

## COMPETING AGENDA

Feminists, Islam, and the state in  
nineteenth- and twentieth-century Egypt

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*As in Europe and the United States, an explicitly feminist movement had arisen in nineteenth-century Egypt among middle- and upper-class women. Alongside that movement a drive developed to liberate the country from British imperial domination, which siphoned off Egyptian resources and blocked independent rule. In the 1920s and thereafter, feminism and national liberation were intertwined causes in Egypt as they were in many other regions dominated by imperial powers such as France, Russia, Japan, Belgium, Portugal, and the Netherlands. To channel feminist activism into the anti-colonial cause, nationalists promised that independence would bring improvements in women's condition; but to their mind the national cause had to come first. Imperial domination affected everyone, it was argued, whereas the oppression of women only affected some of the people.*

*Debates over women played a surprisingly large part in anti-colonial theories used to argue for independence. In some of these debates it was said that imperialism made women too Western; independence would allow them to return to the safety and seclusion of the home. In India, women's spirituality in the privacy of the home was said to be akin to the spirituality of India before Western domination. Both needed to be restored. However, in other regions seeking independence, the Westernization of women was at the center of anti-colonial movements. The modernization of women in such areas as literacy would improve the general condition of the people and allow them a stronger position in the world of free nations.*

*Aided by women's activism and feminism, Egypt gained its full independence after World War II. The situation of women did not fulfill the promises made by nationalist leaders, however. This too was a common result of the anti-colonial struggles of the post-World War II period. None the less, the continuity in women's activism from the beginning of the twentieth century through the post-World War*

*II period was more visible in many decolonizing countries than in the United States and Europe over the same period. A strong women's presence shaped social and political movements for the entire century.*

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In Egypt the 'woman question' has been a contested domain involving feminists, Islamists, and the state. This chapter explores their competing discourses and agenda in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Egypt and how they have shifted over time.<sup>1</sup> Divergent discourses arose in the context of modern state and class formation, and economic and political confrontation with the West. These multiple discourses have been sustained in strikingly different political and economic cultures as state and society continually negotiate changing realities.

From the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the state in Egypt tried to draw women into the economic and technological transformations underway. As a consequence it began to wrest women away from the more exclusive control of the family, threatening the authority and domination of men over their women. Earlier in the century, after freeing Egypt from direct Ottoman rule, the new ruler, Muhammad 'Ali, while consolidating his power, had placed the Islamic establishment centred at Al Azhar under the control of the state. The former broad purview of the religious establishment was eroded piecemeal in the drive towards secularisation of education and law. The only exception to this was the sphere of personal status laws.<sup>2</sup> For women this created an awkward dichotomy between their role as citizens of the nation state (*watan*) and as members of the religious community (*umma*). In a division that was never precise, the state increasingly came to influence their public roles, leaving to religion the regulation of their private or family roles. The structural contradictions and tensions this created have to this day never been fully resolved.<sup>3</sup>

While promoting new social roles for women, the state could not afford unduly to alienate patriarchal interests and has therefore made various accommodations and alliances. Whatever their competing interests, the state and religious forces have retained patriarchal forms of control over women. It is this patriarchal dimension that feminists have identified and confronted and for which they have been variously attacked, contained, or suppressed by state authorities and Islamists alike. However, in Egypt there has been sufficient space – albeit more frequently taken than granted – within state and society for women to speak out as feminists and activists. Moreover, the authorities have at times deliberately encouraged women's initiatives for their own purposes.

The earliest articulation of women's feminist consciousness, first discernible in occasional published writings – poetry, essays, and tales – by the 1860s and 1870s, preceded colonial occupation and the rise of nationalism.<sup>4</sup> It was more widely expressed from the 1890s with the rise of women's journalism and salon debates. This new awareness (not yet called feminist; in fact the term 'feminism' was not used in Egypt until the early 1920s) was based on an increased sensitivity to the everyday constraints imposed upon women by a patriarchal society. Muslim, Christian, and Jew alike shared this sensitivity and they projected an

understanding, implicit or explicit, that these constraints were not solely religiously based as they had been made to believe. Furthermore, from the rise of feminism in Egypt to the present, its advocates across the spectrum from left to right have consistently used Islam, as well as nationalism, as legitimising discourses. In this chapter, feminism is broadly construed to include an understanding that women have suffered forms of subordination or oppression because of their sex, and an advocacy of ways to overcome them to achieve better lives for women, and for men, within the family and society. I am using a definition of feminism broad enough to be all-inclusive without intending to suggest a monolithic feminism. I indicate divergences within this larger framework while keeping the primary focus on the interplay among three major discourses, those of feminists, Islamists, and the state.<sup>5</sup>

Feminist, nationalist, and Islamist positions on the 'woman question' have seldom been considered together in the literature.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, although women's views come from the inside, their voices – whether as feminists or Islamists – have been subsumed within 'larger' (male) discourses. Here, I pay particular attention to the agenda of women who are feminists across the political spectrum and of women Islamists. Focusing on what women have to say makes it possible to discern their departures from their male counterparts as well as their own internal differences.

The exploration of the competing agenda and discourses on women is organised within the following historical framework: (1) the modern state-building and colonial periods; (2) the period of the liberal experiment; (3) the period of the revolution, Arabism, and socialism; and (4) the era of *infatih* capitalism and populist Islamist ascendancy.

### **The modern state-building and colonial periods: nineteenth century to 1922**

During the nineteenth century, especially in the later decades, new contenders appeared in the shaping and control of discourse in general, and more particularly, discourses on women. With the broadening of opportunities for education and the rise of women's feminist consciousness, women who had previously been the objects of prescriptive pronouncements began to challenge patriarchal domination.

The expanding modern state promoted new educational and work opportunities for women, especially in health and teaching, but incurred resistance from families. In the early nineteenth century, for example, Egyptians did not initially allow their daughters to attend the new state midwifery school (Ethiopian slaves were recruited as the first students).<sup>7</sup> In 1836, Muhammad 'Ali appointed a Council for Public Education to look into creating a state system of education for girls but it was found impossible to implement. Later, however, during the rule of Isma'il, one of his wives

sponsored the first state school for girls which opened in 1873, serving the daughters of high officials and white slaves from elite households. Meanwhile, encouraged by the state, Shaikh Ahmad Rifa'i Al Tahtawi and 'Ali Pasha Mubarak published books in 1869 and 1875 advocating education for women, using Islamic justifications from the Quran and *Hadith*.<sup>8</sup> It was not easy, however, to draw women out of the realm controlled by the family.

Feminist discourse first emerged in the writings of women of privilege and education who lived in the secluded world of the urban harem.<sup>9</sup> Women gained new exposure through expanded education and widening contacts within the female world. They made comparisons between their own lives and those of women and men of other social and national backgrounds. Through their new education women also gained deeper knowledge of their religion. Some urban middle- and upper-class women began to contest the Islamic justification for their seclusion, *hijab* (meaning then the veiling of both face and body), and related controls over their lives.<sup>10</sup> In 1892, Zainab Al Fawwaz protested in *Al Nil* magazine, 'We have not seen any of the divinely ordered systems of law, or any law from among the corpus of (Islamic) religious law ruling that woman is to be prohibited from involvement in the occupations of men.'<sup>11</sup> When Hind Naufal founded the journal, *Al Fatah* (The Young Woman) in the same year, inaugurating a women's press in Egypt, women found a new forum for discussing and spreading their nascent feminism.<sup>12</sup>

This emergent feminism was grounded, and legitimised, in the framework of Islamic modernism expounded towards the end of the century by Shaikh Muhammad 'Abduh, a distinguished teacher and scholar from Al Azhar. 'Abduh turned a revolutionary corner when he proposed that believers, by which he meant the learned, could go straight to the sources of religion, principally the Quran and the *Hadith*, for guidance in the conduct of everyday life.<sup>13</sup> Through *ijtihad*, or independent inquiry into the sources of religion, 'Abduh demonstrated that one could be both Muslim and modern and that indeed not all traditional practice was in keeping with Islam. In dealing with gender issues, 'Abduh confronted the problem of patriarchal excesses committed in the name of Islam. He especially decried male abuses of the institutions of divorce and polygamy.<sup>14</sup>

The opening out encouraged by *ijtihad* had a number of consequences. While Muslim women's earliest feminist writing may not have been immediately inspired by Islamic modernism, it was not long before it developed within this framework. The progressive discourse of Muslim men was, however, situated within Islamic modernism from the start. It was generated by men of the upper educated strata, mainly new secular intellectuals, often men of law.<sup>15</sup> Later, towards the middle of the twentieth century, *ijtihad* would also be evoked by men and women of the lower-middle class to create a populist, conservative Islamist discourse (the

method – that is *ijtihad* – rather than the content was inspired by Islamic modernism). Thus two marginalised groups; women and the lower-middle class, entered the debate.

After women had been producing their own feminist writing for some time, Murqus Fahmi, a young Coptic lawyer, published *Al Mar' a fi al sharq* (The Woman in the East) in 1894, criticising patriarchal tyranny over women in the home which he claimed no religion sanctioned. Five years later, a Muslim judge, Qasim Amin, published his famous book, *Tahrir al mar' a* (The Liberation of the Woman) in 1899, attacking the practice of female seclusion and the *hijab*, by which he meant face veiling (not modest covering of the head and body). He argued that women in Egypt were backward because they had been deprived of the legitimate rights accorded to them by Islam. He insisted that for the nation to advance and become modern, women must regain these rights. This pro-feminist discourse generated from within the establishment, by a Muslim lawyer and judge, drew wide criticism, especially from religious conservatives and members of the lower-middle class.<sup>16</sup> While it was perceived as more dangerous than women's feminist writing, less widely visible at the time, in the long run women's feminism would be more sustained and more threatening.<sup>17</sup>

Early in the twentieth century, women's feminist writing became more visible and reached a wider mainstream audience, when Malak Hifni Nasif, known by her pen-name, Bahithat Al Badiya (Searcher in the Desert), began publishing essays in *Al Jarida*, the paper of progressive nationalist party, *Al Umma*. These essays and her speeches were published by the party press in 1910 in a book called *Al Nisa' iyyat* (which can be translated as 'Feminine or Feminist Pieces', in the absence of a specific term for 'feminist' in Arabic). Women's feminism was becoming more explicit and was increasingly expressed within a nationalist idiom reflecting and fuelling the growing nationalist movement in Egypt.

Another principal producer of feminist ideas in this period was Nabawiyya Musa, who later published her essays in a book entitled *Al mar' a wa al 'amal* (The Woman and Work) 1920. These two women were both from the middle class: Bahithat Al Badiya from the upper and Nabawiyya Musa from the more modest strata. They were among the first graduates of the Saniyya Teachers School established in 1889, and both became teachers. In 1907, Musa was the first Egyptian woman to sit for the baccalaureate examination, and the last until after independence; the colonial authorities, with their policy of training men for practical administration, were not prepared to subsidise women's secondary education. Meanwhile, these two young women carried on consciousness-raising through their public lectures to strictly female audiences composed mainly of upper-class women and at special classes for women at the new Egyptian University (which were soon stopped and the money saved was used to send three men on study missions abroad).<sup>18</sup>

In 1911, Bahithat Al Badiya became a pioneer in feminist activism when she sent demands to the Egyptian National Congress for women's education and rights to employment and women's rights to participate in congregational worship in mosques.<sup>19</sup> While they were claiming women's rights to public space, feminists like Bahithat Al Badiya and Huda Sha'rawi early in the century actually opposed the unveiling of the face that male feminists advocated. As a tactical move, they wanted women to gain more education and to reclaim public space before they unveiled. While for progressive men unveiling had a key ideological and symbolic value, for women unveiling was a practical matter that they themselves would have to undertake, with the attendant risks of taunts and assaults on their reputations.<sup>20</sup>

The nationalists of the *Umma* Party led by Ahmad Lutfy Al Sayyid and other men of the upper class supported feminism, while those of the *Watani* Party, mainly men of more modest middle-class origins, headed by Mustafa Kamil, were antagonistic towards women's emancipation which they saw as an undermining Western influence. Unlike the *Umma* Party, which advocated a more secular society, the *Watani* Party favoured an Islamic society supporting the notion of a caliphate. It was within these respective frameworks that men as nationalists situated their views on women's place and roles and their own attitudes towards feminism.<sup>21</sup>

During the national revolution from 1919 to 1922, the first priority for Egyptian feminists and nationalists of both sexes was independence. To a large extent feminist and nationalist positions temporarily united in favour of the common cause. The extent and harshness of colonial oppression were underscored when upper-class women, mobilised by feminist and nationalist leaders among them, left the seclusion of their harems to demonstrate, and when poor women also filled the streets in more spontaneous protest. Members of the Wafdist Women's Central Committee (WWCC), created in 1920 as the women's section of the nationalist party, the *Wafd*, insisted on participating fully in decision-making, not just in auxiliary activities. In the midst of the revolution, these women at times took public feminist stands. In 1920 for example, when the male nationalist leadership did not consult the WWCC on the independence proposal they were circulating, the women publicly announced their objections.<sup>22</sup> Yet during colonial occupation a feminism that called for greater female participation in society was upheld by progressive male nationalists and generally tolerated by others. Moreover, during the ferment of revolution, male nationalists enthusiastically welcomed women's militancy.

While Islamic modernism, liberal nationalism, and the feminism of progressive men prevailed in the early modern state-building and colonial period, women's causes found a positive and supportive environment. The attacks of conservative *ulama* during this period focused on Qasim Amin's books, while the opposition to feminist ideas by nationalists like Mustafa

Kamil and Talat Harb did not create the broader conservative groundswell that expressions of anti-feminism would produce later in the century. During colonial occupation, women's feminism was not connected with a public, organised movement; it was the articulation of a broad new philosophy. Men's pro-feminism likewise expressed a philosophical position, and at the time was seemingly more radical than women's, for example, in calling for an end to face veiling. Men's feminist rhetoric, however, reached a climax during occupation. In the next stage, we find the more radical development of women's liberal feminism while men's earlier expression of liberal feminism faded for reasons that will become apparent later in our discussion.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries polemics were started that have plagued feminist and Islamist positions ever since and have had political reverberations in official discourse. These concern definitions of culture, authenticity, identity, and modernity – and their implications for women's roles around which a battle of legitimacy has raged. The debate has continued right up to the final decade of the twentieth century, as have the state's efforts to control competing discourses and to appropriate elements useful to itself.

### The liberal experiment: 1923–1952

Early in this period, the feminist positions of progressive men and women which had drawn closest during colonial occupation and in the pre-independence nationalist movement started to diverge. Women had a rude awakening when it became clear that liberal men were not prepared to implement their promise to integrate women into public life after nominal political independence in 1922. Feminists became openly militant, while most men who had been pro-feminist nationalists, in the forefront of whom was Sa'd Zaghlul, grew silent as their attention turned towards their new political careers. A few others responded with concrete positive actions, such as Ahmad Lutfy Al Sayyid, whose championship of university education for women will be noted later.<sup>23</sup> There were moments, moreover, when feminists would be beleaguered, especially in the early 1930s during the government of Isma'il Sidki, a political and social reactionary. In the 1950s, the new more radical, socialist feminists would be harassed outright. During the same period, a rising activist, Zainab Al Ghazali, would move from feminism to Islamic fundamentalism, beginning a conservative women's religious and political movement.<sup>24</sup>

With formal independence (British troops remained on Egyptian soil until 1956), nationalist men become part of the new state. At first the official discourse articulated in the new Constitution of 1923 seemed to fulfil their promises to women when it declared: 'All Egyptians are equal before the law. They enjoy equally civil and political rights and equally have public

responsibilities without distinction of race, language, or religion.' However, the principle of gender equality was soon cancelled when an electoral law restricted suffrage to males only. The following year women were barred from attending the opening of the new parliament, except as wives of ministers and other high state officials. The idealism of nationalist men gave way to political pragmatism in the new independent 'liberal' era.

At this point, women's feminist stance became explicit – the word 'feminist' began to be used – and their feminism became tied to an organised, political movement led by *Al Ittihad al nisa'i al misri* (the Egyptian Feminist Union, EFU) created in 1923 and headed by Huda Sha'rawi. The first unequivocal use of the term occurred in 1923 when the EFU feminists employed the term, *feministe*, in French, the everyday language of most of them. (To this day Arabic lacks a precise term for feminism.)<sup>25</sup> From 1923, feminism crystallised around a set of demands, a broad agenda of claims for political, social, economic, and legal rights. However, initial priority was given to women's education followed by new work opportunities and the reform of the personal status law. Some demands were granted relatively easily, such as equal secondary school education for girls and raising the minimum marriage age for both sexes (achieved in 1923 and 1924 respectively). The entry of women into the state university in 1929 as achieved, not without difficulty, by the Rector himself, Ahmad Lutfy Al Sayyid, one of the few nationalists who actively strove to implement his progressive ideas. Gains in the sphere of employment were mainly achieved in those areas which were most congruent with the immediate priorities of the state, such as in education and medicine. These were fields in which women professionals typically served the needs of other women and thus their new work also perpetuated gender segregation in public space. However, greater numbers of women were also drawn into employment in the expanding textile factories, where they worked more closely with men.

During the early 1930s, when the reactionary, Isma'il Sidqi was at the head of government, feminists encountered some setbacks, such as a conservative educational policy opposing higher education for women. With the change of government in 1933, however, the more characteristic liberal atmosphere was restored. Although feminists were able to conduct public activities, there were also to be disappointments. Most importantly, no headway was made in formal political rights for women, nor in the reform of personal status law. In addition, state-legalised prostitution was not abolished.<sup>26</sup>

During this period religious officials and feminists shared some common social concerns. When the feminists called for the prohibition of alcohol and the ending of state-licensed prostitution, the Shaikh of Al Azhar Muhammad Abu Al Fadl wrote to the president of the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) saying: 'We appreciate the value of your honourable

association and its diligent efforts to spread virtue and combat vice. There are in Egypt now distinguished women whose impact on society is no less important than that of honourable men.<sup>27</sup> However, when it came to demands for political rights for women, the same Islamic authorities pronounced them to be un-Islamic, both officially through *fatwas* (religious decrees) and through unofficial utterances.<sup>28</sup>

Official Islam was not the only Islamist platform during this period. A conservative popular Islamic movement emerged with the creation of the Muslim Brothers (*Ikhwan Muslimin*) by Hasan Al Banna in 1928. This movement drew on a wide base of support from the modest and lower strata of the middle class, strongly opposing the continued British military presence and economic imperialism. The Muslim Brothers, connecting Egypt's ills with a deviation from the practice of true Islam, went to the sources of their religion for fresh inspiration. They emphasised individual reform as the first step towards improving society, but their ultimate, more radical goal was the creation of an Islamic state. The ideology of the Muslim Brothers, laying stress on the moral foundations of society, articulated a conservative discourse privileging the patriarchal family, male authority over women, and clear-cut differentiation of gender roles.<sup>29</sup>

During the militancy of the 1919 revolution and its immediate aftermath, class differences between women as feminists and nationalists were of little importance in the face of larger common causes. However, in time, differences in class and culture produced cleavages between women and raised questions of cultural authenticity. The upper class had adopted elements of Western manners expressed in dress, in everyday life, and in the use of the French language. Indeed, the language of the EFU journal founded in 1925 was French. Because the EFU leadership was upper class and because its feminist ideas were mainly expressed in French, feminism came to be considered, especially by detractors, as foreign. The nationalism of Egyptian men who also spoke French and wore Western dress was not, however, denigrated in the same way.<sup>30</sup> The importance assigned to cultural symbols was different for the two sexes. Men could change and retain authenticity (the *tarbush* or fez, the Ottoman head-dress, was even forbidden to men by the state following the 1952 revolution) while the burdens of continuity were placed on women.

The tension between feminism and cultural authenticity is well illustrated in the case of Zainab Al Ghazali. The daughter of a prosperous cotton merchant with an Al Azhar education, she joined the EFU as a young woman in 1935. Around that time, Al Azhar initiated seminars for women at the *Kulliyah Shar'iyah* (the Islamic Law College) under the direction of Shaikh Ma'mun Shinawi (later, Shaikh of Al Azhar) which Al Ghazali joined. Within the year, Al Ghazali formed the Muslim Women's Society (MWS) – Shinawi was present at its inauguration – and left the EFU. In a recent interview Al Ghazali said, 'The Egyptian Feminist Union wanted to

establish the civilisation of the Western woman in Egypt and the rest of the Arab and Islamic worlds.' She also remarked that when she left the feminist organisation, Huda Sha'rawi told her, 'You are separating yourself from me intellectually,' adding, 'I ask you not to fight the Egyptian Feminist Union.' And Al Ghazali confesses, 'I never fought it.'<sup>31</sup> In fact, there was occasional co-operation between the two organisations, mainly in nationalist activism, as Hawa Idris, the head of the EFU's youth group, the *Shaqiqat* (established in 1935) recalled recently.<sup>32</sup>

The division between feminist and fundamentalist women that originated in the late 1930s was to persist, and their divergent orientations, perceptions, beliefs, and agenda would be articulated in competing discourses. While the EFU women found their feminist ideology and programme compatible with Islam, and sought its legitimising force, their overall ideological framework was secular rather than religious. For Al Ghazali and the MWS, on the other hand, since the *Shari'ah* regulates all aspects of life, a separate ideology of feminism was at best redundant and at worst an undermining Western ideology. Al Ghazali, who extols the absolute equality (*musawa mutlaqa*) between women and men in Islam, finds women's liberation within the framework of religion.<sup>33</sup> Fundamentalist men and women typically speak of complementarity rather than equality and stress male authority over women. The EFU championed greater access for women to public roles while the MWS lauded women's family duties and obligations.

As a secular Egyptian organisation, the EFU included under its aegis Muslims and Christians alike, while the MWS as a strictly Muslim religious organisation did not cater to all Egyptians. The issue of 'secularism' (*almaniyya*) has been contentious. Fundamentalist women called Egyptian feminism 'secular', thus implying that it was outside the bounds of Islam. However, Egyptian Muslim women distinguished their feminism which they based on Islamic principles from the 'secular' basis of Turkish feminism. An article in the EFU's journal *Al Misriyya* (The Egyptian Woman) in 1937 said, for example, that 'while the Turkish woman has attained her freedom by virtue of foreign laws [alluding to the 1926 Turkish Civil Code based not on the Islamic *Shari'ah* but on a Swiss model] the Egyptian woman will never ask for her rights except by basing her requests on the Islamic *Shari'ah*.'<sup>34</sup> The EFU and most other feminists later shied away from a secularism which severed all links with religion. This would be called '*almaniyya la dini*', literally, secularism without religion, by some of today's fundamentalists. Women's fundamentalist leadership under Al Ghazali favoured an Islamic state with a theocratic ruler, while the EFU feminists accepted the notion of a secular state whose legitimacy was grounded in the basic principles of Islam.

Around the time of the creation of the MWS, Egyptian feminist activism broadened in response to the Arab Uprising in Palestine and to calls for support from Palestinian women to Egyptian feminists. Both Arab and

religious – Muslim and Christian – identities were evoked in the drive to save Palestine. The EFU hosted the Conference for the Defence of Palestine in 1938, which religious and state authorities applauded equally. It was yet another instance when militant nationalism blurred gender lines. The feminists' collective nationalist action in 1938 led to the first pan-Arab Feminist Conference in 1944. Waving the banner of Arab unity, the pan-Arab feminist conference again won the praise of governments and the Islamic establishment for their nationalist actions.<sup>35</sup>

Towards the end of the 1930s and in the 1940s, feminism in Egypt broadened its outreach and new organisations proliferated. The EFU began its Arabic-language journal, *Al Misriyya*, in 1937, aiming to 'elevate the intellectual and moral level of the masses and to create lines of solidarity between the different classes of the nation.' The Arabic periodical aimed at a wider audience than *L'Egyptienne* and projected a self-consciously Islamic tone heralded in the journal's motto: 'Take half your religion from 'Aisha.' It was to be 'the *minbar* [pulpit] for feminist demands' as well as 'the tongue of the most noble nationalist hopes'. However, while EFU leaders Huda Sha'rawi and Saiza Nabarawi tried to serve the needs of a broader constituency, the rank and file of the EFU resisted opening up the organisation membership to women of humbler extraction. On two separate encounters with this author in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Duriyya Shafiq, from a middle-class family in Tanta in the Delta, contrasted Huda Sha'rawi's welcoming encouragement to her when she returned from France in 1939 with her doctorate with the grudging reception of the EFU membership.<sup>36</sup>

EFU resistance to broadening its constituency and the political and economic changes following World War II in Egypt encouraged a proliferation of more populist feminist organisations headed by middle-class women. Wishing to accelerate the struggle for political rights for women, former EFU members Fatma Ni'mat Rashid and Duriyya Shafiq founded respectively the *Hizb al nisa'i al-watani* (National Feminist Party, NFP) in 1944 and *Al Ittihad bint at nil* (The Daughter of the Nile Union, DNU) in 1948. Along with the advocacy of political rights for women, both the NFP and DNU mounted literacy and hygiene campaigns among the poor. They also sustained the concern with family law reform, education and work rights for women. Duriyya Shafiq, a protégée of Sha'rawi, was the more dynamic leader of the two, whose DNU was larger, longer-lived and more effective with branches throughout the country, whereas Rashid's NFP was a strictly Cairene organisation with limited outreach. Unlike their political goals, the social projects of these two feminist organisations could scarcely have antagonised the Muslim Brothers or the MWS.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the widening class base of the feminist movement through new organisations led by women who had come of age during the first phase of feminist activism, this new strand remained essentially within the

liberal framework evolved by the EFU. It was the younger generation of women, university students and graduates of the mid-1940s, who moved in a new direction as socialists and communists. For them the liberation of women was tied to the liberation of the masses, and both necessitated the end of imperialism and class oppression in Egypt. A young leader of the new socialist feminists, Inji Aflatun, a landowner's daughter, discovered Marxism at the French Lycée in Cairo. After graduating from Fuad I University (later Cairo University) in 1945, she helped found the *Rabitat fatayat al jami'a wa al ma' ahid* (the League of University and Institutes' Young Women) which Latifa Zayyat, a student leader, soon joined. The League sent Aflatun and others to the first conference of the International Democratic Federation of Women, but it was closed down the following year in the drive to suppress communists. However, the socialist feminists went on to form other associations, such as the *Jamiyya al nisa'iyya at wataniyya al mu'aqata* (The Provisional National Feminist Association). Within the mainstream communist movement there was no room to address women's liberation, which was subordinated to the struggle against imperialist military occupation and class oppression. Aflatun linked class and gender oppression, connecting both to imperialist exploitation.<sup>38</sup>

The growing nationalist determination to expel British troops from Egypt led to coalitions among feminist and fundamentalist women. In 1950, the *Harakat ansar al salam* (the Movement of the Friends of Peace) brought together EFU feminist and then president, Saiza Nabarawi (Sha'rawi had died in 1947) and the young leftist, Inji Aflatun. The same year, Nabarawi created the *Lajna al shabbat* (the Youth Committee), attracting women like Aflatun who went to poor quarters of Cairo to politicise women. In 1952 when violence broke out in the Canal Zone, the *Lajna al nisa'iyya lil muqawama al sha'biyya* (the Women's Committee for Popular Resistance) brought together women from the left and right including the socialist feminist, Aflatun, and the fundamentalist, Al Ghazali. Once again, women joined ranks with male nationalists in common cause and again men welcomed their support.

During this period, the religious establishment, as we have noted, at times supported women's demands and at other times opposed them. While fundamentalists did not support any of the feminists' demands, neither were they overtly anti-feminist. This changed, however, on the eve of the 1952 revolution when religious scholars held a conference to examine all aspects of women's status within the context of Islamic law. They now openly attacked the feminist movement, claiming it was influenced and supported by British imperialists, and saying that 'Colonialism had encouraged women to go out in order to destroy Islamic society.'<sup>39</sup> The conference condemned the Egyptian feminist movement for its disruptive effects on society and held Sha'rawi and Shafiq responsible. Evaluating

the past, it attacked Murqus Fahmi and Qasim Amin and praised the (anti-feminist) stance of Mustafa Kamil.

The reactionary conclusions of the conference seemed to be in part a response to the growing numbers of women in the workforce. By the early 1950s, women were found in shops, factories, the professions and the social services in sufficient numbers to alarm the patriarchal sensibilities of male fundamentalists. The conference, wishing to turn the tide or at least to stem it, scorned women's forays into public life, lamenting that women 'wished to be degraded by going out to work and being seen by everyone.'<sup>40</sup> The conference reiterated the reactionary refrain 'a woman's natural place is her home', insisting that 'her entry into public life is unnatural.' The nub of the problem for these men was revealed in their declaration, 'The most serious threat facing our society is the oriental woman's refusal to obey men.' Although fundamentalist men raised the alarm in March 1952, it was not until 1978 that the conference proceedings would be published under the title, *Harakat nisa'iyya wa silatuha ma' al isti'mar* (Feminist Movements and Their Connections with Colonialism), edited by Muhammad 'Atiya Khamis. This occurred six years after Sadat had come to power, by which time religious fundamentalism in Egypt had won considerable public prominence. (Khamis in another book, *Mu'amarat didd al usra al muslima*, *Conspiracies against the Muslim Family*, n.d., charged that unveiling was a weapon of communism.) But during the period of Arab socialism under Nasser, these sentiments were not overtly expressed.

The period of the liberal experiment was a time in Egypt when a capitalist economy with ties of dependency to a dominant Europe still operated largely within a neo-imperialistic framework. The feminist or pro-feminist ideology that had served the nationalist cause during colonial occupation was no longer seen by most men to be useful or desirable during this new period of albeit incomplete independence. Thus feminists achieved limited gains. Their successes did not threaten the ruling class. In fact, these limited gains could be said to have helped construct a more viable, modern society by harnessing women to the development goals of the state. Feminist discourse was allowed public expression for the most part by the state, except in its most radical socialist form, but even this managed to survive more surreptitiously. When this period ended, women still lacked formal political rights, a symbol of their secondary status as citizens, while the stalemate on the reform of personal status laws affirmed their unequal positions within the family.

### Revolution, Arabism and socialism: 1952 to the early 1970s

This was a time when independent feminist voices would be silenced. Radical Islamists were also suppressed, although the Islam of the

establishment and the apolitical discourse of religious scholars would be tolerated. In short, it was a time when the state heavily-handedly silenced all political competitors, and did so publicly. The masses, whose liberation the state championed, included rank and file fundamentalists among those muzzled. Women, whose cause the state also claimed to support, and did so in certain ways such as granting them the vote, were likewise suppressed as independent political actors. However, the feminism of the leaders who had come of age in the previous period remained alive behind the scenes, while a rising generation of future feminists was nurtured as women took advantage of new state-sponsored opportunities in education and work. In this atmosphere of repression, feminists sharpened survival skills that would be useful in the battles they would encounter in the 1970s and 1980s.

The revolution of 1952, led by young military officers of the lower middle class supported in their struggle for power by members of the same class among the Muslim Brothers, promised to usher in a new era. Soon, however, the Muslim Brothers were suppressed as dangerous to the state, and the leader of the Muslim Sisters, Zainab Al Ghazali, was imprisoned. From the early 1960s Arab socialism, with its new economic measures such as land reform and industrialisation, challenged the old class system. It was an era of hope for the majority, including the leader of the next generation of feminists, Nawal Al Saadawi, a 1955 graduate of the Medical Faculty at Cairo University, who recently recalled the early enthusiasm and optimism of her generation.<sup>41</sup>

The Arab socialism of the state in the 1960s called for social equality and justice for all citizens and aimed at pan-Arab unity and wider Afro-Asian solidarity. While the tone of Arab socialism was secular, it accommodated religion. The 1962 Charter delineating the Arab socialist project declared: 'The essence of religious messages does not conflict with the facts of our life. . . . All religions contain a message of progress. . . . The essence of all religions is to assert man's right to life and to freedom.' The Constitution of 1964 stated in Article 1: 'The United Arab Republic is a democratic, socialist state based on the alliance of the working powers of the people. The Egyptian people are part of the Arab nation.' Article 5 declared Islam the religion of the state. The new state suppressed Islam as a political force but did not tamper with the Muslim identity of the society.

The stifling of competing discourses did not occur instantly. Feminist organisations continued their activism after the revolution of 1952. At this juncture, they made a final push for women's political rights in which Duriyya Shafiq of the DNU led the way. In 1953, when a proposed revision of the Electoral Law was under review, she published *Al Kitab al abiyad lil huquq al mar'a al misriyya* (The White Paper on the Rights of the Egyptian Woman), a compendium of pro-suffrage arguments by sympathetic secular liberals and politicians as well as pro and con views from within the Islamic



establishment. For example, a constitutional lawyer, Sayyid Sabri, argued that laws must change as the conditions and needs of society change. Since women were now part of the public opinion of society (*al ra'i al 'amm*) they should be able to participate in the formal political system. He noted that the Electoral Law contradicted the Constitution, which declared Egyptians equal in civil and political rights. However, the state and official Islam came down firmly against political rights for women. The Constitutional Affairs Committee of the Senate rejected women's suffrage and the *Fatwa* Committee of Al Azhar issued a decree saying that Islam did not condone it. The *Mufti* of Egypt, Shaikh Hasanayn Makhluf, contended that Islam opposed political rights for women. Shaikh Allam Nassar, who, it should be noted, was then a former *mufti* made the opposite claim, however. The day after the *Fatwa* Committee made its announcement, Islamic organisations held a conference in the office of the Muslim Brothers. Included in their lengthy statement was the demand that the government close once and for all 'the door to this *fitna*' (literally chaos, but here referring to political rights for women), claiming it had been proven that political rights for women were contrary to religion, the Constitution, and the public interest. Meanwhile Shafiq intensified her militancy in this heated battle through a sit-in at the parliament and a hunger strike. Finally, in 1956, thirty-three years after EFU feminists had first demanded suffrage, the revolutionary government in its fifth year granted women the right to vote.<sup>42</sup>

The intentions of the state, however, were made clearer in its actions than in its official discourse. Feminist leaders tried to continue their political struggle while the state put a final stop to their public activity. In 1956, the same year that the state granted women the right to vote, it paradoxically started to ban feminist organisations and to suppress public expression of feminist views, completing its task by 1959. The Egyptian Feminist Union, under pressure from the government, purged its membership of the alleged communist Saiza Nabarawi. The state dismantled the old EFU, but allowed a truncated version to continue as a social welfare society under the name of the Huda Sha'rawi Association. Meanwhile, after suffrage had been achieved, feminists formed *Al Lajna al nisa'iyya lil wa'i al intikhabi* (Women's Committee for Electoral Awareness) to make poor women aware of their rights, but the authorities closed down the committee within a year. Around the same time, a coalition of women of different political tendencies came together in *Al Ittihad al nisa'i al qawmi* (The National Feminist Union, the NFU). The authorities, however, blocked their project by withholding a permit for the NFU and finally shut it down in 1959. Aflatun was sent to prison in the same year. By then, Shafiq was under house arrest. Nabarawi and Rashid were also silenced. The clampdown on feminists occurred within the wider context of political repression. The state apparently perceived feminists as more dangerous than fundamentalists since the Muslim Sisters did not suffer the same fate until 1964, when they were

banned; the following year their leader, Al Ghazali, was gaoled. The same year, new laws forbade the formation of women's political organisations.

The ideology of the new regime was set out in the 1962 Charter. The official discourse shifted from the more formal rhetoric of parliamentary democracy of the previous period to a fervent championing of the rights of the masses and socio-economic development. The grip of the old feudal class system was to be broken and the final vestiges of imperialist domination were to be eradicated. The Charter heralded Arabism expressed in language, culture, and pan-Arab political links. Now, also for the first time, the official state ideology confronted patriarchal supremacy. The Charter stated: 'Woman 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 shaping life.' This was situated in the context of the development needs of the country. The Constitution promulgated two years later declared in Article 8, 'The State guarantees equality of opportunity to all Egyptians.' This was translated into free university education and a guaranteed job for every graduate. State support for fuller participation of women in public life would before long, however, trigger conservative reactions.

Meanwhile, official educational and employment policies opened up new opportunities for women. Women's literacy rate increased and greater numbers of women graduated from university and entered the labour force. A corollary of this was a rise in the percentage of single women in the 1960s and 1970s and a decline in fertility. (Lower fertility rates, however, were also connected with birth control programmes which the state supported.) Because of the state's interest in increasing its scientific and technical capacities, it enforced policies to encourage greater enrolment in the applied sciences at university. Larger numbers of women were accordingly attracted to these subjects and subsequently into the professions. Nearly all women medical students graduating in the mid-1960s were reported to be practising their profession.<sup>43</sup> The marked increase of women with training in applied subjects and in the scientific and medical professions during this period should be noted for, as we shall discuss later, it was women university students specialising in these areas who were at the centre of the new wave of young fundamentalists in the 1970s and early 1980s.

As often happens historically, when objective conditions change there is a burst of idealist and prescriptive literature extolling the very roles that are being altered in the process. The decade following the proclamation of the National Charter of 1962 saw attempts to circumscribe the public roles of women through a reaffirmation of the doctrine of divinely sanctioned biological differences between men and women, and the renewed exaltation of wifely and maternal roles. There was also a call for different education for the two sexes corresponding to their different

'natures' and roles. Conservatives recognised that women's economic independence would reduce their need and desire to remain dependent upon men.<sup>44</sup>

This period also witnessed the rare entry of a woman into the domain of scholarly religious discourse. 'Aisha 'Abd Al Rahman, known as Bint Al Shati (a name purportedly taken as a pseudonym to hide her life of scholarship and writing from her *fallah*, relatives) became a professor of Islamic thought at Cairo University and a prolific writer of articles and books, including a series on the lives of the wives and female relatives of the Prophet Muhammad, held up as paragons for the modern woman. Neither feminists nor fundamentalists within their respective perspectives would consider her radical enough. But widely differing regimes through the years have considered her both safe and useful: she belongs to the *fuqaha al sultan* (the sultan's men of jurisprudence). Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak have all decorated her.<sup>45</sup>

While Nasser gave Bint Al Shati space and awards, the fundamentalist, Zainab Al Ghazali was imprisoned in 1965 only to be released after Nasser's death. Her brand of Islamist discourse envisioning an Islamic state and insisting on the implementation of social justice for all, rather than just rhetoric, could not be tolerated during the Nasser period. She would only be allowed back on the scene from 1971 under the Sadat regime when competing discourses would once again surface.

We have already noted that under Nasser, Amina Sa'id was the exception to the suppression of feminists. Two years after the 1952 revolution she founded *Hawa* (Eve), a popular magazine for women, published by the large publishing complex, *Dar Al Hilal*. In 1956 she became a member of the Board of the Press Syndicate and three years later its vice-president. Sa'id wedded the message of liberal feminism to the socialist state's 'gender-neutral' agenda for the mobilisation of its citizens. She used her pen to promote women's causes within the framework of the Arab socialist revolution. Speaking to a Beirut audience in 1966 she said, '(Women) as a group form the greatest obstacle to national progress to be found in our country today', echoing the same notion differently phrased by male progressives at the end of the nineteenth century. While noting that recent declarations concerning sexual equality in Egypt and other progressive Arab states had provoked public hostility, she assured her Arab sisters that the Egyptian state had 'assumed responsibility for the emancipation of women.'<sup>46</sup>

Although her own brand of feminism coincided in large measure with the agenda of the state, Sa'id was not simply its spokesperson but a feminist who candidly criticised the failure of the state, then and later, to remedy inequities embedded in the personal status laws. She also decried women's new double burden, that accompanied their expanding economic roles, which the state did little to alleviate.<sup>47</sup> In fact, it was feminists with a social mission like Hawa Idris, who devoted her life to providing childcare for

mothers working in the state system, and women belonging to social service societies who attempted to alleviate the double burden of poor working women.<sup>48</sup>

The education and work opportunities created after 1952 brought large numbers of women from middle- and lower-class families into the ranks of the educated and employed. However, while the new policies altered class and employment structures, gender inequalities persisted. The legacy of this partial change is apparent in the lives of two women born in the 1930s and educated at university in the 1950s, who in the 1960s and 1970s emerged as new feminist and Islamist activists.

Nawal Al Saadawi, after graduating as a medical doctor in 1955 found a mission as a practitioner among the rural poor. She was faced with physical and psychological health problems afflicting women relating to such matters as the practice of circumcision and the obsession with female virginity. The connections she made between patriarchy, class, and religion in structuring the oppression of women led her to publish *Al Mar' wa al jins* (The Woman and Sex) in 1971, the first year of the Sadat regime. With Al Saadawi feminist discourse took a new turn: she introduced the issue of sexual oppression of women connected with everyday customs as well as the prevalence of deviant behaviours such as incest that victimised women inside the family. The feminist physician broke a cultural taboo by exposing the sexual oppression of women. The following year she lost her job. Silenced in Egypt, with her books and writings blacklisted and censored by the state, she went into self-imposed exile.<sup>49</sup>

Safinaz Kazim studied journalism at Cairo University, graduating in 1959. From 1960 to 1966 she studied in the United States where she received an MA from New York University while living and working Greenwich Village as a theatre critic. It was in the United States that Kazim began to move from the political left to right. The problem of identity nagged her. Around the same time she was inspired by the book, *Al 'Adala al ijtimaiyya fi al islam* (Social Justice in Islam), by the Muslim Brother, Sayyid Qutb who had himself become disenchanted with the West and looked to Islam as a force of revolutionary revival. The mentor whom she never met was killed not long after her return from the United States in 1966. Six years later, after a pilgrimage to Mecca, Kazim took up Islamic dress signalling her total commitment to Islam. In the 1970s she met Zainab Al Ghazali with whom she shared the view of Islam as '*din wa dawla*' (religion and state) and the desire to see an Islamic state in Egypt.<sup>50</sup>

Between 1952 and the early 1970s, feminist voices with the exception of Amina Sa'id whom the state found useful and safe, were muted. However, the state also created structures and conditions within which a new feminism incubated. The conservative pronouncements of Islamist scholars and thinkers were tolerated, even though they championed women's domestic roles at the very juncture when the state was encouraging women

to join the workforce. However, radical Islam which aimed at a more drastic overhaul of state and society was quashed. Yet, as we have seen, although these plural discourses were suppressed, they were by no means eradicated.

### ***Infitah* capitalism and populist Islamist ascendancy: the 1970s and 1980s**

This period, which spans the rule of Sadat and the regime of Mubarak, witnessed a resurgence of competing discourses. Women's feminism became public once more while Islamic fundamentalists also found scope for new expression. In fact, the state itself became an agent in the promotion of forms of feminist and Islamist discourse to further its own objectives. At the same time, controls were imposed on the more independent or radical expressions of these two positions.

Under Sadat there was a fundamental shift from socialism and anti-Western imperialist rhetoric to *infitah* (open door) capitalism and strong pro-Western rhetoric. This was accompanied by a shift from pan-Arabism to an inward focus on Egypt sealed when Sadat made a separate peace with Israel in 1979 and Egypt was expelled from the Arab League.

When Sadat came to power in 1970 the country was in a condition people wearily called 'no war, no peace' and still traumatised by the defeat of 1967 in the war with Israel. Sadat capitalised on the popular religious resurgence that followed the war and encouraged it, in part as a counterpoise to Nasser's Arab socialism with its more 'secular' cast.<sup>51</sup> After the war of 1973 and the acclaimed victory, there was a noticeable upsurge in the Islamic fundamentalist movement. It was popularly believed that victory had come because Muslims had returned to the correct practice of religion. The state encouraged the new emphasis on religion fuelling the spread of a fundamentalism which it subsequently needed to contain.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, the advocacy of women's causes espoused by Jihan Sadat and inspired by the UN decade of women (1975-1985) was encouraged by the state. However, the more independent and radical feminism promoted by Nawal Al Saadawi and others was contained. This has been interpreted in part as a result of Jihan Sadat's drive, and her ability as the president's wife to style herself the supreme advocate of women's causes in Egypt and so to keep competing feminists out of the limelight.<sup>53</sup> However, on another front, the government could not tolerate independent feminist activism because of its need to appease conservative Islamist forces.

At the beginning of the Sadat period, for the first time since independence in 1922, the state promulgated a constitution spelling out a dichotomy between women as (public) citizens and as (private) family members governed by the *Shari'ah*. Thus women's right to the prerogatives of full citizenship became subject to male control. The new Constitution of 1971 stated in Article 40, 'Citizens are equal before the law; they are equal in

public rights and duties, with no discrimination made on the basis of race, sex, language, ideology, or belief.' The unprecedented explicit declaration of no discrimination on the basis of sex would seem at first glance to represent a step forward. However, we must note the 1971 language: 'equal in public rights and duties' as opposed to the 1923 language: 'They enjoy equally civil and political rights and equally have public responsibilities.' Moreover, the 1971 Constitution declared:

The state guarantees a balance and accord between a woman's duties towards her family on the one hand and towards her work in society and her equality with man in the political, social, and cultural spheres on the other without violating the laws of the Islamic *Shari'ah*.<sup>54</sup>

Meanwhile, Islamic fundamentalism continued to gain new adherents among women evidenced by the growing numbers of women wearing the *hijab*. Islamic groups became increasingly active on university campuses, spreading their word and actively recruiting. They were successful in appealing to large numbers of women, especially of the lower and more modest middle class. Many of the new recruits were among women studying medicine and the sciences who, moreover, tended to stay out of the workforce after graduation.<sup>55</sup> At the beginning of the movement to adopt Islamic dress, a young woman, Ni'mat Sidqi, published an account of her conversion to Islamic dress and an apology for the veil in a book entitled *Al Tabarraj* ((bodily) Display) published in 1971 which became a cult book among young women in the early 1970s. At the same time, Amina Sa'id mounted a counter-attack on veiling in the press, mainly in her magazine, *Hawa*.<sup>56</sup> However, the trend persisted and by the mid-1980s veiled women from the wealthier strata of society had appeared. Among these was Keriman Hamza, the first television announcer to wear Islamic dress, who has recounted her conversion in her book *Rihlati min al sufur ilal hijab* (My Journey from Unveiling to Veiling). Veteran feminist Sa'id had been the main opponent of veiling until recently when a young leftist, Sana Al Masri, attacked the practice and its wider implications in her book, *Khalf al Hijab* (Behind the Veil) (1989).

Released from gaol in 1971, the veteran fundamentalist leader, Zainab Al Ghazali, could return to discrete activism. Her prison memoirs, now in their tenth edition, have attracted new generations to her cause.<sup>57</sup> The year after Al Ghazali's release, Safinaz Kazim took up Islamic dress, becoming active as a 'committed Muslim' which she calls herself, rejecting the term 'fundamentalist'. The author of several books and drama critic for the weekly magazine, *Al Musawwar*, she has assumed the role of a crusading intellectual with a special concern for issues of culture, identity, and authenticity while Al Ghazali has been active as an organiser.

Both women wish to see an Islamic state in Egypt and both have experienced state surveillance and incarceration. Kazim was imprisoned three times under Sadat: in 1973, 1975, and 1981. Each time, interestingly, she was accused of being a communist.<sup>58</sup> This could be motivated by a wish to discredit a fundamentalist leader and demoralise the movement without being seen to challenge Islam.

The contradictory pressures on women under Sadat were enormous. The reversal of socialist policies became clear in the 1974 proclamation of the policy of *infitah* when the door was opened to foreign investment and the private sector was encouraged once again in Egypt. The state no longer promoted full employment but, on the contrary, propagated an ideology that curtailed women's public roles encouraging a retreat into the home. This was attempted in different ways, many of them illegal. Lawyers and other women prominent in public life exposed this in their booklet, *Al Huquq al qanuniyya lil mar'a al 'arabiyya bain al nadhariyyat wa al tatbiq* (The Legal Rights of the Egyptian Woman: Theory and Practice) (1988), writing,

We have observed a retreat from the principle of equality regarding the woman at work. . . . This has become clear in certain practices that are contrary to the Constitution and Egyptian law such as in the newspapers for jobs specifying that applicants must be males.<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile, rising inflation and the out-migration of men to neighbouring oil-rich countries, leaving women behind to cope, have pushed more women into the workforce.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the spread of the veil has been connected in part with women's need to work and their wish at the same time to protect themselves from exposure to male harassment. This security, however, is sought at the price of engaging in passive rather than active resistance to male intimidation.<sup>61</sup> On a different front, in yet another of its contradictory moves, in 1979 the government unexpectedly enacted a law guaranteeing women thirty seats in Parliament which led to an immediate increase of women in the legislature.<sup>62</sup>

However, the most dramatic and politically sensitive move was the presidential decree making fundamental changes in the personal status laws for the first time in fifty years. Excesses of patriarchal privilege were curtailed in an unprecedented manner with the expansion of women's ability to initiate divorce, added protection for women in divorce, and with controls placed on polygyny. The president's wife had pushed hard for the 1979 decree, issued when the parliament was in recess, which, indeed, became known as 'Jihan's law'. Many men, not only fundamentalists, were outraged, but for feminists the gains constituted an important, if still inadequate, step forward.<sup>63</sup>

The year 1979 was highly charged for Egypt abroad as well as at home. Egypt ratified the Camp David accord with Israel isolating itself from the

Arab world and antagonising both leftists and conservatives at home. The decrees favourable to women within the family and in parliament provoked Muslim conservatives. Meanwhile, the revolution in Iran brought Khomeini to power ushering in a new Islamic state which heartened fundamentalists in Egypt. As Islamist forces gathered momentum, the Egyptian state made an important placatory move in 1980 when it amended the Constitution to read: 'Islamic jurisprudence is the principal source of legislation', replacing the 1971 formulation that 'the *Shari'ah* is a principal source of law'.<sup>64</sup>

Egypt was in a period of new and dangerous tensions which the state could not control. In autumn 1981, massive arrests were made of women and men across the political spectrum including feminists and fundamentalists among whom were Nawal al Saadawi and Safinaz Kazim.<sup>65</sup> Not long after these arrests, Sadat was assassinated by a Muslim fundamentalist and the two women were released along with others by the new president, Mubarak.

The early 1980s witnessed the renewed visibility and organisation of independent feminism. Al Saadawi, who had by then gained both a local following and international reputation, was active in feminist organising and politics. There was a significant number of highly educated women who espoused feminism practising law and medicine, teaching in university, working in business, and active as writers and journalists. A number of these women, under the leadership of Al Saadawi, struggled to establish the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA). In AWSA's own words: 'We knew that the liberation of the people as a whole could not take place without the liberation of women and this could not take place without the liberation of the land, economy, culture, and information.'<sup>66</sup> The process of institutionalisation was not easy. The Ministry of Social Affairs refused a permit to the feminist organisation in 1983. It relented, however, at the beginning of 1985 and AWSA registered the same year as a non-governmental organisation with the United Nations.

In 1985 in the face of growing opposition to the 1979 decree law revising the Personal Status Law, the government cancelled it.<sup>67</sup> This galvanised feminists into collective political action. Finally, within two months a new law was passed restoring most, but not all, of the benefits to women provided by the 1979 law. This occurred just before a large delegation of Egyptian feminists went to the United Nations Forum in Nairobi marking the end of the Decade for Women. It would have been impolitic for the Egyptian delegation to attend with such a major grievance.

There was marked concern among feminists at the growing conservatism in Egypt evidenced in efforts we have already mentioned to curtail women's public roles and push them back into the home. In 1986, AWSA held its first conference. Under the banner of 'unveiling the mind', its theme was Challenges Facing the Arab Woman at the End of the Twentieth Century.

The proceedings issued by the Associations's own publishing house declared: 'It has become clear that the traditional stance towards women and their rights undercuts progress in Arab societies. The present situation demands a deeper, more modern look at women's roles in society as well as in the family.'<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, the authors of *The Legal Rights of the Egyptian Woman* mentioned above, pooled their practical talents to advance the cause of women, reminding them of their constitutional and legal rights as well as their rights under international treaties and conventions ratified by the Egyptian state. They published an open letter warning against the retrograde trends threatening to curtail women's rights and calling for the establishment of a women's platform to counteract these trends articulated in mass publications.<sup>69</sup>

The proliferating popular conservative Islamist literature of the 1980s echoed writings from the 1960s. According to the Egyptian historian, Huda Lutfy, since the early 1980s an increasing number of Egyptian publishing houses have specialised in cheap editions of popular religious tracts. These tracts extol the domestic roles of women, held up as the cornerstones of a new virtuous society, and stress the need for male authority over women to guide them along the correct path.<sup>70</sup>

An important author of popular books with wide appeal is Shaikh Muhammad Mitwalli Al Sha'rawi, a former minister of *Awqaf* (Religious Endowments), who has spoken to Muslims since the 1970s through state television, which accords him prime time. In the quietist tradition he praises the virtues of obedience and patience for men and women alike while he preaches specifically to women about their family and domestic duties. In a reactionary vein, Sha'rawi has called the woman who works while she has a father, brother, or husband to support her, a sinful woman.<sup>71</sup> Shaikh Sha'rawi's tone supports the official line. In addition to enjoying continued television time, he received a state decoration in March 1988.

There is a different emphasis in the discourse of fundamentalist women leaders Al Ghazali and Kazim, who both play active public roles. Kazim finds no contradiction between women's public and private lives. Al Ghazali left a husband because he interfered with her Islamic activism. She told me, 'Woman companions (of the Prophet) have given as much to Islam as men, even more. The woman companion sacrificed herself, her husband, and her children while the male companion sacrificed (only) himself.' Yet, although Al Ghazali has carved out a public role for herself and has attracted working women to her cause, she continues to commend women's primary roles as wives and mothers.<sup>72</sup> In 1979, in an article in *Al Dawa*, Al Ghazali blamed feminists for encouraging women's public roles despite the dangers that await them in the public arena.<sup>73</sup> Fundamentalist intellectual and professor of English at Cairo University, Muhammad Yahia, in a recent interview said, 'The Islamic movement is seen as marginalising

women but the Islamic movement, itself, sees attracting women to the movement (as public activists) to be its problem.<sup>74</sup> It seems that the mixed messages delivered by the movement contribute towards keeping women out of the public struggle.

Meanwhile, towards the end of the 1970s, there appeared what might be called a neo-Islamic modernism articulated by Al Ghazali Harb, a graduate of the languages section at Al Azhar and a former journalist, in his book, *Istiqlal al mara'a fi al Islam* (Independence of the Woman in Islam). Harb, like 'Abudh a century before him, called for a return to the sources of religion for a correct understanding of Islam.<sup>75</sup> Saying that women should consider themselves equal to men, he extolled women's work roles not only to meet economic needs but as a guarantee of their independence. In this he attacked patriarchal supremacy in the family and opposed the expulsion of women from public space. Harb took on the fundamentalists when he declared that there is no such thing as Islamic dress, saying that Islam does not require *hijab* whether veiling the face, or simply the head and body. He asserted that only a correct upbringing can protect women, not veiling. Harb was sternly criticised for these views by Muhammad Yahia, who saw the ideas of Harb (who he noted was far from the calibre and stature of 'Abduh) as useful to the state as a counterpoise to fundamentalism.<sup>76</sup> A few feminists have welcomed this position on women's liberation, argued in Islamic terms, because it suits them personally, while others simply acknowledged its wider political utility.

The state, trying to contain the spreading Islamic fundamentalist challenge, however, tries not to antagonise fundamentalist forces alternating between tough and conciliatory attitudes with the result that it generally displays a conservative stance regarding gender issues. It also favours more moderate conservative Islamicists such as Bint Al Shati who advocate an Islamic society, but not an Islamic state. The government bestowed a decoration on Bint Al Shati in 1988. However, women like Zainab Al Ghazali and Safinaz Kazim, who call for an Islamic state, and Nawal Al Saadawi, who advocates an end to patriarchal and class oppression, make the state very wary.

## Conclusion

The 'woman question' around which competing discourses have flourished in Egypt has been, as we have seen, about more than women. It has been about gender relations and sexual hegemony, and broader issues of power. It has been a question through which the state, the religious establishment and Islamic movements have projected other designs. Women themselves helped to formulate the question on their own terms both as feminists and as actors in Islamist movements. While as feminists they generated their own terms of debate and as Islamists they mainly reproduced male

discourses, as actors in everyday life both assumed new roles, and in so doing gave further definition to the question. While there has always been room in Egypt for alternative positions on the 'woman question' – with the state, Islamists, and feminists all keeping it alive – only feminists, for whom the 'woman question' is central, have meaningfully attacked patriarchal interests and opposed male supremacy.

The state has through different phases generated contradictory discourses and policies. It characteristically imposed its own agenda and in so doing attempted to define the 'woman question' to suit its own political ends. Thus we have seen that while the state has promoted new roles for women for pragmatic and ideological purposes, it has also upheld imbalanced gender relations and male authority out of political expediency. In the state-building, liberal, socialist, and *infatih* capitalist periods, there have been shifts in rhetoric and emphasis. But while the terms of discourse shift, a substratum of basic gender inequality is retained which does not ultimately challenge patriarchal relations nor the state's own power bases. Because of the state's own ambiguities, official discourses on the 'woman question' have often been discourses of deception.

Islam, in modern Egypt, has been controlled by the state. The Islamic establishment has had to negotiate with and accommodate the secular state. The last bastion of official Islam has been the regulation of family life. This is precisely the area where the state has allowed patriarchal control over women a free hand and where gender relations have been most unequal. Populist, fundamentalist Islam confronted the state but upheld conservative codes of gender relations and endorsed male supremacy. Uncompromisingly radical *vis-à-vis* the state, it has elicited a defensive reaction from the state taking the form of a show of 'Islamic toughness' in the area of gender relations, most notably demonstrated in conservative family laws. Women Islamists, normally excluded from the Islamic establishment, have joined the ranks of more radical, populist fundamentalist movements. Their leaders have taken on daring social and political roles while acquiescing in an ideology that contradicts their own conduct as activists.

Secular feminists have created the only discourse that insists upon radical changes in gender relations. Feminists have held their own, despite repression by the state, and feminist ideology in Egypt has always managed to survive. In more liberal political climates, feminism can be absorbed into what appears to be a more supportive environment, as we have seen in the period of struggle for national independence. In more hostile contexts, when the agenda of the state and Islamists promote extreme conservatism, such as that of contemporary Egypt, feminism emerges as an oppositional discourse.

This chapter on competing agenda on the 'woman question' in Egypt has attempted to give a sense of the complex choreography of these discourses,

how space is given and taken, and how – for all but feminists the 'woman question' in the end is a matter of political expediency.

## NOTES

For their comments and suggestions regarding this chapter I would like to thank Deniz Kandiyoti, Yesim Arat, John Esposito, Sarah Graham-Brown, Erid Hill, and Albert Hourani.

- 1 For general definitions of feminism (women's rights, women's emancipation, women's liberation) see Karen Offen, 'Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach', *Signs* (autumn 1988) no. 14, pp. 119–47 and Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), appendix. For definitions of feminism in the Egyptian historical context see Margot Badran, 'The Origins of Feminism in Egypt', in Anna Angerman *et al.* (eds), *Current Issues in Women's History* (London: Routledge, 1989). In this chapter the various meanings of feminism should be gleaned from context and Margot Badran, 'Independent Women: Over a Century of Feminism in Egypt', in *Old Boundaries New Frontiers*, forthcoming; Margot Badran, 'Dual Liberation: Feminism and Nationalism in Egypt, 1970s–1985', *Feminist Issues* (spring 1988).
- 2 See Margot Badran, 'Huda Sha'rawi and the Liberation of the Egyptian Woman', Oxford D. Phil. thesis, 1977 and 'The Origins of Feminism in Egypt', and Judith Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth Century Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- 3 On this dichotomy see Nawal El Saadawi, 'The Political Challenges Facing Arab Women at the End of the 20th Century', pp. 8–26 and Fatima Memissi, 'Democracy as Moral Disintegration: The Contradiction Between Religious Belief and Citizenship as a Manifestation of the Ahistoricity of the Arab Identity', in Nahid Toubia (ed.), *Women of the Arab World* (London: Zed, 1988), pp. 36–43.
- 4 See Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (eds), *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (London: Virago and Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1990).
- 5 Badran, 'Over a Century of Feminism in Egypt', pp. 15–34.
- 6 See Deniz Kandiyoti, 'End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey', and Afsaneh Najmabadi, 'Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran', in Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) *Women, Islam and the State* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 48–76 and Margot Badran and Eliz Sanasarian, 'Feminist Goals in Iran and Egypt in the 1920s and 1930s', paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association Meetings, San Francisco, 1984.
- 7 See Laverne Kuhnke, 'The "Doctress" on a Donkey: Women Health Officers in Nineteenth Century Egypt', *Clio Medica* 9 (1974) no. 3, pp. 193–205.
- 8 The books are respectively: *Tariq al hija wa al tamrin 'ala qawa'id al lughah 'arabiyya* (The Way to Spell and Practise the Rules of the Arabic Language) (1869), and *Al Murshid al amin lil banat wa al banin* (The Faithful Guide for Girls and Boys) (1875).
- 9 See, for example, selections by Warda al Yaziji, Aisha Taimuriyya, and Zainab Fawwaz in Badran and Cooke, *Opening the Gates*.

- 10 On the *hijab* in nineteenth-century Egypt see Qasim Amin, *Tahrir al mar'a* (The Liberation of the Woman) (Cairo, 1899). Bahithat Badiya has written on the changing modes of *hijab* in early twentieth-century Egypt. She generally favoured retaining the face veil for the time being for pragmatic reasons, but was aware this was not required by Islam. On the subject see, for example, her 'Mabadi Al Nis'ai', in Majd al Din Hifni Nasif (ed.), *Ta'thir Bahithat al Badiya Malak Hifni Nasif 1886-1918* (The Heritage of Bahithat al Badiya Malak Hifni Nasif) (Cairo, 1962), pp. 318-20. On the historical and contemporary context of *hijab*, see Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd, 'Polemics on the Modesty and Segregation of Women in Contemporary Egypt', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1978), p. 23-50. For various interpretations in general of *hijab* see Mostafa Hashem Sherif, 'What is Hijab?', *The Muslim World* (July-October 1978) nos. 3-4, pp. 151-63.
- 11 Zainab Al Fawwaz, 'Fair and Equal Treatment', *Al Nil* no. 151 (18, dhu al hujja, 1892) trans. Marilyn Booth, in Badran and Cooke, *Opening the Gates*.
- 12 The early years of the women's Arabic press in Egypt are the subject of a dissertation by Beth Baron presented to the University of California at Los Angeles in 1988.
- 13 See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 130-63.
- 14 See 'Abd Al Razek, 'L'Influence de la femme dans la vie de Chiekh Mohamed Abdu', *L'Egyptienne* (August 1928), pp. 2-7. Abdu's writings include: 'Hajjat Al Insan lil Zawaj', 'Fatwa fi Ta'adul Al Zaujat', and 'Hukum Ta'adul Al Zaujat', in Muhammad 'Imara, *Al 'amal al kamila li Muhammad 'Abduh* (The Complete Works of Muhammad 'Abduh) (Cairo, c. 1971), pp. 49-54, 111-118, and 127-35.
- 15 See Juan Ricardo Cole, 'Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13 (1981), pp. 397-407, and Thomas Philipp, 'Feminism and Nationalist Politics in Egypt', in L. Beck and N. Keddie (eds), *Women in the Muslim World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).
- 16 On Qasim Amin see Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, pp. 164-70.
- 17 On women's feminist discourse from the 1860s to the present see Badran and Cooke, *Opening the Gates*.
- 18 On the public lectures see Huda Shaarawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 92-3. Writings and speeches of Bahithat Al Badiya and Nabawiyya Musa are found, among other places, in their respective books: *Al Nisa'iyyat* (trans. as either Women's or Feminist Pieces) (Cairo: Al Jarida Press, 1910) and *Al Mar'a wa al 'amal* (Woman and Work) (Cairo, 1920). Donald Reid communicated to me the information related here concerning the closing of the women's section and the new use of the funds saved.
- 19 See Majd Al Din Hifni Nasif, *Ta'thir*.
- 20 See Margot Badran, 'From Consciousness to Activism: Feminist Politics in Early 20th Century Egypt', unpublished paper.
- 21 See Philipp, 'Feminism and Nationalist Politics in Egypt', and Cole, 'Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt'.
- 22 Badran, 'Dual Liberation'.
- 23 Progressive men including Lutfy Al Sayyid, for example, acted as advisers to the Egyptian Feminist Union in their various professional capacities.
- 24 Fundamentalists, like feminist, is a term that needs to be understood in historical context but broadly it signifies the person who returns to the fundamentals of Islam, especially the Quran and *Hadith*, and is associated with a conservative

- reading of Islam. Many persons generally referred to as fundamentalists reject the term, preferring to call themselves committed Muslims. In this chapter I use the term 'fundamentalists' in a broad way, aware of the inherent difficulties, hoping the contexts in which it appears add clarification.
- 25 In a paper published in Arabic, 'Nisa'iyya ka quwa fi al 'alam al 'arabi' (Feminism as a Force in the Arab World), in *Al Fikra al 'arabi al mu'asir wa al mar'a* (Contemporary Arab Thought and the Woman) (Cairo: Arab Women's Solidarity Press, 1989), pp. 75-90, I deliberately used *nisa'iyya* in the title to signify feminism, although this is not normal usage.
- 26 See Badran, 'Huda Sha'rawi and the Liberation of the Egyptian Woman', pp. 299-308.
- 27 *Mudhakirrat ra'ida al 'arabiyya al haditha Huda Sha'rawi* (Memoirs of the Modern Arab Pioneer Huda Sha'rawi) (Cairo: Dar Al Hilal, 1981).
- 28 See Duriyya Shafiq, *Al kitab al abiyad lil huquq almar'a al misriyya* (The White Paper on the Rights of the Egyptian Woman) (Cairo, 1953).
- 29 The most complete study of the Muslim Brothers remains Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).
- 30 On language, feminism, and cultural authenticity see Irene Fenoglio-Abd El Aal, *Défense et illustration de l'Egyptienne: aux débuts d'une expression féminine* (Cairo: CEDEJ, 1989).
- 31 Interview with Al Ghazali, Cairo, February 1989. On Zainab Al Ghazali see Valerie J. Hoffman, 'An Islamic Activist: Zaynab al-Ghazali', in E. Fernea (ed.), *Women and the Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).
- 32 Interview with Hawa Idris, Cairo, April 1988.
- 33 Interview with Al Ghazali, Cairo, February 1989.
- 34 Fatma Ni'mat Rashid, 'Muqarana bain al mar'a al Misriyya wa al mar'a al Turkiyya', *Al Misriyya* (1 May 1937), pp. 10-13.
- 35 See Norma Salem, 'Islam and the Status of Women in Tunisia', in Freida Hussain (ed.), *Muslim Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), pp. 141-68, John Esposito, *Women in Muslim Family Law* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1982), p. 92, and Maxine Molyneux, 'The Law, the State and Socialist Policies with Regard to Women: The Case of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen', in Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) *Women, Islam, and the State* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 237-71.
- 36 Interviews with Duriyya Shafiq in Cairo in 1968 and 1974.
- 37 See Badran, 'Huda Sha'rawi and the Liberation of the Egyptian Woman', and 'Independent Women: A Century of Feminism in Egypt', and Akram Khater and Cynthia Nelson, 'Al-Harakah Al-Nissa'iyyah: The Women's Movement and Political Participation in Modern Egypt', *Women's Studies International Forum* II (1988), no. 5, pp. 465-83.
- 38 Interviews with Saiza Nabarawi in 1968 and 1973 and with Inji Aflatun in 1975. On socialist feminism see Khater and Nelson, 'Al-Harakah Al-Nissa'iyya', pp. 473-7; Michelle Raccagni, 'Inji Eflatoun, Author, Artist and Militant: A Brief Analysis of Her Life and Works', unpublished paper, n.d.; Selma Botman, 'The Experience of Women in The Egyptian Communist Movement, 1939-1954', *Women's Studies International Forum* 2 (1988), pp. 117-26; Guiseppe Contu, 'Le donne comuniste e il movimento democratico femminile in Egitto al 1965', *Oriente Moderno* (May-June 1975), pp. 236-48.
- 39 Muhammad 'Atiya Khamis (ed.), *Al harakat al nisa'iyya wa silatuha ma'al ist' mar* (Feminist Movements and Their Relations with Imperialism) (Cairo: Dar Al Ansar, 1978).

## WOMEN AND REVOLUTION IN VIETNAM

Mary Ann Tétreault

Throughout their history Vietnamese people had fiercely resisted the incursions of Chinese, French, and Japanese, but the French had come to control the area in the last third of the nineteenth century. During World War II (1939–1945) the Japanese had taken over. Throughout the course of these successive foreign occupations the Vietnamese forged opposition movements, most notably a peasant and nationalist version of Soviet communism. Women were active in these struggles, and their activism was built on a centuries-old tradition of women's heroism in resisting foreign invaders.

As soon as World War II ended, a Cold War erupted between the Soviet Union and the United States – the new world superpowers. Many struggles for national liberation felt the effects of this Cold War and perhaps nowhere more destructively than in Vietnam. After the French occupiers were definitively driven out in 1954, peasants eagerly supported the Communist Party that had led the fight against French imperialism. Communism was often influential in shaping national liberation movements because it advocated and usually enacted land reform that broke up the massive estates of Europeans and local landlords. Distributing land to the landless, it was also successful in mobilizing women by theorizing that their condition would improve once socialism triumphed. The Vietnamese Communist Party, like the communists in the Russian Revolution of 1917, was scrupulous in including women in its leadership (though not always at the very highest levels).

As the war against the French ended in triumph for those who wanted liberation, the United States stepped in to keep Vietnam from going communist. The United States' allies in South Vietnam came in large measure from the wealthy landowning classes and the Catholic Church. Fighting these groups too, the peasant communists found the participation of women a crucial necessity. In a 'People's War' against a superpower with atomic and other massively destructive weapons, intense individual activity by women, men, and children pitted itself against technology. This chapter shows the complex ways in which women participated, often to guard their positions in government or improve their condition as peasants. Although