁷⁶ Thompson in Nasser, 64.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 65.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 66.

unstable with the West, and the Soviet Union built a new relationship with the new republican-oriented government. On an international level, Egypt led the nonaligned movement of the Third World nations. On the Arab level, Egypt appointed itself the leader of the Arab nationalist movement. Exclusively Egyptian nationalism thrived in the 1920s and 1930s, however, political scientist, James Jankowski explained that Nasir in the 1950s: “emphasized the coexistence as well as the compatibility of his Egyptian and Arab loyalties. ‘Arab Egypt’ was used in his public rhetoric from an early date; later addresses declared Egypt to be ‘a member of the greater Arab entity’ or maintained that ‘by our country I mean the whole Arab world.’”³⁷⁹ When he drafted the Egyptian National Charter of 1962, he addressed his audience as “the Arab people of Egypt” and later explained that “there is no conflict whatsoever between Egyptian patriotism and Arab nationalism.”³⁸⁰ However, Jankowski claims his allegiance to Egypt is stronger than his allegiance to the Arab world. Severe Egyptian patriotism was instilled in him from his youth as a member of the Young Egypt movement and his participation in student protests in the mid-1930s. Nasir’s identification with Arab nationalism was secondary, he began using the term “the Arab nation/*al-umma al-‘Arabiyya*” in 1954, “Arab nationalism/*al-qawmiyya al-‘Arabiyya*” in

³⁷⁹ James Jankowski, “Arab Nationalism in ‘Nasserism’ and Egyptian State Policy, 1952-1958,” in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, James Jankowski, Israel Gershoni, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, 151. Jankowski quoted Nasir from Egypt, Ministry of National Guidance, *Majmu‘at Khutub wa Tasrihat wa Bayanat al-Ra’is Jamal ‘Abd al-Nasir* (multivol; Cairo, n.d.), 1:55.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 151.

1955, and “Arab unity/*al-wahda al-‘Arabiyya*” in 1956.³⁸¹ He also began to claim the main goal of the Revolution is to unite Arabs into a nation.³⁸² For the next few years, Nasir argued that the motive behind Arab nationalism was that Egyptian problems were Arab problems: “Our strength is in this Arab nationalism, the Arabs sticking together for the benefit of the Arabs.”³⁸³ Arab nationalism was a shield from imperialism and Israel; it was a “weapon.”³⁸⁴

Nasir showed a personal inclination to keeping religion out of politics even though he discussed the “Islamic circle” as the largest circle of which Egypt needs to find its appropriate function in his *Philosophy of the Revolution*.³⁸⁵ Nasir believed that Egyptians were “in a group of circles which should be the theatre of our activity and in which we try to move as much as possible.”³⁸⁶ The first and most important circle is the “Arab circle,” the second is the “African Continent circle.” The third was the “Islamic circle.”³⁸⁷ However, this role in the Islamic

³⁸¹ Jankowski, 153.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 154.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁵ Nasser, 60-61.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁸⁷ Nasir contemplated “the eighty million Moslems in Indonesia, the fifty million in China, the few million in Malaya, Thailand and Burma, the hundred millions in Pakistan, the well-nigh over a hundred million in the Middle East, the forty million in the Soviet Union, and the millions of others in the other remote and far-flung corners of the earth [...] all welded into a homogeneous whole by the same Faith, I come out increasingly conscious of the potential achievements co-operation among all these millions can accomplish—co-operation naturally not going beyond their loyalty to their original countries, but which will ensure for them and their brethren-in-Islam unlimited power.” *Ibid.*, 61, 63.

circle is minimal compared to being Egyptian or Arab. He showed that in order to be a member of the Arab nation, language and culture were more important than religion.³⁸⁸ He even used the word “*ummah*” for Egypt, not in an Islamic context, which is the only context in which it had been used before then. The tensions this caused with the Islamist Muslim Brothers resulted in the “Islamic Conference” in 1954. It was a joint initiative with Saudi Arabia that promoted “international Muslim education and interaction, the propagation of the message of Islam, and the establishment of Islamic cultural centers,”³⁸⁹ as Jankowski described it. Later, after the sweeping measures to crush the Muslim Brothers in late 1954, the Nasir regime gave it less recognition. The regime continually estranged itself from several factions of society.

The Decline: Alienation and the Voices of Divergence

A major flaw in the movement, that claimed to be for all Egyptians, was the failure by Nasir to include all portions of society in the new society he was attempting to create such as, intellectuals, the upper-class, feminists, communists, and Islamists. The most marginalized sect of society was the Islamist movement. The Muslim Brothers was considered the most serious domestic threat by the new regime in the mid-1950s. According to Jankowski, the regime rejected a religious

³⁸⁸ Although Nasir recognized the importance of the third circle, he warned it should never go beyond one’s loyalty to their country, and stressed how the first circle (the Arab circle) is “the framework of which we should endeavor to turn, move and act with all our force.” Nasser, 60. Loyalty to one’s country versus loyalty to one’s religion is the debate most predominant between the nationalists and the Islamists in Egypt during that time.

³⁸⁹ Jankowski, 156.

foundation for national politics as a way to set themselves apart from the agenda and attraction of the Muslim Brothers.³⁹⁰ This was a consistent policy towards the Brothers and any groups associated with them such as the Society of Muslim Ladies founded by Zainab al-Ghazali. Nasir shut down the Muslim Brothers, dissolved the Society of Muslim Ladies and imprisoned and executed many members of these groups.³⁹¹ As a way to preserve its monopoly over power, the Nasirist government did not tolerate opposition from these organizations, as it was maintaining a secular government and especially after the attempt by the Muslim Brothers on Nasir's life during a speech.

By the middle decades of the twentieth century, feminism, unlike at the turn of the century, again began to convey what Ahmed phrased as “a persistent and ever-widening bifurcation within Egyptian and Arab “feminist” discourse—feminist in that it affirms women and women's subjectivity.”³⁹² Also, unlike the turn of the century, this time the woman Islamist Zainab al-Ghazali and the founder of the Society of Muslim Ladies represented the mainstream and more influential divergence, while the feminism of Huda Sha'rawi, al-Ghazali's former mentor, became secondary and the alternative path.³⁹³

Born in 1918, Zainab al-Ghazali al-Jubaili was brought up with the anticipation of her becoming an Islamic leader. Zainab's father, an al-Azhar

³⁹⁰ Jankowski, 156-157.

³⁹¹ Ahmed, 197.

³⁹² Ibid., 196-197.

³⁹³ Ibid.

graduate, who toured the country and preached in local *masjids* on his time off from being a cotton merchant, was responsible for instructing her in Islamic cultural heritage. He assured her she would be a leader with the help of God. However, “not in the style of Huda Sha‘rawi, she reports him saying, but in the tradition of the women leaders of Muhammad’s time,”³⁹⁴ reveals Ahmed. Her own organization, Society of Muslim Ladies, which she founded at the age of eighteen in 1937, aimed to assist women by teaching them about Islam, running welfare activities and an orphanage they established, also, they helped poor families and assisted men and women in need of employment obtain positive jobs. She was convinced that women’s liberation was a concept that was a deviation resulting from the backwardness of Muslims. The goal of her association was to help Muslim women study Islam and to familiarize them with their religion in order to uncover this backwardness. The only way for Egypt to be governed was by the *Qur’an* not a secular constitution. Al-Ghazali’s idea of the role of women in an Islamic society is very clear and identical to the ideas of the Muslim Brothers: a woman’s primary role and priority is in the family. Although women are permitted to have professional and political lives in Islam, it cannot hinder her main duty as mother and wife. Ahmed explained al-Ghazali’s philosophy on why a woman’s role as a mother is crucial: “They are the ones who build the kind of men that we need to fill the ranks of the Islamic call. So women must be well educated, cultured, knowing of the precepts of the Koran and Sunna, informed

³⁹⁴ Ahmed, 200.

about world politics, why we are backward, why we don't have technology. The woman must study all these things, and then raise her son in the conviction that he must possess the scientific tools of the age, and at the same time he must understand Islam, politics, geography, and current events."³⁹⁵ Within six months of the establishment of the Society of Muslim Ladies, Hasan al-Banna tried to convince Zainab to integrate her organization into the Muslim Brothers. Even though he was persistent in applying pressure, Zainab and the members of the Society of Muslim Ladies declined, but promised him complete support in other ways.³⁹⁶ However, in 1948 Zainab pledged her allegiance to the Muslim Brothers and agreed to the merger, he welcomed it but said that the Society of Muslim Ladies "remains as it is,"³⁹⁷ according to al-Ghazali. Soon after the government had dissolved the Muslim Brothers and its leaders were undergoing trials, and al-Banna was assassinated in 1949. Even though the Society of Muslim Ladies was independent from the Muslim Brother, in the late 1940s it was ordered to disband, which led Zainab to challenge this order in court and win. By this time, Zainab was embraced into the Muslim Brothers organization as a senior consultant. In fact, from 1965 until 1972 she was imprisoned and tortured for her link to the leadership in the Muslim Brothers and a suspected plot to kill Nasir.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ Ahmed, 198-199.

³⁹⁶ Zainab described al-Banna as being angry at this decision. Ahmed, 197.

³⁹⁷ al-Ghazali, 27.

³⁹⁸ Ahmed, 197-198.

The most unique aspect of Zainab al-Ghazali's life was her contradictory stance when it came to her own married and family life. Her first marriage was dissolved because her husband did not agree with her mission and work. Before their marriage she set the condition that her husband would not keep her from her work, and if he did, they would separate. Her grievance was that he kept her from her mission and the marriage consumed all her time. Zainab was in complete control in her married life, and practiced a right legally binding in Islamic law. However, he did not keep her from being a wife or being a mother, which are according to her, a Muslim woman's main priority. She was being kept from being an activist, which was supposed to be a secondary priority. Her second marriage conditions stipulated that her husband was not to come between her and her work, also he agreed to become her assistant.³⁹⁹ Her second marriage can be described perfectly in the following conversation she had with her husband

Muhammad Salim Salim:

'Do you remember, my dear husband, what I told you when we agreed to marry?'

'Yes! You made some conditions, but I fear for you today because of your opposition to despots.'

'I remember very well what I told you. As we were going to be married I told you there was something in my life that you needed to know about so that you wouldn't ask me about it later on, for I will never relinquish it. I

³⁹⁹ The second marriage conditions were agreed upon in writing. Ahmed, 200.

am the President of the Muslim Ladies Group...I am under pledge of allegiance, until death for the sake of Allah, to Hasan al-Banna.

Nevertheless, I have not stepped even one single step which would bestow upon me this divine honour. However, I believe one day I will take this step that I wish and dream of. If that day comes, and because of it, a clash is apparent between your personal interests and economic activities on the one hand, and my Islamic work on the other hand, and that I find my married life is standing in the way of *da'wah*⁴⁰⁰ and the establishment of an Islamic state, then, each of us should go our own way.⁴⁰¹

When it came to inter-group relations, the Society of Muslim Ladies collaborated with the EFU and the Muslim Brothers for common causes and events. With the Muslim Brothers, the Society of Muslim Ladies forged a formal alliance and shared the same political and social philosophies. With the EFU, however, their relationship was more complex. Although both groups held differing outlooks on the paths or methods to advance Egypt or the women of Egypt, and expel imperialism from their country, however, they united in these goals. Both the EFU and Society of Muslim Ladies offered many services for Egyptian women and their families, and believed women were entitled to actively participate in the public, and finally they both expressed solidarity with Palestine. For example in 1938, at the Eastern Women's Conference for the Defense of Palestine in Cairo, the Egyptian delegation was comprised of 20 women from the

⁴⁰⁰ *Da'wah* means preaching.

⁴⁰¹ al-Ghazali, 37-38.

EFU in addition to women from other organizations of various back grounds, such as Zainab's. Badran referred to Zainab's appreciation of cooperation between feminists and Islamist women with her thoughts on the conference: "In past times, as today, the woman has called for peace and lifted the banner of right to defend the land and its dignity. It is not strange that today she calls for help for her Palestinian sister and sacrifices everything dear shouting in the face of men: 'Rise up from your sleep and be awakened from your foolishness and gather all your power and consolidate your forces.' It is the women in this conference who have awakened everyone to come to the rescue."⁴⁰² Zainab and Huda both advocated the unity and solidarity of the sexes for this cause specifically.

Another example of women from across the political range—the communist, Inji Aflatun, the EFU member, Saiza Nabarawi, and the woman Islamist, Zainab—coming together was when they formed *Lajnat an-Nisa'iyah lil-Muqawamah al-Sha'biyah* (Women's Committee for Popular Resistance) in 1952 when fighting began in the Canal Zone. They joined in public demonstrations.⁴⁰³ Although Zainab did not agree with Huda Sha'rawi of the EFU, or any other feminist organization for that matter, Huda's generation set the stage for future generations such as Zainab as she did in fact and even forged a divergent path that eventually replaced the EFU.

Feminists also were victims of the wrath of the Nasirist regime. In egalitarian reforms of the state, the 1956 Constitution granted women the right to

⁴⁰² Badran, 1995, 229.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 248.

run for political office and the right to vote, however, on the condition that she seek permission and exhibits literacy, a condition that did not apply to men.⁴⁰⁴ These actions outraged liberal feminist Durriyah Shafiq, and led her to go on a hunger strike.⁴⁰⁵ Durriyah Shafiq was born in 1908, when figures from the first generation of women pioneers were embarking on their feminist journeys, setting the stage for the likes of Durriyah. Growing up, she was surrounded by mainly women, her grandmother, mother, sisters, cousins, and governesses. Despite the loving presence of her father in her life and the way he doted on her mother, she was incredibly aware of the unjust plight of women in Egyptian society from a young age mainly from observing and listening to miserable accounts of domestic life.⁴⁰⁶ Her education was western, as was customary for her class. As a child, she was sent to an Italian nuns' school, and later a French mission school for her elementary education.⁴⁰⁷ After the devastating loss of her young mother, Durriyah found solace in her education and did extremely well. At sixteen years of age she earned her baccalaureate, the youngest to do so, and placed second in the country.⁴⁰⁸ In 1928, obsessed with attending the Sorbonne in Paris and determined in her words "to get away from the memories and the pain of

⁴⁰⁴ Cynthia Nelson, *Doria Shafik, Egyptian Feminist: A Woman Apart*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996, 234.

⁴⁰⁵ Ahmed, 205. Shafiq and her associates were a later and more liberal offshoot of the women's movement.

⁴⁰⁶ Nelson, 10.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

estrangement; to tear myself away from all these nightmares,” she wrote to Huda Sha‘rawi for help as she was the president of the EFU.⁴⁰⁹ In May, she welcomed the news of her scholarship that was arranged with the Ministry of Education.⁴¹⁰ Three months later, Durriyah at the age of nineteen left her proud father and family on a ship to France to pursue furthering her education.⁴¹¹ She had traveled back and forth from Paris to Alexandria from the year 1928 and on, and when she lived with her father in 1933, she always felt the need to return to the Sorbonne to earn her doctorate. After failing to settle in Egypt and after some personal and public troubles, she returned to Paris in 1936 at the age of twenty-seven to return in 1940 with her doctorate and a husband. As a result of her stays abroad in search of her liberation and further entrenching herself into French culture, as well as the many events and situations that made up the political and social climate of pre-war Egypt, Durriyyah did not fully comprehend “the full meaning of these disorders around [her] in this prewar period, except for the feeling of impending chaos,”⁴¹² explained Cynthia Nelson, professor of anthropology and biographer of Shafiq.

Her return to Egypt was a disappointment and gave her a sense of rejection. Her benefactress, Huda Sha‘rawi, according to Durriyah, was poisoned against her by her EFU entourage: “I only knew that it was impossible for me to

⁴⁰⁹ Nelson, 25.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 29.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 30.

⁴¹² Ibid., 69.

become a member of the Egyptian Feminist Union. Thanks to the clever maneuvers of her entourage, I was positively estranged from Huda Sha‘rawi.”⁴¹³ Also, she did not receive a teaching position at the university as she had hoped. However, she did teach temporarily at al-Saniya and the Alexandria College for Girls, and eventually became a French-language inspector with the Ministry of Education.⁴¹⁴ She found her true calling in journalism when she co-founded the feminist journal *Bint an-Neel*, Daughter of the Nile, (1945-1957) in which she reached out to a wide readership of middle-class Egyptians.

In 1948, she founded *Ittihad Bint an-Neel*, Bint an-Neel Union which aimed to achieve equal political rights for women and brought together more middle-class women in to the organized movement. According to Badran, in addition to supporting suffrage, it also involved, like other feminist organizations, “a broad social program including literacy for women; they also continued the struggle to achieve reform of personal status laws.”⁴¹⁵ Soon after she linked her union to the International Council for Women using the name “the National Council for Egyptian Women,” and was elected to the decision-making committee of this parent organization. This caused resentment and disagreement from the many other women’s organizations for Durriyah’s blatant imposition of herself and her union as the representative of all Egyptian women’s organizations,

⁴¹³ Nelson, 101-102.

⁴¹⁴ Ahmed, 203.

⁴¹⁵ Badran, 1995, 217.

and was publically criticized in the media.⁴¹⁶ Bint an-Neel Union was a politicized organization more radical than other women's organizations particularly the religious Society of Muslim Ladies and aristocratic EFU.⁴¹⁷ An example of this was Bint an-Neel Union's first "militant action" when one thousand women led by Durriyah demonstrated at the Egyptian parliament in 1951. The EFU was invited and joined this march.⁴¹⁸ Interrupting the parliament's session for three hours, they only agreed to disband when the presidents of both chambers of parliament pledged to endorse their feminist demands.⁴¹⁹ This caused backlash from conservative Egyptians that in turn called for the banning of women's organizations that demanded political participation. Durriyah and her organization were slowly being estranged from the conservative elements of society, and naturally, also from other women's organizations. However, later that same year on November 13th hundreds of thousands of Egyptians demonstrated against British occupation on the anniversary of the 1919 revolt, which marked when Egyptian women first entered the public sphere.

⁴¹⁶ Ahmed, 203.

⁴¹⁷ Another example of the Bint an-Neel Union's radicalism compared to other women's organizations of its time was that they had a paramilitary unit that received military training made of two hundred women. The unit joined the demonstrations opposing the government, the king, and British presence in Egypt in January 1952. Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Nelson, 170.

⁴¹⁹ Ahmed, 203.

Among the people demonstrating solidarity for this cause were women from across the spectrum.⁴²⁰

After the July 23, 1952 Revolution the Bint an-Neel Union carried on its efforts to work for women's political rights. A constitutional assembly was created in March 1954 to approve or reject a constitution that was proposed. The fact that women were not included in this assembly led to a hunger strike headed by Durriyah. She was joined by fourteen other women in Cairo and others in Alexandria from Bint an-Neel Union, as well as other groups.⁴²¹ After ten days of the strike, it ended when the governor of Cairo put in writing that he was sent on behalf of the president to assure the strikers: "that the new constitution will guarantee women's full political rights."⁴²²

In 1957, Durriyah went on another hunger strike addressed to Nasir, demanding: "that the Egyptian authorities give back total freedom to Egyptians,

⁴²⁰ Nelson, 176.

⁴²¹ Ahmed, 205. Munira Husni, a middle-class Egyptian activist, who was disenchanted with the aristocratic and French-speaking EFU and had organization-related as well as personal matters against Durriyah, formed her own organization. Yet, she put aside her personal differences and past events behind her and joined Durriyah in the strike to represent her organization and share in a historic event. After all, what Munira was demanding was what Bint an-Neel demanded, as well as the EFU, and other organizations. In her memoir about her life in the Egyptian women's movement she explained: "I consider work in women's associations the simpler path to what we desire for women in terms of true social consciousness, however in order for us to make this consciousness be effective and positive, we must organize our women's associations and groups in a way that encourages profitable financial stability, cooperative spirit among other associations, in addition to a planned agenda. This will not achieve the intended success unless with the creation of a high council for women's associations..." Husni, 150. My translation.

⁴²² Nelson, 204.

whether male or female, and put an end to the dictatorial rule that is driving [the] country towards bankruptcy and chaos,”⁴²³ Nasir put her under house arrest and her journal and union were closed down.⁴²⁴ By this time, Durriyah had alienated herself even more from many in Egypt, particularly from within the feminist movement. After her confrontations with Nasir, many came to see her as a traitor to Egypt. A petition titled “Egyptian Women Renounce the Position of Doria Shafik” with twenty seven names revealed quite common feelings toward Durriyah at the time:

We women of Egypt were amazed by Mrs. Doria Shafik’s announcement and we strongly condemn such an act which injures our feminist reputation abroad. We hasten to state that our feminist movement has entered a new phase since our national revolution of 1952 and since the Egyptian woman has fully gained her political rights under the new constitution. Our feminist movement is a people’s movement, far removed from individualistic trends which characterized prerevolutionary feminist movements based on personal publicity.

There is much evidence to suggest that Mrs. Doria Shafik has isolated herself from the modern feminist movement and from the female population of Egypt and that one way of confessing her isolation was

⁴²³ The other demand, in French, addressed to the secretary-general of the United Nations: “that the international authorities compel the Israeli forces to withdraw immediately from Egyptian lands and reach a just and final solution to the problem of the Arab refugees.” Nelson, 238; Ahmed, 205.

⁴²⁴ Nelson, 240.

through her statement: 'I alone bear the responsibility of this work. I alone am responsible for this deed.'⁴²⁵

Her second hunger strike proved to be her final public activity. Bint an-Neel Union forced their president and founder to step down. Tragically, Durriyah suffered numerous mental breakdowns in the years that followed and in 1975 at the age of 67 years she committed suicide by jumping from the sixth floor of her apartment building.⁴²⁶

Many women were thrown in jail or placed under house arrest for their activities and outspokenness against the regime. They demanded more reforms such as in family law (which included marriage and divorce laws) and compulsory education for boys and girls and no limits to higher education for women. The education demands were met, however, little else was, despite the regime's espousal of considering men and women equal partners.⁴²⁷ On the situation of women under the Nasir years, Talhami explained:

Thus, the social and economic transformation of Egypt that began during the early years of this century greatly accelerated under Nasser. The net impact of these changes on women was immense, even though women did not achieve all of their declared goals, especially reforming the Shari'a. Yet this social and economic mobilization did not empower women politically but merely allowed restricted political participation. Economic

⁴²⁵ Nelson, 246-247.

⁴²⁶ Ahmed, 206; Nelson, xxvi.

⁴²⁷ Ahmed, 209.

opportunities in the context of increased urbanization, however, made women, especially petit bourgeois women, available to all forms of mobilization. The cumulative effect of releasing the untapped economic and social forces of Egyptian society made entire classes, including women, available for political mobilization.⁴²⁸

Other groups alienated from the new Egyptian regime, were the elite upper-class that significantly lost power and property under new state policies and the Agrarian Reform that were swiftly put in place. Another group dissatisfied with the Nasirist regime and their focus on agrarian reform were the Communists, although a small group in Egypt, they were also persecuted. For example, Inji Aflatun was an artist and Marxist who endured adversity doubly as a woman and as a communist and was imprisoned from 1959 to 1963.⁴²⁹ Latifa al-Zayyat was a leftist activist, student leader, writer and novelist.⁴³⁰ According to Botman, leftist feminism in Egypt surfaced from the communist underground.⁴³¹ Dissatisfied with class disparity, second-class status of women, and British colonialism during the 1940s, the leftist feminists “extended themselves to working-class women in factories, focusing on the national question generally, and on social issues relating

⁴²⁸ Talhami, 28.

⁴²⁹ Ahmed, 207. For more on Inji, see Aflatun, 1949. Although Inji often cooperated with other activists and organizations such as the EFU and Bint an-Neel, Inji was one of Durriyah’s strongest critics and accused her of being a traitor in the petition against Durriyah’s public actions.

⁴³⁰ Botman, 44.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

to health, education, and the family,”⁴³² Botman explained. In 1945 Aflatun founded *Rabitat Fatayat al-Jami‘at wa al-Ma‘ahid*, the League of University and Institutes’ Young Women, and al-Zayyat later joined.⁴³³ The league demanded democracy, the right to vote for women, social services from the state, and equal pay for equal work.⁴³⁴

In *Thamanun Milyon Imra’ah Ma’na* (1948), *Eighty Million Women are with us*, *Nahnu an-Nisa’ al-Misriyat* (1949) *We, the Egyptian Women*, and her paintings expressed Inji Aflatun’s feminist activism, radical politics, and her acknowledgment of “intersections of class and gender oppression,”⁴³⁵ and how it was a result of imperialist manipulation, revealed Badran. In 1950, she became a member of *Lajnat al-Shabbat*, the Youth Committee, which was created within the EFU. Latifa al-Zayyat, although similar to Inji in her Marxist outlooks, differed in her approach by initially concentrating largely on class and nation. Later in her novel *al-Bab al-Maftuh* (1960), *The Open Door*, Latifa engaged in a consciousness of gender. Badran described the young woman in Latifa’s story as someone who “finds liberation from middle-class patriarchal restrictions through involvement in nationalist politics at the university,”⁴³⁶ which is not unlike Latifa’s own experiences while attending university.

⁴³² Botman, 1999, 45.

⁴³³ Botman, 1999, 45; Badran, 1995, 152.

⁴³⁴ Botman, 1999, 45.

⁴³⁵ Badran, 1995, 152.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

The government continually alienated different segments of Egyptian society instead of including them all in the process of building a new Egyptian society. It did not try to garner support and approval from all these groups, which would have built credibility and legitimacy, and not to mention increase the popularity of Nasir and his regime. Nasir did not find a way to embrace or incorporate these segments left out of the loop, even though they all shared his vision for social justice, equality, and anti-colonialism to some extent.

When Nasir and his organization, the Free Officers, took over the government in the 1952 Revolution, in the eyes of many of these groups the possibilities for achieving their goals after the removal of what was seen as a corrupt foreign government, were endless. The belief in endless possibilities was enforced especially with the promises of reform and the strong nationalist sentiment offered by the new government headed by Nasir. With each group, Nasir presented a glimmer of hope when the government declared minor reforms for their causes, but many paled when compared to the sweeping land reforms that were the main focus of the Revolutionary Command Council. The focus on the rural areas of Egypt isolated the urban areas where the other major movements were based. However, the lack of attention the urban area or specific movements received is explained by the many directions Nasir was being pulled whether from international pressures, domestic threats, or wars.

Major Events and Situations

The majority of scholars cite the war of 1948, or the Palestine war as a major motivator or reviver of Arab nationalism and many attribute it as a direct response to Zionism. However, political scientist, Bassam Tibi discredits this idea by writing: “Early Arab nationalists aimed at establishing their own nation-state restricted to Arabs, in Asia Minor. Their actions cannot only be explained by the Palestine issue, and it is completely wrong to reduce Arab nationalism...to a response to Zionism.”⁴³⁷ He emphasizes that Arab nationalism is much older than the Palestine issue. However, when it comes to Nasserism in Egypt, 1948 is a crucial year especially for Nasser who was a young soldier at the time and was sent to fight there.

Nasser himself describes his recollections and understanding of the Palestine issue: “I remember, as far as I am personally concerned that the first notions of Arab consciousness began to creep into my mind when I was still a secondary school student. I used to come out with my fellow students on a general strike every year on the 2nd of November as a protest against the Balfour Declaration which favored establishing a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, despotically usurped from the legitimate owners of the land.”⁴³⁸ When questioned why he would feel so strongly about a land he has never been to before, his answer was that he sympathized with the Palestinians. He also writes

⁴³⁷ Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: Between Islam and the Nation-State*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1997, 20.

⁴³⁸ Nasser, 49.

of his experiences in the war and how he was determined to return to Egypt to begin his revolution there. The defeat of that war, called the *nakbah*, was a dark shadow that hung over Arabs for decades to come, and the 1967 war, referred to as *naksa*, was just as devastating that Nasir resigned while the war was still in full force on the Syrian front on June 9th 1967.⁴³⁹ Nasir claimed full responsibility for this shocking setback.⁴⁴⁰ Instead of regaining what Arabs lost from the *nakbah*, Israel served the Arab armies crushing blows.⁴⁴¹ What is significant about this defeat was that Nasir was at the helm this time, he was not a soldier helpless as his commanders made demoralizing blunders such as in 1948. The Yemeni Civil War (1962-1970) between the supporters of the monarchy and supporters of a secular nationalist state, was a conflict Egypt was heavily involved in during the time of the 1967 war. Egyptian troops withdrew from Yemen only to join another

⁴³⁹ Mehran Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East: A Political History Since The First World War*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, 121. *Naksa* means “step backwards” or “setback.”

⁴⁴⁰ Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, ed, *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict*. New York: Penguin Books, 2008, 105. In Nasir’s resignation speech, he took the blame for the defeat and named the colleague that would take his place under the 1964 Provisional Constitution: “I tell you truthfully and despite any factors on which I might have based my attitudes during the crisis, that I am ready to bear the whole responsibility. I have taken a decision in which I want you all to help me. I have decided to give up completely and finally every official post and every political role and return to the ranks of the masses and do my duty with them like every other citizen...I have entrusted my colleague, friend and brother Zakariya Muhiedin with taking over the point of President and carrying out the constitutional provisions on this point.” Ibid., 105. His resignation was withdrawn the next day after appeals from the masses for him to remain at his post as their leader.

⁴⁴¹ *Nakbah* translates to a “catastrophe” or “calamity;” used in reference to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.

battle on the home front, this more than likely affected the performance and effectiveness of Egyptian soldiers.

On the political level, domestic policies were failing, poverty, and bureaucratic corruption ran rampant. On the economic level, the government could not keep up with the population growth and rural emigration to urban centers; in addition, Egypt had been in several bloody and costly armed conflicts which drained the government's budget, even though it was managed by military trained officers. Another failure was the split of the United Arab Republic in 1958, which lasted only three years.⁴⁴² The entity that was meant to help materialize Nasir's vision of Arab unity and prove his critics wrong, dissolved very quickly. Their mistake was they applied Nasirist policy in Syria, which was tailored from the Egyptian experiences with colonialism and urban elitism. Syrians soon rebelled against the corruption and ignorance of Egyptians sent to govern in Syria. Nasir was clearly overwhelmed. Nasir dealt with these major issues and was being pulled in all those different directions. To add to these pressures were the international pressures of the looming global Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union.

In addition to the problems that Nasir and his government faced, Egyptian society and groups became more political, more frustrated, and more outspoken. Organizational lines that divided groups became more defined with each movement claiming to have the solution for what ails Egypt and her society and

⁴⁴² Egypt and Syria joined to form a republic in 1958, based on their mutual zeal for Arab nationalism.

politics. Many Islamists, feminists, and secularists became militant, and all became more organized. However, internal in addition to external pressures were constantly in motion in Egypt.

The Cold War and the One Within

Many scholars have blamed the failure of Arab nationalism on the inter-Arab rivalries (often called the Arab Cold War) between Arab states during the Nasirist era. The belligerent states were those that were pro-West conservative monarchies (such as the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan) and the secular nationalist juntas with associations with the Soviet Union (such as Iraq, Syria, and Egypt). An example of these rivalries is the Yemeni Civil War where Egypt and Saudi Arabia fought on opposing sides in another country. However, would there not have been this bi-polar region of pro-West (or Western-backed) and anti-West governments; would there have been these strong rivalries? My analysis places more blame on the larger looming global Cold War than the Arab Cold War. The Arab Cold War would not have existed as it had in that context, if it were not for the Cold War's far and deep influence. The West and the Soviet Union manipulated the Arab nations (as in other regions of the globe during that time) to play into their international agendas, despite the claim Nasir was an expert at playing the United States and the Soviet Union against each other. An example of this manipulation was one of Nasir's greatest political triumphs, the Suez Crisis,

when the Israelis, British, and French, attacked Egypt in 1956.⁴⁴³ Nasir became known as a victorious hero and leader of the Arab world, a title associated with him for the rest of his life, as a result of his defiance of the West.⁴⁴⁴

Nasir resisted formally joining any side for quite some time attempting to remain neutral while he led the non-aligned movement of other former colonies of Europe. His resistance against the two super powers indicated a rejection of what he and other Arabs saw as another form of imperialism less visible than the obvious and prominent former British presence. However, when financial and security burdens in Egypt became overwhelming for Nasir, he made an arms deal

⁴⁴³ T. G. Fraser, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 66-69.

⁴⁴⁴ Anthony McDermott, *Egypt From Nasser to Mubarak: A Flawed Revolution*. New York: Croom Helm, 1988, 24. McDermott describes the international incident succinctly: “The three participants hostile towards Egypt, Britain, France and Israel, all had their substantial grudges. For Britain, the nationalization of the Canal, ‘seizure’ in other parlance, had been the last straw in a series of acts of insubordination. As for the French, Egypt would have to pay for supporting the FLN Algerian rebels in their fight for independence. France also had direct financial interests in the Canal. As for Israel, hopes that peace might be possible with Egypt now that Nasser was in power had been dashed and replaced by resentment, antagonism, and the feeling that he should be taught a military lesson. They were replaced also by concerns at Egypt’s acquisition of new arms and by increasing annoyance at cross-border guerrilla raids from the Gaza Strip. Not least amongst the aims of the 1956 tripartite attack was the overthrow of Nasser, but what happened in fact did much to strengthen Arab claims which otherwise might easily have been dismissed as mere paranoia or wishful excuse-forging. It has since been revealed that not only was the intention to smash Egypt militarily, but also to have Nasser assassinated—although it was never quite clear who was meant to replace him. Nasser, Egypt and that of the radical Arab world which stood with him were to have been taught a lesson, but if anything, the reverse was the case: Nasser emerged as the hero, and Eden, who had personalized the conflict with Nasser, as the loser.” *Ibid.*, 24.

with the Soviet Union and more or less chose a side in the Cold War, much to the horror of the Egyptian Islamist movement.

Islamist Resistance and Expansion

One of the major voices of the Islamist movement particularly in Egypt during the first half of the twentieth century was Hasan al-Banna, who was heavily influenced by earlier Islamic reformers like al-Afghani and ‘Abduh.⁴⁴⁵ Al-Banna founded the Muslim Brothers in 1928. Historian David Commins explains that his early years, beginning when he was thirteen years old, “the political climate surrounding Banna’s early years of social awareness was marked by foreign domination and resistance to it.”⁴⁴⁶ He was from the town called Mahmudiya, where he followed in his father’s footsteps of obtaining a religious education, when he was thirteen years old he joined the Hasafiya Sufi order. He endeavored to maintain Islamic values in his life and to compel others to as well. Moreover, he united his personal devotion with a predisposition to enlist in groups that had mutual outlooks.⁴⁴⁷ In 1923, as a young man, al-Banna moved to Egypt’s capital, Cairo, to attend Egypt’s teacher training college, Dar al-‘Ulum and graduated in 1927. The highly politicized atmosphere in Cairo and the cultural westernization in Egypt led him to associate with people of the same mind and participate in Islamic reform groups. At the age of 22, his reformist

⁴⁴⁵ David Commins, “Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949),” in *Rahnema*, 133.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 128-129.

ideas garnered regular audiences by the time he formed the Muslim Brothers in March of 1928 with the intention of fostering true Islam and initiating a resistance against foreign control.⁴⁴⁸ Within four years of its establishment, the Muslim Brothers spread throughout Egypt and centered in Cairo where al-Banna was transferred by the Ministry of Education. As founder, al-Banna implemented his leadership and control as the organization steadily grew and launched its own press, periodicals, and cultural programs over the next ten years. Al-Banna was murdered in 1949, and did not witness the end of British imperialism and the beginning of the new Egyptian state.

Initially at the time of the Free Officers takeover in 1952, the Islamists were united with Nasir and his evident anti-colonial stance. Also, they agreed with the Free Officers' position on the need for social justice and reform, yet they did not share the same vision on how to achieve these goal. As time passed, and as a result of differing visions for Egypt, discontent within the Egyptian Islamist movement increased dramatically since Nasir first rose to power. Opposition was more vocal, their militancy threatened Nasir's life, and their groups became the most organized and influential in opposition to the Nasirist regime. However, Nasir's harsh and authoritarian measures against these men and women did not deter them. Nasir had reached out to some of the head figures and intellectuals such as Sayyid Qutb in order to join forces with Islamists, specifically the Muslim Brothers. Even though their groups were dissolved and banned and their journals

⁴⁴⁸ Commins in Rahnema, 132.

were shut down, they continued their struggle from jail or house arrest by writing or lecturing.

Egypt aligning with the Soviet Union (atheists according to Islamists) was the last straw for the Islamists. They believed in basing society on Islamic laws, *shari'ah*, in order to reach an ideal productive society. Men and women are required to follow the teachings and instructions mandated by the *Qur'an* and *hadith* in their daily lives, going against the teachings of Islam causes corruption, immoral society, and poverty. According to the Islamists, these maladies were already happening in Egypt. The failures of the nationalist oriented state were broadcast by the Islamists as the evil results of secular society and as lessons to learn from. They claimed that Egypt had forgotten God, so in turn God forgot Egypt, which resulted in the terrible tragedies and defeats suffered by the Egyptian people. In this way, the Islamists benefited greatly from the nationalists' failures and catastrophes. They capitalized on the disappointment and shock of the Egyptian masses, and in turn Egyptians began to explore the Islamist cause. Egyptians were exhausted from defeat, stifling imperialist agendas, and Arab rivalries; they sought a new optimistic path. Islamism grew from the marginal voice of opposition to the British in the early twentieth century to the dominant voice of opposition after the failures of the nationalist voice of Nasirism in the late twentieth century.

The year 1967 was the deciding year for the final demise of Arab nationalism as a viable ideological basis for a government. The decline was

gradual after a series of events in the highly politicized conditions of the global Cold War. This collapse gave rise to the Islamist movement as the strongest and most dominant opposition to the Egyptian government during the 1950s and 1960s. Arab nationalism and particularly Nasirism did not have the chance to thrive in the environment of the 1950s and 1960s Middle East specifically and the global setting in general with inter-Arab rivalries resulting from the ominous Cold War. Those dissatisfied with Arab nationalism found Islamism for a voice in troubling times. This section described a brief history of Arab nationalism and its progression into Nasirism in Egypt. Next, the fall of Nasirism and in turn Arab nationalism was explained by several factors, which were: first, the exclusion of segments of society by Nasirism; second, the crucial events and conditions that produced pressure on Nasir and the philosophy he espoused; and third, the combination of the major events and divisions in society that produced obstacles for the nationalist agenda. In addition to these factors, the Cold War polarized the globe despite Nasir's and many attempts by others to maintain neutrality. Finally, one of the major reasons for the breakdown of Arab nationalism in the Middle East and particularly Egypt was the determination by the Islamist movement and the increase of their followers. To support these arguments and produce evidence, this section examined scholarly work by experts of the three fields Islamism, Arab nationalism, and Nasirist Egypt, also the works of leaders from that era.

Nationalism across the globe has been largely an anti-colonial reaction to European dominance of the early half of the twentieth century. Edward Said

explained that “Western imperialism and Third World nationalism feed off each other,”⁴⁴⁹ opposition intensified as the long reach of imperialism expanded during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Egypt, Nasirism, named after Egyptian president Jamal ‘Abd an-Nasir (1952-1970), was the Arab version of nationalism. Also, in Egypt, beginning from the early 1950s Islamic opposition gained momentum as it faced the new generation of Egyptian Muslim leaders as opposed to foreign non-Muslims. Islamist opposition had developed into a more local or personal movement, it grew amongst fellow citizens, members of the same nation. Prior generations of Islamists struggled against and opposed foreign leaders and imperialist. As a way of observing their religion, Islamism called for returning to Islam. Saba Mahmood explains this concisely: “Scholars of Islamic movements have often argued that the resurgence of Islamic forms of sociability (such as veiling, increased interest in the correct performance of Islamic rituals, and the proliferation of Islamic charities) within a range of Muslim societies is best understood as an expression of *resistance* against Western politico-cultural domination as well as a form of social protest against the failed modernizing project of postcolonial Muslim regimes (Burgat and Dowell 1997; Esposito 1992; Gole 1996; Roy 1994).”⁴⁵⁰

This section will describe the differing positions on how to govern Egypt by the Islamists and the nationalists, even though they both ultimately have

⁴⁴⁹ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993, xxiv.

⁴⁵⁰ Mahmood, 24.

similar goals such as social justice and unity. Also, how the Islamists were observing or practicing their religion by resisting what they saw as corrupt leaders and un-Islamic laws, as did many other generations of Islamists before. And finally, the section will conclude with examples of two members of the Muslim Brothers and how they resisted the new national government.

Once the European control or presence was eliminated, the nationalists were the victors. Although Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brothers were initially sided with the 1952 Revolution, they quickly became disillusioned. They opposed the secular government and the application of socialist reforms. The Islamists disapproved of the reforms that were seen as Western reforms, as socialism was a product of the West, and the idea of anything associated with socialism was “godless.” The Islamist movement became reactionary to this new post-colonial establishment. Therefore, nationalism has often been seen and approached as opposing or conflicting with Islam in Muslim or Muslim-majority countries.

According to Islamists, nationalism contradicts Islamic principles and places less emphasis on Islamic unity and laws and more on secular government and a godless path. Although, unity, social justice, and anti-imperialism were common demands from Islamists and Arab nationalists in Egypt alike, voices from the Islamist movement such as the Muslim Brothers emerged as against the post-colonial regime. To the Islamists, the nationalists had the potential to implement *shari‘ah* and set Egypt on the correct path to return to the ideal Islamic

state after the removal of foreign powers, in order to flourish under the grace and approval of *Allah*. However, broken promises repelled the Islamists from endorsing the newly formed government. The government was failing to fulfill its obligation to form a Muslim state, and the Islamists began their resistance once more, but this time against fellow Muslims and Egyptians not non-Muslims or foreign rulers. The Nasirists had missed their chance to incorporate the Islamist movement in the formation and governance of post-colonial Egypt, and the Islamists re-embarked on the legacy of the up-hill battle against un-Islamic governments.

Interestingly, nationalists may believe in Islam and be practicing Muslims; however, Islamists do not believe in nationalism. Nationalism is a belief, homeland is a *Dar-al-Islam* (home of Islam), the ruler is God, and the constitution is the *Qur'an* according to Sayyid Qutb, a leading figure in the Muslim Brothers.⁴⁵¹ He goes on to say, “Grouping according to family and tribe and nation, and race and color and country, are residues of the primitive state of man; these *jahili* groupings are from a period when man’s spiritual values were at a low stage. The Prophet—peace be upon on him—has called them ‘dead things’ against which man’s spirit should revolt.”⁴⁵² Such influences of *jahiliyyah* should be removed as they may contain aspects of *shirk*.⁴⁵³ Qutb quotes the Prophet as saying: “Get rid of these partisanships; these are foul things,” and “He is not one

⁴⁵¹ Qutb, 126.

⁴⁵² Ibid, 125.

⁴⁵³ Polytheism.

of us who calls toward partisanship, who fights for partisanship, and who dies for partisanship,” and nationalism was stifled.⁴⁵⁴ Muslims only belong to countries where *shari‘ah* is established as law, nationality is his or her belief which makes them belong to *Dar-al-Islam*. The only way to return true Islamic values into the heart of Muslims is to renounce the ways of the *jahiliyyah*.⁴⁵⁵ Qutb encouraged the restoration the “*Qur’anic* generation,” to imitate the founders of the first Islamic community. Professor of politics, Charles Tripp described Qutb’s idea of the ideal Islamic past state and how its “development had harnessed power-in-the-world to the Islamic idea and had thereby created the ideal community, under the leadership of the Prophet and rightly guided Caliphs.”⁴⁵⁶ Only then will God return Muslims to the better state.

Arab nationalism, or Nasirism, was a combination of socialism, nationalism, and non-alignment. This ideology took over Egypt and other Arab countries. Nasirism emphasized being Arab first and Muslim second. Islamic identity was crucial to Arab identity, but it was not to be singled out as the only important element of the Arabic speaking people. After all, many Arabic speaking Arabs are not Muslim, but Christian and Jewish. Nasir’s approach was all inclusive, he attempted to organize the Arabs in order to unite and organize into a larger global community, where as Qutb and the Muslim Brothers believed in organizing and uniting the Muslim *ummah*, or Muslim community.

⁴⁵⁴ Qutb, 123.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁵⁶ Charles Tripp, “Sayyid Qutb: The Political Vision,” in *Rahnema*, 161.

Nasirism aimed at reform, social justice, and anti-imperialism, as the Islamists did, however, Nasir's foundations were not rooted in Islamism. Nasir reached out to Qutb from the Muslim Brothers to become the Secretary-General of the recently formed Liberation Rally. Moreover, instead of nurturing an ally in Qutb, Nasir banned the Muslim Brothers two years into his presidency as the government was aware of the Brothers' capability of violence.⁴⁵⁷ Qutb was thrown into jail several times by Nasir's government for plots to overthrow the government or to assassinate Nasir. However, jail would not stop him from writing his many books. What drove a wedge even deeper between the nationalists and the Islamists was the informal and often formal relationship, alliance, or business dealings with the Soviet Union or Eastern bloc. These countries were seen as atheist nations and a Muslim nation should not be associated or aligned with such nations if the Muslim community is to go beyond *jahilliyyah*, follow *shari'ah*, grow, and prosper.

The Islamist movement had had a long history before that point, particularly in Egypt. They believed in *jihad*. *Jihad* could be the inner struggle within every Muslim, or physical actions against un-Islamic or *jahiliyyah* elements in the world. The act of joining the group, the Muslim Brothers, in itself was an act of resistance to the nationalist government and a rejection of their authority as well, as the only authority belongs to God. Some members of the Islamist movement wrote as their resistance, such as Sayyid Qutb and Zainab al-

⁴⁵⁷ Tripp in Rahnema, 159.

Ghazali. Both figures were shaped by their experiences as young people. Qutb was shaped by his travels to the United States as an educator. He observed materialism, individualism, and capitalism in America. These became major elements in his writings of his criticism of the West, nationalism, and secularism. He returned and joined the political and Islamist movements that were flourishing in the early 1950s. However, he soon embraced the Islamist movement more and dropped the nationalist movement.⁴⁵⁸

Al-Ghazali was also very influenced by her early experiences as a young woman in Egypt. She joined women's groups such as the Egyptian Feminist Union when she was sixteen years old; however she found it too nationalist and secular so she left the group.⁴⁵⁹ Her involvement in groups since her teenage years influenced her recommendation that Muslim women should be active participants in the public. On this subject, Mahmood has quoted al-Ghazali as writing: "Muslim women should play an active role in public, intellectual, and political life (such as running for public office or holding the position of a judge), with the important caveat that these responsibilities should not interfere with what she considers to be women's divinely ordained obligations to their immediate kin (al-Hashimi 1990)."⁴⁶⁰ However, she is against Muslim nations having women presidents or prime ministers. This view of public positions and political activism by al-Ghazali did not correspond with that of the male religious institution of her

⁴⁵⁸ Tripp in Rahnema, 158.

⁴⁵⁹ Mahmood, 69.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid, 70.

generation. She often stated in her speeches and writings that Muslim women and men were equally urged to worship God. Mahmood points out that this modernist religious activism by al-Ghazali demonstrates “the histories of the Islamism and secular liberalism are intimately connected, a connection that is, nonetheless, saturated with tensions and ambivalences.”⁴⁶¹

Both Qutb and al-Ghazali were drawn in by national and anti-imperial movements at young ages, yet, the movement could not hold them. Both joined the Muslim Brothers and rejected Arab nationalism and Nasirism. The nationalist movement was lacking, and once Nasir passed his peak in immense popularity and the Egyptian government’s failures became more obvious and less forgivable in the eyes of the Egyptian people, the Islamist movement gained momentum and ammunition to condemn and blame Nasirism and Arab nationalism for Egypt’s distress. Wars, poverty, corruption, and poor foreign and domestic policies plagued Egypt during the 1950s and 1960s. Under Anwar Sadat in the 1970s, when the new President tried to wipe out the former president’s legacy and any trace of Nasirism, he reached out to the Muslim Brothers. *Shari‘ah* was allowed to be the foundation of the Egyptian constitution, although “in actual practice the *shari‘ah* has been restricted to the domain of personal status law in accord with the modernist logic of keeping religion domesticated within the private realm,”⁴⁶² Mahmood clarified.

⁴⁶¹ Mahmood., 70.

⁴⁶² Ibid, 77.

Nevertheless, by doing so, Egypt was embracing an Islamic identity, which is what the nationalists tried to accomplish while controlling the armed wing of the Islamists and the violence committed. Eventually, the very violence the Egyptian authorities were attempting to clamp down on was perpetrated against President Sadat in 1981 when he was assassinated on the 6th of October. Restraining the Islamist violence in Egypt continued to be a problem for authorities even into the 1990s. In 1992, an anti-terror law was passed in the Egyptian government increasing the power of the police to detain and arrest suspected terrorists. According to Mahmood, Egypt has since then been continuing their crack down on opposition: “Since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, the Egyptian government has capitalized on the U.S.-sponsored ‘war on terrorism’ to further quell Islamist opposition and to generally ban any form of political dissent.”⁴⁶³

Professor of Islamic studies, Carl Ernst briefly summarizes the situation of post-colonial Muslim countries: “Through the new communications technologies unleashed by globalization, Islam became a badge of transnational solidarity against European invaders. In the nineteenth century, nationalism spread as a concept of ‘imagined community’ by which people identified themselves as part of a theoretical society that joined them to multitudes of strangers.”⁴⁶⁴ In conclusion, the nationalist and Islamist movements in Nasirist Egypt were closely

⁴⁶³ Mahmood., 76, note 91.

⁴⁶⁴ Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 2003, 203.

integrated and strived for similar goals such as independence from foreign rule, social justice, and reform. However, after the withdrawal of colonial authority from Egypt, Islamist dissatisfaction grew with the secular, liberal, and nationalist government under President Nasir (1952-1970). Early in the post-colonial period, Egypt suffered a schism between Egyptians either following Arab nationalists led by Nasirists or Islamists led by the Muslim Brothers. This section described the opposing viewpoints of the Islamists and nationalist on the proper manner of governing Egypt after European withdrawal and how women activists played roles in both movements. The Islamists resisted the nationalist's un-Islamic laws and socialist reforms, and finally to conclude two members of the Muslim Brothers were briefly described to explain their role in the resistance against Nasirist Egypt, giving a detailed insight into the political and international setting in which the Egyptian women's movement developed during the second half of the twentieth century.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

Al-Haraka an-nisa'iyya in Egypt experienced many transformations in the late nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century, in addition to many hurdles from society, government, and al-Azhar. Through the endurance of this movement, it thrived by way of the press, social activities and charities, public lectures, nationalist resistance, public protests, and national and international women's conferences. The main obstacle that hindered women's organizations such as the EFU and Bint an-Neel Union from advancing as far as they aspired was the continuous negotiated control between the secular state and the religious establishment, which led to the consequent authority of the government over the public domain and the command over the private domain by religion. Women, who were subjugated in both the public and private domains of Egyptian society, were kept out of this arrangement which concerned their lives most directly and were secluded in the latter. However, by the onset of the twentieth century, women began increasingly venturing into the public sphere. After women established a burgeoning press, began receiving education and teaching, they gradually entered the public sphere at first on a small scale to attend lectures and such. However, the definitive and unmistakable point of no return was the moment Egyptian women for the first time publicly protested in 1919 against British occupation. Since women in Islam were guaranteed specific financial, legal, and marital rights, the Egyptian women's rights movement used

the *Qur'an* and *sunnah* as their tools in their calls for reform and in demands their rights be implemented properly and justly.

The two main competing nationalist and Islamist movements always promised support to the women's rights movement, and as a result, gained support from women. However, the secular and religious agendas of the nationalist and Islamist movements respectively did not place women's rights as a priority and that did not ever change significantly. Although it was slightly less difficult to contend with the Egyptian government in power in the early 1950s, the women's rights movement challenged the secular nationalists and the conservative Islamists for equal political rights and freedom, equal education, and reform in personal status laws, which were in fact pledged to the women's movement. Any progress by the women's rights movement in Egypt were accomplished at a sluggish rate and required daring confrontation and encouragement from the likes of Huda Sha'rawi, Nabawiyya Musa, and Malak Hifni Nassef, among many others and other generations who dedicated their lives to empower the Egyptian woman.

The diverse women's movement frequently confronted injustices and hurdles in society with a united and collective front, despite some rivalries and inter-organizational conflicts. Regardless of occasional inharmonious relations between women's groups, the knowledge that unity was essential was imperative to leaders of the movement. Gaining political rights and education were issues that concerned women as a whole and were common ground for the vast spectrum of women's groups to support each other. The women's groups differed mainly

in what they focused on but not in their over-all goals. The women's rights movement was divided along political and religious lines just as the men Islamist and nationalist leaders, writers, and reformers were. However, where as these men comprised fixed opposing forces in the political, religious, and social issues, for women these lines were not as clear cut and were blurred because women on both sides advocated the same causes such as marriage reform and equal education. It is difficult to categorize the leaders of this movement. However, this study clarified the differences between the groups within the movement by exploring the boundaries between them or shared patterns that brought together women of one mind to create charitable and social activist organizations.

The three main factions of the women's rights movement during twentieth century Egypt were the moderate secular nationalists led by Huda Sha'rawi, the conservative Islamists led by Zainab al-Ghazali, and the relatively radical and more liberal groups led by Durriyah Shafiq. This study recounted the history of the connections made by these differing factions and how they cooperated and united more often than not in order to achieve reform in society, politics, religion, and education. It begins with a review of the sources used and an explanation of the definitions of the terms chosen to categorize the groups and individuals discussed in the study. The second chapter is dedicated to women and nineteenth and twentieth century *shari'ah*, which determined the status of women. Next, is a chapter devoted to the initial groups of women activists and feminists in addition to individual sections on each of Huda Sha'rawi, Nabawiyya Musa, and Malak

Hifni Nassef, which also include their individual accomplishments as well as their contributions and overall efforts to the movement as a whole. The chapter concluded with a section on Huda and Nabawiyya and their unique individual resistance to the restrictions they faced in Egyptian society. The final and fourth chapter gave a concise background into the political situation in Egypt after the British presence. Its purpose was to give context to the Egyptian women's rights movement and its position in the struggle for power between the nationalists and the Islamists. This final chapter, described the time period of which was the backdrop of Zainab al-Ghazali's and Durriya Shafiq's activism. The lives and activism of each were briefly delved into.

The main concerns women had from both the secular and religious movements were to demand protected equal rights and amendments from the Egyptian government as well as articulate fervent nationalist anti-British sentiments. Regardless to the authorities, women from both sides of the spectrum usually were in a conflict with them whether it was the British before 1952, or the Nasirist regime. Women joined forces when it was truly necessary in order to demonstrate the vital necessity of their main goals which were plain and simple: social justice, reform to the personal status laws, equality in politics and educations; and to also demonstrate their unity and solidarity against the authorities holding them back.

Although each faction resisted in separate and different manners, it was still executed in unity. Aside from their goals being the same, they both relied

and used Islam and its rights towards women to bring about the change they sought; some more than others. They collectively advocated the same goals. Yet, the paths they chose were different. The moderate feminists as a group, although not especially overtly religious, called for equality, abandoning seclusion, and unveiling and used the *Qur'an* and *sunnah* to justify these calls. The women Islamists were staunch believers that in order to have a just and ideal society, the Egyptian government must follow Islamic laws which they demanded. Both movements displayed passionate anti-imperialist sentiments, and demanded the British withdraw their influence from Egypt. Nevertheless, the main difference between both of these movements was that moderate feminists hoped to model Egypt after a European example by taking certain principles and adapting them into the Egyptian culture as a way to prosper and women would become on equal footing in terms of educational and social advancement. The Islamists, however, influenced by Islamic reformers believed it was possible to be pious and modern at the same time and did not valorize the west.

The common theme throughout the history of the Egyptian women's rights movement was unity through disunity and convergence despite divergence. Their cooperation demonstrated the possibility of these two sides coming together to form a viable and effective coalition between secular leaning feminists and devout Islamists. This however was not demonstrated by their male counterparts in the nationalist and Islamist movements. The Islamist women's progressive Islam merged with the feminist agenda of the moderate feminists to advance and

liberate Egyptian women was attainable. The women Islamists aligning with the feminists in order to demand reform from the government did not compromise their faith or piety, and similarly, by the feminists joining with the women Islamist they did not compromise their own beliefs in a more modern society. The twentieth century witnessed some significant achievements by the women's movement as a whole and by women members as individuals. In the early decades of the twentieth century women made changes and advancements such as renouncing seclusion, entering higher education, and minor changes to the personal status laws. A major change was the right to vote and run for parliament in 1956. One of the legacies left by those generations of women's activists was that success was attainable through unity and partnership.

There is a perception that feminism in Egypt experienced a setback during the wave of conservatism of the late half of the twentieth century. The significance of this trend is that it reflects to some extent the overturn of the Nasirist vision for Egypt and a path toward conservative Islamism. Moreover, the trend illustrates the post-1967 negative response to the defeats and setbacks of post-colonial secular societies in the Middle East. The significance of this development in relation to this study suggests that in spite of the alliance between secular and religious women of the women's movement, the religious segment of society eventually secured more authority, popularity, and energy in Egypt. As a result of this shift, there is an indication that interaction and evolution of the movement that occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, allowed feminism, or

women's activism, while wearing *hijab* to be no longer mutually exclusive as it had been in the past.

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