MERIA

The Mixed Impact of Feminist Struggles in Egypt During the 1990s

By Sherifa Zuhur*

The women's movement in Egypt made gains in the late twentieth century but there were also many areas of scant progress or stagnation. Among the controversial issues have been the legal framework of women's rights, marriage and divorce laws, female genital mutilation, and issues of dress and modesty. The state's efforts to control women's groups have produced both a certain degree of official sponsorship along with aspects of control and manipulation. One critical and hotly debated question is whether feminism can be Egyptian in content or whether it is and must remain a Western import, thus reducing its legitimacy and acceptability.

The last century witnessed women's transition in Egypt from the harem to corporate and governmental offices. The decade of the 1990s illustrated the mixed manner in which feminist ideas, programs, and progress interacted with social and political currents in Egypt.

Historians have remarked on the contradictory ideological currents that appeared in the last century's end ("fin de siècle"), the 1890s. In the West, an active suffrage movement coexisted with new interests in spiritualism. In the Middle East, the debate over female education, seclusion and the veil, dubbed the "feminist awakening" occurred with mixed motives, the continuity and improvement of women's domestic roles prominent among them.(1) With Charles Dickens in mind then, one could ask whether the 1990s were the best or worst of times for women in Egypt?

Debates over feminism in Egypt in the 1990s began with consideration of the most basic semantic, theoretical and political questions: How should the term be written in Arabic? Is feminism primarily a creature of the West? If so, how does one characterize the history of indigenous feminists such as Huda Sha'rawi, Bahithat al-Badiya, Nabawiya Musa, and others?

Along with such questions, a variety of women's voices and competing ideas on women's potential and appropriate roles in Egypt have become manifest in this decade. Does feminism represent women's struggle against men or women's struggle *with* men for human rights? Since some who energetically seek the transformation and improvement of women's status disavow the word "feminist" how should one differentiate among different goals and views?(2) Can individual feminists or specific feminisms be congruent with Islam?(3)

Clearly, during the 1990s, there was a great increase in public debate on feminist issues. For many years, Egypt has witnessed a growing number of women professionals and the appearance of serious literature dealing with gender issues. The principle of female employment has become entrenched and even conservative forces have accepted education and political mobilization for women.(4) Feminists penetrated many layers of society as educators and activists. Many of them emerged from particular *shilla*s (an age set, often cohorts in college) and chose to make the political personal and vice-versa, in an eminently feminist fashion.(5)

The conflict--sometimes violent--between Islamists and the Egyptian government brought several women's rights issues to public attention such as veiling and the relationship of intellectual freedom to personal status laws, including divorce. One controversial Islamist tactic was to force a divorce via a third-party lawsuit, on an

unwilling couple to punish the husband.(6) For example, Nasr Abu Zayd, a scholar whose writing appeared too secularist to his Islamist critics, faced such an attack, and left Egypt in response.(7)

Economic developments have also had an important effect on the status of women. The ruling National Democratic Party in Egypt, which enjoys support from a new elite made prosperous by privatization policies, has been more open to reforming the role of women. At the same time, an increase in poverty or financial strain due to inflation and other factors increased the cost of marriage for large numbers of people and encouraged the new practice of *'urfi* marriage wherein the established costs of *shari'a* marriage could be avoided (discussed below). Thus, local customs combined with inflation necessitated legal reforms that impact women. Feminist attitudes were in turn, necessary to effect these changes.

Another area of change was a boom in the number of non-governmental organizations. In 1999, there were an estimated 14,000 such groups, many of them dealing with projects specifically targeting women. Officials close to President Mubarak perceived the independent activity of such groups to be dangerous--and inappropriate for Egypt's current socio-religious mood. The government created what might be called GONGOs (government-created non-governmental organizations--an oxymoron) and also sought to disempower existing NGOs. But in response to international pressure against this action--coming from U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and First Lady Hilary Clinton among others--some NGOs were permitted to resume activities while others are awaiting approval. (It should be noted that some included among the NGOs were actually GONGOs.)

To understand this situation's complexity, consider the experience of Egypt's best-known, veteran feminist Nawal Saadawi. Toward the beginning of the decade, the government closed her Arab Women's Solidarity Association and reassigned its license and assets to an Islamic women's organization. She had to leave the country for a time. By early 2000, however, her message was in vogue again among many, especially younger, women inspired by the January legal reforms. Her views inspired the creation of a new organization, al-Nahda al-Fikriyya lil-Mar'a al-Misriyya. However, this group has not as yet gained full legal status through registration.

Other NGOs are cautiously surveying the situation after the surprising crackdown on sociologist Saad Eddin Ibrahim and his Ibn Khaldun Center in the summer of 2000. He and 27 associates were charged with treason and espionage, and several were imprisoned for a while. The case is still in the courts. (8) Ibrahim's organization sponsored the registration of women voters and called for judicial supervision of the election process. The charges against the Ibn Khaldun Center and the Women Voters Support Center were based on the claim that their use of properly obtained research funds from the European Commission constituted espionage on behalf of foreigners. This event could intimidate any woman’s NGOs from seeking foreign funding. In addition, researchers have been experiencing problems, delays or denials of grants that require the Ministry of Education's approval if they involve topics dealing with gender, since the mid-1990s.

The mixed situation for women can be seen in a survey of the following women’s issues: obstacles persist in the fight against female circumcision; the January 2000 legal reform, which enhanced women's ability to obtain a divorce but also elicited a strong public backlash; a continuing public debate over "Islamic" dress; and finally, a severe and troubling increase in censorship has affected treatment of women's sexuality and gender issues in print.

FGM (FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION)

FGM, or female circumcision as it is termed in Egypt, has been an important issue for women's rights activists in Egypt. According to various studies, those who practice FGM believe it to be a "good

tradition," in that it controls both female sexuality and enhances fertility. In fact, it has decidedly negative effects on women's reproductive and psychological health

Estimates indicated that 50 to 60% of Egyptian women have been circumcised. The reason that the figures are quite high is related to the class divisions in Egyptian society. The far more numerous lower classes, both Christians and Muslims, follow this Nile valley tradition, while the families of Turco-Circassian derivation, the main segment of the small historic elite, do not.(9) Furthermore, some prominent Islamists asserted that FGM is an Islamic practice. For example, the Al-Azhar mosque-university, which has played a role in promoting family planning, has produced conflicting statements on FGM, and has not strongly opposed the practice.

New data has suggested that the practice is much more pervasive than was previously admitted. A 1995 EDHS (Egypt Demographic Health Survey) showed that 97% of Egyptian women who have been married ("ever-married women" including divorcees and widows) are circumcised.(10) A separate clinic-based study confirmed these results. Although the study cannot tell us how many young girls are being circumcised today, it does illustrate the magnitude of the issue. Thus, FGM continues despite the attention originally drawn to this issue by Nawal al-Saadawi many years ago (11); articles by feminists and journalists; local feminist endeavors including creative anti-FGM advertising (including posters designed by Caritas)(12); and increasing rates of female education.

The FGM Task-Force headed by Marie Assaad was established in 1994 operating under the National NGO Commission for Population and Development. It has created research, mobilization, and advocacy groups, with a center for documents and media reports on FGM. Yet despite the Task Force's attempts to show that it is a form of violence against women, this procedure will apparently continue so long as Egyptians believe that it makes their daughters more marriageable and moral. (13)

Somewhat paradoxically, several key members of the Task Force did not support the 1996 ban on FGM in government hospitals and clinics. They thought it was better for women's health to insist that any FGM be supervised by doctors, taking it out of the hands of midwives and barbers, who often perform it. This meant that some feminists opposed to any form of FGM were in conflict with the Task Force's strategy.

The ban on FGM in government hospitals, it is interesting to note, came about because of public controversy generated by international media coverage. When CNN broadcast footage of a circumcision, the producer and network faced legal charges for supposedly promoting a negative image of Egypt. The charges were dropped, and the minister of health denounced FGM, issuing decree 261 in 1996 forbidding FGM in governmental medical hospitals and clinics. The decree was challenged in the courts and overturned, but was reinstated in 1997.(14)

DRESS/MODESTY

The significance of dress is to divide women into two visibly different groups, one of which seems to lay claim to Islamic modesty, while the other can be criticized for adopting foreign ways, or even immorality. The *hijab*, or modern Islamic dress, adopted from the late 1970s onward has maintained its popularity among students and white collar workers.(15) By the 1990s, it had spread to the lower classes, rural areas, some elements of the elite, and has even been adopted by African and some Filipino immigrants in Cairo so that they would avoid harassment in the streets.

This popularization has also meant that such garb does not necessarily indicate support for Islamist groups. Indeed, the style has been visibly altered from 1999 onward to the wearing of a discrete scarf, in many cases tucked under the collar, rather than the previously more enveloping head garment, the *khimar*. The *niqab* (face veil) was actively

discouraged and is rarer now than it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

However, in general, women must now, as compared to earlier decades, dress somewhat more conservatively in the streets and Islamists have mounted campaigns against Western dress such as wearing jeans. (16). There are also periodic news articles concerning the supposedly "seductive" dress of students at the American University in Cairo. A particularly shocking rape took place on a public bus in 1996, and the judge castigated the victim for not wearing the *hijab*, although he approved of the long skirt she had worn

After many years of silence on the issue and claims that Islamism played no role in the spread of hijab, the government took action to discourage the niqab, particularly after the Islamist takeover of the Imbaba area of Cairo in 1993. Colleges, secondary, and technical schools have brought a certain degree of peer pressure, or even directives from teacher's to wear a hijab. (17) A headmistress of the Qasim Amin School had required the hijab of all students. The Minister of Education then issued Decree No. 113 in 1994, indicating schoolgirls could only wear the hijab with parental consent. The Ministerial decree prompted outrage on the part of many parents, teachers, Islamists, and the general public. (18)

Many women state and write, for instance in letters' sections of various newspapers, that the emphasis on women's modesty in public conveyed through the *hijab's* popularity has led to heightened harassment of unveiled women in public. The issue clearly involves the conception of women and modesty in public space.

ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

Many new, small groups have carried out important feminist work while insisting on independence from the state's direct control. The FGM Task Force has been mentioned. Other such groups include the Women in Memory Forum, which has sponsored lectures and publications on topics of women's history, literature, and drama, and the Nur publishing group, which has held conferences, and published a periodical and other materials. Also active is the Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women, which gives credit to women entrepreneurs; the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance; the New Woman Research Center, originally established in 1983 and registered in 1990, engaged in a variety of feminist activities, the Ma'an Research Center; the Bint al-Ard association which grew out of an Egyptian Palestinian solidarity group in Mansura; the Omdurman Women's Center, dealing with the numerous Sudanese women refugees; and other groups such as the Alliance for Arab Women, including some affiliated with political parties.

These small groups have limited funding and are dependent on volunteers. They have sometimes avoided publicity, in order to deflect criticism from the public or the press. There is also concern that too high a profile would bring at least temporary cancellation of their licenses by the government. But focusing on low-key activity, and limited memberships mean that they only preach to the converted and need to expand their base if society is to be affected. The groups also do not agree on all issues. For example, the group close to the leftist Tagamu' party has applied a class-based critique to the movement.(19). In the spring of 2000, the National Council for Women was established under the leadership of Mervat Tallawy. It is not clear if it will absorb much of the feminist activity of other groups or find ways to work cooperatively with them.

The independent women's groups cannot even be sure they will represent Egyptian women at international meetings. At the 2000 UN Beijing+5 conference on women in New York, Egypt's delegation was made up primarily of state-sponsored representatives. Suzanne Mubarak, the president's wife, gave a determined and politicized message there, and made proposals including those advocating micro-credit for women. Egyptian critics of the

proceedings were nevertheless unhappy with the government-controlled group's lack of coordination and consultation with the independent NGOs attending the conference.(20) Feminist Aida Seif al-Dawla commented that the state had adopted the feminist NGOs' rhetoric on women--in representing their needs as human rights issues--but had not necessarily adopted the substance of the NGOs programs.(21)

The history of feminist organizations in both Asia and the West has shown that grassroots based efforts as well as those of female politicians and state-derived reforms were important in effecting feminist transformations. To this end, Nawal Saadawi attempted to establish a national Women's Union in February of 2000 to serve as an umbrella organization encompassing the many independent feminist NGOs. (22) The government did not support this initiative, however, and instead, set up its own organization.

The National Council for Women (NCW), was officially established in March 2000, with Suzanne Mubarak as president, and Mervat Tallawy, the former Minister of Social Affairs, as Consul General. Tallawy has set out to improve women's share of political power. The Council set up working groups in the various governates, has held two Intellectual Forums and--with UNDP co-sponsorship and in tandem with an NGO, the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights--advised and supported women candidates in the 2000 elections.(23) One hundred and twenty women ran for Parliament and seven women (two more than in 1995) won seats. The group co-hosted the first Arab women's summit held in Cairo, November 18-20, 2000, along with the al-Hariri Institute and the Arab League. This event, attended by numerous Arab first ladies, focused more on Palestinian women due to the events of the al-Aqsa Intifada, rather than the broader feminist agenda that had been planned.

Will the NCW absorb much of the feminist activity of other groups or find ways to work cooperatively with them? State-promoted feminism could remain ceremonial, or at worst, a potential source of backlash, but at its best, could improve and give teeth to legal reforms as in the NCW's recommendations that husbands who withhold alimony be imprisoned.

The independent women's groups cannot answer these questions yet. At the 2000 UN Beijing+5 conference on women in New York, Egypt's delegation was dominated by state-sponsored representatives, although two reports were prepared. One report was written by the NCW along with the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood. The other included the views of 421 NGOs and was sponsored by the Alliance for Arab Women and UNICEF. Suzanne Mubarak, the president's wife, gave a determined, and politicized message there, and made proposals for a Global Facility which would for example offer credit to women entrepreneurs. Some Egyptian observers of the proceedings were unhappy with the government-controlled group's lack of coordination and consultation with the independent NGOs attending the conference.(24) Feminist Aida Seif al-Dawla commented that the state had adopted the feminist NGOs' rhetoric on women but had not necessarily adopted the substance of the NGOs programs.(25)

One area where the government has sought to improve women's status is through economic development projects, in which additional income can contribute to women's independence, well-being, and self-esteem. Some of these programs, however, are not economically viable while others are initiated but not fully implemented. In the weaving center established by Suzanne Mubarak in Siwa, women work on pseudo-Oriental rugs with the goal of saving up for the costs of marriage. This program, though, is purely economic and lacks an educational component, and does not challenge the social system that requires marriage with its currently high costs.(26)

Many such economic endeavors are funded by the U.S. A.I.D program or by agencies funded by European states. In one of the latter, a project consultant related his

shock at discovering that women were told to buy jelly from stores to display in a provincial women's association festival as their own produce, since this area lacked any traditional craft products.

One might contrast this depressing example with an NGO project in Minya, whose goal was to increase women's consciousness through meetings and discussions. This project was sponsored by the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services. Muslim and Christian participants contributed very positive ideas regarding self-esteem, the need to end violence against women, including domestic violence, the irrelevance of media articles designed for women, and Egyptian women's history--a topic neglected in the national curriculum.(27)

LEGAL REFORMS

A new personal status law passed by Parliament and signed into law by President Hosni Mubarak on January 29, 2000, energized women's activists. It includes the creation of a family court able to facilitate divorce cases and a family insurance plan. But there were also sharp criticisms of the new law. The most hotly contested clauses involved women's right to invoke *khul*, meaning that women may initiate a divorce on any grounds, so long as they return the groom's gifts of jewelry (the *shabka*) and dowry payments (*mahr*). (28). The payments are often made in two installments, with the second often withheld in case of divorce. Women are thus able to ransom themselves from marriages, although the better educated and wealthier will obviously be the greater beneficiaries from this aspect of the reform.

The new law would allow such a divorce after intervention by one arbiter for each side. This measure follows the Quranic command, "If ye fear a breach between them twain. Appoint [two] arbiters, one from his family and the other from hers" (Surah IV:35). When the arbitration process fails, then a divorce is granted in three months and is irrevocable. If the arbitration process fails then the divorce will be granted in three months and is to be irrevocable. The new law also prohibits men from divorcing their wives without immediately informing them (*talaq al-ghiyabi*). This practice was probably the worst abuse of the existing legal situation and stemmed from an earlier limited practice of pronouncing "I divorce thee" three times, (*talaq al-bid'a*) thus bypassing any efforts to mediate, or reconcile partners.

Finally, the law recognizes *'urfi* marriages. 'Urf is a actually a category of law derived from customary practice and tribal law which has, in certain cases been employed as an acceptable source of shari'a. However such marriages were not previously considered to be as legitimate as were registered nikah (the "normal" category of the marriage contract) marriages. 'Urfi marriage is to date, an Egyptian phenomenon. Many young Egyptians, reportedly often including university students, resort to *'urfi* marriages because "regular" marriage is beyond their financial means, costing more than six years' wages for many young Egyptian men. The funds include payment of the dowry (*mahr*) gifts, formal engagement and wedding parties, purchase of an apartment and major appliances and furniture. (29)

If not for this alternative, young people would have to postpone marriage for many years and in the meantime are not, according to local custom and Islamic law, supposed to have sexual relations. Although many have engaged in *urfi* marriages, the courts had previously refused to consider the legal issues such couples might encounter if they seek to divorce or have children.

BACKGROUND

The laws of personal status (including marriage, divorce and inheritance) have been codified in many but not all Muslim states, and are based on laws formulated within particular schools of Islamic law, (*shari'a*). Debates over these laws first emerged in the nineteenth century, when the customs of female seclusion and the lack of education for women were also questioned. The Ottoman Empire which held formal authority over Egypt first passed two imperial edicts

allowing women to sue for divorce on limited grounds in 1915 and codified family law in the Ottoman Law of Family Rights two years later.

In Egypt, laws passed in 1920 and in 1929 broadened the grounds for divorce by incorporating principles outside the strict Hanafi legal code but acceptable in the more lenient Maliki version. This change allowed women to obtain a divorce under certain conditions: if they were deserted, mistreated, denied financial maintenance, or whose husbands were imprisoned or had a serious contagious disease.(30)

Other reforms, rejected by King Fuad and re-proposed during the 1940s were drawn up to allow women to write clauses into their wedding contracts restricting their husband's right to take another wife. Subsequent efforts ensued in 1971, due in part to efforts by the Minister of Social Affairs 'A'isha Ratib. These eventually resulted in reforms decreed by President Anwar al-Sadat in 1979 during a parliamentary recess, and then later passed by the legislature.(31) Due to this extra-parliamentary method of legal passage, however, the reforms of 1979 (known as Jihan's laws, for First Lady Jihan Sadat) were declared unconstitutional by the Higher Constitutional Court in 1985 and most, but not all of their advances were rolled back.(32)

The 1979 personal status reforms had incorporated new grounds for divorce by a woman if her husband took another wife without her consent. She was to be informed if her husband divorced her and allowed to obtain a notarized certificate of divorce. The divorced wife retained custody of her children--until the ages of 10 for a boy and 12 for a girl--and was to be awarded the family apartment as a residence until she remarried. These reforms also gave women the right to work, so long as it did not interfere with their "family duties" and ended the practice of *bayt al-ta'a* (house of obedience) wherein the husband could lock up a wife who had tried to leave the marriage (or to initiate a divorce) at home until he obtained her "obedience."

It should be noted that earlier and recent reforms do not apply to Coptic women. Although the intent of such legal reforms has been to create a civil personal status code, the Church refused to recognize divorces that did not involve grounds of adultery and has denied couples who were divorced in "civil" proceedings the right to remarry. In part, this is the Coptic Church's reaction to other civil laws which imposed precepts derived from shari'a upon non-Muslims.(33)

BACKLASH

The rescinding of the 1979 reforms and the opposition to the 2000 reforms is related to the continuing rise of Islamist influence and an increasingly strong profile of religious authority within Egypt. Several key issues are absent in the new (2000) law. These include restrictions on polygamy and efforts to encourage women's inclusion of protective clauses in their marriage contracts. Egyptian women who marry a non-Egyptian man still may not confer their citizenship to their children, while non-Egyptian women who marry Egyptian men are eligible for citizenship after two years and their children are Egyptian.

Particularly controversial in the new reform law was Article 26, dealing with a woman's right to travel without her husband's consent. In Islamic law, women have required the permission or presence of a *mahram*, a close male relative who acts as a guardian for travel. The Egyptian government decided to drop Article 26 from the draft law just before passage as a concession to its opponents, although the Shaykh al-Azhar, Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi had supported the new law even with that provision (and was criticized by the Islamists for this support).

Fierce opposition to the reforms appeared. Cartoons featured female harridans pursuing frantic husbands with their brooms, women rushing to the airports, or men donning women's clothes and headscarves and assuming domestic chores. After the law's passage, one cartoon featured a woman determinedly packing her suitcase. Her husband protests, "You can't travel without my permission!" but the wife retorts, " I can't? Then I divorce you!" Both humorous and

serious debate revealed doubts that women should be entrusted with expanded rights to divorce or given the ability to travel like men. The implication was that they would flee the confinement of marriage if given an opportunity to do so. (34)

Beyond the cartoons, some of the backlash is no doubt partisan. The main support for legal reforms comes from the ruling NDP (National Democratic Party). Opposition spokesmen were furious at what they regarded as a steamrolling process and promised legal challenges to the new law. Given previous judicial defeats over such laws, this is worrisome for feminists who are gearing up to present their own legal challenges to expand the reforms, for example by challenging the travel ban.

GENDER IN THE CULTURE WARS

Another form of backlash has occurred through conservative and Islamist attacks on writing that deal with Islamic themes in unconventional ways, discuss sexuality openly, criticize traditional gender roles or practices, or the Gulf states, or somehow evince too secular a worldview by the author. Arab women fiction writers--including Hanan al-Shaykh, Alifa Rifaat, Ahdaf Soueif, and younger authors like Miral Tahawy--have meanwhile, forged ahead in exploring issues of gender and sexuality. A definite increase in censorship has taken place in Egypt and more than 500 titles have been "withdrawn from circulation," as the main category of censorship is euphemistically termed. Works by Hanan al-Shaykh, Alifa Rifaat, Mohamed Choukri, Abd al-Rahman Munif, Said Ashmawi, Edward Said, and many other authors have appeared on the list, which has even included rather innocuous women's studies' texts such as Women Imagine Global Change. The suspicion with which such works are viewed has been intensified by controversies over works deemed to be objectionable on religious grounds, such as Maxime Rodinson's Muhammad, and in the mass protests and threats of violence against Haydar Haydar's book Walima li-Aashaab al-Bahr (35).

This has led to self-censorship, heightened suspicion of overtly feminist themes, and hysteria about any mention of homosexuality. One uproar, reaching even into parliamentary committee deliberations, concerned a work included in a course on modern Arabic literature taught by a scholar who has been identified as a feminist. Even when treatments of FGM or men's use of women as sexual objects are included in non-explicit language, or written from an exclusively Egyptian perspective--as in the short stories of Alifa Rifaat (Distant View of a Minaret)--they are simply considered to be too provocative.

CONCLUSION

The situation regarding women's rights and demands is thus extremely complicated in Egypt. The state has supported certain legal reforms for women but these have been limited. It permits NGOs, including those with a feminist agenda, but sometimes pressures or suspends them. Micro-credit for women-led businesses is encouraged but international displays of Egypt's poverty or publicity about practices such as FGM have been condemned.(36) The government moves against certain Islamist-favored restrictions on women, but also, as if seeking society's approval--expresses its own version of Islamic conservatism. It advocates a moderate, elitist form of feminism which it perceives to be helpful to the development process but does not necessarily want to introduce any disruptive social change regarding gender roles or women's status. Thus, intellectuals and writers who choose to deal with gender issues are constrained both by two potential adversaries--Islamist attacks and the government's paternalistic efforts to contain them, or failure to support their freedom of expression.

In this same environment, violence against women, and legal efforts to end discrimination on the basis of sex (including items in the constitution) are described as being too controversial or too "Western" to pursue. In such an environment, the net effect

of feminism in the decade closing the century has certainly engendered mixed results.

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NOTES

1. Lila Abu Lughod, "Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions," in Lila Abu Lughod, ed., Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East (Princeton; Princeton University, 1998).
2. Azza Karam, Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt. (New York: St. Martin's and London: MacMillan, 1999) pp. 4-14.
3. Sherifa Zuhur, Revealing Reveiling: Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Nadje al-Ali, Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle EastL The Egyptian Women's Movement (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Azza Karam, Women, Islamisms and the State; Safinaz Qassim "Al-Feminism: Harakat al-getto al-nisa'iyya," al-Musawwar, (24 June, 1994). Zuhur, "Women Can Embrace Islamic Gender Roles in Paul Winters, ed. Islam (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1995) pp. 93-94; and in discussions of particular figures, such as Durayya Shafiq, in Cynthia Nelson, Doria Shafik: Egyptian Feminist, A Woman Apart. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996) as in the quote on 142 and pp. 275, 282-284.
4. Sherifa Zuhur, Revealing Reveiling 92-95, 98, 106-108; Arlene MacCleod, Accomodating Protest: Working Women, the New Veiling and Change in Cairo ((New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) pp. 85-91.
5. al-Ali, Secularism, Gender and the State.
6. Some depictions of this incident portray it as a natural outcome of the limited freedoms of Arab intellectual life, whereas my interest here is in the Islamists' intervention in the marriage status of those they perceive as enemies. An example of the "limited freedoms" approach is Milton Viorst, "The Shackles on the Arab Mind. Washington Quarterly, 21:2 (Spring 1998).
7. A similar effort was made when Islamists charged Toujan al-Faisal of Jordan with apostasy in 1989 and tried to divorce her from her husband after labeling her feminist views as anti-Islamic. Nancy Gallagher, "Women's Human Rights on Trial in Jordan: The Triumph of Toujan al-Faisal," in Mahnaz Afkhami, ed. Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995) pp. 209-231.
8. The prosecutor has requested the maximum penalty for charges "ranging from accepting foreign funds without government authorisation to compiling false reports about domestic conditions. They are also accused of attempting to embezzle money and making plans to bribe radio and television officials to broadcast programmes about the Ibn Khaldun Centre" Jailan Halawi "As Long as it's Fair," Al-Ahram Weekly On-line (23 - 29 November 2000) . The European Commission has issued a statement declaring the validity of its funding of these programs, and the lack of financial irregularities "Statement of the European Commission on the trial of the Egyptian democracy activist Professor Saad Ibrahim." Brussels, 13 December, 2000.
9. Leila Ahmed recalls that she did not know what cliterodectomy was as a child, and her mother's comment on hearing about one was simply "That is not something that we do." The word "we" here refers to the sort of

Turko-Circiassian family to which her mother belonged. Leila Ahmed, A Border Passage: From Cairo to America--A Woman's Journey (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999) p. 97.

10. Fatma H. El-Zanaty, E.M. Hussein, G.A. Shawky, A.K. Way, and S. Kishor. Egypt Demographic and health Survey 1995 (Calverton: National Population Council and Macro International Inc., 1996). Guenena and Wassef write "Some women from this nationally representative sample underwent a gynecological examination, and a validation study was done on the entire sample to confirm the figures." Nimat Guenena and Nadia Wassef, Unfulfilled Promises: Women's Rights in Egypt. (New York: Population Council, 1999) p. 61.

11. Nawal Saadawi, "Circumcision of Girls" in Saadawi, The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World. (in English, London: Zed, 1980; and Boston: Beacon, 1982) pp. 33-43.

12. These show for example, a happy smiling girl-headed flower with a whole stem, beside another girl-flower with a pained face being snipped by shears, or a picture of children playing together and a large scissors snipping off the image of one girl. Both bear the caption " La lakhtan al-banat," and are included in Guenena and Wassef's booklet. But the posters are not in evidence in the streets of Cairo, and it would be highly controversial to include them in a television campaign on FGM. Yet that is the sort of approach that is necessary to really affect public consciousness. Family planning initiatives have used television for such purposes.

13. Although there are differences in circumcision in Egypt as compared to the Sudan (where a more severe form of the operation takes place), an article on FGM in the Sudan illustrates the deeply rooted attitudes about women that help to perpetuate the practice. Janice Boddy, "Womb as Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision in Rural Northern Sudan" in Roger N. Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo, eds. The Gender Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy. (New York and London: Routledge, 1997) pp. 309-324.

14. Guenena & Wassef, Unfulfilled Promises, p. 50.

15. Zuhur, Revealing; MacLeod, Accomodating; Andrea Rugh, Reveal and Conceal: Dress in Contemporary Egypt. (Cairo: AUC Press, 1986) pp. 149-156 (also discusses men's Islamic dress); Fadwa El Guindi, "Veiling Infitah with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's Contemporary Islamic Movement," Social Problems, 28 no. 4 (April 1981) pp. 465-85; Fadwa El Guindi, Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance (Berg: 1999).

16. "Al-Jeans fi Wizarat al-Awqaf," al-Nur, 20 February 1991.

17. As is clearly portrayed in a scene in a technical school in the film, Of Boys, Girls and the Veil (1997) directed by Youssri Nassrallah. The film also shows that the protagonist's sister adopts the hijab without peer, teacher, or parental pressure to do so.

18. Guenena and Wassef, p. 46, who discuss the polorization of women via dress in an insightful manner and "Akhir Iftera'at Wazir al-Ta'lim…al-Hijab Hurriya Shakhsiyya" al-Nur 21, October, 1992.

19. The New Woman Research and Study Center, "The Feminist Movement in Egypt" in NWRSC, The Feminist Movement in the Arab World (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi, 1996) p. 43.

20. Mariz Tadros, "No Time To Talk," al-Ahram Weekly (8-14 June 2000).

21. Yomna Kamal, "United they stand--if they're allowed" Middle East Times, 25 Feb. 2000

22. NWC Members include Dr. Farkhonda Hassan, Dr. Gaber Asfour, Dr. Zeinab Radwan, Ms. Mona Zulficar, Dr. Heba Handoussa, Ms. Seheir Kansouh, Dr. Hoda Sobhi, Dr. Salwa Gomaa, Dr. Laila El Khawaga and other prominent individuals. See the NWC's home page, <http://www.ncw.gov.eg/newsncweng.htm>. Also**,** Paul Garwood, "Project Aims to Boost Egyptian Women's Voice, Middle East Times, 30 June 2000**;** Amina Elbendary, "Ladies of the House," Al-Ahram Weekly Online, Issue 504 (19-25 October 2000);

Amina Elbendary, "The Meaning of Success." Al-Ahram Weekly Online, Issue 509, (23-29 November, 2000).

23. Maha Khalil, "Global Women's Issues Tackled at New York Conference" Middle East Times, (9 June 2000); and Dahlia Hamouda "Treading Carefully for Women's Rights" Al-Ahram Weekly (15 - 21 June 2000)

24. Mariz Tadros, "No Time To Talk," al-Ahram Weekly (8-14 June 2000).

25. Personal communications with women workers, Siwa, April 2000. This might be compared to projects elsewhere in the Arab world which include a components of literacy and management courses, and health courses as well as more explicit discussions of women's status.

26. Tadros, "No Time to Talk."

27. Guenena and Wassef, pp. 64-66.

28. Muslim women's rights to divorce are more limited than men's. One category of divorce is *tafriq* involving women's right to petition the court for divorce given particular grounds such as injury, the husband's physical defects, failure to pay for the wife's maintenance, or more recently absence or imprisonment. *Khul'*, a different legal category, allows the woman to "buy" her divorce by forfeiting the delayed portion of the dower or bride price, or by paying a sum of money. For good summaries see "Marriage and Divorce," Legal Foundations (by Aziza al-Hibri) and "Modern Practice" (by Eleanor Doumato) in John Esposito, ed., Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World Vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

29. As early as 1980, Andrea Rugh cited journalists comments that marriage costs were unmanageable and explained new strategies for saving since such costs had out-stepped wages, Andrea Rugh, Family in Contemporary Egypt (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984) pp. 254-256. Diane Singerman estimated the cost of marriage at $10,490 in the mid 1980's, Diane Singerman, "The Family and Community as Politics" in Diane Singerman and Hoda Hoofar, eds. Development, Change and Gender in Cairo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) p. 169. Singerman along with Barbara Ibrahim of the Population Council presented a table of marriage costs by area within Egypt and explained how and why the groom's and bride's sides assumed different relative proportions in rural vs. urban locations in a conference on women and the family held last spring in Cairo at the American University in Cairo. The cost of marriage is now approximately six times the average male's annual salary, although this may range even higher.

30. John Esposito, Women in Muslim Family Law (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982) pp. 53-55.

31. Fauzi Najjar, "Egypt's Laws of Personal Status," Arab Studies Quarterly 10, no. 3 (1988).

32. Mervat Hatem, "The Pitfalls of Nationalist Discourses on Citizenship in Egypt," in Suad Joseph, ed., Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East . (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000) pp. 55-56 and Mona Zulficar, al-Mar'ah al-Misriyya fi 'Alam Mutaghiir (Cairo: Rasa'il al-Nid'a al-Jadid, n.d.) pp. 3-4 and 17-19.

33. Ibid, pp. 54-55 and also see, Ghalli Shukri. Al-Aqbat fi watan mutaghayir. (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1991).

34. Sherifa Zuhur, "Freeing Egyptian Wives " WIN (Women's International Network) Magazine No. 30, March 2000.

35. The opposition Sha'b party was suspended on the 20th of May for allegedly inciting the demonstrations over the book which led to the death of several students by Egyptian security forces. Al-Ahzar University's weekly newspaper, The Voice of al-Azhar had published a statement confirming that the book "crosses the borders of what is dictated by religion, violates what is sacred to Islam, religion and public morality." Middle East Times 25-31 May 2000. Intellectuals responded to the attacks on the book with a collective statement and appeal to support freedom of expression.

36. For years, police discouraged photography of Egypt's poorest residents and squatters. During the current era of

privatization, the government estimates a lower rate (less than 30?) of poverty based on those who earn less than $1 per day than do some NGOs. In an article commenting on the poor nutrition of young women, Aida Saif al-Dawla held that the poverty rate has increased "in Egypt from 29 percent in 1981/8 2 to 45 percent in 1998/99." Rasha Mehyar, "Rising Poverty Affecting Appearance," Middle East Times, (Online) 2 June 2000.