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# The effects of western feminist ideology on Muslim feminists

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# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

## MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

# THESIS

**THE EFFECTS OF WESTERN FEMINIST IDEOLOGY ON MUSLIM FEMINISTS**

by

Rochelle S. Whitcher

March 2005

Thesis Advisor:                 Anne Marie Baylouny
Second Reader:               James Russell

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**THE EFFECTS OF WESTERN FEMINIST IDEOLOGY ON MUSLIM FEMINISTS**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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# ABSTRACT

Women are potent symbols of identity. They signify a vision of society that identifies a nation. The Middle East provides a perfect example of this. It has one of the highest rates of population growth in the world, yet maintains one of the lowest literacy rates and labor force participation among women. This has a direct impact on their ability to be seen as modern states. Furthermore the Middle East has come under attack for having one of the poorest records of human rights, particularly in reference to women. Contrary to this implication Middle Eastern women have taken extremely active roles in the gender debate and the socio-political struggles within their societies. The results of this participation have yielded a number of different interpretations of what it means to be a feminist and if this title is even something that Muslim women want. It has also created a very complex relationship between the west and western feminism which has deep implications in contemporary gender politics.

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# I.    INTRODUCTION

Women have become potent symbols of identity throughout the world. They are mothers, wives, and sisters and in these roles are the caretakers of culture, enacting a vision of society that has the potential to define a nation. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Middle East. The Middle East encompasses over 20 different countries with a diverse array of languages, histories, and cultures yet when people talk about the Middle East they instantly identify it with the religion that ties all of these countries together, Islam. Islam is seen as one of the main factors in the subjugation of women in these countries. This simplistic analysis is problematic because it addresses the Middle East as a monolithic entity that is inherently imbued with biases. Left unaddressed is the rich socio-cultural intricacies involved in gender relations in these countries. [1]

The Middle East has one of the highest rates of population growth in the world, yet maintains one of the lowest literacy rates and labor force participation among women. This has a direct impact on their ability to be seen as modern states. In their bid to modernize the Middle East has come under attack for having one of the poorest records of human rights, particularly in reference to women. Because of this, issues dealing with women's rights have become, "part of an ideological terrain where broader notions of cultural authenticity and integrity are debated and where women's appropriate place and conduct may be made to serve as boundary markers."[2] However, the effective investigation of women and gender relations within Muslim Middle Eastern societies requires the study of the societies within which they are rooted. Additionally it is important to look at the way in which gender and sexuality are articulated socially, verbally, and institutionally. This definition is what creates the boundaries and regulations that confine where, when, and how women are able to engage in the public sector.[3]

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[1] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions" in Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East p 2.

[2] Deniz Kandiyoti, "Women, Islam, and the State: A Comparative Approach," in Comparing Muslim Societies: Knowledge and the State in a World Civilization, p246.

[3] Many theorists divide society into the private and public sectors-where women tend to have domain in the private sector and men tend to dominate the public. It is this division that is so hard for "western" feminists to reconcile.

This thesis will show that contrary to mainstream "western" thought Middle Eastern women have taken active roles in the gender debates and socio-political struggles within their societies throughout the last couple of centuries. There has been a stream of feminist thought that has been articulated through literature, participation in the public sphere, and the creation and maintenance of women's societies that are focused on improving the condition of women. However, the results of this participation have yielded very different interpretations of what "feminism" and the "feminist movements" are and what the role of women in society should be. These differing interpretations create a very complex relationship between the "west" and "western feminism" and its implications in contemporary Muslim gender politics.

This relationship is further complicated by the imposition of western feminist ideals and ideology on Muslim societies which has been harmful in the creation of a dialogue about gender politics in the Middle East. Scholars argue that recent trends in the Middle East emphasize a reversal in the gains that women have made in last couple of decades, this is supported by the fact that more and more women are freely choosing to veil, thereby supposedly subjugating themselves to the will of the male portion of their society. This assertion has imbued the veil with a political, cultural, and social status the goes far beyond its initial significance. In addition women in the Middle East have continued to be extremely politically active and in some instances have embraced the veil as a tool to effectively work within the social, cultural and political system that is currently in place.

This thesis is important because in the last decade or so there has been a division within the ranks of the feminist movements in the Middle East. Many of the traditional feminist movements in the Middle East were secular movements based on western models and espoused western ideologies. However this type of movement was often in direct contention with the powerful religious elite because in some instances it flaunted basic religious doctrine and in others it challenged the patriarchal structure of Islam itself. Many of the religious elite saw this rebellion by women as a symptom of a bigger problem, western imperialism, something that had to be eradicated at any cost. This tension threatened the power relationship between the political elite and the religious elite

often threatening the stability of the state. Because of these factors, government policies were implemented that were directed at effectively controlling or completely destroying these movements.

The 1990's saw the emergence of a new thread of feminist dialogue-one that identified and interacted within the bounds of Islam. Muslim women realized that they did not have to completely abandon their socio-cultural identities to have a voice and they did not have to define themselves based on western ideologies and could instead redefine themselves within the bounds of Islam.

Furthermore, the Middle East has become the battlefield where Islam and western ideologies are engaged in fight for supremacy. Intrinsically enmeshed in this fight is the debate about gender and the role of women in the Middle East. To further fuel the debate in 2004 the French National Assembly passed a law banning "conspicuous religious symbols" to include Jewish skull caps, *hijab*, and large crosses.[4] A similar law was conceived in Germany a couple of months later refocusing the debate about Muslim women and gender roles in Islam to that of the nature of a piece of clothing. In all of these instances decisions are being made that are eerily similar to those made by Riza Shah in 1977 when he mandated the forced un-veiling of women in Iran in an effort to modernize. In all of these cases women are not given the choice to be active participants in their fate, their freedoms were mandated by a power hierarchy that does not in most cases directly represent or include them.

The language and ideologies used by the media and the leadership of western democratic societies, when discussing the Middle East, explicitly disregard the historical evidence of a women's movement in the Middle East.  It paints them as subdued victims who are unable to effect change. This is dangerous because it removes a large portion of the population from the debate.

Therefore, through the following methodology, this thesis will attempt to show that the evolution of the women's movement in the Middle East has been effective at causing change throughout the history of the Middle East and that recent trends towards a

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[4] "France Awaits Headscarves Report" at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3307995.stm. *Hijab* refers to modest Islamic dress and consists of a full length covering and includes a head scarf.  Last date accessed 02/05.

more Islamic type of feminism is a result of the natural progression away from western ideologies. This does not mean that women in the Middle East are abandoning the search for women's rights but that they are searching for sources of feminism within the existing socio-cultural context and using indigenous sources instead of importing ideologies. The second chapter focuses on defining sexuality, Islamic feminism, and gender. The third chapter traces the historical roots of the women's movement in Egypt and the fourth chapter traces the historical roots of the women's movement in Iran. Both of these countries are vastly different and yet have exhibited similar patterns of revolution and growth which are directly tied to the women's movement.

Chapter II discusses the intrinsic problems with using western definitions, terminology, and ideology when talking about a distinctly non–western entity. Part of the problem is that western feminist discourses dealing with gender in the Middle East bring with them biases that treat the Middle East as a monolithic entity instead of addressing each case individually. This type of analysis is extremely problematic because it does not address gender issues in the social, religious, and political context within which they exist and imposes ideas and preferences taken from the west, and presumed to be monolithic there-but are neither agreed upon nor implemented in the west itself. Edward Said identifies this phenomenon in his book, <u>Orientalism.</u> Additionally, there are different definitions of what gender, sexuality, and feminism are and these definitions can lend very different meanings to social and cultural relationships.

The Middle East has become increasingly important in the last decade or so. Due to this the west has been forced to pay more attention to what is going on in the region. The recent trend towards a more fundamental religious ideology is troubling in that it can effectively destroy the precious balance of power that maintains the stability of the region. In efforts to maintain this balance of power the west has continually pushed the idea of modernization. It is within this context that the gender debate has been waged. This is problematic because it does not address all of the aspects of the debate and in actuality removes women as agents and makes them passive participants. It also does not address the recent trend of "modern," highly educated women in the Middle East turning away from western ideas of modernization and embracing and creating their own feminist identity.

This chapter also addresses an emerging trend towards a new feminist paradigm that seeks to remove itself from western feminist ideas. It will look at the implications of the Islamic feminist movement and how this movement has re-focused on Islam as the sole defining characteristic of the movement. The Middle East is very important to the US and continues to define policy. The political, social, and cultural implications of policy are not always obvious to the people making the policy. This is inherently dangerous because policy in the Middle East is created by elites for elites and does not address the marginalized portions of society, to include women. It also impacts foreign relations, in that the west is still trying to import its ideological framework as a tool to modernize instead of working within the existing framework. This serves to radicalize the portions of society that may not have been radicalized previously.

Chapter III looks at the history of feminist movements in Egypt which purports to be a modern secular democratic country. The vision of women in Egypt at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was one of seclusion, subjugation, and overt sexuality which were often exaggerated in the accounts of European travelers.[5] This vision would be drastically altered in the next two centuries. Due to the political machinations of Mehmed Ali and his thrust towards modernization, women would be pushed into the public arena making them political actors. This process was accelerated with the intrusion of colonial powers. This intrusion created an avenue of exposure to other cultures and societies that had not previously existed. It also initiated and international debate on gender politics. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century women in Egypt had access to a multitude of different social, political, and cultural ideologies. Such exposure would have a lasting effect on how women, as political actors, responded to and worked within the framework of institutions that existed in their societies.

Chapter IV looks at the role of women in Iran an Islamic theocratic state. The role of women in Iran paralleled that of women in Egypt. It has been a give and take relationship between the state apparatus, its political and ideological ties, and society in general. Prior to the revolution in 1979 Iran was moving fast towards a "modernization" which forced reforms onto society from the top down. The reforms did not correspond to

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[5] Edward W. Said. <u>Orietalism</u>, Vintage Books, New York, 1978.

a societal movement. Additionally, many of the Shah's policies were directed at excluding political parties and denying group participation in the state. These factors gave impetus to the revolutionary movement. In 1979 when Iran became the Islamic Republic of Iran, many of the rights and freedoms that had been imposed by the Shah and the state apparatus were revised. Women were now removed from a "public sphere" and relegated to the "private sphere." They were however, able to work within these confines and an even more highly politicized social movement evolved. This movement has steadily been working to reinstate the rights that were repealed in the revolution of 1979.

# II.    FEMINIST AND GENDER IDEOLOGIES

## A.    INTRODUCTION

The late twentieth century marked a turning point in Muslim women's intellectual engagement with their religion. Initially, many Muslim women searching for emancipation denounced Islam as the leading causal factor in the gender specific socio-cultural prescriptions, which subjugated them. On the whole, the assumption was that Islam was inherently patriarchal and due to this was the root cause of subjugation. This was evidenced in its dictums regarding veiling, marriage, and familial obligations and rights. Following the vein of this argument, women felt that the restrictive inherent nature of Islam stopped them being able to fight within the system. In response, they disengaged from their religion and in turn embraced a completely different ideology, western feminist ideology.[6] Western feminist ideology provided a viable alternative, for a while. However, in recent years there has been a new trend in feminist thought in the Middle East. In part, this is due to the overwhelming social pressures these women face from the rising tide of Islamist ideology. It is also in response to a growing need for socio-cultural authenticity and legitimacy, independent of western ideologies, which has ultimately led these women to reject western feminist ideology. Women are now returning to the texts of their faith and working within the confines of an Islamic ideology to reclaim their Islamic rights. This new trend has created a new set of problems for, not only people researching the women's movement in the Middle East, but for the women living the women's movement, as well. It raises numerous issues that work to divide the women's movement in the Middle East. This dividing line is very dramatic and is forcing women to take positions on either one side or the other. It tends to overlook the possibility of a middle ground while alternately neglecting the reality within which most women exist.

This chapter will discuss the intrinsic problems with using western definitions, terminology, and ideology when talking about a distinctly non–western entity. Part of the problem with western feminist discourse about gender in the Middle East, is that they

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[6] Haleh Afshar, Women in the Middle East: Perceptions, Realities and Struggles for Liberation. pp. 7-10.

bring with them biases that treat the Middle East as a monolithic entity, instead of addressing each case individually. This type of analysis is extremely problematic because, it does not address gender issues in the social, religious, and political context within which they exist. Furthermore, it imposes ideas and preferences taken from the west, which are presumed to be true, but are neither agreed upon, nor universally implemented in the west itself. Edward Said identifies the root of this phenomenon in his book, Orientalism.[7] Lending even more confusion to the issue is the fact that there are a variety of different definitions for gender, sexuality, and feminism. These definitions, depending on the context within which they are used, can lend very different meanings to social and cultural relationships.

This chapter will also address the emerging trend toward a new feminist paradigm which seeks to completely remove itself from western feminist ideology. This move has a number of political, social, and cultural implications. The new Islamic feminist movement has re-focused on Islam as the sole defining characteristic of the movement. They have, in some cases, aligned themselves with more radical, male oriented groups that often exist on the margins of society. This is inherently dangerous because, policy in the Middle East is created by elites for elites and does not address the marginalized portions of society, to include women. It also impacts foreign relations, in that the west is still trying to import its ideological framework as a tool to modernize, instead of working within the existing framework. This serves to radicalize even larger portions of society that may have previously existed in the middle ground. The largest part of the problem is the west is unable to recognize that a framework already exists in the Middle East.

## B. ORIENTALISM

Women are potent symbols of identity. They are the mother, wives, and sisters and as such are often used to define a nation. They represent not only economic and political power but "symbolic power" as well. Symbolic power is often represented in

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[7] Edward Said's book Orientalism, describes a phenomenon that pervaded western society throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Interestingly enough there have been various fields of study devoted entirely to the Orient.

language, religion, education, art, and ideology.[8] It is in the realm of these institutions, that women's participation has become much more visible in the last century or so. This increased visibility has changed the balance of power and provided a new balance that is dependant on a more real experience. However, contrary to the increased participation of women in the social and political sphere, somehow their ability to mimic western dress and western modes of behavior has remained a causal factor in the translation of their "modernity."

For centuries, western thought has used the justification of colonial power relationships with Third World countries to dominate the Middle East. This is seen in the "traditional 'orientalising' invention of [Muslim] women."[9] These claims are further substantiated by the fact that the legal and social status of women in the Middle East is perceived as being of inferior quality than that of women anywhere else. This myth is perpetuated by high birth rates, low literacy rates, and low female labor force participation. It is also seen in the rhetoric of the religious apparatus, which is often followed by reinforcing state laws and regulations. Pious women are often portrayed as increasingly domestic, with their sole purpose in life being identified as that of good wives and mothers. Other than these basic functions, these women have nothing of value to offer society. Furthermore, a strong social argument exists that women are different beings, with difference habitually being linked to inferior. This mentality dates back as far as written history. In some cases, women have been able to overcome this obstacle and to some degree have obtained legal, if not socio-cultural equality with men. For many reasons this level of equality has not been embraced in the Middle East. There are many reasons behind this inequality. It is partly due to the continued portrayal of women as the harbingers of lust and manifestation of sinful thoughts and actions. This depiction of women is not unique to women in the Middle East. It is in fact a larger part of the rhetoric regarding women throughout the world. So why are Muslim women unable to attain the level of socio-cultural equality that a typical western woman enjoys?

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8 Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi, "Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East Through Voice and Experience," pp 2-7

9 Malika Mehdid, "A Western Invention of Arab Womenhood: The 'Oriental' Female" in Women in the Middle East: Perceptions, Realities, and Struggles for Liberation, ed. Haleh Afshar, p18.

One of the main factors behind this question is the distinction between Muslim women and western women. This distinction is based on the biased creation of a western model of modern society in juxtaposition to the creation of an eastern despotic 'oriental' society.

In 1978, Edward Said sought to describe and create a method of defining the relationship between the east and the west. He would create an ideology, called Orientalism, to explain the pervasive stereotyping and continued western domination of a set geographical area called the Orient. This area encompassed a wide diversity of different cultural identities. Accordingly Said defines Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and the Occident."[10] He based his ideology on the premise that the world was inherently divided into two spheres. He was specifically commenting on how "others" view literature. This was especially seen in literature. On one side stood the Occident, or more accurately the modern secular west and on the other side stood the Orient, which included a large portion of the Middle East and parts of North Africa. This distinction pits a modern superior ideological identity against what was construed as a lesser identity. It also helps create a relationship that is based on the distinct domination of one identity over the other, which fuels biases based on racial/ethnic differences. Furthermore, Said claims that this ideology has affected and infected thinking about the Middle East to such an extent that even today most people cannot differentiate between what is real and what is an inherent prescription of Orientalism. This supposition has important consequences in the ability of the west to effectively engage Middle Eastern countries.

First and foremost, if this distinction is as prevalent today as it once was, there can be no true interaction between the Occident and the Orient. Accordingly, the level and depth of interaction possible between the two spheres is directly dependent on how they identify themselves. This is based on the number of biases which are inherent in the actual distinction between the two identities. When the distinction is made, it becomes apparent that a group embraces the implications and all of the baggage explicitly tied to the identity that they have embraced. Moreover, they have identified themselves on the grounds that there is something different and often superior, which effectively separates

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10 Said, Orientalism, p.4.

one group from the other. This type of mentality does not invite reasonable exploration or interaction between the two identities. This interaction is most noticeable in the representation of women in early literature and images of the Middle East.

The image of the Muslim world that began to emerge as early as the seventeenth century, was one of an exotic despotic land full of intrigue, sex, and any number of things inherently pagan. These images were conveyed to the western public, through popular travel accounts, written exclusively by men. Embedded within these accounts were images of a culture, in which women were secluded and subjugated by means of the *harem.* 'Oriental' women were portrayed as overtly sexual objects which were owned by men. As a result of this seclusion, women's status in society, even though mostly unobserved, was declared tantamount to slavery. Furthermore, European observers asserted that an inherent tyrannical nature seemed to exist within societies in the Orient. This relationship could be seen in both the subject/ruler relationship and the male/female relationship. These observations created a European narrative that was based on a sense of superiority. It also created a set of generalities about a culture that further solidified an "us" and "them" identity. Additionally, these accounts helped produced a vast array of literature that purported an understanding of Muslin culture, Muslim women and Muslim sexuality.[11]

This body of literature established an Oriental standard of sexuality that lay in direct opposition to the image of respectable bourgeoisie European women. Muslim women were portrayed in images that were superficially reminiscent of 'Arabian Nights.' Without taking into account that 'Arabian Nights' was arguably a piece of feminist fiction. They were framed within an overall image of eroticism, perversity, and lushness.[12] All of which derived from an imaginary construct of Muslim sexuality as something that was lascivious and promiscuous.[13] A number of postcards were taken depicting Muslim women in the *harem*. These women were often seen reclining in sexually provocative poses, half-dressed in clothing that revealed more than it covered. The image was enhanced by suppositions that Muslim women were secluded to the point

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[11] Said, Orientalism, pp. 185-90.

[12] Mehdid, pp. 23-25.

[13] Ibid.

that were forced to spend their days engaged in idle gossip and smoking. They had no function in society other than pleasure and reproduction. Furthermore, their excursions outside the walls of the *harem,* though few and far between, were reduced to social visits, which often included visits to sorcerers and/or cemeteries. This only added to the western image of Muslim peoples as backwards and superstitious.

Moreover, Muslim women were made to appear detached from any temporal or spatial reality. These suppositions served to set Muslim women apart, as a distinct group, from the rest of society.[14] In an even more creative assault on the sexuality of Muslim women, many western writers portrayed them as nebulous creatures devoid of depth and deprived of a consciousness. In these early depictions of Oriental femininity, Muslim women would now assume dual identities, that of the silent and covered beast of burden and that of the half-naked sexual *harem* princess. More often than not, these identities would overlap in a confusion of roles and symbols that had no base in reality. They were in fact, purely the construct of the Orientalist's imagination. In this instance, Orientalists effectively manipulated the meaning of Muslim femininity to effectively dehumanize Muslim women. The monotonous repetition of these images throughout the pages of early western literature eradicated any type of individuality in Muslim women. Consequently, all Muslim women were relegated to the role of the *harem,* which would become the most pervasive structure of Orientalist perceptions. Because actual *harem* life was mostly unobserved, these western manifestations would render the real lives and experiences of Muslim women as moot and invisible.[15] These images, though mostly the product of fantasy, would pervade western thought about the Middle East for centuries. Even when factual evidence proved that Muslim women were not what they had been portrayed as, the Oriental images persisted.

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[14] Mehdid, pp. 23-25.

[15]. Ibid.

## C. FROM FEMINISM TO GENDER

Feminism is a loaded term. It has a variety of definitions and can refer to a wide variety of different social movements. Originally, it evolved in a particular historical context and as such carries with it a certain amount of definitional baggage. It was introduced in a French journal in the 1880s to criticize male predominance. The women using the term sought to make claims for rights women had been promised in the rhetoric of the French Revolution. Since then, it has evolved into a complex ideology that encompasses a variety of different social, cultural, and religious movements, all claiming to represent the true identity of a woman. However, for the purpose of this thesis, feminism will refer to the body of work concerned with the social, political, and economic equality of women.

Prior to the last thirty or so years, the participation of women in the social sciences has been minimal at best. Many of the works and theories established prior to the 1970s were written and researched from a purely androcentric bias.[16] Women seemed to be absent as social actors. This created a weakness in the explanatory framework of most social studies. Furthermore, in the economic arena, women's unpaid labor had in the past not been counted. This rendered it all but invisible, even thought it was a large factor in the stability and reproduction of the counted labor force. In an effort to fix the inherent problems with these areas of study, several different ideological and feminist groups emerged to challenge the status quo. These were smaller off-shoots, but produced a much larger ideological base. Eventually, it would grow to encompass a number of different beliefs and ideas tied into what it meant to be a feminist. Subsequently, a debate began questioning whether or not this title was something that women in the Middle East wanted or identified with. All of these issues tied neatly into the debate about what represented the true identity of a Muslim woman, while also raising the question about whether or not there could be a monolithic definition of a Muslim woman.

Most liberal feminists believed that the basic cause of women's universal subordination was located in the customary and legal constraints that were placed on a

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[16] Kandiyoti, p. 3.

woman's access to the "public sphere."[17] These constraints are created based on a level of prejudice between the masculine and the feminine, a division inherently existing in any given society. However, this approach has been discounted in recent years because it has been unable to create a framework that explicitly defines the boundaries of the theory. It has also failed to investigate the deeply-rooted nature of gender subordination.[18] While working to create a cohesive framework, two very different strains of feminist thought emerged. Radical feminists tended to focus on imbedded patriarchy and patriarchal structures as the sole force behind male domination. It was the continued reinforcement of these types of structures, combined with an inherent masculine bias that was responsible for the continued oppression of women. The most basic evidence of this type of oppression was the inability of women to control their most basic rights i.e. their sexuality and procreative capacity. This ideology, however, is unable to explain the historical and cultural variants in gender relations which exist and have existed worldwide. Furthermore, questions were raised about the suitability of presenting women as a self-evident category. All of these questions and debates would create a gradual shift away from the idea of feminism as the best way to study and distinguish society, to a broader categorical field of study, gender. This transformation can be traced through a series of different paths of discussion and research related specifically to women and the women question in the Middle East.

Feminist scholarship has taken a distinct path in the Middle East, which is directly tied to the historical narrative of a continued cultural and religious assault by the west. It has been forced to focus internally, having to grapple with certain historical events that are specific to the area. At the same time, it has maintained an international focus. It has maintained a constant dialogue with a broader expanse of feminist thought and scholarship. This dialogue has created an atmosphere that is at times congenial and at others adversarial. This conflicting relationship has evolved in an atmosphere awash in highly politicized and emotionally charged events that have wielded an enormous amount

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[17] Valentine Moghadam, Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East, p. 16.

[18] Deniz Kandiyoti, Gendering the Middle East, p 8

of pressure and influence on the feminist movement in the Middle East.[19] Accordingly, Deniz Kandiyoti identifies four distinct phases dividing the feminist movement in the Middle East.[20]

The first wave of feminist ideology in the Middle East emerged between the nineteenth and early twentieth century, under the auspices of colonial and post-colonial state formation. It grew out of a number of social movements concerned with the contamination of cultural values and identity by colonial powers. Women were actively recruited to participate as national actors, in a collective identity against a specific identifiable foe. However, their ability as national actors was still bounded by culturally accepted "feminine" boundaries, which were written by their male counterparts. Often the actions taken during and after the protests served to reaffirm these boundaries. Furthermore, this type of movement developed a symbiotic relationship, which was fostered by the context within which it was created. Islam was seen as the identifying marker of the authentic social and cultural identity, in direct contrast to the imported western version of modern society and culture. By virtue of this relationship, the feminist movement faced a choice: it could accept that Islam was inherently oppressive or it could deny that Islam was inherently oppressive.[21]

If one accepted the first premise, then the only way to move forward would be to actively disengage from the patriarchal structure of Islam when dealing with gender issues. This premise was embraced by the Mohammed Reza Shah in Iran and further implemented by his son, the Shah. It was evidenced in their state mandated reforms that flew in the face of the *ulama* and *shari'ah*.[22] These reforms denied the role of Islam in the sacred sphere of the family, while at the same time removing the *ulama* as the sole

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[19]. Deniz Kandiyoti, Gendering the Middle East, p. 8.

[20] Advances in the role of women in the Middle East have been selectively injected into studies about the Middle East. Within this framework an enduring legacy of imperialism still exists. This legacy stifles further exploration into the cultural processes and internal institutions which are essential to the construction of gender hierarchies and power subordination.

[21]This division is seen in both Egypt and Iran. It emerged in the mid twentieth century and has been directly involved in the debate between western feminism and Islamic feminism. It has also created an emerging body of research and literature where women are reclaiming their rights based on study and exploration of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*.

[22] The Shii *ulama* are a very hierarchically structured clergy who are schooled in Islamic sources. In Iran they exercise the power to practice *ejtehad*. Through this practice they can interpret the *Qur'an* and *hadith* to create sacred laws. The laws are called *shari'ah*.

proprietors of establishing gender roles. They also effectively removed women's agency, arguably making the reforms just as oppressive as the previous situation. The inability of women to affect their own lives would play a large role in the downfall of Reza Shah as well as his son. The tension between the state and the *ulama* put women in a precarious position. On one hand, they were being told that they now had more rights and freedoms. On the other hand, as is often the case, when women pressed too hard for what they were promised, they were often ostracized by their communities. Furthermore, the Shah did not so much offer rights to women as try to establish what he perceived as indicators of a modern state. Many women saw through the rhetoric of the reforms and recognized them for what they were, a state-directed grab for power. This, and the fact that the *ulama* were so removed from state apparatus, yet still maintained a wide power base, de-legitimized the Shah's modernization efforts.

In Egypt, in the early stages of the feminist movement this same premise was embraced with similar results. Initially, some western educated, Egyptian women embraced the idea that Islam was the problem. Their assertions were based on the fact that laws and regulations that served to subjugate women were created by the religious establishment. Women were seen as chattel. They were, for all intents and purposes, owned by their father and brothers until they were transferred to a husband. Their education and rights were secondary to those of their male siblings. It is worth pointing out that during this time period, unlike western women, Muslim women were able to own property, independent of their husbands. However, women, especially upper and middle class women in Egypt, had more access to foreign ideas and education. This access and the expanding economy resulted in a top down movement of modernization or what some term westernization. These conflicting images of womanhood would create a resulting tide of tension within the socio-cultural sphere that would result in a division between the feminist movement and the Islamist women's movement in Egypt. All of these factors combined to create the perfect recipe for the revolution, or more correctly the evolution, of the feminist movement in the Middle East.

In the early eighties, an emerging number of young women, the second generation of feminists, felt that they should not have to give up their social and cultural identities to be modern or have rights. This shift in perspectives can be explained by any number of

different factors. One of which was the rising tide of Islamist, or as it has frequently been called fundamentalist, ideology. An important element of this movement was a strong belief in the basic assumption that modernism, which is sometimes described as synonymous with secularism and westernization, was wholly to blame for the moral degeneration of society. The moral and subsequent physical degeneration of society was a direct consequence of society's rejection of Islam as the guiding factor in every aspect of life. Consequently, the only way to cure this problem was to return to the true tenants of Islam and the ideal society that it prescribed. In the confines of this ideal society women had a specifically defined role, which subsequently reinforced the idea of "female domesticity and modesty through a protected and private family with women as the functionary and man as the gatekeeper."[23] For many who advocate this ideology, a women's behavior is not only a symptom of societal degeneration but in some respects the cause of it. It is within the confines of this argument that many Islamists regard gender segregation as a necessary function of society. The concrete restraints of Islamism would force women to undertake a new set of strategies described by Kandiyoti as patriarchal bargains.[24] Many of these bargains and negotiations took the form of subversive techniques, acquiescence, individual co-optation, and collaboration.

Under the weight of patriarchal religious oppression, reinforced by the state, women were forced to adopt strategies which would best serve their purposes. In Iran after the Revolution in 1979 active resistance, in the form of nongovernmental organizations and such, was no longer an effective tool of resistance. They could not deliver, because they were ruthlessly suppressed and regulated by the state. Furthermore, family and communal pressures increased, often forcing women to rethink their positions. In some instances, women embraced the state/religious rules and regulations and in turn became the most aggressive enforcers of these rules and regulations. They would basically act as agents of the state, rooting out women within their community, who resisted or flaunted state regulations. In other instances, women gave into the pressures placed on them by bosses, family members, and the state and quit their jobs and returned

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[23] Shahin Gerami and Melodye Lehnerer, "Women's Agency and Household Diplomacy: Negotiating Fundamentalism," pp. 556-558.

[24] Kandiyoti, pp.10-12. Patriarchal bargains are a set of identified bargains between men and women, where one sex fulfills a certain role in return for the other sex fulfilling a set role.

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to the domestic sphere. At the same time there were women who understood the intricacies of the system. Because of this, they were able to work within the system to achieve their goals, even when that included advanced education and employment. Finally, there were a number of women who learned to operate outside the confines of the system while seemingly complying with the system in place.[25]

Another important factor in the rise of Islamist sentiment was the severely repressive natures of most of the "modern states" in the Middle East. This is especially evident in Egypt and Iran. The legitimacy of the state was often closely tied to the *ulama* and because of this the state had to perfect a precious balancing act between the state's needs and those of the religious elite. As is often the case when there are conflicting agendas, one agenda is marginalized in order for the other to reach its stated goal. The state accomplished this by ruthlessly suppressing anyone who spoke out against the state. Men and women were imprisoned under flimsy excuses and sometimes held for years. It is important to note that these repressive measures were used in the backdrop of political and social marginalization of all groups that did not advocate a pro-state message. They also evolved at a time when the reality of what is was to be Islamic and in the case of Egypt, Arab was being heavily influenced by outside (western) powers.

The second wave was symbolized by an emergence of social science paradigms and developmentalism.[26] During the 1950s and 60s, the role of women in society and the ensuing questions about the roles that they should play, were incorporated into a broader idea of social transformation. This ideology encompassed modernization. The indicators of modernization resided in the development of a given society. This model looked at the traditional role of women, in rural areas, as examples of a lack of modernity juxtaposition to the urban role of women, which was an indicator of modernity. However, this model would prove to be just as problematic as other. It looked at levels of socio-economic development *vis a vis* urbanization, industrialization, and education, in lieu of recognizing culturally specific indicators. This level of superficial analysis tended to

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[25] During the first few years after the revolution and during the Iran/Iraq war many women worked in the black-market. These women were often upper middle class and had numerous external ties. They were able to smuggle in contraband and then resell items such as clothing, china, perfume, which were all banned by the Islamic regime, at a profit. They often held these sales at their homes in upscale neighborhoods under the disguise of tea parties and women's meetings all of which were perfectly legal.

[26] Kandiyoti, pp. 10-12.

create an image of rural people as a homogenous group, which they were not. It also neglected to recognize that with the growth of industry and urban development women tended to lose access to traditional avenues of livelihood and social participation. Furthermore, studies in development judiciously pointed out that, women did not have economic power, in the true sense of the word. Traditionally, women were not the wage earners and in most cases their access to money and the economic market was based on their relationship to a male counterpart.

A woman's lack of economic power was viewed as one of the largest determinants in the unequal partnership between women and men. This paradigm was often reinforced in the household relationship. However, this traditional economic relationship would be challenged with the embracing of industrialization and development. Furthermore, state expansion, economic development, oil wealth, and an increased integration with the world market created a market for state induced changes.[27] Some of these changes included: educational reforms, land reforms, and judicial reforms, some of which served to loosen the restrictive barriers placed on women. Education, in this instance, is a key component in development. It has been shown that an increase in education directly affects fertility rates and labor force participation.[28] Furthermore, education helps create a new stratum of women who often actively seek to better their lives through, employment and political representation even if it is in direct contradiction to social and cultural norms. This contradiction is further complicated by the introduction of western educated and western trained Muslim feminists.

The third wave of feminist scholarship, presented by Kandiyoti, is represented by a dialogue within feminist discourse. This level of discourse is partially enabled by the increased access to western scholarship and education.[29] The open access to western feminist scholarship provided a number of different ways to study gender issues in the Middle East. It also provided a number of different theories that could be selectively incorporated into Middle Eastern studies. The incorporation of these theories into feminist studies in the Middle East provided a vast number of distinctly individual styles

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[27] Moghadam, p. 18.

[28]. Ibid.

[29] Kandiyoti, p. 12.

of scholarship, which were manifested in a rich output of research, literature, and scholarly writings on the Middle East. However, these writings, while providing useful information, complicated the classification of definitive gender identities. They presented a number of contradictory images of the role of women in the Middle East.

On one level, a number of researchers unintentionally set themselves up as sympathetic observers to the plight of women in the Middle East. By taking this position, they created an "us versus them" dichotomy that stifled analysis. This is due to the fact that their analysis was based on the premise that Muslim women were inherently backward when compared to western women. While Muslim women could affect a certain amount of change, they would only be able to achieve a certain level of freedom, because they were constricted by the inherently patriarchal nature of their religion and culture. Consequently, it would never be equal to the level of freedom that women in the west enjoyed. This type of analysis presented a familiar set of problems. It did not address the social and cultural boundaries of gender relationships. On the other hand, there was a significant number of Muslim women scholars who had been western trained, but were limited in their research by virtue of the fact that they belonged to the community they were trying to study. As members of that community these women were restrained by and subject to, the rules and regulations of that community. Finally, there were a number of Muslim women who rejected western academia and theories on the gender roles in the Middle East. These women were more focused on studying their roles with the framework of a national identity and Islam. All of these different levels of analysis created a broad spectrum of study that did not necessarily correspond to concerns presented by western feminist scholarship.[30]

Furthermore, a new level of divergent thought began to emerge in the Middle East. It sought to remove the emphasis on state legislated changes in gender roles and identity. Feminism, in this instance, is a radical challenge to the very premise of Islamic society. In Islam the core ideology is submission to God and his word which is expressed in the *Qur'an* and subsequently the *hadith.[31]* Both of these are or were, depending on the

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[30] Kandiyoti, p. 13.

[31] Qur'an is the holy book of Islam. It is the word of God written by his Prophet Mohammed. Hadith are the traditions and recorded saying or deeds of the Prophet, his companions, or the Imams.

strain of Islam you are studying, eventually translated into *shari'ah*. Behind this argument lies the belief that feminism and the feminist movement is a purely western creation geared toward destroying a society where, the rights of women and gender roles are explicitly defined within the boundaries of a social, religious, and cultural identity. Indeed, the western brand of feminism and feminist ideology seems to place emphasis on the primacy of the individual and their gratification, rather than the community while at the same time denouncing men as the main enemy.[32]

In a society where both men and women face massive political and economic oppression this type of ideology places pressure on the already fragile familial relationships that are a part of the culture. In these cases, women are often forced to renegotiate their patriarchal relationships. They do this, in part, through the reclamation of their rights within the ideological framework of Islam. Women work to show that Islam is not inherently patriarchal but that pre-Islamic patriarchal culture has co-opted Islam and polluted it with tribal and cultural customs. These women have attempted to reclaim Islam by returning to texts as the source of their rights. At the same time, they embrace Islam and work within the confines of their socio-cultural bounds to affect change. It is also relevant that these women reject the term feminist and instead begin to look at a broader categorical definition, which is based on differentiations between genders.

Gender is a defining point in the Middle East, because it "denotes the meanings given to masculine and feminine, asymmetrical power relations between the sexes, and the ways that men and women are differently situated in and affected by social processes."[33] It determines the amount of education one will receive, the legal rights a person has, and the social barriers a person will be required to face throughout their lives. It is a system which is culturally constructed, to create social structures which are inherently imbued with biases based on their construction. Gender is also problematic in that it is defined by society yet does not mean the same thing throughout society. It has habitually applied intrinsic values that are dependant on class, ethnicity, and race.

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[32] Gocek and Balaghi, pp. 3-9.

[33] Moghadam expands on Judith Lorber's definition of gender, while it is a powerful source of social distinctions it is not an all encompassing ideology. Gender distinctions will differ with differing social and economic class as well as race and ethnicity.

Furthermore, the study of the relationship between gender and society tends to marginalize the actual experience of the women in the society that are being studied. This is particularly true of studies about gender relationships in the Middle East. The main reason why this happens is because most of the current discourse on the Middle East is studied through the lens of the Third World. This type of discourse focuses on the translation and interpretation of the Third World by western hegemonic powers.

Studies on the Third World often contain Orientalist elements that tend to homogenize the Third World. They identify the Third World as a monolithic entity. This assumption is even more problematic than looking at the Middle East as a monolithic entity, because the Third World encompasses an even larger area. Furthermore, these studies do not address the broad spectrum of cultures, religions, and societies that exist within the realm of the Third World. Even well meaning attempts to study the Third World often fail, in that they have inadvertently reproduced elements of western hegemony. Identifying Muslim women as Third World women presents them as a monolithic subject while at the same time identifying them as a cohesive and coherently represented groups.[34] Moreover, it does not look at them within the confines of a social relationship, but instead defines them outside of social relationships. This creates numerous problems, especially when gender is defined by its social relationships.

Similarly, feminist discourse tends to focus on the patriarchal explanations of gender relations, instead of looking at the entire range of explanations available. Both of these realities give little or no agency to the people that are actively involved in these discourses.[35] Therefore, the best way to combat these problems is to define gender and create a framework that explicitly includes everything within the boundaries of gender as well. According to Joan Scott gender is the "social organization of sexual difference."[36] This definition is interesting because sexual differences acquire socially and culturally constructed meanings, which are not always evident to people who do not exist within the confines of that social or cultural reality. Furthermore, gender as a structure, contains

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[34] Gocek and Balaghi, pp. 2-7.

[35] Gocek and Balaghi, p. 8.

[36] Joan W. Scott, Gender and Politics in History, p. 2.

elements that can be used to gather information about the nature of tradition, identity formation, and the power relations inherent in certain societies.[37]

Some theorists believe that the study of gender is best undertaken through the deconstruction of literature. This type of analysis allows the reader to discover and define the power relationships in society, independent of scholarly thought. These definitions can then be used to define the role of gender in society. Furthermore, this type of analysis takes into account the effects of the everyday experience of women, in these societies. Nevertheless, this type of analysis tends to ignore the ability of the coercive power of the state. Therefore, the best way to define gender and its role in society is to create a framework that encompasses all of these elements and looks at gender as not only a personal experience but a social experience as well. With all of these factors involved it is safe to say that there is no single monolithic gender identity in the Middle East. There is, in fact, a diverse set of identities that have grown out of various cultural, social, and religious frameworks. Many times these diverse gender identities are at odds with one another because they represent a different set of values and experiences and as such speak to a certain typology.

## D.    PROBLEMS WITH THE STUDY OF WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East has become increasingly important in the last decade or so. It represents one of the most explosive areas in the world. It has seen decades of conflict, with intermittent periods of peace. It also holds the largest portion of the world's natural gas and oil reserves. The events of September 11, 2001 forced the world to realize that conditions in the Middle East have degenerated far beyond what was previously thought. The growing acceptance of Islamist religious ideology is troubling because it can effectively destroy the precious balance of power that maintains the limited stability of the region. In an effort to maintain this balance of power, the west has continually supported regimes that attempt to modernize and mimic the west. It is within the larger framework of modernization that the gender debate has been staged. This is problematic

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[37] Gocek and Balaghi, p. 10.

because it does not address all of the aspects of the debate and actually removes women as agents of their own identity. It makes women passive participants in their history as well as the present.

Furthermore, there is the recent trend of "modern," highly educated women in the Middle East turning away from western ideas of modernization and embracing feminist identities that are closely associated with Islam. This has been seen in practices such as the re-emergence of *hijab*. As part of the patriarchal bargaining framework some women have decided that a piece of clothing is just a piece of clothing. For them embracing *hijab* is a way to work within the system in place to gain more freedom. For others, wearing *hijab* signals an adherence to Islamic moral and sexual codes.[38] These different ideas have the paradoxical effect of allowing women access to the public sphere, normally dominated by men, without the fear of repercussions. However, in a greater world discourse, the re-emergence of *hijab* and in some cases the veil, signals a rejection of the west. In this instance, what is on one hand signals a rejection of the west has on the other hand a much broader contextual meaning that is not always clear to people who do not live within the framework. This is not the only problem.

In societies that exist without the capitalist development of classes, the most important division of labor existed between men and women. When a specific class division exists, it changes the level of basic assumptions that can be made about a society. Furthermore, in class-divided urban societies this division becomes much more complicated by even smaller divisions within the societies. In the Middle East, there are distinct social atmospheres particular to the city, the village, and nomadic tribes.[39] All of these groups have their own set of social stratifications and class divisions. While these divisions are often more marked in cities they exist to some degree everywhere. Therefore, where women lived and to what class they belonged directly affected their identity and their inclination to participate in certain events.

The lives of the urban upper and middle class women were vastly different than the lives of other women. Historically, they were veiled, lived with polygamous

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[38]Ahmed, p. 224.

[39] Keddie, pp. 232-233.

relationships, and inherited and controlled their own property.[40] In direct contrast most other Muslim women lived very different lives. Many of the lower classes found they were better served by maintaining the old ways. It was not economically feasible for men in these social strata to take more than one wife. They would not be able to support them and any offspring they had. It was also not practicable for these women to veil; they contributed to the economic stability of the family by participating in the tilling of land and culling of crops. Furthermore, education was not really an option for either men or women due to the economic needs of the family.

However, the transition to a modern western-styled life would have deep economic consequences on the lives of rural women. Men, in this social stratum, identified numerous dangers associated with the abandonment of customs which, were sanctioned by tradition, law, and religious leaders.[41] They also saw that the incursion of western ideology and products were destroying traditional modes of growth. Western intervention, removed many of the traditional tasks and products, which had previously provided important sources of income for the lower class. These products were replaced with finished foreign products that were cheaper to make, more desirable to have, but realistically had no positive affects on the local economy. In some instances products, like hand-woven carpets were highly coveted in the west. Carpet weaving was considered women's work. Because of the high demand, these women were exploited, used as slave labor and often worked in atrocious conditions.

On the other hand, upper and middle class women found themselves in a situation where they were being encouraged, by their male counterparts, to seek modern western education, limited emancipation, and jobs in certain professional fields.[42] This was a result of their direct interaction with western society. Most of the women in these positions had to be able to provide companionship to their husbands and his business associates. Their ability to entertain and host their western counterparts was a direct reflection on their husbands. Due to this, these men were more open to allowing these

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[40] Keddie, pp. 232-233..

[41] Keddie, pp. 232-233.

[42] Ibid.

activities. However, class distinctions alone do not provide the full explanation behind why some ideologies are embraced and others are not.

Class appeal, perhaps, provides an even more in-depth exploration into why some ideologies are embraced and why others are not. In Egypt, early advocates of the liberation of women like Muhammad 'Abduh and Qasim Amin tended to appeal to upper and middle class groups. These groups had direct links to the British and as such exhibited a much more moderate attitude toward the British. This moderation often translated to local issues as well. On the other hand, a larger number of groups do not fare so well in their association with imperialist powers. Groups like the *ulama* and the bazaar, stood to lose an enormous amount of economic and social power. Moreover, they stood to lose their legitimacy if they were effectively usurped by a modern secular government.

Even more importantly, imperialist powers tended to reinforce class divisions. Because of this, the marginalized portions of society often tend to become defensive about traditional roles. Furthermore, the anti-imperialistic rhetoric of the legitimate religious leadership resonates with a larger portion of society. They seek to preserve tradition and reinforce patriarchal structures because they provide a sense of security and normalcy. Removing the association with the invasive western power provides them a sense of legitimacy which is not based on an outside presence. Groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and the Muslim Women's Society appealed to the petty bourgeoisie and had a more popular level of appeal, because they advocated a return to the traditional roles of women and a rejection of western ideology. The Egyptian Feminist Union, on the other hand catered to a more elite portion of society. The EFU was not all inclusive and therefore did not have the staying power of the MWS. Moreover, popular groups have the potential to become even more radical if threatened by rapid change.

## E        CONCLUSION

The field of women's studies in the Middle East has, in the past, remained locked into either a series of relatively uncritical endorsements of modernity or a defense of what was presumed to represent tradition. However, all of this changed with recent studies that

illustrate the complexities, contradictions, and ambiguities of modernity. Moreover, gender dynamics evolve in a complex environment that has social, cultural, and political relationships with both internal and external forces. All of these factors have contributed to the change in the position of women with regards to femininity and masculinity and in the notions of the different rights and obligations of men and women. These changes have been met with to politicization of gender, family law, and a preoccupation of Islamist movements with women's appearance and behavior.

Women in the Middle East face a number of opportunities, risks, and challenges. The Middle East is facing an economic crisis which has had contradictory effects on the role of women in the labor force. In some instances they are excluded from the labor force and in others they are participating in greater numbers than ever. The biggest complication facing women in the Middle East is the rising tide of Islamist thought. The Islamist movement has been able to exert an enormous amount of pressure on governments in the Middle East. Due to this pressure, some governments have acquiesced to the demands of the Islamists setting a precedent that threatens the women's movement and feminist organizations throughout the region. Moreover, some women have found a way to legitimize their movement by co-opting the ideologies of the Islamist movement. These feminists and organizations have found a way to rebel against the traditional location of women in the private domain while men dominate the public sphere. Regardless of whether the debate about the women's question is centered around gender or feminism, a new stratum of women has emerged whose very existence subverts the patriarchal order.

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# III.   EGYPT

## A      INTRODUCTION

The vision of women in Egypt at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was one of seclusion, subjugation, and overt sexuality which were often exaggerated in the accounts of European travelers. This vision would be challenged and ultimately disproved throughout the next two centuries beginning with the political machinations of Muhammed Ali. Ali had a vision of Egypt as a modern state independent of the Ottoman Empire. Through his state mandated reforms women would be pushed into the public sector. Furthermore, the intrusion of colonial powers would introduce an avenue of exposure to western culture and societies. This unfettered exposure would open the debate about gender politics in Egypt. By the end of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century women had created a conflicting image of women in the Middle East. On one hand they had identity that was separate from their social and cultural identities yet they were actively embracing those identities.

This chapter explores the history of the feminist movement in Egypt beginning with Muhammed Ali's progressive reforms. The impact of these state mandated reforms were far reaching and would have implications that would go far beyond their initial scope. Women were provided with educational and employment opportunities and now had impact as political actors. It also looks at the impact that western colonial powers had on gender roles and the impetuous they provided to the women's movement in the Middle East. Western intervention provided access to an image of women that contested culturally prescribed gender roles in the Middle East. Initially upper and middle class women embraced western feminist ideology and all that it entailed. This stance would place them in direct conflict with the religious elite as well as the state apparatus. In the early 1980's a new strain of feminist thought would begin to emerge. These women objected to the term feminism and all of the baggage connected to it. They were not

interested in giving up their identity or their agency. They sought to re-engage the gender debate on their own terms and under the auspices of what they viewed as a legitimate cultural experience.

## B.    MUHAMMAD ALI

Beginning in the later part of the nineteenth century the Egyptian state tried to forcibly draw women into the economic and technological transformations that were taking place. Consequently these state mandated changes would completely threaten the existing social and cultural dynamics of the male/female relationship. Women no longer fell exclusively under the domain of their families. Muhammad Ali, the former pasha of Egypt, felt that Egypt should belong to Egypt and not the Ottoman Empire. He effectively wrested power away from the Ottoman Empire and began to create a "modern" state.[43]

The creation and sustainability of a large conscripted Egyptian military was the largest factor behind Ali's ability to continue to expand the Egyptian state. Egypt was however, faced with a multitude of problems the most important of which was a dramatically increased infant mortality rate. Around fifty thousand children were falling prey to smallpox every year increasing the mortality rate by approximately forty percent and thus decreasing the future pool of available conscripts.[44] One of the main problems identified in the inability to control smallpox was the lack of access to women and children and the lack of qualified female health practitioners. Social and cultural norms did not allow for men to be involved in the prenatal, birth, and postnatal care of women and infants creating an even bigger problem since the only doctors in Egypt were men. The women of Egypt relied on a system of midwives, *dayas*, who had no medical training and no access to modern immunizations.[45]

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[43]Margot  Badran, "Women, Islam, and the State," p.203.

[44] Khaled.Fahmy, "Women, Medicine, and Power" in Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East. Ed. Lila Abu-Lughod, p. 40.

[45] *Dayas* –Egyptian term for midwives little or no medical training. Were not state controlled or regulated and relied on knowledge handed down in a mentor/apprentice relationships. They did not have access to "modern" medicine and techniques.

The second disease that reached epidemic proportions in Egypt was directly tied to the military. It was noted that an inordinate number of the military personnel were falling prey to syphilis. Dr. Clot Bey, a French doctor brought into reform the medical system, determined that this was due to an increased level of prostitution as well as a lack of restrictions on the traffic of women in and out of military instillations including the barracks and the schools.[46] This problem would be the hardest to tackle because to keep the military personnel happy and to prevent a revolt Ali had to allow the men access to their wives, families, and vices. To make matters worse the disease was no longer confined to prostitutes. It was now spreading throughout the ranks of the military wives and concubines. Dr. Bey determined that the key to controlling the disease would be controlling access to the prostitutes, whom he believed were solely responsible for the spread of the disease. One of the biggest stumbling blocks Dr. Bey encountered was the lack of any type of governmental controls on prostitution. Unlike in Europe, the women were not required to undergo medical examinations and screenings, thus allowing the disease to spread unchecked.

In an effort to control the ever increasing prostitute population and rampant spread of syphilis the government legalized prostitution so that it could exert an amount of control over the prostitutes. They also realized that some of these women could be effectively co-opted and recruited into the School of Midwives. Furthermore the problem was headed off by recruiting young girls at the orphanages. These women would be taken in and have their living and educational expenses paid while they were attending the school. When they left they would be given a yearly stipend as well as a bureaucratic military position. However, the school had a hard time finding willing recruits and the government had to eventually buy slaves to populate the school. This would be the only state sponsored school in Egypt open to women until the 1870's.

While the opening of the school was seen as progress towards modernization, it was really an attempt by Ali to keep his military happy and healthy. Ali did not believe in education of the masses and especially did not believe that all women needed to be educated. The *hakimas* that came out of the school were not allowed to take positions

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46 Fahmy, p. 43.

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unless they were married, with their spouses often being doctors and being picked for them by the state with any eye towards maximizing the efficient spread of doctors and *hakimas* throughout Egypt.[47] Additionally, these women while "given the opportunity to become empowered, emancipated actors, and even in some cases strong-willed subjects capable of undertaking small acts of resistance, [these women] were also clearly ….used by the state as agents of discipline and regulation."[48]

There were missionary schools in the area that offered educational opportunities but they were an expense that most families could not afford. In addition, they were more focused on conversion than actual education. Upper-class women had an entirely different set of opportunities available to them. Their access to education was directly tied to their family's access to Europe. Many of them were allowed to receive a certain level of education alongside their male siblings.

## C.    STATE SPONSORED EDUCATION

In 1873 one of the wives of Khedive Isma'il, the new ruler of Egypt, sponsored the opening of the first state school for girls. The school was only open to "the daughters of high officials and white slaves from elite households."[49] It was in this capacity that the elite women of Egypt were exposed to an expanded education and contact with an external female identity. In the 1860s and 70s occasional published writings by women- poetry, essays, and tales- made their way into the public domain. These publications were the earliest documented articulation that a woman's consciousness had begun to emerge. They expressed a new awareness about the constraints placed on women in patriarchal societies and an expanded understanding of their religion. It was during this time that women began to protest the Islamic justification for their seclusion, *hijab,* and other controls placed on their lives. This awareness preceded the British occupation and seems to hint that this movement was in fact not something that had grown in direct response to

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[47] *Hakimas* was the term used to describe the graduates of the School of Midwives. They had basic medical training and were able to provide vaccines, pre and post-natal care as well as care for infants. .

[48] Fahmy, p. 63.

[49] Badran, p. 203.

a nationalistic identity. Furthermore the writings exhibited an innate understanding that the restraints imposed on women were not the sole products of religion either. It was in fact a combination of various different ideologies that had served to subjugate elite women to the confines of the harem.

In 1882 the British established control of the Egyptian state and began to implement a series of economic and agrarian reforms that would drastically alter the social, cultural, and economic systems while also changing the role of women in society. With these reforms a new agrarian capitalist class and a petite bourgeoisie class emerged. These divisions would run far deeper than just economic changes.

Within the strata of the upper middle class a large population of "westernized" professional and government clerks began to emerge. This class had more interaction with European colonists as well as access to European educational opportunities. Men began to see the advantages inherent in their families by adopting more western lifestyles. To be able to effectively operate in this system pressure was exerted on the women not only to be educated but also adopt the dress and mannerisms of their Europe counterparts. Furthermore, the women were an increasingly important and active part of their husband's lives.[50] On the other hand the petite bourgeoisie felt that directly threatened by the intervention of Western powers. The merchants found themselves in direct competition with European merchants who could produce and sell goods at a lower cost. Additional pressure was being exerted on them due to competition in the job market and the cost of education. To ensure economic stability for the family the young men needed government jobs, yet there were a limited number of jobs and an increasing population scrambling for them. The petite bourgeoisie did not want their children to be at a complete disadvantage, so it was more economically feasible for them to adopt an attitude that embraced a more liberal education for women while at the same time arguing for strict veiling and seclusion.[51] It is within the confines of this class stratification that a limited debate on the emancipation of women emerged.

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[50] Juan R. I. Cole, "Feminism, Class, and Islam in the Turn-of-the-Century Egypt," p. 391.

[51] Ibid.

In 1892 the first woman's journal, *Al Fatah*, was published it provided a new, more public, forum for discussion about women's issues. This would mark the formal beginning of the literary, intellectual, social life of women. A manifestation of this movement was seen in the appearance of schools, dispensaries, and charitable organizations that were focused toward women. This also signaled a new more radical modern strain of feminist thought that was grounded and legitimized in the broader framework of an Islamic modernization movement, started and controlled by men.

Shaikh Muhammad 'Abduh was one of the first and most prolific writers of his time on the subject of women's emancipation. He believed that one could be both modern and Islamic, that these two ideologies did not have to be in competition with each other. He also believed that patriarchal excesses were committed in the name of Islam, namely regarding the institutions of divorce and polygamy that were in direct conflict with the true teachings of Islam. A couple of years later another prominent male figure emerged, Qasim Amin. He was a Muslim judge who published two well known works (*The Liberation of Women* in 1899 and *The New Woman* in 1900) that attacked a range of issues including, seclusion, arranged marriages, polygamy, divorce and *hijab*.[52] Amin believed that the backwardness of Egyptian society was directly related to the low status of women and that by rectifying this situation to a moderate degree and within the bounds of Islam, Egyptian society could move forward. Education was the medium within which women would be able to fulfill their correct roles in society and the family.[53]

## D.    EMERGENCE OF A "FEMALE" VOICE

One of the first female writers to reach a mainstream audience was Malak Hifni Nasif, who wrote under the pen name Bahithat Al Badi'ya, translated as Searcher in the Desert. She published numerous essays in the progressive national party paper, *Al Jarida.* In 1910 these essays and her speeches would be republished by the party press in book

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[52] *Hijab,* in this sense means specifically face veiling and not modest Islamic dress covering the head and body.

[53] Qasim Amin <u>The Liberation of Women</u>. His second Publication mentioned above, <u>The New Woman</u>, was an extension of his ideas and arguments presented in the first publication. It was written in direct response to the vast amount of criticism he received from the religious leaders and the Middle Class.

called *Al Nisa'iyyat*, which translates as Feminine Pieces.[54] Al Badi'ya was one of the first graduates of the Saniyya Teachers School. She raised the female consciousness through a series of public lectures and classes directed at a strictly female, mostly upper-class audience. In 1911, she started a new wave of activism. Her protest about the rights of women in the public sphere culminated in a list of demands she sent to the Egyptian National Congress, insisting on women's right to education, employment, and allowing their active participation in congregational worship in mosques.[55] Unlike her male counterparts, Badi'ya did not want women to unveil in particular the face coverings. This was because the removal of this symbol did not signify any increase in a woman's rights or freedoms. She believed that most women who forewent the veil and *hijab* in favor of western dress did so because of vanity and not for ideological reasons. She believed that it was the behavior of men that brought shame upon society, not women's ignorance as Amin believed.

During the years of the national revolution (1919-1921), the first priority was independence from an oppressive British occupation. Women were encouraged to become militant and participate in protests. The Wafdist Women's Central Committee (WWCC) was created as the female counterpart to the *Wafd* party and Huda Sha'rawi was elected president. However the closer Egypt came to gaining nominal independence the clearer it became that the nationalist movement had started to become divided. Liberal men were not prepared to implement their promises and integrate women into the public sphere. While the women who had participated in the nationalistic movement had become more openly combative, the men who had previously been pro-feminist became quite and more focused on their new political careers. In 1923, after realizing that the *Wafd* party was not going to uphold their promises the WWCC broke with it and formed the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU).

The EFU was revolutionary in that it was the first women's organization that was independently created by women. The EFU aimed to raise the intellectual, moral, and

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[54] Badran , p.205. The title of the book can be translated as Feminist Pieces. At this time there was no direct translation for term feminist into Arabic.

[55] Badran, p. 205.

political level of women which would enable them to attain equality in all spheres.[56]The EFU would also be the first group to employ the term feminist and feminism when referring to themselves and their actions. Many of the leadership in the EFU were European educated upper-middle class women and were resistant to penetration by the lower classes. The elitist membership of the EFU would work against their aims in the future. One of the main goals associated with the EFU was education and they fought to have equal secondary education for all sexes, the entry of women into the state universities, and continued study abroad through a series of scholarships. These women made extraordinary progress, but they would be unable to accomplish some very important goals. Some of which were formal political rights for women, reforms in the personal status laws, and the abolishment of state-legalized prostitution.[57] In the mid 1930s internal debates about feminism and cultural authenticity would divide the movement along lines that still resonate today.

The author of this debate was Zeinab al-Ghazali. Al Ghazali was the daughter of a prosperous cotton merchant with an Al Azhar education. Within a year of joining the EFU Al Ghazali split off and created the Muslim Women's Society (MWS), a strictly Muslim religious organization. In an interview Al Ghazali stated that, "The Egyptian Feminist Union wanted to establish the civilization of the western woman in Egypt and the rest of the Arabic and Islamic worlds."[58] She felt that The EFU was too preoccupied with western ideologies and freedoms. In addition the EFU was too liberal and secular, which in effect placed it in direct contestation with Islam. The MWS based its ideology within an Islamic framework and *shari'ah*.[59] They believed that Islam provides for absolute equality between men and that *shari'ah* regulates all aspects of life. Therefore any ideology that is separate from this overall framework, such as feminism, is superfluous and in some cases dangerous because it was western influence that undermined Islam. The MWS was more focused on the familial duties and obligations of

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[56] Badran focuses on a more extensive list of goals and aims articulated by the EFU which basically boil down to active political participation and agency.

[57] Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," p. 208.

[58] Badran, p. 210. This quote was used by Al Ghazali in a recent interview about the split between the EFU and the creation of the MWS.

[59] *Shari'ah* is Islamic law.

women. They accomplished this by providing Islamic studies, welfare activities, and gainful employment within the confines of Islam.

While attending a lecture at the Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) headquarters Hasan al-Bana approached Al Ghazali and proposed a joining of forces. The Brotherhood rejected the idea of a westernized woman as a model of modernity and promoted a return to the fundamentals of Islam. They agreed that education was essential for women so that they could better fulfill their roles as mothers and wives, as long as it did not interfere with those duties.[60] Al Bana believed that the goals of the MWS and the MB were closely linked and that they could both accomplish more if they worked together. Initially Al Ghazali refused to join her organization with the MB. However, growing resentment of the British power in Egypt would work to drive the nationalistic forces and the feminist movement together with one focused goal, the creation of a truly Egyptian state. In the late 1940s when the Brotherhood was ordered to dissolve, the MWS changed its name to the Muslim Sisterhood and joined in the fight for an Islamic state.

The EFU on the other hand continued to resist change. They were unwilling to broaden their constituency and as such excluded a large number of women, who did not fit into their social sphere, from the ranks of their movement. A number of these middle class women actively sought to join the fight for women's rights, encouraging the propagation of more populist feminist movement. This movement was headed by middle class women, but actively recruited from all levels of society and was aimed at a more bottom up approach to women's rights. Fatma Ni'mat Rashid and Duriyya Shafiq, former EFU members, founded the National Feminist Party (NFP) and the Daughter of the Nile Union (DNU) which mounted literacy and hygiene campaigns among the poor. While the movement's ideological bases were similar those of the EFU they had divergent opinions about social projects and the DNU had no ties to any political party and was more militant.[61] In 1951 Shafiq and 1500 women stormed the parliament demanding full political rights, reformation of the personal status laws, and equal pay. Shortly after the revolution, the DNU re-organized as a political party.

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[60]  Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, The Idea of Women Under Fundamentalist Islam, Has an entire chapter on the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, specifically Hasan Al-bana, related specifically to the role of women in society.

[61] Nadje Al-Ali, Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East, pp. 63-66.

Moreover, a younger generation of women began to move in a new direction, toward communism and socialism. This generation believed that the liberation of women was directly tied to the liberation of the masses, which required an end to imperialism and class oppression. However, within the larger framework of communism and socialism the feminist struggle would become subordinate to the larger struggle. During this intense period of struggle the religious establishment alternately supported and rejected women's demands for rights but did not openly speak out against the feminist movement.

The ambivalent attitude of the religious establishment would change just prior to the 1952 revolution. A group of religious scholars held a conference with the intent of examining women's status within the bounds of *shari'ah*. As a result of this conference the religious establishment declared that the feminist movement was influenced by imperial powers with the intent of destroying Islam.[62] It held that the Egyptian feminist movement had effectively disrupted society and noted that Sha'rawi and Shafiq were to be held responsible for this disruption. It determined that women degraded themselves by venturing out of the private sphere and working. These declarations were seen by most of the feminist movement as a direct reaction to the number of women that had permeated the work force. Men no longer had complete control over women and this threatened the patriarchal structure of society. Regardless of these declarations feminist discourse was allowed in public and women gained limited achievements. All of this would change with the revolution in 1952.

Nasser came to power in 1952 and immediately dissolved and disbanded all political parties, introducing Arab socialism instead. A series of land reforms were implemented that altered the class structure in Egypt breaking the power of the elite and creating a new and larger middle class. Furthermore, the state made primary education not only free but obligatory for all children between the ages of six and twelve. In the following years this decree would be extended up through university. Classes were now coeducational and the academic workplace would soon follow suit. The demand for education, especially in urban areas, increased so dramatically that the state was hard pressed to meet the demands. In addition the number of girls attending school increased

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[62] Badran, pp. 214, 242-7.

at a much higher rate than that of boys.[63] The state declared that it was committed to opening the doors of opportunity to all of its citizens, which by definition included women.

By 1956 the state had granted women the right to vote and to run for political office. However the official discourse of the state did not always translate into reality. In 1957 the state began a systematic process of dismantling the feminist movement and in place implemented a state sponsored one. It banned feminist organizations, sometimes jailing the leaders, and suppressed all forms of public feminist expression. To further complicate the situation the language of the National Charter, which was approved in 1962, stated that "all citizens had the right and the obligation to work, women as well as men. 'Women must be regarded as equal to man and must, therefore, shed the remaining shackles that impede her free movement, so that she might take a constructive and profound part in the shaping of life."[64] Yet by 1964 the last of the feminist organizations had been disbanded and legislation was put in place further restricting the formation of any new women's organizations, forcing many of the organizations underground.

It would not be until the death of Nasser that women were once again allowed to publicly express feminist ideologies in Egypt. The state, under Nasser, effectively co-opted both the feminist and Islamist movements in order to further its agenda and reduce popular movements. Both would find avenues for expression in this new era. Controls were placed on the more independent and radical elements in both of these movements restricting their ability to affect change and incite political upheaval. Under Sadat there would be a fundamental shift away from Nasser's brand of Arab socialism towards a more secular, capitalistic, pro-western policy known as *infitah* (open door). Under these policies the role of the state was drastically reduced and an avenue was opened for private business. However many of the state sponsored feminist programs opened under Nasser were closed under Sadat.

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[63] Leila Ahmed, <u>Women and Gender in Islam</u>, pp. 208-213. By the 1970's the ratio of girls to boys was about one to two. The most dramatic increase in women's participation was seen at the higher education levels. For further statistics see <u>Modernization and Muslim Education</u>, Saquib.

[64] Ahmed, p. 210.

The contradictory pressures created by the *infitah* policies and the women's movement were succinctly captured in the wording of the new constitution which explicitly defined the rights of women within the context of *shari'ah*. Sadat's seemingly acquiescent attitude toward perceived western pressure created a growing sense of alienation that was further fueled by an increasing amount of social inequality. An ideology embracing a return to Islam had been steadily gaining prominence since Israel defeated Egypt in 1967. The Islamist movement, which would later be called fundamentalism, provided an answer to the ever increasing problems in Egypt and it appealed to a broader spectrum of the population. As more and more joined the rank and file of the Islamist movement they were able to exert even more pressure on the state, causing it to be pulled in two different directions. These groups became more active in spreading their word on and around university campuses specifically targeting the next generation. They called for a return to *hijab* and a rejection of western ideas equaling modernity. This appealed too many of the women in the lower and middle classes who were adversely affected by the *infitah* policies, since it was purported to represent a return or reclamation of an authentic Islamic Egyptian identity.

On the other end of the spectrum a new wave of radical feminists emerged who directly challenge the state while also challenging the patriarchal structure of Islam. One of the most prominent figures in this movement, Nawal El Saadawi, believed that the system in place in Egypt not only allowed but supported practices that were inherently destructive to women. She believed that it was not Islam but Arab patriarchal customs and imperialistic economic and political forces that were the real reason women, till then, failed to win their emancipation.[65] El Saadawi adopted a policy of confrontation with the state that caused her to be jailed numerous times. Her works were seen as so inflammatory and heretical that they were banned in Egypt. She had however gained a local following and international status as a champion for the rights of women.

Social and economic factors placed inordinate amounts of pressure on the government, probably influencing the contradictory policies that would be implemented in the next couple of years. The state once again embraced a policy that no longer

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[65] Nawal El Saadawi, <u>Hidden Face of Eve</u>, p. xv.

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promoted full employment and in fact sought to effectively restrict the role of women in the public sphere. At the same time, many Egyptian men were leaving for the oil rich gulf-states, causing a shortage of people which effectively forced women back into the workforce. It is out of this reaction and the need for security that some women in the public sector would embrace the veil, while others did so as a purely political statement.[66] All of these forces put considerable pressure on the state, and in 1979 the government enacted legislation that would guarantee thirty seats for women in parliament. Furthermore, for the first time in over fifty years fundamental changes were enacted in the personal status laws. This new legislation broadened the parameters for women to initiate divorce, added protection for women in divorce, and placed controls on polygamy.[67] This move however, backfired and had immense consequences. The legislation had the effect of consolidating the middle and the conservatives against the government. Around the same time, the Egypt ratified the Camp David accord with Israel, further antagonizing both the left and the conservatives. In Iran, Khomeini had incited revolution and successfully ushered in an Islamic state, heartening Islamists in Egypt and legitimizing their cause. Egypt entered a new juncture. The tensions between the state and the population had intensified to the point where Sadat could no longer control the population. He was forced to conduct massive arrests across the entire political spectrum. It was shortly after wave of arrests that Sadat would be assassinated.

Shortly after the assassination the new president, Mubarak, released a number of the political activists that had been arrested and held by Sadat's regime. One of them was Nawal El Saadawi. While Islamists made up a large part of the political constituency of Egypt, external forces were now applying pressure on the Egyptian government to adhere to UN conventions regarding women's rights. However, in 1985 President Mubarak gave into internal pressure and amended the personal status law. The revisions revoked most of the freedoms that had been granted.

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66 Ahmed presents a very interesting discourse regarding the veil, its history, symbolism, and co-optation as an Islamic symbol. The veil is especially interesting because women have embraced it as a tool to reclaim their agency.

67 This legislation was known as Jihan's law. Sadat's wife Jihan spearheaded the push for this legislation as a strategy for undermining the strength and legitimacy of the Islamist movement. It was a bold move to not only improve international public relations but to hopefully encourage the growth of an internal secular population that would be able to undermine the power of the Islamists.

Concurrently, a large number of highly educated women under the leadership of El Saadawi struggled to establish the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA). The organization operated under the premise that the liberation of the people as a whole could not happen unless women were liberated and women would not be liberated until the government stopped controlling the land, the economy, and culture.[68] It was not until 1985 that the Ministry of Social Affairs allowed the AWSA to have their permit. AWSA vehemently protested the changes to the personal status laws and within two months of them being revoked, most of the changes were reinstated. Coincidently, this occurred right before a large number of Egyptian feminists attended a UN forum in Nairobi, marking the end of the Decade for Women. In 1986 AWSA held their first conference, under the banner of 'unveiling the mind.' The conference was focused on the challenges that faced Arab women at the end of the twentieth century. In 1991, AWSA's permit was revoked by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Some critics believe that this was because like El Saadawi, the organization was too confrontational toward the state and outspokenly critical of Islamist positions on gender. This made it an easily identifiable target. Whatever the reasons AWSA was officially dissolved and banned and eventually El Saadawi was exiled to the US where she taught for a couple of years before returning to Egypt.

## E.     CONCLUSION

The 1990s marked the beginning of a new form of feminist discourse in Egypt. External pressures based on military and economic aid put the state in a position where it had to conform to certain expectations of human rights to continue receiving aid. At the same time, internal pressures fueled by the rising tide of Islamist sentiment in Egypt have created an environment ripe for conflict. The increased influence of international agencies via monetary aid has further fueled the debate about the legitimacy of some NGO's. Internally the debate about whom and what constitutes the legitimate voice of feminism continues. Islamist feminists claim the role of women is clearly delineated within the confines of Islam and that it is in fact a misinterpretation of Islam by man

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[68] Badran, p. 225.

which has created inequality within society. They see the more secular feminists as a western influence that threatens to destroy society. These feminist are even further divided in that some see an Islamic state as the only solution, while the more moderate stream of thought believes that an Islamic society will solve the problem. Secular feminists, on the other hand, believe that it is patriarchy and class oppression that threatens women. These feminists are seen as a bigger threat to the state because they call for a complete restructuring of socio-cultural norms.

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# IV.   IRAN

## A.   INTRODUCTION

The image of women in Iran in the 18<sup>th</sup> century closely resembled that of women in Egypt. They lived quiet lives of seclusion, which were enhanced by the widely sexualized images of the *harem*. These images did not reflect the true role of Iranian women. Their lives varied, depending on where they lived and their socio-economic status. Iranian women were not, as is often portrayed, a monolithic entity. They were extremely socially diverse. This was due, in part, to a number of historical, religious, and cultural differences. Further complicating the situation was the lack of a centralized state. The Qajar dynasty was only one tribe, albeit the most powerful one, among many. Due to the lack of a centralized state apparatus and the lack of a universal identity, the Qajar monarchy was unable to impose a set of universal social and cultural norms. Instead, they used economic and political manipulation to control the other communities and cement their power. Within Iran, three different interpretations of Islam existed, Sunnism, Twelver Shiism (Shiism), and esoteric Shiism (Sufism and Ismailism). All of these groups had different views on the rights afforded women and the subsequent role that they would have in society.

It was not until the Safavid period (1501-1629) that Shiism became the state religion. Adopting Shiism as the state religion gave Iran specific identifying features, which set it apart from other Muslim Middle Eastern societies. First, Shiism as an institution was economically independent of the state. They accomplished this through a series mechanisms set up to provide donations and endowed lands (*vaqf*) which were completely controlled by the religious establishment. Second, they followed the practice of *ejtehad*.[69] Shii faithful were required to follow the edicts, *fatvas*, which resulted from the practice of *ejtehad*. Finally, the Shii clergy, *ulama*, gained the power to make all judicial decisions and carry out the prescribed punishments. However, the clergy often expressed different and sometimes conflicting responses, especially concerning the role

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[69] *Ejtehad* is described as the ability of legal jurists to use logic and reasoning as in conjunction with the *Qur'an* and *hadith* to form legal opinions called *fatvas*.

of women. Some believed that women had the right to receive education and were equal to men while others vehemently protested any changes to the status of women. Because of these conflicting ideas and the lack of a centralized state apparatus, a number of mostly upper and middle class women received an education, albeit in most cases limited to topics suitable for women. However, in some cases women received religious training and were able to reach the level of learning and accomplishment necessary to become *mollahs*. However, they were confined to teaching other women and were not allowed to cultivate a following.

This chapter will explore the diverse roles women held during the later part of the Qajar period. The Qajar monarchy controlled an extremely decentralized government, which was unable to effectively exert control throughout the country.[70] This lack of control allowed for a bunch of mini-states within the state, which exercised their own set of cultural norms and values. This had a direct impact on the economic and political growth of the entire population. Moreover, the Qajar monarchy was in peril of being overthrown. Nasr od-Din Shah had allowed a number of concessions to the British, at the expense of the Iranian people. These concessions would have a lasting impact on the establishment of a nationalistic identity, which arose in direct contrast to a British presence in Iran. This chapter will also look at the impact that the constitutional revolution had on women and the future effect it would have in shaping their identities. After the constitutional revolution, the Qajar monarchy faced an insurmountable amount of pressure from the population and political rivals. As a result of all of this pressure, in 1925 the Qajar monarchy was dismantled. The Pahlavi dynasty would take its place. One of the first projects embraced by the Pahlavi dynasty would be the consolidation of the state. This was accomplished through a series of projects aimed at building up the state's infrastructure. Furthermore, Mohammed Reza Shah was determined to bring Iran into modern age, ideologically. Reza Shah did this by implementing a number of reforms aimed at education and women. The most controversial of these reforms was the state mandated un-veiling of women. This reform directly challenged the power of the *ulama*

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70 The Qajar's were the most dominant tribe to rise out of the tribal anarchy in the late 1700s. While the Qajar's were coming to power the Shi'ite hierocracy began to see the wisdom of growth and power independent of the state. It would not be until almost the mid 1800s that the hierocracy and the Qajar monarchy would reach an accord, which would allow the monarchy to have some control over the *ulama*.

and their control over the "sacred sphere" of the family. Reza Shah's son, who will be called the Shah, would implement even more radical reforms aimed directly at improving the status of women. These reforms removed all of the *ulama's* control over the sacred sphere of the family and as a consequence further alienated the Shah from the *ulama*. These actions would result in the revolution of 1979. The final part of this chapter will explore how the revolution affected the rights of women and what they have worked to gain since the revolution.

## B.    QAJAR PERIOD

Under the rule of the Qajar monarchy, Iran consisted of a number of communities, which exercised varying degrees of social and cultural autonomy, depending on their proximity to urban centers. The Qajar monarchy was unable to create and maintain a central state apparatus that was capable of exercising control over the entire state. As a result, the court was forced to resort to political and economic manipulations to gain the concessions out of other communities. The urban community in the Qajar state was further divided into several categories. At the top of the social ladder was the nobility, which included a large number of people.[71] After the nobility, there were the large landowners, state officials and bureaucrats, merchants and traders, and finally the clergy. The women in these groups followed the same social ranking as their husbands and families. The Qajar court closely resembled the image of an early European royal court, society was expected to serve them and not vice versa. This was illustrated in the spending of the court. Most of the revenues from land and cattle taxes were spent on maintaining the royal households and not on public programs. The situation was further complicated by the close ties the Qajar court had with the west. Many people saw the court as a bloated, corrupt, and weak institution that was willing to hand control of the state over to foreigners. This image was perpetuated by Shii clergy, who were concerned with maintaining their power and position. These political machinations would have a great impact on the role of women in Iran.

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[71] Many of the Qajar Shahs had upwards of 50 wives and concubines. Their numerous children were ranked on birth, and status of their mothers. The royal household lived a very opulent lifestyle, which took a lot of money to maintain.

The lower portions of the economic strata had a wide variety of positions, on the role of women in society. Most of the active participation of women in society was determined by basic socio-economic needs and not an idealized vision of the role of women in society. In the smaller nomadic tribes, women did most of the physical labor, were not veiled, and were less segregated than the traditional Islamic women. However they were also unable to inherit and did not enjoy the economic rights enjoyed by some traditional Islamic women.[72] On the other hand, women who lived in the rural areas, which tended to be more agricultural, participated in the work force out of economic necessity. Subsequently, they did not veil and had more lax rules regard of segregation than the urban upper and middle classes. In other rural areas, many women participated in various activities that involved textiles.[73] They were actively engaged in carpet weaving and shawl-making, both of which were marketable products. These women were often veiled and observed stricter rules of segregation. In addition, a professional class of women which included, midwives, healers, saleswomen, and in some cases even *mollahs*, existed within the urban and rural settings.[74] However, these female *mollahs*, were neither allowed to submit binging religious edicts nor maintain dedicated followers. They were in essence, only allowed to preside over religious ceremonies which did not involve men.

During this time period, the relationship between the *ulama* and the monarchy played a very important role. The *ulama* exercised a certain amount of influence and power, which was not directly tied to the monarchy. At the same time, they maintained a certain amount of mutual inter-dependency. The state had to support the *ulama* to maintain their legitimacy likewise; the *ulama* had to support the state to maintain their social positions. Historically, the *ulama* exercised control over education and religious matters. However, during the latter part of the nineteenth century they would expand their sphere of influence to include all matters related to marriage, death, and inheritance rights. Simultaneously, they increased their ideological hold over the population through

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[72] Nikkie R. Keddie, Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution, p. 31.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Mollahs are religious scholars who often lead prayer, interpret the Qur'an and lead religious rituals.

the implementation of specific ritualistic celebrations.[75]  In addition, the *ulama* had very close economic ties with the bazaar, which was the social and economic heart of the city. Many of the merchants, traders, and craftsmen conducted all of their business and politics through the bazaar, which was a male dominated class. However, there were a few gender specific businesses that required women to run them such as bath houses and selling goods in houses. The ties between the *ulama* and the bazaar class would be further strengthened through marriage and the resulting familial ties. Toward the end of the nineteenth century the *ulama* began to surround themselves with large numbers of religious students, who were completely faithful to them and them alone. Initially, this grab for power did not directly threaten the hold of the monarchy but by the end of the nineteenth century it would play a large role in the downfall of the Qajar monarchy.

However, it was women in the upper class strata which bore the closest resemblance to the image of the pampered, secluded women that western travelers had as the image of Islamic women. 'Royal' women and 'respectable' women of the landed aristocracy and merchants lived almost their entire lives within the confines of *harems* and *andaruns*.[76] They were married in either adolescence or childhood and brought up by nannies and select tutors. Most of the women living in the *andaruns* experienced a limited amount of freedom. They were allowed to go out for socially approved reasons, which included: women-only religious ceremonies and gatherings, regular visits to public baths, and occasional shopping in the bazaar. However, whenever they went out they were required to be completely veiled from head to toe. Royal women were not even allowed these simple freedoms. They led their entire lives within the confines of the *harem*. They were not however, the simpering ineffective women they were often made out to be. Most of them were well educated in religion, literature, and music. Some even enjoyed studies in philosophy and language. They also, wielded great power and political influence at court. Some of Fath Ali Shah's daughters served as court advisors. Nasr od-Din Shah's mother was directly responsible for the removal and murder of Amir Kabir, a prominent and popular minister, during her husbands reign. Two of Nasr od-Din Shah's

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[75] Parvin Paidar, Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran, p. 40.

[76] Paidar, p. 38.

daughters, Taj ol-Saltaneh and Fakhr od-Douleh, were also famous.[77] One of them translated and wrote popular fiction while the other became a social critic and joined the anti-Qajar constitutional movement.

Contrary to how women actually lived in different socio-economic spheres the "proper role of women" in society was delineated by the *ulama*, which controlled the "sacred sphere" of the family.[78] The *ulama* exerted complete authority over the family and the roles that it and each of its members played in society. By extension, the *ulama* also controlled the idea of what a proper woman should be. All of these characteristics were based on their interpretation of the *Qur'an* and *hadith* which, were subsequently translated into *shari'ah*.

During this time period, a number of male intellectuals began to raise the question of women's emancipation. Their arguments were based on a secular revisionist ideology that blamed the present situation of women in Iran on the lack of education and freedom they were allowed. Many of them recognized that there was a link between social progress and women's emancipation. Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh was a self proclaimed atheist who embraced the "glorious Persian" era that preceded the Islamic conquest of Iran. Akhundzadeh believed that Islam was imbued with practices such as polygamy, temporary marriage (*siegh*), and veiling, which served to subjugate women and fostered the ills of Iranian society. His narrative however, was constructed entirely on the basis of contesting the current political and socio-economic situation in Iran. It did not address the reality of women's lives prior to the Islamic conquest.[79] Mirza Agha Khan Kermani agreed with Akhundzadeh but believed that the seclusion and veiling of women not only retarded their physically growth but affected their spiritual growth and spirituality as well. He published the first Iranian opposition paper abroad.[80] At the same time, a number of secular newspapers, at home and abroad, began to publish articles dealing with women and their roles and rights in society. *Parvaresh* was one of the most well know. It published a series of articles that likened the role of women in Iranian society to that of

[77] Paidar, p. 39.

[78] The Shii clergy made up a very structured and hierarchal group called *ulama*. This structure differs from how Sunni Islam is organized.

[79] Paidar, p. 46.

[80] Ibid.

animals. It argued against the belief that literate and educated women were in danger of losing their chastity. Furthermore, there was no natural law that proved that women were less in any way than men. These secular reformist views were not the monopoly of men.

Bibi Khanum, a woman from a lower-class background, wrote a very interesting piece on the idea of women being the causal factor of all of the ills in society. Her essay, written in 1896, was in direct response to another essay, which took the position that it was women and their inherent immorality that degraded society. Khanum's essay was titled *Maayeb ol-Rajal* which translates as *The Vices of Men*.[81] In the essay Khanum listed the various character flaws that men benefited from and the subsequent blame that was laid at women's feet, for a man's lack of control. She went on to warn women not to take the advice of the other essay, which was written by a man. She believed that the other essay sought to perpetuate the myth of the superiority of men over women, with advice about how it was a woman's religious duty to remain at home. Furthermore, she believed that women alone were not to blame for their backwardness or the corruption of the country. Women had no political power or representation and as such did not have the ability to affect political change. Due to this immutable fact, women could not take sole credit for the sad state of the country. Men, on the other hand, had access to numerous avenues of change and representation. Because of this men were directly responsible for the state of Iran. Therefore, men should seek to fix themselves before trying to offer advice to women. Khanum's ideas were very radical. They threatened the very myth of male superiority. However, many of these writers were secular revisionists. They contradicted the religious apparatus and as such did not appeal to a majority of the population, which were allied with the *ulama*.

The struggle for power between the *ulama* and the monarchy would take a new form in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This struggle would manifest itself in the form of a constitutional revolution, which would pit the corrupt bloated monarchy against the *ulama* and it supporters. The Qajar monarchy had a history of offering concessions to Britain, which paid off for the elite but effectively marginalized the rest of the population. These concessions economically suffocated the bazaar class which was directly tied to

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[81] Paidar, p. 48-50.

the *ulama*. The most well known and widely conflicted concession had to do with the curing and selling of tobacco. In 1891, the prominent Shii *mojtahed* Haji Hasan Shirazi issues a *fatva* forbidding the use of tobacco.[82] This *fatva* was even embraced by a number of the Shah's wives.[83] The Shah, in reaction to the protests, declared that Shirazi would either smoke tobacco in public or he would be banished from Iran. Shirazi refused to bend and prepared to leave Iran. The news of his exile led to massive protests in Tehran. Women took to the streets and attacked tobacco shops, which had not closed in observation of the protest. Nasr od-Din Shah was forced to give in to popular demand and eventually revoked the concession. However, later that same year women would once again take to the streets of Tehran in massive protests against food shortages. In Tabriz, a famous heroine, Zeinab Pasha, led a number of protests against the governor and merchants who were hoarding foodstuffs to artificially raise the prices. Shortly thereafter, Nasr od-Din Shah was assassinated and his son Mozaffar od-Din Shah succeeded him.

Mozaffar od-Din Shah continued in his fathers footsteps, implementing a number of even more unpopular economic policies. However, he relaxed a number of politically repressive policies regarding the formation of social organizations. This allowed the widespread rise and subsequent organization of "secret societies."[84] By 1905, these groups while ideologically different agreed on the concept of constitutionalism. Women joined in the fight as well. They turned their traditional social and religious gatherings into political meetings. They circulated information, spread news, acted as informants, and participated in demonstrations.[85] In one instance, the Women's Revolutionary Movement sent a number of threatening letters to the Shah demanding a constitution and a house of justice. Many of the merchants and the craftsmen encouraged their wives to become involved in these protests. In another instance, a number of women attacked the British consulate and the telegraph office. The interesting part of the attack is that the women were veiled. Their *chadors* provided them with a level of anonymity that men

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[82] *Mojtahed* is a practioner of *ejtehad*. Title position held by men who are learned enough to practice religious jurisprudence.

[83] Paidar, p. 51.

[84] The societies were organized around similar political and religious ideologies. They became secret after Mozaffar od-Din Shah realized his folly in allowing these types of organizations. There were a number of women's societies as well.

[85] Paidar, p. 53.

could not accomplish.[86] In August of 1906, Mozaffar od-Din Shah finally conceded to the demands for a National Assembly, which would be called the *Majles*.

When the electorate was divided there was no mention of women or lower class illiterate men. The *Majles* set out to draft a Supplementary Fundamental Law but as time began to pass the differences between the members became even more pronounced. Eventually, they were able to create a draft but the new Shah, Mohammad Ali Shah, was ardently anti-constitutionalist and refused to ratify the Supplementary Fundamental Law. Instead, Ali Shah declared martial law. He shut down all of the political organizations, bombed the *Majles*, and enacted a series of violently repressive acts. Many of these organizations were forced underground. Ali Shah's reforms resulted in a civil war that tore the country apart. In the later part of 1908, Mohammad Ali Shah was deposed in favor of his son. The second *Majles* convened in 1909 and then again in 1911. In 1911, they realized that Iran was facing financial ruin. To fix the situation they employed an American, Morgan Shuster, to put the countries finances in order. This threatened the Russians, who in turn, threatened to occupy Iran if they did not get rid of Shuster. A group of women, who were reported to be carrying arms under their veils, marched on the *Majles*, in protest of the Russian ultimatum. They offered their jewelry and money in support of creating a National Bank.[87] In 1910, The Women's Society reappeared with a new name. They took the nationalistic title, The National Ladies' Society.[88] All of the members were women from prominent constitutionalist families. The Executive Committee of the organization was made up of three very prominent Iranian women, Agha Beygom, Agha Shazadeh Amin, and Sedigheh Doulatabadi. Members of the Society waged protests against the acceptance of foreign loans because they believed that this would lead to foreign interference. They also conducted a number of welfare projects, one of which was the establishment of an orphanage. These women also held a conference in Tehran specifically focused on planning women's education. While all of these protests were going on a number of women choose to begin protest veiling. During

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[86] *Chadors* refer to the full tent-like piece of clothing that covers the body from head to toe. They sometimes include a face veil.

[87] The other alternative to a National Bank was foreign aid, in the form of loans. Many of the Iranian People did not want this because they did not want to be indebted to foreign powers.

[88] Paidar, p. 69.

a particular incident in Tehran a large group of women publicly removed their *chadors*. This caused an enormous outcry. Men and women protested what they viewed as immoral behavior. However, it was the women who would were the most vociferous in their objections. They refused to associate themselves with women they deemed prostitutes.

Consequently, this time period witnessed an upsurge in the number of schools for girls that were opening. These schools were completely run and staffed by, either rich Muslim women or missionaries. However, they were vehemently opposed by hard-line clerics like Sheykh Fazlollah Nuri. Sheykh Fazlollah Nuri went so far as to issue a *fatva* declaring the founding of girls schools as being against Islamic *shariat*.[89] Despite this, the popularity of these schools continued to grow. In 1910, the first group of women graduated from the American School in Tehran. The next couple of years were followed by heated debates within the *Majles* on the role of women in society. Many of them feared the emancipation of women. The believed that education and emancipation of women would lead to a loss of male honor.[90] Furthermore, women's emancipation was seen as a tool of morally corrupt western intellectuals in order to allow easy access to women. In February of 1921, a military coup *d'etat* brought Mohammed Reza Khan to power, ending over 150 years of Qajar rule.

## C.     PAHLAVI DYNASTY

Mohammed Reza Khan changed his last name to Pahlavi, a Persian name, and adopted the title Shah. Reza Shah initiated the creation of a modern secular state. He wanted Iran to be able to participate in the global market. The best way to accomplish this was by creating a strong central state with a single language and religion, national sovereignty, and the emancipation of women. The only way to do this was by implementing a number of severely repressive reforms aimed at returning full control and

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[89] Paidar, p. 68.

[90] This is based on the idea that male honor is closely associated with the honor and purity of women. F a woman loses her honor this directly reflects on the men of the family. Honor killings and punishment stem from this idea.

power to the state. He removed control of education and the judicial system from the *ulama* and banned the teaching of the *Qur'an* and *shari'ah* in schools. Additionally, Reza Shah put state policies in place which were aimed at creating a national identity. They were policies like: mass conscription, compulsory birth certification, uniform style of clothing, country-wide systems of transportation and communication, as well as the implementation of a central administrative bureaucracy and security apparatus.[91] Furthermore, he forcefully settled traditionally migratory tribes, forcing them to adopt lifestyles that were notably lower than what they had enjoyed before. These reforms adversely affected most of the population in Iran.

During this time period, a number of women's magazines, specifically aimed at women, were published. One of them was *Women's Language*, which was published by Sedigheh Doulatabadi. Doulatabadi was an extremely remarkable woman. She was born into a very strict religious family in Esfahan. At a young age, she was married to a much older man. She started her political activities by joining the National Ladies Society in 1911. A couple of years later she opened a girls school in her hometown. However, after three months the school was closed and Doulatabadi was beaten by a group of people who protested the opening of the school. Not long after this incident, she opened her newspaper and founded the Esfahan Ladies' Company. Both were controversial and resulted in Doulatabadi being exiled to Tehran. She continued to publish her newspaper for a couple of years in Tehran, until it was again banned for being too controversial. After this she went to Paris to study psychology. While there, she represented Iranian women in a number of international women's congresses. In 1927, Doulatabadi returned to Iran. Upon her return, she refused to veil and was often seen in public without a veil.[92] A number of other magazines directed toward women and published by women emerged around he same time as Doulatabadi's but they would all suffer the same fate and eventually be banned with the exception of one, *Women's Universe*. This magazine was founded in 1921 by the Association of the Graduates of the American Girls' School. It survived for thirteen years because it made a point of stating that it was not a political tool. It published a number of articles that discussed not only gender roles but the harm of

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91 Keddie, Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution, pp. 88-95.

92 Paidar, p. 95.

seclusion and veiling. It used literature, poetry, and theoretical discussions to campaign for the improvement of women's rights.[93]

However, the most far reaching movements in this time were directly associated with the socialist and communist movements. The largest and most established of these was, the Patriotic Women's League. The League was set up in 1922 by Mohtaram Eskandari, a Qajar princess who was married to a prominent socialist leader. A couple of months after the formation of the League, Doulatabadi joined the Executive Committee. The League actively and enthusiastically campaigned to increase women's rights and education. They specifically targeted female students. The League's sponsored public burnings of works that were anti-women. They also published a journal, *Patriotic Women*, which was dedicated to politics, religion, and other matters that were of utmost importance to women. [94] Furthermore the communist party encouraged women members to participate in the League. However, they found the League a little too laid back for them. In 1923, these women broke away from the League and formed the more radical, Women's awakening. In 1927, the Second Congress of the Communist Party took Place. Items on the agenda included better conditions for working class women, paid maternity leave, and the abolition of night shifts for women and children.

In 1931, Reza Shah forced a law through the *Majles* that declared all anti-monarchal activities illegal. He did this because he believed that any independent political thought was a hindrance to rapid modernization. Furthermore, he needed these groups to be declared illegal so that he could effectively ban all oppositional political parties. This included all of the aforementioned women's organizations and magazines. BY 1935 Reza Shah had effectively shut down all independent political and feminist activities. In their place he instituted a number of state mandated gender programs. The gender programs had two specific aims. One was the integration of women into the public sphere. The social participation of women was seen as the benchmark of modernity. It allowed women to be integrated into the national processes, which was essential to the country being able to progress. The other aim was the creation of educated mothers. In order to usher in a more modern and progressive era, the youth of

[93] Paidar, p. 95.

[94] Paidar, p. 96.

Iran needed to be better educated. Reza Shah believed that this could be accomplished, to a degree, by the education of women. However, in an effort to control and manipulate these changes, Reza Shah formed an official Ladies Center. His, daughter, Princess Shams Pahlavi was appointed the honorary president. The Center, while state run, provided a haven for women who choose to continue their fight for emancipation within the bounds of state policy. It also prepared the way for Reza Shah's most controversial change, mandatory unveiling.

In 1936 Reza Shah passed legislation that outlawed the use of *chadors* and scarf in public spaces. He ordered the police to forcibly remove these garments from any women who wore them in public. Most of the women in the upper and middle classes embraced this new found freedom and took it a step further. They began to adopt western dress. Because of this overwhelming support, the *ulama* remained ineffective in their protests. On the other hand, not all women embraced unveiling. These women were insulted even more when they were attacked in the streets by the police, who forcibly removed their veils. This legislation, while a step in the right direction, was not seen by many women as a true step toward the emancipation of women because it did not make veiling a women's choice. Instead the state removed women from the equation yet, again.

Compulsory unveiling was accompanied by a series of other measures aimed at increasing women's education and employment opportunities.[95] The national system of public education was expanded and controlled by the newly established Ministry of Education. The government also set up a national Girl's Scout organization. On the employment side, civil service jobs were opened up to women. The largest concentrations of women were employed in the fields of teaching and midwifery. In order to regulate midwifery practices the newly established Ministry of Health set up a three year training program under the charge of a female French physician.[96] A few women, who had been educated abroad, returned to Iran and were employed as doctors and lecturers at the University of Tehran. Women were also being employed by foreign companies as clerks and typists. This type of employment would eventually be taken up by government departments as well. Women's increased entry in education and employment was not,

[95] Paidar, p. 109.

[96] Ibid.

however, followed by political participation. Women still did not have the right to vote or be elected. Furthermore, the state's integration policies stopped short of substantial reforms directed at the family. The family remained under the auspices of the religious courts and *shari'ah*. While Reza Shah's policies were aimed at diminishing the role and power of the *ulama*, he did not completely disagree with all of their patriarchal ideologies. Reza Shah's policies, however, were nothing compared to the reforms his son would implement.

During WWII, Reza Shah supported the Germans. As a result of this mistake the Allies occupied Iran splitting it into three different spheres of influence. In addition they forced Reza Shah to abdicate his throne in favor of his son. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah, had not been brought up in the stifling confines of a traditional Islamic home. He was educated in Europe and spent a majority of his life there. While in Europe he gained an intimate knowledge of the workings and policies of a modern western state. This knowledge would translate into a number of measures and reforms, which would lessen the power of the Shah while at the same time increasing popular dissent.[97] Due to the Shah's age and upbringing, he had neither the experience nor the strength to maintain control of the population through repressive means. He was forced to adopt a number of conciliatory policies towards political organizations and social groups, which had been severely repressed under his father. Furthermore, in an effort to build support in the rural sectors the Shah implemented a series of land reforms, which returned land that had been taken by the state.[98] These measures would have unintended consequences. Economically, Iran was facing some of the worst problems it had ever seen. In the rural sector poverty and famine were rampant. The problems were further exacerbated by increased rents and taxes. In the urban sectors, during the war the bazaar class benefited from the disruption of foreign trade. However, with the end of the war Iran was forced to renegotiate their regulations on foreign trade. With an increased internal foreign presence came an increased level of imports, effectively shrinking the bazaar's profit margins.

Despite the relative economic depression the business and professional middle class continued to grow. Consequently, there were an increasing number of intellectuals

[97] Keddie, Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution, pp. 105-110.

[98] Paidar, p. 119.

who were not employed. These intellectuals tended to associate their dissatisfaction with the state.[99] This dissatisfaction would become even more pronounced with the perceived westoxification of Iran. In 1967 the Shah passed the Family Protection Act. The Act legally diminished the power of the *ulama* and *shari'ah* in regards to the sacred sphere of the family as well as addressing certain women's rights. One of the key issues that it addressed was the institution of marriage, something that had previously fallen under the jurisdiction of the *ulama* and *shari'ah*.

The Family Protection Act changed the legal age for marriage from 15 to 18 for women. There were however, concessions to the age requirement at the request of the families. Women were now also allowed to instigate divorce proceedings, if they felt that they were not being provided for within the confines of the law. It also restricted a man's previously unlimited right to request a divorce. This article made divorce an option for both sexes. The Act also changed the laws pertaining to polygamy and temporary marriage (*seigh*) both of which were legal in *shari'ah*. Men were now only allowed to take additional wives/consorts if the first wife agreed to it and he could fully support all of them to an equal extent. The basic presumption behind this article was that no man could treat numerous wives equally. For a man to take another wife without the first wife's permission he had to prove that she was unable to perform her wifely duties, which included sexual relations, bearing and rearing of children, and the maintenance of the house.[100] It also affected the rights of a woman in relation to child custody and visitation, in the event of a divorce or death (Articles 14, 16, 17).[101] It allowed women to get out of the home and into the workforce by changing the education policy for women. Primary education was now available for all children, including girls. Furthermore, it opened doors for education at the university level as well by opening fields of study that had recently been closed to girls and by allowing more women to attend university. However, many women especially the Association of Women Lawyers argued that the Family Protection Act still placed the status of women below that of men.

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[99] Paidar, p. 121.

[100] Paidar, pp. 153-157.

[101] Ibid.

Between the years 1973-75, the Shah instituted the first official population policy. Under the umbrella of population control, abortion was legalized during the first trimester of pregnancy with the permission of the husband. The Ministry of Public Health also set up a network of family planning clinics specifically geared towards contraception and birth control. This made contraceptives, mainly the pill because it was the cheapest, available nationwide.[102] This was all done in an effort to curtail the rapid growth of the population in an economy that already could not support itself. Many of the Shah's reforms were based on a secular modernizing agenda. He did not create these reforms because he truly cared about liberating women. He had very traditional ideas about the roles of women, which were evidenced in writings and interviews. However, he strongly believed that for the state to become modern women had to be modern to a degree.[103] This was evidenced in the creation of the Women's Organization of Iran (WOI). Under the umbrella of the WOI all of the independent women's charities, organizations, and societies, were brought under the control of the state. They were strictly regulated and run by the Shah's sister. Through this vehicle the state was able to determine the pace and details of women's liberation without the interference of women.[104] This is not to say that there were not women who lobbied for change and reformation, but if these changes had not been previously highlighted by the states agenda, they simply did not get addressed.

Furthermore, the Shah felt challenged by the *ulama*. The best way to maintain his power and de-legitimize the *ulama* was to highlight the vastly inferior role of women proposed by the *ulama*. The Shah was also facing external pressure from various sources. His reforms were a direct result of these conflicting tensions. Moreover, they deliberately stripped the *ulama* of power and control over the sacred sphere of the family. In many cases, The Shah's reforms directly contradicted what the *ulama* and *shari'ah* proclaimed to be just, proper, and moral. The *ulama* claimed these reforms were a sign of westoxification, a disease that was corrupting their society with loose morals and values. In an attempt to clamp down on this anti-Shah sentiment the Shah enacted a series of repressive measures that further alienated the population.

[102] Paidar, pp. 154-156.

[103] Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran," in Women, Islam, and the State, pp. 60-62.

[104] Ibid.

To make matters worse, the changes and freedoms that were promised in the Family Protection Act were either ambiguous enough or written in such a way that if and when women tried to press for the rights promised them they would inevitably lose the fight. At the most they would gain their freedom but lose their economic stability and at the worst they were ostracized from society and labeled immoral.[105] Women were no more the masters of their destiny than they had been prior to the Shah's reforms. Furthermore, many women felt that they were being put in a position where tremendous pressure was being applied from both sides. On one hand women had the freedoms granted by the Shah's reforms yet on the other hand they had their traditional beliefs and upbringings which conflicted with the Shah's reforms. Due to this pressure many women were unable to reconcile themselves with the Shah's ideas of modern progressive women. They felt a closer bond with Khomeini and his ideas about revolution and the creation of an Islamic state. Women played a large role in the revolution, protesting, marching, and subsequently voting for Khomeini. They quickly realized after the new government was in place that they had made a grave mistake. Women had traded a relatively free state for a return to a patriarchal, traditional, oppressive Islamic regime. Khomeini quickly worked to reverse and in some instances completely destroy everything that the women's movement had gained during the Pahlavi era.

## D.    REVOLUTION AND BEYOND

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was one of the most renowned and revered Imams of his time. During his time in exile in Iraq, he wrote prolifically against the Shah and his ideas of modernization. He believed that the Shah's regime was infected by "westitis." Women, under the Shah's rule, were no longer the chaste preservers of Islamic society. For Khomeini and his supporters, the only way to save society was the institutionalization of "true" Islamic doctrine, that which was found in the *Qur'an* and the *hadith*. A student of Khomeini's, Morteza Motahari took this one step further and said that in Islam there were two separate spheres that existed in the world, that of society, which was ruled by "man made" laws and that of the family which was sacred and governed by "natural

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[105] Paidar, pp. 164-166.

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laws."[106] Motahari believed that this division was necessary because the evils in western societies existed because they mixed the family and social spheres. It was also understood that the woman's Islamic role in life was that of mother and wife. For a woman to be a good mother she needed to be home to raise and nurture the children, she could not do this if she was employed in the public sector. After Khomeini' regime came to power women's dreams of empowerment were quickly killed. A couple of days after taking office Khomeini declared that all women had to be veiled those that were not would be subject to repercussions under *shari'ah*. Khomeini believed that women were the markers of an Islamic identity. He stated that women who decried the *hijab* were the painted dolls of the Shah's anti-Islamic western regime and that they should be treated as such. Men and consequently women were allowed to harass women who appeared in the streets without *hijab*. Women were also quickly removed from government jobs, judiciary positions and any other types of work that were not deemed suitable for women under the tenants of Islam.[107] Women were once again relegated to the home and the hearth. The Family Practice Act was declared anti-Islamic and all of the changes and rights it entailed were repealed.

The new regime stated that any women who had received divorces under the premises of the Family Protection Act were still legally married to their husbands. Women were once again put under the thumb of the men in their lives. They were no longer allowed outside of their homes unless they were escorted by a male relative. The practice of *seigh* and polygamy were reinstituted and the family planning and population control policies were stopped. Emphasis was returned to absolute right of a father or paternal grandfather in custody matters and marriage for female children. The legal age for marriage was reduced to 9 years old for females (the age of the Prophet Mohammed's wife Ai'sha). Women were again put into the category equivalent to that of chattel. They belonged to first their fathers and brothers and then to their husbands. The death penalty was reinstated for adultery, to include rape. Moreover, physical punishment (i.e. lashings) for infractions of the laws was reinstated. The regimes attitude toward women was, in one respect a broad project aimed at removing the westernized modern middle class. On the

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[106] Moghadam, pp. 194-196.

[107] Moghadam, pp. 197-199.

other hand, it had the effect of relegating women back into the role of second class citizens.[108] Women, however, were not prepared to return to this role.

The rapid Islamisation of Iran had an unsettling effect on the regime. It made gender the battlefield instead of focusing on the solidification of the new regime. In the face of this new regime women faced two choices they could they could protests against the regime or become a part of the regime. While many women chose the later some chose the former. The Women's Society of Islamic Revolution (WSIR), which was headed by Shahin Tabatabai, Zahra Rahnavard, and Faezeh Hashemi, vehemently protested forced *hijab*.[109] The WSIR not only published a popular Muslim women's magazine but set up centers in rural areas. These centers focused on creating women's awareness. They believed that failure of traditional Islam was rooted in its male dominated culture and its distorted interpretations of Islamic Law.[110] While not overtly anti-Khomeini the WSIR did not believe that Khomeini's regime understood the implications of their policies. Moreover, they refused to associate themselves with secular feminists. In the initial years following the revolution a number of women's organizations, most of which had party ties, were ruthlessly suppressed by the new regime. However, a number of important factors would allow women continued access to the public sphere. These included the devastating effects of the war with Iraq, severe economic depression, and the inability of the state to meet labor force demands.

It would not be until the death of Khomeini that the state would be forced to recognize the fact that some of their policies were actually detrimental to the growth of the state. Nowhere was this more evident than in the first census after the revolution. In the years between 1976 and 1986 the population of Iran grew at an alarming rate of 3.9%. Out of the approximately 49 million Iranians close to half of them were under the age of fifteen.[111] Furthermore, a long and expensive war with Iraq had almost tripled the foreign

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[108] Moghadam, p. 200.

[109] Paidar, p. 241.

[110] The WSIR did not embrace a western view of women. It believed that the west failed to liberate women because women were portrayed as sexual objects. Furthermore, communist groups failed to liberate women because it placed too much of an emphasis on women's productive role in society. Islam (true Islam) provided the answer.

[111] Moghadam, p. 202.

debt. Many Iranians were facing crippling poverty. These numbers scared the *ulama* into reconsidering family planning. In June 1989 the government formally lifted the ban on the use of contraceptives. By 1990 the state realized that even more effective measures had to be taken.

In 1992 the High Council of the Cultural Revolution adopted a set of employment policies directed towards women. This directive, while reiterating the importance of family roles encouraged the integration of women into the workforce. It continued to rule out certain occupations for women because they were deemed un-Islamic and therefore inappropriate. The government also changed its policy on the role of women in the legal field. By 1995 there were 185 registered female lawyers in Iran. During the 1995 parliamentary elections, nine female members were elected to the *Majles*. By 1996, 38 percent of civil servants were women. These numbers belie the belief that the revolution returned all women to private sector. In fact, proper Muslim women were not banned from the public sphere. Moreover, many Muslim feminists realized that they could better serve their movement by adopting the regimes image of proper Islamic women, i.e. wearing *hijab* and then working within the system to affect change. In the first *Majles* four women were elected. One of these women was Azam Taleghani. Taleghani was a well educated political activist. She believed that social justice could only be attained by removing the rampant consumerism of the elite. Furthermore, she was well know for advocating a woman's right to control her body and thereby her fertility. Another of the more active women elected to the *Majles* was Maryam Behrouzi. Behrouzi studied theology in the university prior to the revolution. She led a number of anti-Pahlavi protests. After the revolution she became an advocate of women's rights. She believed that women shouldered an even bigger burden than men because women were responsible for the home and the children. Interestingly enough both of these women believed that the forces that were subjugating women in Iran were not a part of Islam. They were cultural inclinations that had been fed to society in the name of Islam.[112]

Many of the women who had participated in the revolution were severely disappointed with the results of the revolution. While some of these women believed that

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[112] Moghadam, p. 217.

it was patriarchal practices that had been imported into Islam others believed that Islam and the Islamic state were directly responsible for the reduction in their positions. These women took up the feminist cause under the auspices of secularism. They believed that the only way to improve the role of women in society was to get rid of the Islamic state. Many of these secular women were forced into exile. However, they continued to protest the regimes policies toward women. Both of these groups realized that they would have to work together in order to affect changes. This collective participation was seen in the media more than anywhere else.

The best example of this cooperative feminist strategy is especially seen in two of the most well known Islamist women's magazines *Zanan* and *Farzaneh*. The stated aims of these magazines are to, "promote women's status through emphasizing legal, social and economic shortcomings, and to propose change in civil and penal laws, the employment legislation and constitutional law."[113] These magazines print secular and Islamist articles. In some issues they have translated classic feminist essays by western feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Wolfe, as well as more modern feminist articles. Despite the fact that there are no real independent women's organizations in Iran women have found an overt way to act collectively. The interesting debate behind this cooperation is that women have realized that they can gain more by collaborating than they can by catering to the ideological differences. Furthermore these magazines have the distinct advantage of being able to exert pressure on the elite by using women's networks within civil society. However, these institutions have been under attack by traditionalists who urge the government to shut them down. Despite all of these changes women still feel that they have not made drastic advances in reclaiming their rights. Furthermore, there has been an emerging trend of violent reaction against women who defy the traditionalist view of women.

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[113] Azadeh Kian, "Women and Politics in Iran: The Gender Conscious Drive to Change," pp. 91-92.

## E.    CONCLUSION

Islamic feminists like Sherkat, Teleghani, and Heshmi, have made important contributions to the women's question in Iran. They rely on the reinterpretation of Islamic texts in order to challenge laws and policies that they believe are based on orthodox, literalist, and misogynist interpretations of the texts. The also address some of the fundamentals of Islamic doctrine and use these to debate the gender system in place in Iran. As a result of this pressure the Iranian government has adopted a number of conciliatory policies that have effectively increased the status of women in Iran. In addition secular women have found a way to express their ideas without undermining Islamic feminist and the feminist ideology.

What is unique to the feminist debate in Iran is that the protagonists do not simply use Islamic discourse but operate within the parameters of a state in which a vision of Islam has been realized. The younger generation has quickly forgotten the lessons of the revolution. For them it is not uncommon to work alongside women. Women, while still not able to directly participate in religious debates have affected enormous change. Society in Iran has become extremely gender-aware. However, not all steps have been in the right direction. In 1998 a law, proposed by conservative female members of the *Majles* passed. It restricted the rights of women and the women's press to propagate women's rights outside the confines of the legal and Islamic framework currently in place. Moreover, no real debate has been offered about *hijab*. *Hijab* seems to be the sacred cow of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

# V.  CONCLUSION

The role and condition of women in the Middle East has been a contentious subject. According to western standards Middle Eastern and especially Muslim women suffer the most egregious conditions. These assertions are demonstrated in the disparity between population growth and lack of literacy and labor force participation amongst women. In these instances women are not seen as productive members of society. They are portrayed as the quiet unseen masses. Islam is seen as the leading factor in the subjugation of these women. However, this claim does not look past the superficial analysis of these societies. The effective investigation of women and gender relations within the Islamic Middle East requires an in-depth study of the societies these women inhabit. It is through these studies that we can begin to dissect the underlying narrative of gender relations in the Middle East. This narrative is colored by a number of extremely important historical factors. Determining how gender and sexuality are articulated socially, verbally, and institutionally. This debate is further complicated by the imposition of western feminist ideologies as the sole true identifier of feminist ideology.

The west has created an image of Muslim women as a monolithic entity. This is particularly problematic because the Middle East covers over twenty different countries, each with unique socio-cultural qualities that have shaped gender relations. It is within a very specific political, religious, and social background that the "woman question" has been framed. Moreover, a number of western feminists have imported western femininity, or lack thereof, onto Muslim feminists. They use these ideals as the yardstick of modernity without taking into account area specific socio-cultural factors. All of these approaches fail to open a true dialogue about gender politics in the Middle East and discount the active participation of Muslim women in gender debates and socio-political struggles. There has been a stream of feminist thought in the Middle East which has been articulated through literature, active social and political participation, and the creation and maintenance of numerous women's societies. The results of this participation have yielded a number of different results. In some cases Muslim women have begun to question what it is to be a feminist and what the feminist movement truly represents. This

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new Muslim feminine identity created a complex relationship between western feminist ideologies and an emerging Muslim feminist ideology.

The symbol of Muslim women's subjugation, the veil, has gained new prominence in the political arena. In the last two decades there has been a re-emergence of Islamic dress, including veiling. In some instances it has been a tool of the state to distinguish Muslim from western society. In other cases it has been an Islamic attempt to reclaim a cultural authenticity that is distinct from the west. In both of these instances the veil was a direct reaction against a western presence. Initially it was western men who imbued the veil with political, cultural, and social status that goes far beyond its initial significance. This ideology was first expressed in Egypt by Lord Cromer. He believed that the modernity and liberation of a country could be seen in its abandonment of Islamic ways including clothing. This image created a dichotomy equating western clothing with modernity and Muslim clothing with backwardness. Later, this image would be further enhanced by western media and academia. They placed an emphasis on the veil as a tool of subjugation. For them it identified a way in which Islamic societies could completely erase women as identifiable entities. However, these critics neglected to investigate the actual roles of women in these societies and their own societies. Furthermore, they neglected to offer an explanation that did not in some way make one identity superior to the other.

In the later half of the twentieth century, the roles of Muslim women have transformed and the nature and variety of women's participation become complex. This complexity derives from a number of different changes in the social reality and the external realities. In Iran women became a state project for modernization. During Pahlavi rule women were not seen as active political participants. They were just another way for the Shah to symbolically display Iran's modernity. Under the umbrella of modernization women were granted a number of rights that served to elevate their positions in society. These rights and freedoms were given in such a way that the state still controlled women and defined gender roles. These laws had a number of added benefits, women were now allowed to enter the arena of white-collar and professional

work, opportunities for advanced education were opened, and in some cases women were allowed to become members of parliament. In these instances women worked within the state system.

However, not all Iranian women were content to work within or be a part of the system. This was seen in the massive participation of women in a number of different protests throughout history. The most well know being the protests leading up to the 1979 Revolution. After the Revolution women were once again made pawns of the state and the religious elite. Important laws like the Family Protection Act, which had been put in place by the Shah's regime, were repealed. Women were once again relegated to the domestic sphere under the auspices of an Islamic state. This turn of events was unsettling for Iranian women. Even more unsettling was the forced return to *hijab*. Iranian feminists have not let these events hold them back. Women have been extremely politically active in Iran. Both secular and Islamist feminists have petitioned the courts to change laws, they have launched protests, and made gains in re-defining gender boundaries. Perhaps the most pervasive example of the women's movement in Iran is seen in the media. It is in this environment that women have found a way to work together, regardless of their differing ideologies to affect change.

The same trend can be seen in Egypt. Initially women were used as tools of the state in its effort to modernize. They were pushed into the public sphere, making them important political actors. This process was accelerated with the intrusion of western colonial powers. The opening of Egypt to western ideas and culture created a complex relationship between the colonized and the colonizers. This relationship would later be identified by Edward Said as Orientalism, a way of identifying oneself in contrast to an eastern other. By the end of the 19th century women in Egypt had access to a multitude of different social, cultural, and political ideologies. This exposure would have a lasting effect on how women identified themselves and how they were identified by the state and men.

Initially, for a number of different reasons, upper and middle class women embraced western feminist ideologies. However, in the 1930's an internal debate would begin to emerge that would split the feminist movement in Egypt down the middle. Some

Muslim women believed that they did not have to identify themselves via and imported western idea of feminism. They instead could find a culturally authentic way of reclaiming their rights and freedoms. Parallel to the Iranian case a revolution occurred. After the revolution all groups that were not state controlled by the state were ruthlessly suppressed. This included almost all of the women's organizations and all of the feminist organizations. This suppression did not, however, stop women from pursuing their goals.

In the late 1990s a number of external factors caused Egypt to take a hard look at its level of human rights abuses. At the same time a number of internal pressures by Islamist groups were placing an inordinate amount of pressure on the state to define gender roles. Both of these factors have contributed to the raging debate about what and who constitutes the real feminist voice in Egypt. Islamist feminists believe that Islam provides the answer. Through a feminine re-interpretation of the holy texts women are working to claim their rightful role in society. On the other hand there are the secular feminists who see Islam as sole arbiter of women's subjugation.

In both of these cases the debate continues about what role women should play in the public sphere. Much of this debate is centered on the identification of what or who constitutes a feminist identity. In the last couple of years this debate has become a broader one about gender. This has changed the language of the debate but not the reasoning behind it.

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