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Complexity of Women's Liberation in the Era of Westernization: Egyptian Islamic and Secular Feminists in Their Own Context

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COMPLEXITY OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION IN THE ERA OF WESTERNIZATION: EGYPTIAN ISLAMIC AND SECULAR FEMINISTS IN THEIR OWN CONTEXT

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Dissertation Abstract

Complexity Of Women's Liberation in the Era of Westernization:
Egyptian Islamic And Secular Feminists In Their Own Context

Informed by postcolonial/Islamic feminist theory, this qualitative study explores how Egyptian feminists navigate the political and social influence of the West. The following meta-questions guided this research: How do women in Egypt who self-identify as feminists define feminism? How do they use this definition in their activism? How is Westernization influencing Egyptian feminists and their participation in national and political conflicts?

Data sources were based on individual interviews. The findings indicate that although the phenomenon of Westernization in Egypt had both negative and positive influences on the Egyptian women's liberation movement, it has caused major divisions between secular and Islamist Egyptian feminists. This study advances new ways of understanding how Westernization has penetrated into the Egyptian women's liberation movement, how Egyptian feminists consider the notions of modernity and progress, and how Westernization has contributed to the division between secular and Islamist feminists in Egypt. Overall, this study highlights differences between secular and Islamic feminism in Egypt but it also illustrates their shared goals and common rejection of the Western discourse on women's rights.

Keywords: women's liberation, Egypt, secular feminism, Islamist feminism.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all Middle Eastern women

Who never stop fighting for their freedom

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To my mother: There is no one word that can describe how much I appreciate your efforts to raise me and my other five brothers and sisters. In spite of the very difficult circumstances you had in your life, you were always by our side to give us the courage to move on in our educational journeys. Mother, I made it. Thank you for your endless support.

To my three sisters, Maisa, Arwa, and Jihan, whose struggle stories in patriarchal Middle Eastern societies have inspired me to conduct this research: My sisters, your struggle is not in vain. All of you have learned from your suffering how to make a successful life for yourselves and your children.

To my younger brother, Mottasim: Thank you, my brother, for believing in me and encouraging me to continue my doctoral program. I truly believe brothers are born for adversity.

To my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Susan Katz: I feel very fortunate and honored to have worked with you. Thank you for the many hours of dedicated and excellent consultation you offered me. My dissertation would never have seen the light without your wise guidance and faithful support.

To my best friend, Ibrahim Al-Najjar (abu Adel): Thanks a lot, Ibrahim, for all of your support and help. I believe you are a brother even if we do not share the same biological mother and father.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the most controversial issues regarding the Arab world is status of Arab women. Scholars as well as the public constantly debate whether Arab women are oppressed or not, whether they need to be liberated, and how they can liberate themselves. A further question is how and to what degree Westernization has affected the women's liberation movement.

The status of Arab women has interested me since I was in my teenage years. Having the privilege of being a man living in a male-dominated society such as the Arab world has not stopped me from recognizing the lack of gender equality and the challenges that prevent Arab women from having full economic, social, and cultural rights. Women's suffering in the Arab world drew my attention because of my sisters' difficult experiences within the patriarchal system of Saudi Arabia. As discussed below in the background section, witnessing my three older sisters' suffering made me question the traditional and religious principles that undergird the patriarchal system in the Arab world. Although I did not have a solution or an alternative to my sisters' situation, I sympathized with women who live in Saudi Arabia or in other Arab countries dominated by patriarchy.

The spark that caused me to think deeply about the ideology of women's liberation and the struggle to end the oppression of Arab women in the Arab world was my moving to the West in order to pursue my graduate studies. I was amazed by the freedom and power that Western women have in the West, and I was astonished by their independence, their control over their lives, and the protection they receive from the law. The differences in

women's status between the West and the Arab world have raised questions for me such as: Are Arab women oppressed compared to Western women? Do they need to live in the same way as Western women in order to gain their freedom? Does the Arab world need a deeper Western influence to implant the seed of women's liberation? Finally, do Arab women need help from the West in order to pursue their liberation?

In this research, I have aimed to address many of these questions. Furthermore, this qualitative study gave Arab women the opportunity to speak for themselves, express their own thoughts about women's liberation, and present the story of their struggle to seek gender equality.

Due to the difficulty of studying the women's liberation movement in the Arab world as a whole, I narrowed down my topic and chose a single country, Egypt, to conduct my research. I considered Algeria, Palestine, and Egypt because of the unique histories of the women's liberation movement in each of these countries; ultimately, I chose Egypt because the feminist movement has deep historical roots there and specific circumstances that would provide rich research data. My choice was also due to personal connections with Egyptian people that would give me easier access to collecting data and conducting interviews.

Ever since I began to investigate the women's liberation movement in Egypt, I have encountered the topic of modernism. I have learned how modernization is an intrinsic factor to understand the Egyptian women's liberation movement: As Samman (2011) asserted, the status of women is always the measure of modernity in Arab societies. When I started to research the topic of modernism in Egypt, the phenomenon of Westernization emerged. In order to study the women's liberation movement in Egypt and to understand the sociopolitical processes that have influenced it, I realized I had to start from the historical

process of Westernization in Egypt. In discussing the nature of the relationship between Westernization and the political conflicts in Egypt, Asik and Erdemir (2010, p. 1) argued, "The historical imagination appears to be based on a traumatic experience which was triggered by a traumatic event, namely British colonialism." Therefore, the subject of postcolonialism is fundamental to understand the current political turmoil linked to the women's liberation movement.

Additionally, I have realized that historically the women's liberation movement has been divided in two main factions: the secular and the Islamic parties. This division is based on different criteria and strategies for women's liberation, and it has deepened in the aftermath of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. After the deposition of President Hosni Mubarak, the two Egyptian feminist factions have shown different visions of what the new political ideology should look like in order to ensure a future of freedom for Egyptian women. As this research will explain, this division brings back the importance of the impact of Westernization on the Egyptian women's liberation movement.

Statement of the Problem

Since the 1800s, the phenomenon of Westernization in the Arab world has raised several questions regarding the status of women. Arab societies tend to have antithetical beliefs about the influence of Westernization on the women's liberation movement in the Arab world: Some believe that Westernization has paved the road to women's emancipation, whereas others believe that Westernization is a perilous track that causes the degeneration of society and the perversion of Arab women. Concerns about the impact of Westernization have brought postcolonial scholars to problematize the women's liberation movement in the Arab world (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Samman, 2011), since female emancipation has been used

as an argument to legitimate geopolitical Western incursion in the Arab world. As Leila Ahmed (2011) has stated, colonial feminism was a Western discourse of dominance that created a connection between the issue of Arab culture and the status of women. According to the colonial feminist view, the only way to achieve progress for Muslim women was abandoning their native Islamic culture. As Asik and Erdemir (2010) have argued, the reaction to Westernization has generated radical trends in Egypt, mostly Islamic radicalism. They claim that "the reaction to Western discourse was a rejection of Western values mostly by political Islamists. Egyptian radical Islamists perceive the Westernization process as the continuation of the historical act of colonial invasion" (p. 118).

The choice to accept or reject the influence of the West continues to be a complex issue for Arab women who support the women's liberation movement. In Egypt, the feminist movement began in the early 1920s and was shaped by a secular Western model (Kynsilehto, 2008). The influence of Western culture is evident in early 20th-century Egyptian feminists such as Hoda Sharawwi and Doria Shafik, as well as in contemporary feminist scholar Nawal El Saadawi (Abu-Lughod 1998). However, while secular Egyptian feminists borrowed from Western feminist ideology, a new feminist trend emerged that would reject the secular model of women's liberation. The birth of Islamic feminism in Egypt exemplifies the emergence of new subjects and new political identities that are specific to the context of the Arab World (Badran, 2009).

The decade of the 1970s marked the rise of the Islamic feminist movement. Religious feminists in Egypt began to reinterpret Islamic texts and sought a deeper understanding of Islam and of the role of women in the religion. Religious feminists used the reinterpretation of Islamic texts to challenge patriarchal beliefs and advocate for greater

women's rights (Shahidian, 1998). The division between Islamist and secular feminists deepened after the Islamic party won the Egyptian presidential election in 2012. For example, some Islamist scholars such as Omaima Abou Bakhr, professor at Cairo University, do not see the shift in political power to Islamist parties as being a setback for the process of women's liberation in Egypt, especially in terms of their participation in the political field. In contrast, the secular Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi (1980) claims that the Islamic leading party (Muslim Brotherhood) failed to support the liberation of women in Egypt, and that it will continue to fail because its methods are religious and not secular.

Background and Need

In the aftermath of the Egyptian military coup, Egypt's interim government has passed a new law that restricts the right to public assembly. The law requires Egyptians to seek approval from police one week before holding protests; this period was shortened in subsequent versions that nevertheless made the request process even more difficult. The law also permits police officials to reject, cancel, or postpone protests. Therefore, police officials have restricted the protest areas, which turned parts of Cairo's iconic Tahrir or Rabaa squares into off-limits zones. The new law also authorizes the police to use firearms against peaceful protesters (Amnesty International, 2013).

According to a report issued by the Middle East Monitor (2014), protesters who are convicted of breaking the protest law will face up to five years in prison and fines of $14,513. Amnesty International (2013) reported that after the protest law was passed, hundreds of Islamic female protesters were arrested, and some of them were sentenced to up to 11 years. Islamic detained women are suffering harsh treatments, torture, and sexual

abuse; some of them have been sexually assaulted 14 times in one day (Middle East Monitor, 2014).

The brutal actions by the Egyptian government against Islamic women and the violation of their human rights have generated the attention of human rights organizations worldwide. Amnesty International has called for the release of three women arrested in a peaceful demonstration on the Mansoura University, reporting that these women are facing fabricated and illegitimate charges simply for exercising their rights. Additionally, Islamic female activists were killed in the aftermath of the 2013 military coup. An example is Asma Al-Beltagi, the teenage daughter of Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohamed Al-Beltaji, who was killed by a police sniper who shot her in the chest and back while she was in Rabaa Al-Adawiyya Square during the army's operation to disperse the supporters of the ousted president Mohammed Morsi (Middle East Monitor, 2014).

Even female Egyptian journalists were included in the death toll that followed the 2013 military coup. Reporters Without Borders reported that Mayada Ashraf, a journalist for the Al-Dostour daily newspaper, was shot in the head while she was covering a peace demonstration of supporters of the ousted president Mohammed Morsi on March 2014. The military-controlled media stated that Mayada was shot by pro-Morsi protesters, whereas independent media claim that she was intentionally killed by police snipers together with three other protesters, as proven by raw footage and by the testimonies of Mayada's friends who were with her and witnessed the incident (Middle East Monitor, 2014).

Theoretical Framework: Postcolonial/Third World Feminism

This study is informed by postcolonial/Islamic feminist theory (Mohanty, 1984, 1991; Spivak, 1988). Postcolonial and transnational feminist theorist Chandra Mohanty (1984)

criticized the Western feminist view of non-Western feminists. In her famous essay "Under Western Eyes," Mohanty (1984) argued against the continuation of Western imperialism over the Third World's culture:

> the inherence of politics in the discourses of "culture" in the West and how contemporary imperialism is a hegemonic imperialism that exercising to a maximum degree a rationalized violence action through fire and sword, and also through the attempt to control hearts and minds. (p. 335)

Mohanty criticizes Western feminism, arguing that the West often sees Third World women as a monolithic group. To the contrary, Mohanty (1991) states that

> just as Western women or white women cannot be defined as coherent interest groups, Third World women also do not constitute any automatic unitary group. Alliances and divisions of class, religion, sexuality, and history, for instance, are necessarily internal to each of the above groups. (p. 49)

Mohanty (1984) explains that the image of an "average Third World woman" is socially constructed and it defines her as sexually oppressed, uneducated, homebound, victimized, and ignorant in contrast to the "Western" woman, who is portrayed as educated, modern, and in control of her own life. Mohanty supports her argument with examples of writers such as Fran Hosken, the U.S. writer, feminist, and social activist who wrote about female genital mutilation, or Patricia Jeffery, who portrayed women as victims of Islam. Similarly, Mohanty criticizes Juliette Minces and the idea, expressed in her 1982 book *The House of Obedience: Women in Arab Society*, that all women in the Middle East are the same. The creation of the homogeneous category of the Third World woman is very problematic in that it "assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a

generalized notion of their subordination" (Mohanty, 1984, p.31). Therefore, this portrayal of Third World women can be described as a "colonial move" (p. 39).

In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" literary theorist and philosopher Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) discussed how Third World people and women in particular are represented in the West. Spivak argues that postcolonial studies in the West review the neocolonial imperatives of political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural removal and therefore are unknowingly complicit in the task of imperialism. According to Spivak, postcolonialism in the first world has institutionalized a discourse that classifies the East in the same way as did the actual modes of colonial dominance it seeks to dismantle. Spivak (1988) argued that the colonialized people whom she refers to by the term "subaltern" are represented as the "other" in the first world:

> Both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (p. 287)

Consequently, Spivak came to the conclusion that the "subaltern cannot speak" (p. 308).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Egyptian feminists navigate the political and social influence of the West. To this end, it was important to include Egyptian feminist voices in academia in order to understand the current division between Islamist and secular feminists in the Arab world and their complex relationship to the influence of the West. This study also examines the development of the feminist movement in Egypt and

offers a critique of Islamic feminist theories. Readers of this study will gain an understanding of how the mechanism of women's liberation movement in former Western colonies has risen.

This research addresses the following research questions:

1) How do women in Egypt who self-identify as feminists define feminism?

2) How do they use this definition in their activism?

3) How is Westernization influencing Egyptian feminists and their participation in national and political conflicts?

Limitations of the Study

The most important potential limitation of this study is the fact that I belong to a different culture and gender than the participants. My main concern was that being a Saudi of Palestinian descent man while all the participants are Egyptian women would place me as an "outsider." Bartunek and Louis (1996) described insider and outsider team research as a type of collaboration wherein insider practitioners are already in the setting and operating effectively within it, whereas outsiders enter the setting on a temporary basis in order to conduct research (as cited in O'Leary, 2010, p. 27. Similarly, I was worried whether my position as an outsider could hinder my ability to enter the setting and gain the confidence of the participants. In that sense, I needed to surmount my status as an outsider researcher in order to gain my participants' trust. As O'Leary (2010) stated, however, being an outsider researcher has its advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, I did my best to enhance the advantages and minimize the risks associated with my position as an outsider. I tried to make my participants see the advantage of dealing with an outsider researcher—in particular, the fact that I could bring an outside perspective and, therefore, greater objectivity (O'Leary,

2010). For example, I could have been viewed by the participants as having more power than they do; however, I explained to them that my research was a collaborative and participative process based on sharing power. I also talked about how being different in gender and nationality could give more power to both of us. My point was that my participants and I should focus on appropriate use of our power and work on empowering each other. As O'Leary (2010) states, rather than denying their position of power, outsider researchers should engage with the paradox of democracy by trying to use this power in a positive way to empower others. O'Leary claims that research should set himself in a paradoxical situation of wielding power in order to facilitate others to empower themselves. Therefore, my aim has been to ensure that the voices of all participants would be heard and valued and to explain to them that their voice is their power, which could be strengthened by being delivered to the public by a male researcher.

Another disadvantage I considered in advance was that my participants would perceive me as a potential male oppressor and not feel comfortable sharing their experiences with patriarchy. To address this problem, I highlighted other aspects we had in common to place myself as an insider of the participants' group. My point was that although I am a man and my participants are women, I still share with them the same culture and language. My expectation was that this aspect would help me, particularly when addressing the subject of Westernization: Whether my participants were welcoming or denouncing of Westernization, I shared with them the experience of being touched by the Westernization of the Arab world.

Significance of the Study

This study documented changes in Egyptian feminism and created a forum for the voices of Egyptian feminists to speak out. This study hopefully will contribute to the

scholarly conversation on globalization and the impact of Western influence on grassroots movements in the Arab world. For example, practitioners of Middle Eastern or humanistic studies may reflect on how any sociopolitical conflict seriously affects the experience of women's struggle. Additionally, understanding the experiences that Egyptian women face in the ongoing political turmoil in Egypt may help government organizations, NGO's, intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations, and other organizations support women's rights more effectively.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is divided into four sections. The first part explores the start of the Westernization phenomenon in the Arab world and the Western perspective on women's liberation. The second part examines the Arab discourse of modernity and advocacy for women's liberation. The third part discusses the feminist movement in the Arab world with the rise of the Islamist trend in Egypt. The final part discusses the role of Egyptian women in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and the confrontation among Egyptian feminists in the women's liberation process.

The History of Westernization in the Arab World and Egypt in the Presence of the Islamic Empire

During the last period of the Ottoman Empire, Arabs lived in lethargy and isolation. While the West was prospering and advancing in science and technology, the Arab world significantly deteriorated and lagged behind (Abu-Lughod, 2011; Moans, 1978). Because of their isolation and lack of education, Arabs were not aware of the gap between themselves and their European neighbors (Abu-Lughod, 2011). Arabs lived off the legacy of their glorious past, dazzled by the Arabs' and Turks' victories and dominance over Europe that were transmitted from one generation to the next without the benefit of new information. Due to a lack of knowledge about the European status quo, the image that the Arabs had of the Europeans reflected their memory of the Dark Ages: European people were seen as barbarians, dull, and backward (Abu-Lughod, 2011). This viewpoint lasted until the French campaign in Egypt and Syria led by Napoleon Bonaparte in the 18th century that caused the awakening of the Arabs from their lethargy and false assumptions about Europe.

The Opening to the West

According to Abu-Lughod (2011), the French expedition to Egypt in 1798 marked the first contact Arabs had with a foreign culture after a long period of isolation during the Ottoman Empire. They were astonished by the Europeans' advancement in technology and science, and many of them welcomed the French campaign because they saw in it an opportunity for development and progress in their societies. For example, Napoleon Bonaparte and his companions, who were mercenaries and scholars, presented themselves as the rescuers of the Arab people from the Turkish authoritarian regime. They promised to bring about the emancipation of the Arab people and to put them on a track of progress and development that would bring them from darkness to enlightenment. The history of the French Revolution gave more authenticity and credibility to the European's claim to bring liberation and civilization to the Arab world. The struggle of the French people to liberate their nation from a tyrannical monarchy and develop a modern advanced society with a democratic political system made Arabs feel secure and unconcerned to have Western foreigners among them (Abu-Lughod, 2011).

Westernization and the Strategies of Developing in the Arab World

Westernization is a process that emerged in the Arab world in the 18th century as an attempt to produce new Arab generations who would be on a par with modern people in the West (Abdul Latif, 2007; Samman, 2011). After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of Europe as the new world power, Arab people mainly agreed with the notion that the Arab nations needed immediate transformation in order to become developed, advanced nations equal to Europe, and they started to search for a strategic response that would allow them to catch up to the Europeans (Said, 1993; Samman, 2011). However,

Arabs were divided as to how to develop the Arab nation and modernize the Arab people. Many Arabs considered occidentalizing the Arab world as the basic strategy to develop the Arab nations and become equal to the Europeans, whereas other Arabs rejected the idea (Abdul Latif, 2007; Samman, 2011).

The Colonial Discourse of Modernism and Modernizing Arab Women

Based on the Western ideology of civilization and modernity, modernism had to follow Western criteria; any other approach that did not match the West's model would be considered backward and trapped in a past without progress (Said, 1978). The only way towards becoming a modern civilized nation was taking the Western path, because Western culture was the only civilized culture (Said, 1978; Samman, 2011).

The West viewed Arab women as backward for the reason that Arab women were stuck in Arab culture, which was considered inferior because of the influence of Islam and its differences from Western culture. Therefore, the liberation and modernization of Arab women must occur through Westernization: By imitating Western women, Arab women would situate themselves among civilized modern people and get free from the backwardness of an outdated Arab-Islamic culture (Jayawardena, 1986; Said, 1978; Samman 2011). According to the ideology of Westernization, the look of Arab women had to be changed from that Islamic look of backwardness to a modern, civilized look (Samman, 2011). In the Western perspective, the veil is the cornerstone that differentiates between civilized and backward women, and Muslim women must abandon the veil in order to seek modernism. Many Muslim women were influenced by the Western discourse of modernity, and they gave up their veil in order to pursue modernity and civilization (Ahmed, 2011; Gole, 1996; Mohanty, 1984).

The Arab Discourse of Modernity

This section explores how the Arab people have internalized the colonizer's notion of modernity. Samman (2011) describes the colonizer's notion of modernity as follows:

> Colonial modernity is obsessed with the constant judgments of people in accordance to a radicalized scheme of progress and regression, placing some as advanced and others as underdeveloped, where the West and its others were poisoned in linear scale of civilizations, religions, and race. (p. 186)

In that sense, Arab people needed to respond to the notion of modernity shaped by the colonizer's standard to avoid being perceived as uncivilized. Since the beginning of European colonialism in the 19th century, Arab elites have expressed their reaction to the colonial script through political activities. The desire to modernize the Arab world, along with advocacy for women's liberation, has divided Arab society in three main categories: (a) radical Westerners, including secularists and nationalists; (b) moderate Islamists; and (c) radical Islamists (Samman, 2011). Although nationalism and Islamist ideology emerged after in mid-twentieth century as opponents of Westernization, Westernization still considered as influential factor on the Arab people's culture.

Ahmed (2011) argues that the British colonial power came to the Arab world with an assumption of superiority. For example, the British diplomat and colonial administrator Lord Cromer, who ruled the protectorate of Egypt during British colonialism, argued in his 1961 book, *Modern Egypt*, that women were degraded by Egyptian men because they accepted the practice of veiling. Ahmed (2011) purports that Cromer was one of those Western supremacists who believed in what Gayatri Spivak has notoriously described as "white men saving brown women from brown men:"

> The narrative of Cromer was useful in this era of European imperialism in that it cast European man in his role as colonizer as someone who, by virtue of his imperialist rule, was not only bringing civilization to backward peoples but also saving local women from the oppression and degradation imposed on them by native men. (p. 23)

Ahmed points out that Cromer's view was often repeated and even recently endorsed by both Cherie Blair, former wife of U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair, and Laura Bush, wife of the former president of the United States, George W. Bush, in order to justify the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan.

As a result of British colonialism in Egypt, Egyptian intellectuals adopted Cromer's ideas as the standard of women's liberation. Ahmed (2011) argues that British colonialists succeeded in implanting a feeling of inferiority among the Egyptian elites in the late 19th and early 20th century, and she supports her argument by criticizing the book *The Liberation of Women,* written in 1899 by Qasim Amin. Amin claimed that "European civilization was clearly superior to that of Egypt; if women were not veiled in Europe, then it was clearly not necessary" (p. 30). Therefore, Amin advocated the unveiling of Muslim women because the practice of veiling, which had once been practiced in European societies, had now been abandoned there. Ahmed (2011) argues that Amin was fascinated by the European man, and this made him agree with the actions of European imperialism around the world:

> Praising European civilization as one that had "advanced with the speed of steam and electricity" to conquer "every part of the globe," Amin notes admiringly that wherever European man goes "he takes control of its resources . . . and turns them into profit . . . and if he does harm to the original inhabitants, it is only that he pursues happiness in this world and seeks it wherever he may find it." When the European

> colonizers encountered "savages," Amin writes, "they eliminate them or drive them from the land, as happened in America … and is happening now in Africa … When they encounter a nation like ours, with a degree of civilization, with a past, and a religion … and customs and … institutions … they deal with the inhabitants kindly. But they do soon acquire its most valuable resources, because they have greater wealth and intellect and knowledge and force. (p. 22)

Ahmed observes that in response to Amin's ideas, many Egyptian women in the 1940s-1970s era Westernized their lifestyle, their furniture, their appearance, and their clothing. What turned the Westernization trend in Egypt, according to Ahmad, was the trauma of the Arab-Israeli wars in 1967 and 1973. The humiliating defeats of the Arabs were perceived as a punishment by God and led to a growth of the Islamist tendency. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood demanded for a more energetic religious practice to go over the political and social crises in the aftermath of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Ahmed (2011) states:

> As Amin had once done, the Brotherhood called for a profound transformation of Egyptian society; as part of this political project, the veil would again become a central symbol of resistance…. The clothing advocated by the Brotherhood expressed two key ideas: gender segregation and egalitarian principles of social justice. The veil as a statement of the claim to justice has spread across the world—in the west, against discrimination and an aggressive foreign policy; in the Arab world, against corruption and economic injustice. (pp. 115, 119)

Radical Westerners

Radical Westerners reject Islam and believe that oriental-Islamist methods fail to develop society and keep Arabs stuck in the past. Therefore, they believe that the Arab nation needs to be radically de-orientalized and de-Islamized—i.e., it needs to replace its inferior oriental-Islamic culture with a superior Western-secular culture—to be able to move forward towards modernity.

One of the most prominent Arab thinkers who in the early 20th century advocated for Westernizing the Arab world was Taha Hussein, one of the most influential Egyptian intellectuals of the period (Gole, 1996). Hussein (1938) believed that Egyptians should transform themselves into Europeans in order to move forward and become a modern nation; this meant becoming European in all aspects of life, adapting European culture and accepting both its bad and good dimensions.

Another example of a proponent of radical Westernization in the late 19th century is the Lebanese writer and poet Butrus al-Bustani, who claimed that the Arab world would not rise again unless Arabs completely adopted European political and social practices. This Eurocentrism was also evident among Ottoman scholars and writers. For example, the Ottoman journalist and writer Ahmad Faris Shidyaq, considered as one of the founding fathers of modern Arabic literature, advocated for reform in the political and economic system of the Ottoman Empire according to European criteria. From the perspective of radical Westernism, the way to liberate women is by complete and absolute mimicking of the West. Arab women must opt out of oriental culture, considered as a barrier to modernity (Cheref, 2010; Gole, 1996; Samman, 2011).

Secularists

Secularism emerged from the Enlightenment in Europe and was espoused by many Arab thinkers of Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon from the late 19th century until the present. Abdul Latif (2007) argues that secularism as an ideology was intended to modernize and reform the sociopolitical system in the Arab world. Arab secular thinkers were highly influenced by the Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, or Denis Diderot, and they viewed secularism as the solution to the negative impact of religion on Arab societies. According to secularists, religion narrows and limits the thinking mechanism and constrains thoughts and opinions within its own boundaries. In the case of the Arab world, religious people would have rejected new ideas and ideologies that could have been more suitable to the modern time (Abdul Latif, 2007).

Farah Antun (as cited in Samman, 2011), who argued for secularizing the Arab world, represents an example of Arab secular thinking. Antun was highly influenced by French literature and philosophy from the 18th and 19th century. Antun rejected religion, whether Muslim or Christian, as part of Arab culture, and he agreed with the French thinkers who critiqued Islam. Antun believed religion to be the main hindrance to the development of a modern advanced society in the Arab world. He defined religion as an individual and private matter and stated that all people should be seen as sharing a common humanity regardless of their religious background (Abdul Latif, 2007). Other prominent advocates of secularism include Salim al-Bustani, Salam Mosa, Taha Hussein, Shebly alShamel, Adib Ishaq, and Fouad Zakariyya (Abdul Latif, 2007).

Nationalists

Nationalism emerged in the early 20th century as a result of the Western colonial presence in the Arab world. It was a social movement aimed to unite the Arab world by resisting Western imperialism and building a modern nation. Arab nationalists emphasized the sovereignty of the Arab nation and the need to preserve the Arab identity, they advocated for one Arab nation and sought to unify the economies of the Arab world, end tribalism, educate women, and fight Zionism in Palestine (Garaudy, 2007; Jayawardena, 1986).

Nationalists looked with favor at the West's modernity and so-called civilization. Arab nationalist thinkers in the period between the 19th and early 20th century were highly influenced by European enlightenment thinkers such as Auguste Comte, Ernest Renan, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, and others. Their admiration of Western modernity led them to believe that Arab countries had to adopt Western methods of liberation to become advanced and modern (Golley, 2004; Samman, 2011). Nationalists believed in the necessity to eradicate Arab societies from all traditional and religious beliefs that were keeping the Arab nations from evolving and being strong enough to prevent Western aggression (Garaudy, 2007; Samman, 2011).

Moderate Islamists

Moderate Islamists emerged in the Arab world at the same time as Westernists, during the late 19th century. According to Samman (2011), moderate Islamists believe that any religion has certain essential factors that are not possible to change, such as creed or faith, and others that are open to change, such as practices that have become outdated and irrelevant. Islamic modernists of the late 19th century, like anticolonialists Sayyid Jamal Al-Afgani and Muhammad Abduh, believe in a selective approach that permits adoption of some

Islamic rules and other aspects from the West in order to frame a modern paradigm. Moderate Islamists argue that Islam inherently contains elements that Arabs and Muslims will need in order to confront the challenge of Western imperialism. Therefore, it is acceptable to adopt some Western methods that do not contradict Islamic principles.

Moderate Islamists refer to the Arab and Islamic golden age as their model. Islam in the golden age was good for all people—Christians, Muslims, and Jews. In their view, it is not Islam that has caused the decline of the Arab world, but rather straying away from it. Moderate Islamists believe in adopting certain material principles, like science and knowledge, but not spiritual principles such as morals. Moderate Islamists view radical Westernization as a form of colonialism. For example, the Lebanese Druze Shakib Arslan (as cited in Samman, 2011) denounced all Westernized writers and described their efforts to Westernize the Arab world as a ruthless attack on Islam aimed at destroying the spirit of Islam and all other Eastern traditions (Samman, 2011). As Cleveland (1985) stated in his work *Islam Against the West: Shakib Arslan and the Campaign for Islamic Nationalism,* by the time Arslan died in 1946, he had written 20 books and 2,000 articles, most of them about the threat of Westernization of the Arab culture.

Some radical Westernists have transformed to become moderate Islamists. Muhammad Husayn Haykal was an Egyptian writer, journalist, and Minister of Education in Egypt who began his political career as a proponent of radical Westernism. In the early 20th century, Haykal changed his position to fall in the line with the Islamic modernists after he became disappointed with Western ideology. He wrote:

> I had tried to transmit to those who shared my language the intellectual culture of the West and its spiritual life, so that we might adopt them both as models and as guides.

> However, after all my labors, I realized that I had planted seeds in barren soil. Even when the earth accepted them, it produced nothing for them. (As cited in Samman, 2011, p. 149)

For Haykal, this failed strategy of emulating the West caused much humiliation and devastation to the Arab world, and the solution was to return to an authentic tradition (Samman, 2011).

Radical Islamists

According to Samman (2011), the phenomenon of Islam as a political and social movement was augmented after Arab secularists failed on their promise to create a modern social nation and put an end to Western imperialism. Therefore, the radical Islamist movement in Egypt was a response to the historical experience of Westernization in the Arab world. Asik and Erdemir (2010) argue that it is necessary to address the historical imagination of Westernization in the Arab world to understand the Egyptian reaction towards Westernization. The traumatic experience of British colonialism in Egypt was an intrinsic factor behind the growth of the Islamist movement in Egypt. Islamists consider the deterioration of Egyptian society to be the result of the Westernization movement in the aftermath of British colonialism. For example, Keddle observed that "Islamist reaction in Middle East was directed more against post-colonial states since the former's actions were perceived as tyrannical and anti-Islamic" (as cited in Asik & Erdemir, 2010, p. 112). Radical Islamists in Egypt perceive Westernization in the secularist movement as neocolonial domination. According to radical Islamists, Westernized and secularist Egyptians present more of a threat to Egyptian society than the British colonizers themselves (Asik & Erdemir, 2010).

Radical Islamists position Islam as a superior system and insist that Islam is the only way to defend the Arab world from Western colonialism. Radical Islamists argue that the Arab countries do not need to import the ways and means to seek development and reform from the outside; Islamic-Arab nations have the capability to do that without exotic Western values, as the glories of the Islamic empire illustrate.

According to the radical Islamists, the Arab nation needs to be cleansed of the toxins of Westernization and secularization. Arabs must look back and practice the old Islamic rules in order to move forward (Samman, 2011). In other words, as Jalal Al-e-Ahmad and Ali Shariati argued, Arabs and Muslims, rather than being Westernized, need to be Islamized: Everything, from the government and political systems to the social arena, including women's matters, must be Islamized (Samman, 2011). Radical Islamists believe that Muslim women must abandon the Western model and espouse their traditional role (Samman, 2011). Examples of radical Islamists are Hassan al-Banna, who established the Islamic Muslim Brotherhood organization in Egypt, and Sayyied Qutb, Egyptian author, Islamic theorist, and leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s (Samman, 2011).

Arab Women: The Beginning of Transformation

The Perspective of Women's Liberation

The concept of a women's liberation movement in Egypt arose during the reform era that began after the French campaign (Abu-Lughod, 2011). The reform movement began in the 1820s under the rule of Muhammad Ali Pasha, and at that time modern intellectual figures in the Arab world also began advocating for the liberation of women (Samman, 2011). Most of those intellectuals were former students who had studied abroad during

Muhammad Ali Pasha's expedition to Europe and who came back carrying a desire for reform and development, including in the status of women. One of those reformers was the prominent moderate Islamic intellectual Refaa El-Tahtawi, who was the first man to pioneer the women's liberation movement in Egypt (Moans, 1978). El-Tahtawi was fascinated by how French women were educated, respected, and involved in French society; when he returned to Egypt, he advocated for the education of women and proclaimed that education is one of women's rights (Abu-Lughod, 1998). However, as Nilufer Gole (1996) argued, the desire of educating women by Arab intellectual men such as Refaa El-Tahtawi, Tahar Haddad, and Qasim Amin was based only on the notion of motherhood and the demands of family life; women's only duty and responsibility was childrearing and educating the intellectual men who would serve the nation in the future. In this sense, Arab intellectual men emphasized the relationship between proper mothering and the progress of the nation. The ignorant mother was unsuited for the preparation of a new generation; therefore, women needed to go to school in order to raise their children in a modern, civilized way. Samman (2011) stated that education would provide both the men of tomorrow and the mothers of the future.

One of the greatest advocates of this notion of motherhood was the prominent Egyptian intellectual Qasim Amin. Much of the discourse on the education and the importance of childrearing came from Qasim Amin's work *The Liberation of Women*, published in 1899 (McBroome, 2013). Amin inextricably linked the development and progress of the nation to the condition of women; therefore, he advocated for women's education, the removal of the veil, and an end to seclusion. By contrast, Tahar Haddad, the Tunisian scholar and reformer, advocated liberating Arab women based on humanitarian

grounds rather than on the need to produce the children of the future. In his book *Our Women in the Shari 'a and Society*, Haddad (1930) advocated for expanded full rights for women and proclaimed to end the Islamic rule over women, because in his view the modern interpretations of Islam repressed women (Haddad, 1930).

The Voice of Women in the Women's Liberation Movement

The voice of Arab feminists emerged from the nationalist movement and started to appear through the nationalist literature. Yet to advocate for women's liberation and be heard, Arab women had to establish their own literary salons, women's clubs, and women's journals. Their publications focused on women's rights in the Arab world: Through poems, essay, stories, articles, and discussions they advocated for women's right to education, demanded amendments to marriage and divorce laws, claimed the freedom to choose to wear the veil, and rejected segregation as well as the narrow role of women as child bearers and housewives. Among those intellectual women were Zainab Fawwaz, Warda Al-Yazigi, and Aisha Al-Taimuriya, who were from Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, respectively (Ahmed, 2001; Samman, 2011).

Feminism in Egypt

The establishment of feminist organizations heightened women's ability to make their voices heard. The Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) was founded on March 16, 1923, by the former leader of the women's rights activist Hoda Sharawwi. When she returned to Egypt after participating in the International Feminist Conference in Rome in 1935, Sharawwi threw her veil in the sea and started to call for a rejection of the traditional female roles in Egypt and for gender equality (Bezirgan & Fernea, 1992).

In the mid-1940s, the feminist movement gained power and came to openly challenge the Egyptian authority. At the time, the leader of the Egyptian Feminist Party, Doria Shafik, endorsed the liberal ideology of the modern feminists and openly challenged the state regulations, demanding political rights, the reform of the Personal Status Law, and equal pay for equal work. After the 1952 revolution, equal rights were granted to women in the areas of education and work; women were given the right to vote and to run for election for the first time in Egypt's history. Although she was influenced by Western culture, Shafik was not totally accepting the Westernization in Egypt and rejected British colonialism, as demonstrated by her participation in many activities against British imperialism (Abu-Lughod, 1998).

In 1972, the feminist Nawal El Saadawi published a book, *Women and Sex*, which demanded more freedom for Egyptian women and criticized the use of religion to justify women's oppression in the Arab world. Al-Natour (2012) argues that although El Saadawi addressed feminism through the lens of a Western ideal of womanhood, she also acknowledged that Egyptian women had the right to form their identities within their culture's standards as well as the right to resist Western imperialism and sexual liberation. El Saadawi also advocated for Egyptian women's participation in political activism and called for Egyptian women to be politically involved with revolutionary struggles (Ramand & Mahdy, 2012).

The 1970s also marked the rise of the Islamic feminism movement. Religious feminists in Egypt began to reinterpret Islamic texts and sought a deeper understanding of Islam in regard to women status. Religious feminists used their reinterpretation of Islamic texts to challenge patriarchal beliefs and advocate for greater women's rights (Shahidian,

1998). Both secular and Islamic feminists demanded more freedom and sociopolitical opportunities for women, but they disagreed on the ideology that should inform the liberation of women: Whereas Islamic feminists approached women's liberation from within the Islamic framework, secular feminists wanted to impose the values of secularism and individualism on Egyptian society (Nordwall, n.d.).

Islamic Feminism

One of the most important issues in the sociology of gender and feminist studies in the Arab and Muslim world is the relationship between Islam and women. This relationship has become tenser after the emergence of Islamic movements in the Arab world and the Islamic revolution in Iran. The tension between Islam and feminism is founded on the allegation that a major aspect of the Islamic religion is its patriarchal criteria, and that many verses in the Koran clearly discriminate against females. According to Darvishpour (2008), Islam considers a woman as a dangerous being and an active sexual power. Therefore, women's sexuality has to be hidden in order not to lure men into committing a sin by having sexual relationships against the rules of Sharia law, and Islamic rules such as polygamy, repudiation, and sexual segregation function as a strategy to constrain the women's power (Darvishpour, 2008).

Based on the subordination of women in the Islamic world, many feminist researchers in the West view Islam as one of the worst types of patriarchal religion that legitimizes gender inequality. However, critical scholars like Said (1993) and Mohanty (1984) consider this assumption as a product of Western ethnocentrism. Similarly, Mahmood (2005) argues that linking Islam to the discourse of women's oppression is at risk of bringing back Orientalist notions into current times. Orientalism emerged during European Enlightenment

and the colonization of the Arab World; Said (1978) defines it as the perception in the West of an absolute difference between East and West that underlies theories, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts about Oriental people. According to Said (1993), Orientalism provided a rationalization for European colonialism over the Arab world based on the notion that the East is inferior and therefore in need of Western intervention or rescue.

The Islamic feminist consciousness that started to emerge in the Middle Eastern world is based on different principles than the ones that inform Western feminism. Whereas the notion of feminism in the West is based on secularism and the rejection of traditional authority, Islamic feminism is derived from indigenous culture and traditions. The strategy of Islamic feminist liberation is to use tradition and religion to liberate Muslim women from what they consider oppressive practices based on a misunderstanding of the religion. For example, Islamic Egyptian feminists have joined forces in a campaign to eradicate female genital mutilation and argue that female circumcision does not exist in traditional Islamic culture (Badran, 2009;).

According to a study by the World Health Organization, female genital mutilation in Egypt is a cultural practice that exists for religious, traditional, and social reasons. A study by also the World Helth Orgnization (n.d) showed that 41% of female students in primary, preparatory, and secondary schools had been exposed to female genital mutilation. Religious tradition is the most often used rationale for performing female genital mutilation in Egypt. According to a 2008 survey by Demographic and Health Surveys in Egypt, 72% of married women reported in 2000 and 2003 that female genital mutilation was an important part of religious tradition. Traditional beliefs in Egypt are also an important factor underlying female genital mutilation. According to the 1995 Demographic and Health Survey in Egypt,

more than one-third of Egyptian married women who were subjected to female genital mutilation believed that an Egyptian husband would prefer his wife to be circumcised for reasons of cleanliness and to prevent promiscuity before marriage.

Egyptian Islamic Feminism

The purpose of the Islamic feminist movement in Egypt is to position Muslim women within the Islamic revival movement. The concept of Islamic revival refers to the rebirth of the Islamic religion throughout the Islamic world that started in 1970s (Shahidian, 1998). The Islamic revival is an intellectual response to the colonial influence of the West in the Muslim world and to the political decline of Islamic powers since the collapse of the Islamic empire in the 18th century. Islamic revivalists oppose the colonial exploitation of Muslim countries and the imposition of secular values by the West, and they aim to reassert the original Islamic values in order to reform Muslim societies (Montasir, 2014).

The Egyptian Islamic Women's movement is part of the broader Islamist revival movement. Egyptian women from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds started to provide religious lessons (usually in mosques) to one another on the proper reading of the Islamic texts, which they see as necessary to the Islamic revival movement in Egypt. The Islamic Egyptian women's movement marks the first time in Egyptian history that women were performing a role that had been mostly appropriated by men in Sunni Islamic practice (Jamal, 2008). Saba Mahmood points out that "the Egyptian Islamic women's movement has fundamentally changed both the male character of the mosque and Islamic pedagogical practices associated with this public space" (cited in Jamal, 2008, p. 122). Egyptian Muslim women believe that the Islamic women's movement is integral to the Islamic revival movement and that Muslim women have to benefit from it in terms of improving their

sociopolitical status (Binzel & Carvalho, 2013). According to Badran (2009), Muslim women activists believe that the participation of Muslim women in politics is a moral duty.

The 2011 Egyptian Revolution

Western Perspective

The West views the participation of women in the revolution as a sign of democracy and as the beginning of women's liberation in the Arab and Muslim world. According to Egyptian women, however, the way the West sees female participation in the national conflict is an example of the orientalist imaginary of the "victimized" Muslim-Arab woman. This perspective, therefore, reflects the biased Western understanding of the Arab and Muslim world (Al-Natour, 2012).

Women's Participation and Influence

The influence of women in the 2011 Revolution has been under-reported by the mainstream media in the Arab world, as if most of the participants were male and the uprising were predominantly driven by males. By contrast, Al-Natour (2012) argues that by taking an active role in the 2011 uprising, the female protester "marks her emerging subjectivity within its new complex context" (p. 69). Al-Natour claims that the 2011 uprising was dependent on the women of Cairo, and that "their active roles inside Tahrir Square made the survival of the revolution possible and problematized gendered issues" (Al-Natour, 2012, p. 75).

Identity of Egyptian Women's Participants in the Uprising

The majority of Egyptian female participants in the 2011 revolution did not identify themselves as working for women's empowerment, and they avoided the use of the label "feminist" (McBroome, 2013). Egyptian women during the revolution focused on tabling

down the regime rather than addressing women's issues. But whether or not they considered themselves feminists, female participants agreed on the women's responsibility to participate in shaping the future generations of Egyptian women (McBroome, 2013).

After the fall of the Egyptian regime, the transitional government led by the Egyptian military declined to include any share for women, and as a result less than 2% of the post-revolution parliament was composed by women female (Coleman, 2013). The exclusion of women from the political institutions of the future indicates how deeply the patriarchal system is embedded into Egyptian society. Women's participation in the Egyptian revolution was considered by some male politicians as an exception rather than a redefinition of existing gender norms that was integral to the broader political and social transformation (McBroome, 2013). Egyptian women have since criticized their marginalization and exclusion from the political transition.

Confusion of Feminist Identity

In order to participate actively and advance their condition in a patriarchal environment, women had to emphasize specific aspects of their identities. During the uprising, females had started using slogans like "Women of Egypt Unite" and "Women and Men Together." However, over the course of the uprising, they changed the language from "women" to "mothers" or "daughters of Egypt" in order to appear less threatening to the Egyptian men. This shift in language exemplifies the identity conflict of female Egyptian revolutionaries, who had to rephrase their slogans in more culturally acceptable terms to be protected in a patriarchal society (Taher, 2012).

However, despite their use of non-threatening slogans during the protest in Tahrir Squire, female participants were not totally safe. During the Women's Day March, women

were subjected to sexual harassment. Men who were at the march rejected women's demands for gender equity in political participation (Taher, 2012). The day after the march, the police raided the women's tents and arrested dozens of women whom they subjected to a virginity test, a procedure that involves stripping women down and inspecting their hymens (Taher, 2012). The practice of virginity tests has been widely reported in the Western media as evidence of the Western assumption that Egyptian society is oppressive to its women (Mahdy & Sanchez, 2012).

The Bodily Behavior: Modesty vs. Nudity

Women in Egyptian culture are usually portrayed in Western discourse as victims of oppression. In particular, the veil (headscarf) or the Islamic costume has been turned into a symbol of oppression and backwardness (Ahmed, 2011). The West sees the woman's body in the Muslim and Arab world as a tabula rasa on which to inscribe modernity, civilization, and freedom. The Western assumption about veiled women positions women in Egypt as inferior to women in the United States and in other cultures viewed as liberal (Mohanty, 1991). The notion that veiled women are oppressed reflects the simplistic view of non-Western women as subjugated and of Islam as a tyrannical power.

From the Western perspective, the dress code and body image of women are crucial criteria to judge their liberation; therefore, the Egyptian women's outfit becomes a symbol of acceptance or rejection of Western secularism in their liberation activities (McBroome, 2013). Westernized Egyptian women mostly appear in a Western outfit and reject wearing the veil, unlike others who kept Middle Eastern or Islamic wear.

During the 2011 Egyptian uprising, many Egyptian women, including conservative feminists, insisted on preserving their Arab or Muslim identity by continuing to wear the veil

and maintaining the look of modesty. Their argument was that giving up the Egyptian women's modesty would be a violation of the "authentic" Egyptian womanhood (McBroome, 2013). Egyptian women consider the sexual violence they suffered from the military police forces during their protests against the Egyptian regime as a violation of Egyptian women's modesty, and they raised a court case and political campaign against the military. An example is Samira Ibrahim's revolutionary campaign to resist the exposing of Egyptian female political prisoners to the virginity tests . Ibrahim's campaign claimed that violating the Egyptian women's body was a violation of their identity as Muslim women. Ibrahim received an award by the United States for her bravery; however, this award was later withdrawn because of her condemnation of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and of Western imperialism in the Arab world. For the United States, criticizing Israel was an anti-Semitic act (McBroome, 2013).

One Egyptian woman who chose to represent her political and social resistance through nudity is Aliaa El-Mahdi, "the naked blogger," a feminist activist who became known for publishing a nude photo on her blog, challenging traditional and religious roles in Egyptian society. El-Mahdi's case has been welcomed in the West, and her narrative has been understood in U.S. and Western media as a symbol of resistance against the barbaric Muslim men, especially since she was against the new Islamist Egyptian constitution and Islamic president Mohamed Morsi (Al-Natour, 2012).

Rise of Islamic Political Parties

The domination of the Islamic political party over Egyptian society after the 2011 revolution increased concerns among liberal feminists in Egypt. Liberal feminists believe that the Egyptian women's struggle for equality confronted two major challenges after the

Muslim Brotherhood, a conservative Islamic political party, won the presidential election. The first challenge had to do with legal issues: The Islamic party enforced new constitutional laws that lacked a clear statement on women's rights and changed the educational curriculum in Egypt to favor its political and spiritual beliefs. The main educational criterion adopted by the Islamic government is to limit women's role in societies to marriage and homemaking. According to liberal Egyptian feminists, the control of the conservative Islamic faction over Egyptian society would strengthen barriers to women's ability to understand their rights and create a new generation of ignorant women (Montasir, 2013)

On the other side, conservative Egyptian feminists believed that the new Islamic rule in Egypt would provide the right education for women (Montasir, 2013). According to conservative Egyptian feminists, the Islamic party was cleansing Egyptian education of subjects that diverted women from the right path. Conservative Egyptian feminists believe that Islamic teaching is the way to create righteous societies and to grant women their rights because Islam gives consummate rights to women. Conservative feminists admired the decision to remove from school textbooks certain texts that advanced anti-Islam or Western feminist ideas, such as the writing of historic feminist Doriya Shafiq's. Shafiq is considered by conservative Egyptian feminists as a Westernized feminist due to her demand to abandon Islam's rule in Egypt because Islam would not do justice to women (Montasir, 2013).

Conclusion

The first section of this literature review has covered the history of Westernization in the Arab world, which marked the start of the modernizing process and provoked the desire to liberate Arab women (Abu-Lughod, 1998). This part also presented the Western discourse on how to modernize the Arab women and the impact of Westernization on the ideology of

women's liberation.

The second part examined in more depth where Arab women stand in the modernization debate in the Arab world and the internal divisions caused by attempts to modernize Arab women. As Ahmed (2011) and other scholars argued, Westernized Arabs used women to prove how Westernized the Arab people had become, and both Westernized and un-Westernized Arabs and Muslims used women's appearance to measure how well they fared in relation to Western standards (Said, 1993; Samman, 2011). For example, Qasim Amin (1900) stated that "the first step for women's liberation is to tear the veil and totally wipe out its influence" (as cited in Samman, 2011, p. 185); On the other hand, Ali Shariati (1971) stated that "the modest dress that the contemporary girl chooses to wear is not returning to a past but is doing something more progressive then even modernism" (as cited in Samman, 2011, p. 185).

The third section presented the voice of women in the women's liberation movement and discussed the Islamic feminist phenomenon in Egypt and its impact on the women's liberation movement. This part also illustrated limitations in the literature that laid the foundation for my own study: Badran (2009) and Mahmood (2005), the main scholars who wrote about Islamic feminism in Egypt and its relationship with the West, conducted their research before the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and therefore missed the impact of the revolution on the Islamic feminist movement.

The final section reviewed the role of Islamist Egyptian feminists during and in the aftermath of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and their encounters with the West and Westernized Egyptian feminists. This section also illustrated the important connection between the history of Westernization and the current political turmoil that affects the

women's liberation movement in Egypt.

A number of studies have addressed the women's liberation movement, primarily in Egypt, Turkey, and Iran, but I did not find any specific work analyzing the story of the recent Egyptian revolution and how it connects to the Islamic feminism. Particularly, no studies currently exist on how Egyptian feminists have navigated the political and social influence of the West since the 2011 revolt. Most of the recent studies marginalize the subject of Westernization and its role in the women's movement during the aftermath of the 2011 revolution.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation is a qualitative oral history study that focuses on the experiences of feminist Egyptian women activists, and it is based on interviews with Egyptian women who consider themselves Islamic or secular feminist activists.

This chapter describes the following components of this research: (a) research design and methodology, (b) research setting, (c) data collection, (d) data analysis, (e) protection of human subjects, and (f) background of the researcher. In the following chapter I will discuss in more length the complex issue of participant recruitment and selection in this study.

Research Design and Methodology

In Spring 2013, I conducted a pilot study with Salma Elshakre, an activist Egyptian woman living in the United States, as part of a graduate class assignment. My questions focused on Elshakre's experiences as a woman participating in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Following the pilot study, I decided to use the same approach to conduct my dissertation research and to ask more open-ended questions in order to learn about the whole life story of the participants. After deliberation with my dissertation committee, I decided that an oral history methodology would be most effective for this study.

> The Oral History Association (2009, para. 2) defines oral history as
>
> a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in the past events. Oral history is both the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating the written word, and one of the most modern, initiated with tape recorders in the 1940s and now using 21st-century digital technologies.

Specifically, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) state: “Oral history allows us to get at the valuable knowledge and rich life experience of marginalized persons and groups that would otherwise remain untapped, and, specifically, offers a way of accessing subjugated voices” (p.151). In addition, the authors note, “while oral history focuses on the individual and her narrative, it can be used to link micro- and macro phenomena and personal life experiences to broader historical circumstances” (p. 153).

I believe it is fundamental to address the history not just in order to understand the present but also to predict the future. Because I am connecting the history of Westernization to a social movement in the current time, oral history seemed to be the best design for my research. By understanding the experiences of Egyptian people in the era of post-colonialism, In particular, oral history is a valuable source for understanding the experiences of Egyptian feminists, whether individuals or groups, in one of the most difficult times in Egyptian history.

Research Setting

The research setting was conducted in Cairo, Egypt's capital. I chose Cairo because this is where most of the political events of 2011 took place and where my participants live. In particular, the interviews for both groups Islamist and secularists took place in coffee shops, restaurants, and in some of the participant’ homes. As part of my attempt to decenter and share the researcher’s authority, foster collaboration with the participants, and make them as comfortable as possible (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006), I was open to meet my participants whenever they wanted.

Data Collection

To collect the data for my research, I conducted interviews (two with each participants) over the course of two months, from the beginning of June 2014 to late July 2014. The data collection process involved several steps, including initial screening, selecting the participants, conducting the interviews, transcribing, editing, and analyzing the data. As a first step, early contacts were arranged with each participant from each group. In these meetings, I explained in detail the nature of the oral history methodology, the amount of time required, and the rights of the research subjects.

All the actual interviews were digitally recorded so that during the interview I could take on the role of an active listener. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) point out that as active listeners,

> we must train our minds and ears to hear the story of others, not just the words, but also the meaning, the emotion, the silence. This process may involve the questioning and disavowing of previously held concepts and categories that frame our understanding of social reality, making the process potentially transformational for the researcher as well. (p. 160)

I transcribed the interviews during the month of August 2014 and edited the transcripts for run-on sentences and excessive repetitions of words such as “ums” and “like” (Mayotte, 2013). Then, as soon as the transcripts were completed, I shared the transcriptions with all participants via email in order to honor them and demonstrate that their stories were shared in an accurate and respectful manner (Mayotte, 2013). Finally, because I was not in Egypt after July, I communicated with participants via email in order to ask follow-up questions if needed to fill in any gaps. This final step was completed in September 2014. The

interviews were conducted in Arabic and I translated them into English.

Data Analysis

The process of analysis of my data involved several steps. First, I closely read the transcripts to get a general sense of all the data (Creswell, 2009). Second, I coded the data for themes. Creswell (2008) states that the "process of coding involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence of the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code" (p. 184). I used a combination of predetermined codes based on the literature and common sense as well as emerging codes and unforeseen topics (Creswell, 2009). This step was completed in September 2014.

My analysis of the data has been informed by the literature and the theories being studied, by agreed-upon professional explanations, and by my own values and personal experience with the subject (Creswell, 2009). My techniques for identifying themes in reading and analyzing the texts were based on: (a) an analysis of word repetitions and key terms in contexts; (b) a careful reading of larger texts in order to compare and contrast and to search for missing information; and (c) a deliberate analysis of linguistic features such as metaphors and transitions.

Protection of Human Subjects

Before I started the interviews, on May 19, 2014, I received approval from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all of the interviewees were offered to choose their own pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and protect their identities. However, my participants decided to keep their real names. Further, the participants signed a

form of consent (Appendix A) and received copy of the Research Subjects' Bill of Rights (Appendix B).

Background of the Researcher

My interest in the topic of women's liberation in the Arab world stems from my own experience as an Arab man. I grew up in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where the culture is dominated by ultra-conservative religious ideals and old traditional beliefs. The country was established after an agreement between its founder King Abul-Aziz Al-Saud and the puritan religious leader Muhammad Bin Abdul-Wahhab (al-Rasheed, 2007). It is that marriage between the house of Saud and the newly awakened religious movement that made it possible for the king to settle the land and gain the loyalty of the urban populations and the Bedouin tribes. Over the decades, the kingdom has based its stability on this relationship between the executive and the religious domains. This relationship shaped the regime into a theocratic nation that hinders progress and modernization, especially for traditionally marginalized groups like women.

During my early teens, I was overwhelmed by the witnessing of women's suffering in Saudi's society—their political and legal disenfranchisement, reduced social freedoms, and the restraints imposed by their legal male protectors. Women in Saudi Arabia are not allowed to drive, are forced to wear a veil when they leave home, and need written approval from a male guardian to travel, to work, or even to undergo a medical operation. Even though women comprise 56.5% of the Kingdom's college graduates, in 2004 the number of women in the Saudi labor force hovered at about 5%; the increase in the past decade has been very small (Hamdan, 2005).

As a child and young adult, first-hand experiences caused me to sympathize with women living in Saudi Arabia. My three sisters and my mother were all negatively impacted by the patriarchal system in Saudi Arabia. My sisters lived in fear and anger, and they were depressed; they were forced to choose specific majors at the university because of the limitation on female education. As Hamdan (2005) argued, women do not receive vocational education in engineering, law, pharmacy, geology, petroleum, journalism, architecture, sport education, and political sciences. They do not have full access to educational facilities such as some libraries and recreation departments, and they do not obtain the same quality of education as men. Additionally, my sisters were forced to cover their heads, and even their eyes, whenever they left home, and they were unable to appear outside the home by themselves for fear of the Mutaween—Islamic police who subject women to physical beatings and arrest without trial, without anyone holding them accountable. As for my mother, she devoted her entire life to raising us; however, she has been prevented from living a full, happy life because of the limitations and restrictions imposed on women in Saudi Arabia.

In the Saudi context, I did not see alternatives or solutions for my sisters. I was young, powerless, and because of the feeling of despair and hopelessness, I tried to convince myself to accept the public standard. Then, when I was just 11 years old, my family and I went on a trip to the United States. I was shocked by the huge difference between women's standards of living in Saudi Arabia and in the United States. In the United States, I saw women drive and swim in bathing suits, and I saw women without the veil. They looked happy and free. This trip to the United States presented to me a new definition of freedom, which has informed my notion of women's liberation.

At first, I believed that to be liberated from the patriarchal system and to live in happiness, Arab women must live like women in the United States. To be free of the dominant male culture, I thought Arab women should dress, behave, and even think like American women. For me, the United States became an ideal of justice and freedom, and the gold standard of women's rights. However, my perception of the United States as the symbol of liberation started to collapse after the first Palestinian Intifada in 1987. It was a shocking moment for me when I realized that the country that I considered as the epitome of justice was the biggest supporter of the Israeli aggression against the people of Palestine. According to a report by the United Nations (UNHCR 2013), Israeli violations of human rights are deliberate, organized, and institutionalized. The double standard in United States foreign policy in the Arab world caused me to look beyond the shining image of America as the rescuer of subordinated people in the Arab world, and I started to question the motives behind Western interference in the Arab world.

During my journalism studies at King Saud University, I developed an interest in the study of colonialism and imperialism. I started to educate myself by reading scholars such as Said and Fanon who addressed imperialism, colonialism, and postcolonialism matters in the Arab world. I started to understand the connection between imperialism and women's liberation in the Arab world. As Fanon (1963) argues, the transformation of Arab women according to a Western model is one of the ways in which Western imperialism operates.

I was confused: Transforming Arab women into Western women was part of the Western imperialist agenda; yet, rejecting the Western model meant keeping Arab women under a discriminatory patriarchal system. I wondered if there was an alternative way to liberate Arab women, and what methods Arab women might follow to gain their freedom.

Embedded in this practical question was the philosophical question of how to define freedom for Arab women.

My interest in the subject of Arab women's liberation led me to focus on international human rights, which influenced my decision to study at the University of San Francisco in the International and Multicultural Education Department. Classes on gender and globalization, social movements, race and ethnicity, and human rights law made me realize how complex women's liberation movement in the Arab world has become in the era of globalization. During the Arab Spring, women's participation in the massive wave of demonstrations and protests caught my interest. Their participation made new and bold statements about the liberation of Arab women, and it inspired me to focus more on the ideology and the meaning of freedom for women.

Although I will never understand what it means to live as a female, under the pressure of both the oppressive Arab patriarchy and Westernization, I remain committed to hearing and advocating for the voices of these women. In my doctoral classes in participatory action research, I have learned how to act ethically as an outsider researcher and how to optimize the advantages and minimize the risks associated with this position. I learned about the need to develop a critical awareness of one's position within a group and to focus on promoting positivity and developing trust in the interaction with insiders. I had to be careful that my speaking position as a male researcher would not become oppressive at any point during the data collection process. I did not use my privilege as a man in the Arab world as a tool of dominance but rather as an instrument to support the voice of Arab women. In order to build trust and confidence with my participants, I discussed these issues openly with them. I also shared my own personal history as a brother of three sisters who have been struggling under

the patriarchal system in the Arab world, as well as my own background as a person who has always advocated for human rights. I have published several articles on the Arab Spring in Arabic newspapers and sustained the need to have a future constitution in the Arab world that acknowledges the right of all citizens, including women. In a sense, being a male brought more attention to my work. For example, one of my secular participants, Salwa Bakr, expressed appreciation for the fact that I am a man who calls for women's liberation in the Middle East.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Due to the complexity involved in selecting the research participants, I have designed this separate chapter expressly to present the participants and discuss the process of recruitment and selection. First, I introduce the participants in their own words and then describe the process involved in meeting them and conducting the interviews. Because the research methodology was oral history, finding and selecting the right participants and being able to conduct proper interviews were crucial steps central to this study. However, this process also presented numerous obstacles that required certain arrangements. Below I explain the selection process and discuss the preparation needed to overcome the hurdles in building a trusting relationship with the participants.

In the first section, I intentionally have allowed my participants to introduce themselves in their own words. I have organized the profiles of participants by alphabetical order, first name. By asking my participants to describe themselves, I tried to create a space for them to position themselves within my research. They were able to decide what to share in their short personal narratives and to define their own identity within the context of my project. I am honored to have had the opportunity to learn from all the participants in my research and to be considered a friend to each participant.

Profiles of Participants

Secularists	**Islamists**
Ebtihal Salem: novelist and women's rights activist	Amany Saleh: women's rights activist
Safaa Abd Elmenem: novelist and women's rights activist	Amira Elhefnawy: social activist and women's rights activist

Sahar Tawfiq: novelist and women's rights activist	Fawkia Ayad: social activist and women's rights activist
Salwa Bakr: Egyptian writer and women's rights activist	Kawther Alkholy: women's rights activist
Salwa Mohsen: novelist and women's rights activist	Riham Bahi: women's rights activist

Secularist Participants

Ebtihal Salem: I am an Egyptian independent novelist and women's rights activist. Some of my novels have been published in English translation in Egypt and the United States. My novels tell stories of Egyptian women and offer reflections on the social problems and the patriarchal system in their daily lives. My long writing journey started in my early teens when I read a variety of books of prominent authors, such as Salama Moussa, Georg Hegel, and others, who inspired me to read more and explore the world. Writing is my way of expression, and it is the way to make people hear the Egyptian women's voice.

Safaa Abd Elmenem: I am the principal at a female high school in Cairo. My job is the reason I became a writer and social activist. Through my interaction with my female students, I have sensed the misery and sorrow they experience from patriarchy and poverty. Therefore I have dedicated myself to helping oppressed Egyptian women and to fighting poverty in Egypt.

Sahar Tawfiq: I am an Arab Egyptian novelist woman. As a writer, I believe writing should be dedicated to help humanity. And since I am a woman writer, I dedicate my writing to help Egyptian women.

*Salwa Bakr***:** I am an Egyptian writer. Most of my work describes the marginalization of women in Egyptian society. Some of my works have been published by the American

university presses in English and are also available on Amazon. Since I started my writing career, my message has been that as women we must struggle to achieve the right position in Egyptian society.

Salwa Mohsen: I received my PhD from the Cairo University College of Agriculture. My focus is on poverty in rural areas of Egypt and its impact on Egyptian women. During my studies and research, I have witnessed the suffering of women from poverty. I believe that as long as Egyptian women live in poverty, they are still living under male oppression.

Islamist Participants

Amany Saleh: I am a political science professor at Cairo University and a member of the Egyptian women's organizations The Women and Memory Forum. I am an Islamic feminist. I believe Islamic feminism delivers many solutions for Egyptian women. As an Egyptian women's rights activist, I do my best to contribute to the women's liberation movement in Egypt in order to provide a better life to all Egyptian people.

Amira Elhefnaw: I am from Benha City, in northeastern Egypt. I studied technology at Benha University. I am a teacher and I work two jobs, and I live with my family. My dream is to buy an apartment on the Nile. My future apartment will provide me the privacy I seek to have independence.

Fawkia Ayad: I am a general practitioner doctor at Al Zahraa University Hospital. I believe that as a Muslim Egyptian woman, I am obligated to serve my religion and my Egyptian people as well. I believe that in Egypt the dominant cultural views and images of Muslim women constitute a major hindrance to the course of women's development and progress. This is why I believe Islamic feminism is the solution to women's oppression in Egypt and the whole world.

Kawther Alkholy: I am the chief executive officer of the Noon Center for Quran Research and Studies. I believe the wonders of the Holy Quran never come to an end. I believe the Holy Quran is God's words, the meanings and miracles of the God ever being eternal. Whenever man raises doubts, the Holy Quran presents the manifest proof.

Riham Bahi: I am an assistant professor at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University. I received my PhD from Northeastern University. As a Muslim Egyptian woman, I chose to be an Islamic feminist because I believe we Egyptian women will be in a better position if the Islamic discourse is the hegemonic feminist discourse.

Selection Process

I chose Egypt as my area of study due to the unique history of the Egyptian women's liberation movement and of colonialism in Egypt, as explicated in Chapter II. The ten participants were from two Egyptian feminist groups---secular and Islamist---with five participants per group. To find participants, I made connections with Egyptian feminists and activists in Cairo through my relationship with a professor at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University, Preceptor Nevenka Sullivan. I also relied on my personal relationship with friends who live in Cairo. All of the participants were over the age of 18 years. Since Arabic is my native language, I did not have problems interviewing non-English speaker participants. The goal of the interviews was to understand the complexity of feminism and the phenomenon of Westernization in Egypt. I explored the impact of the Western influence upon Egyptian society on the ideology of the feminist movement.

To recruit the participants I used snowball sampling. According to Creswell (2008), snowball sampling involves identifying "cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich" (p. 158). I sought participants who were enthusiastic

and highly motivated about telling their stories. If anyone was unwilling to share her personal information, this was highly respected, and no participants were in any way persuaded into participating (Mayotte, 2013). The study was conducted over the course of several months, so that numerous meetings were possible, including both informal and formal interviews. All of the participants received pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and protect their identities. However, my participants preferred to use their real names for the study and did not mind to reveal their actual identity. In the end, over the course of this research I built very strong friendships with all of my participants. Additionally, I had a great time during my stay in Cairo, and I have to say that I left my heart in Egypt.

Finding Secular Participants

When I first started the process of finding secular participants, I searched for connections in the United States. However, I did not find the right people to connect me to secular feminists in Egypt. Therefore, I decided to travel to Saudi Arabia, where I know many people who have connections with the local Egyptian community. One of my close cousins, Dr. Jihad Alkhawaja, who works as a teacher in a private high school in Riyadh, introduced me to an Egyptian teacher, Mr. Zahir Algazyaby, who works with him in the same school. Algazyaby was also a novelist, secularist, and human rights activist, which made him the right person to introduce me to Egyptian feminists in Egypt. Algazyaby and I met in Cairo, where he started introducing me to many Egyptian men and women writers and social activists. One of my secular feminist participants, Ebtihal Salem, was among them.

Ebtihal Salem. The first time I met Salem, it was at a poetry and fiction literary event in downtown Cairo. After Alqaziaby introduced me to Salem, I started to talk about my topic, and I invited her to be one of the participants. The research topic attracted Salem's attention and made her enthusiastic to participate and to help me find other participants. After our initial introduction, I met with Salem five more times to conduct the interviews in several coffee shops and restaurants in downtown Cairo. Each meeting with Salem lasted at least three hours.

In the first interview with Salem, I asked her about her career and about how she became a novelist and women's rights activists. Salem was eager to tell me her story and to share her struggles as a female novelist in a patriarchal society. In her early teen years, Salem was passionate about reading and writing; yet she was not satisfied with the regular education she received from school. Therefore, she started to educate herself by reading her father's books. Salem's father had a big library in their house attic where Salem used to spend hours reading all kinds of books, including poetry and novels. Eventually, Salem decided to start her writing career. However, when she tried to publish her first novel, she had to confront the gender barrier. Salem had a difficult time persuading the male heads of publishing companies to publish her work. The male publishers who dominated the publishing industry did not take Salem seriously as a writer because she was a woman. For this reason, Salem became a woman's rights activist. The rejection Salem experienced caused her to dedicate her writing career to the women's liberation movement. Since then, most of Salem's novels have focused on the suffering of Egyptian women. Some of Salem's novels include *Very Ordinary Day* (yolm ady jedan), *The Pride's Heel and the Hours* (kab arosah wa hosan), and *Times for Happiness and Sadness* (awkat hozon wa farah).

In our third interview, Salem surprised me by bringing along a female journalist. The journalist conducted an interview with me to be published in a local newspaper called *Elfagr News Newspaper*. The topic of the interview was what motivated me to come to Egypt and conduct feminist research. Salem wanted to reward me with this interview because she appreciated that I was a man conducting feminist research. She also invited me for dinner two times and gave me four of her signed novels.

Safaa Abd Elmenem. I met Saffa Abd Elmenenm through Ebtihal Salem. Abd Elmenenm is a novelist and women's rights activist. I met Abd Elmenenm two times and we had two interviews, each of which lasted three hours. All interviews were conducted in the literature club in downtown Cairo. The story of Abd Elmenenm as a woman's rights activist started when she became a female high school principal. Abd Elmenenm's students were subjected to many tragedies under the patriarchal system in Egypt. These experiences inspired Abd Elmenenm to write novels about the suffering of Egyptian adolescent girls living under the patriarchal system. Some of Abd Elmenenm's work about the suffering of Egyptian adolescent includes *The Lady of the Place* (saydat al makan), *The House of the Lady Artists* (bet fanana), *Girls and Girls* (banat fe banat), and *The House of Spinster* (bayt al anas).

During our second interview, Abd Elmenenm introduced me to her two daughters. She wanted to have them listen to our conversation so they could learn from her how to be a woman's right activists. For Abd Elmenenm, it was important to pass the message of women's liberation to the next generation. After the end of the last interview, Abd Elmenenm gave me a signed copy of one of her novels, and we are still in touch through social media.

Sahar Tawfiq. I met Sahar Tawfiq through Ebtihal Salem. Tawfiq and I met two times for the interview. At one of our meetings, Tawfiq made dinner for Salem and me, demonstrating Egypt's great tradition of hospitality. Tawfiq participates in the women's liberation movement by writing articles and novels. For Tawfiq, political demonstrations are not the way to seek social and political change; writing is the powerful instrument she chose to deliver her massages to the Egyptian public. Tawfiq's most remarkable work about Egyptian women is her novel *The Taste of Olive* (taam al zaitown). In this novel, Tawfiq discusses the suffering of Egyptian women under the current patriarchal system in Egypt. In the second interview, Tawfiq signed her novel and gave it to me.

Salwa Bakr*:* In my opinion, Salwa Bakr is one of the strongest voices advocating for feminism in Egypt. I was amazed by Bakr's strong personality and her knowledge of the history and philosophy of the women's liberation movement in Egypt and in the Arab world in general. I asked Salem to help me make contact with Bakr, and this is how I met her. Bakr a is very well-known secular feminist in Egypt, and I wanted to invite her to participate in my research. I met Bakr three times, and each interview lasted about three hours. The second meeting was at Bakr's house and the others in coffee shops.

As an opposition figure and political activist, Bakr's history is full of social, political, and feminist actions. Bakr has also published many articles and novels in support of both the Egyptian women's liberation movement and social and political reform. Due to her political activities, Bakr was jailed many times during the presidency of Hosni Mubarak. Bakr's political activities made her an icon for the social movement in Egypt, and she was invited to give talks in many social and political organizations. She was also interviewed by many official newspapers and magazines.

Salwa Mohsen: I met Salwa Mohsen through Ebtihal Salem. I had two interviews with Mohsen, and each interview lasted three hours. Mohsen is a novelist and professor at the Cairo University College of Agriculture with a long history of woman right's activism. Since Mohsen's specialty is in agriculture, poverty is her major concern. For Mohsen, political corruption is the major cause of poverty in Egypt. It was the impact of poverty on Egyptian women that made Mohsen become a women's rights activist. Mohsen has participated in many social and political activities such as peaceful demonstrations and sit-downs against the corrupt Egyptian government. She also participated in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. However, she has devoted most of her time to writing to support Egyptian women and to endorse the women's liberation movement in the Arab world.

Mohsen's novel, *The Other Face of the River* (alwajh alaker llnaher) focused on the suffering of poor Egyptian women under the old traditional system in Egypt and described how women are trapped by political corruption and outdated traditions. Mohsen also gave me a signed copy of her novel.

Finding Islamist Participants

Whereas finding secular feminist participants was not a difficult mission, finding Islamist feminist participants was much more challenging. The major obstacle was related to security. Due to the 2013 military coup against the elected Islamist political party, all the Islamist activists, including women's rights activists, were under a severe crackdown by the Egyptian forces. As mentioned in Chapter II, many female Islamist activists were incarcerated, and some were killed during their protests against the military coup. As a result, Islamist female activists were very careful in engaging in any political or social activities. For me, it was a big challenge first to find Islamist participants, and second to gain

their trust and have them agree to an interview with me. Below I explain in detail how I overcame these challenges.

In the aftermath of the 2013 Egyptian military coup, I published several political articles in Arabic newspapers that addressed the philosophical ideology of the Arab Spring, focusing on the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. In my 2014 article, "What Ruins the Egyptian Revolution," I demonstrated how the 2013 Egyptian military coup had ended the process of democracy in Egypt and brought the dictatorial regime back in power (Alkhawaja, 2014). My argument was that whether or not the elected Islamist political party was good for the Egyptian people, the military coup was not the right way to end the Islamist regime. Since the Islamist party came to power through elections, it should have been removed by elections as well; otherwise, Egyptian people would lose the main reason behind their revolution, which was bringing democracy to Egypt.

Due to this article, many people contacted me through my regular email and Facebook account. Two of these included Islamist participant Amira Elhefnawy and an Egyptian man whom I will refer to as Noor. When I first asked Elhefnawy to introduce me to other Islamist women for my research, her answer was: "My other Islamist friends are in jail." Since I did not have enough Islamist participants, I had to ask another connection to introduce me to Islamist feminists. Then I called Noor and asked him to introduce me to Islamist activists. Noor agreed to help me and started calling his Islamist female friends. However, he told me that although his Islamist female friends trusted him, they were afraid to meet me because they were worried I might be working for the secret Egyptian police.

Finally, one of Noor's Islamist female friends agreed to meet me and participate in my research. She was Fawkia Ayad, a medical doctor student who was a political activist for

Islamist women's rights and had participated in a peaceful demonstration against the military Egyptian coup. Due to Ayad's political and social activities, she was under surveillance by the Egyptian secret police. Ayad agreed to meet me after Noor explained that my research was going to give her voice as an Islamist women's rights activist. However, Ayad asked that we meet in the hospital where she was practicing her internship, so that if the Egyptian secret police asked about me, she could claim that I was one of her patients.

I met the other Islamist participants, Amany Saleh, Kawther Alkholy, and Riham Bahi, through professor Nevenka Sullivan, the Senior Preceptor for Arabic Language at Harvard University.

Amany Saleh. I met Amany Saleh through Riham Bahi. Saleh is a professor, an Islamic woman's rights activist, and a member of the Islamic women's organization The Women and Memory Forum. I met Saleh three times, and we spent approximately three hours each time. Saleh is a public speaker and gives talks at Islamic conferences and women's social meetings. Similar to Bahi, Saleh chose a pedagogical strategy (i.e., using the schools to spread her ideas) to participate in the Islamic women's social and political activities.

Amira Elhefnawy. I met Amira Elhefnawy through Facebook. Elhefnawy contacted me after she read my articles to share her agreement; then we kept in touch and became friends. When I started to collect the data, I asked Elhefnawy to participate in my research, and she agreed. I met Elhefnawy three times, each time for approximately three hours.

In 2010 Elhefnawy became a social and women's rights activist, and in 2011 she joined the Egyptian Revolution. Elhefnawy's participation in the Egyptian Revolution was mostly by promoting the revolution's ideas and sharing information and instructions through

social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. After the revolution, Elhefnawy continued being a political activist and joined the Islamic feminism movement. Elhefnawy had never concerned herself with women's rights before the 2011 Egyptian Revolution; her social and political activities before and during the revolution focused on political reform. However, when Egyptian women were politically marginalized and were excluded from the Egyptian parliament after the revolution, Elhefnawy felt that Egyptian women had not been rewarded as they deserved and started to switch the focus of her networking and social media activities to the cause of the women's liberation movement. She started to post feminist statements on social networks and became an Islamist women's rights activist.

Fawkia Ayad. I met Fawkia Ayad through my friend Noor. Ayad started her social and political activities during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution by participating in the women's demonstrations and sit-ins against President Hosni Mubarak. However, Ayad became an Islamist woman's right activists after the 2013 Egyptian military coup. Before the military coup, Ayad was just an Islamic advocate calling to establish the sharia law in Egypt. However, when Islamist Egyptian women became subjected to the Egyptian police power and were abused, she went from being an advocate to becoming an activist, and she joined the Islamic feminism movement to protect Islamist women from secular men.

Kawther Alkholy. I met Kawther Alkholy through Riham Bahi. Alkholy is a chief executive officer of the Noon Center for Quran Research and Studies. I met her three times in her office, each time for about three hours. Alkholy has organized many Islamic women's activities such as lectures through her work at the Noon Center. She became a women's rights activist after she joined the Noon Center. Work at the Noon Center is about interpreting the holy Quran, and through this work Alkholy started to understand that the

misinterpretation of the Quran by men is a major cause of the patriarchy rampant in Egyptian society.

Riham Bahi. I met Riham Bahi through Nevenka Koricaa, an Arabic teacher at the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization at Harvard University. I interviewed Bahi three times, each time for around three hours. Bahi teaches economics and political science at both The American University in Cairo and Cairo University. Bahi's Ph.D. dissertation was on the Islamic feminism movement in the Arab world. Bahi uses her position as an educator to spread the philosophy of Islamic feminism. Bahi participated in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and joined Egyptian women activists in the Tahrir Square protests.

Building Trusting Relationships with Participants

As mentioned in Chapter I, my being from both a different culture and gender than the participants placed me as an "outsider" researcher, which could present serious problems. However, in my experience this difference turned out to be an advantage that eased the interview process rather than making it more difficult.

First, my gender was not even mentioned as a problem for my participants. Although my participants considered themselves as feminists, my gender was not an obstacle in my relationship with them; rather, it turned into an asset. Egyptian feminists see patriarchy in a different way than Western feminists, and they do not consider men as such to be the cause of women's oppression in society. For Bakr and other participants, the problem with male patriarchy is not one of gender, but rather a matter of sociopolitical circumstances that created the patriarchal system in Egypt, including Western colonialism. Therefore, my

participants and I could be seen as sharing the same goal of enhancing the status of women in the society.

Similarly, being an Arab researcher also proved to be an advantage for me. My nationality was crucial in gaining the trust of both secularist and Islamist participants. Even though I am not an Egyptian researcher, I still was welcomed as if I were an Egyptian man. Indeed, not being an Egyptian was an advantage for me. Due to the unique hospitality in the Arab culture, I was welcomed and offered much support, both from my participants and from others who helped me collect my data during my stay in Egypt. For example, Salwa Bakr invited me to her house to conduct the interviews, Ebtihal Salem invited me for dinner in a well-known traditional restaurant in Cairo, Amani Salah invited me for coffee several times, and Sahar Tawfiq cooked a wonderful Egyptian traditional dish for dinner. Also, since most of my participants are novelists, they gave me copies of their novels as a gift.

Additionally, all of my participants were enthusiastic to talk about the issue of Westernization and its impact on Egyptian women. My being non-Western helped my participants to candidly reveal their opinions about the West and its interference in women's affairs in the Middle East generally and Egypt in particular.

Building Friendships

Since the very beginning of the interview process, I intended to build friendships with my participants. Building a friendly relationship helped minimize obstacles such as the gender barrier or my outsider status. In my participants' perspectives, I was not just a researcher who was collecting data, but rather I became a close friend. In that sense, our friendship made my participants more open and willing to share their stories. Our friendship

also encouraged my participants to help me find more participants. They did that to help a friend, and not just to help a researcher who was a stranger to them.

To build a friendly relationship with my participants, I shared my personal stories and experiences in regards to the issue of women's rights. I told my participants about my three sisters and how I witnessed their suffering under the patriarchal system in Saudi Arabia. I also started the conversation by expressing my desire to be in solidarity with women in the process of finding an answer to the women's question in the Arab world. I was clear and honest with my participants and told them that their participation would give me answers I personally need to better understand the matter of women's liberation. Therefore, I intentionally avoided creating a formal and serious setting for the interviews; rather, I transformed them into casual conversations and dialogues. Although my exchanges with my participants focused on my research questions, we also had casual talks that strengthened our friendship.

CHAPTER V

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of my research. The interviews took place in beautiful authentic coffee shops in the heart of Cairo city and in some of my participants' houses, where I experienced the great hospitality of the Egyptian people. The first interviews focused on the ideology of feminism and on how participants perceived their identity as feminists. The second and exit interviews focused on Westernization and its impact on the women's liberation movement in Egypt. In this chapter, I present the findings related to each research question and single out certain topics for further analysis, using the data gathered from the interview transcriptions and advancing some individual reflections.

Research Question 1:

How Do Women in Egypt Who Self-identify as Feminists Define Feminism?

This section discusses the subject of identity and the complexity of the term *feminist*. Islamists and secularists in Egypt reject the use of the term *feminist* to identify the women's liberation movement in their country. Before explaining this rejection, it is important to understand what is meant by feminism. For the purposes of this research, I define feminism as an ideology that advocates for women's rights on the grounds of political, social, and economic equality. The term *feminist*, therefore, identifies advocates or supporters of the rights and equality of women. It is important to clarify that when Egyptian women reject the term *feminist*, they are not rejecting the ideology itself. They support the idea of gender equality and freedom for women; however, they refuse to use a Western term to identify Egyptian women who are supporters of feminism.

For example, Islamist participant Amany Saleh explained her preference to not be called a feminist when she said:

> I totally respect Western feminists, and I do not mind to be called a feminist. Western feminists made huge efforts and fought for Western women's social rights. However, in our movement, we fight to win; in this case it is better to use authentic terms that are powerful in our culture. We do not need to go through arguments that are not necessary. In the end, it is not about a name; it is about actions and results, no matter what are the terms used and the name of the movement.

Egyptian women have many cultural reasons not to use the term feminist. For example, the Islamist participant Riham Bahi explained how people perceive the title differently in the Western and the Eastern world:

> When I lived in the West, people called me an Egyptian feminist. I accepted to be called feminist in the West because this is the only term used in the West to describe women's rights activists. But here in Egypt, I prefer to be called a woman's rights activist or social rights activists. You need to understand the culture of Egypt. When you introduce yourself with the term "feminist," the first image that comes to the Egyptian mind is the image of Western feminist women walking topless in demonstrations. I understand nudity could work in the Western culture to get attention to the women's cause, but imagine Egyptian women's rights activists walking naked in the Egyptian street. No one would listen to us. So I think that as women's rights activists we should avoid confusion and stay away from terms that would connect us to unaccepted behavior in the eye of Egyptian people.

According to the women in this study, the term *feminist* identifies the Western women's liberation movement and should not be used to identify the women's liberation movement in Egypt. Indeed, the name of the secular women's liberation movement in Egypt is *harket tahrir al-mar'ah al-masriyah,* which means "the Egyptian women's liberation movement." The Islamist women's liberation movement is called *al-harakh al-aslamiyah ltahrir al-mar'ah al-masriyah,* which means "the Islamic women's liberation movement in Egypt." Both secularists and Islamists believe that using these denominations is important to preserve the specificity of Egyptian women's identity. Furthermore, both secularists and Islamist refuse to Arabize the Western term *feminist* to name their women's liberation movement, as stated by Islamist Amira Elhefnawy:

> Yes, I understand I am a feminist, but listen to me, I am from Egypt, and I have to act as an Egyptian woman. Even when it comes to titles and names, I prefer to stick with what Egyptian people already know and are familiar with. Why do I need to use other terms. Let us stay Egyptian.

During our meetings, the participants discussed issues related to the use of language and the changes brought about by the translation of certain terminologies from one language to another. As Salwa Bker said, "The Arabic language, as many other languages, has often borrowed words from other cultures or languages." The origin of many Arabic words can be traced to the English language. For example, the Arabic word *libralyah* comes from "liberalism," *demokratyah* from "democracy," and *dectatoryah* from "dictatorship." However, the term *feminism* has no synonym in Arabic. All the participants agreed that the translation of *feminism* in Arabic is *harakt al-tahrir al-nesayah algarbyah*, which means "the Western women's liberation movement." The use of the term *Western* in the very translation

of the word clearly exemplifies the extent to which feminism is considered exclusive to the women's liberation movement in the West. Even if some participants do not agree with the connection between the term *feminist* and the West, they prefer to avoid being misunderstood by the Egyptian public by not using the term *feminist* in their liberation movement. The Islamist Kawther Alkholy illustrated this point further:

> We are accustomed to be called Islamist activists; changing this title is going to confuse Egyptian people. People in Egypt used to hear from us the term Islamism, not feminism. Personally, I do not want to change what people already know. Besides that, I do not want to risk the understanding of our mission as Islamist women's rights activists. People here might mix us with Western feminists. Do not get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with Western feminists, but you have no idea how much trouble we will get from the Egyptian people if we started to call ourselves feminists. I think there are many negative images about Western feminists. I just do not want to open the door to criticism and risk our movement.

It is important to explain the mechanisms through which foreign words are transformed and adopted in the Arab world. The borrowing of an English word is usually warranted by the need to retain the exact meaning of that word - not because of the lack of an equivalent word in Arabic. For example, the word *lebralyah* came from the English word *liberalism* and is used to refer to the political and social philosophy founded on Western ideas of liberty. The Arabic word for liberalism and freedom is *horyah*, but the two words (*lebralyah* and *horyah*) have different implications and convey different messages. For instance, if someone describes him or herself as a liberal person, he or she indicates the acceptance of Western criteria of liberalism. Because borrowing a Western term means

accepting its Western meaning, many Egyptian women are skeptical of adopting the term *feminism,* and the participants to my research told me they would not call themselves feminists. As Safaa Abd Elmenem commented, "Why do you want to call me feminist? Do I look American?"

In the following section, I address the reasons that my participants, both Islamists and secularists, gave for rejecting the term *feminism*. Among Islamists, four major themes emerged: standard of morality, Western feminists' opposition to Islam, connection to secularism, and Islamic culture pride. Among secularists, the three major themes were: the independence of the Egyptian women's liberation movement, social circumstances in Egypt and their influence on the Egyptian women's liberation movement, and Egyptian cultural pride.

Islamists

Western feminists' standard of morality. Islamist participants perceived the term *feminist* as a stigmatized identity and as a word that only describes Western feminists. For Islamists, the Islamic doctrine and moral instruction are fundamental to the women's liberation movement. The Western feminists' behavior and attitude do not represent the Islamic doctrine and morals; and this helps explain why Egyptian women were careful to start their conversation with the "I am not a feminist" disclaimer.

When I asked Islamist participant Fokyah Ayad how she could stand for women's rights and participate in the Egyptian women's liberation movement while denying being a feminist, her answer was, "I am not feminist but I believe in gender equality." This refusal to be identified as feminist represents the rejection of any association with Western feminism, not with the ideology of the women's liberation movement. Although all of the participants

addressed the necessity of gaining gender equality, ending the patriarchal system, and obtaining more educational and health rights for women (which are mostly feminist claims), they did never mention Western feminists. By contrast, Sahar Tawfiq depicted the status of Egyptian women in the early twentieth century as an example of women's liberation. She said, "We want to be liberated from men like it was in the 1940s. This is how women should look." Tawfiq is referring here to an era in which the hijab was not popular among Egyptian women and Western fashion used to be dominant.

Islamist participants agree with gender equality but disagree with Western feminists' behavior and actions, which in their view contradict Islamic morals and principles. For example, the nudity sometimes used as a tactic to attract public attention during protests has created a negative reputation for Western feminists. Overall, Western feminists are perceived by many Islamists as fallen, ultra-liberal women. Therefore, some Islamists fear that sharing the term *feminism* would ally them to Western feminists who practice un-Islamic behaviors and violate the Islamic moral.

Furthermore, the Islamist participant Fawkia Ayad claimed that feminism is not the right term to describe the women's liberation movement because feminism refers to the immoral actions of Western feminists. Ayad mentioned the feminist organization FEMEN (an activist group known for its naked protests) as an example of the Western feminist movement's lack of principles. She said, "I do not want to be associated to those immoral Ukrainian feminist protest groups who run around naked to demand for gender equality." She added:

> If you want to understand why I do not want to be called a feminist, have you heard about the Egyptian Westernized feminist Alia Majida? [Researcher note: Aliaa

> Magda Elmahdy is an Egyptian woman's rights activist who became known for publishing a nude photo on her blog.] This is an example of a Westernized Egyptian feminist. No, thank you; I do not want to be associated with her under the same term. As Islamists, we need to keep our Islamist women's rights movement clean from the immoral Westernized Egyptian feminists.

For Islamists, the ways that Western feminists present their demands are unacceptable and morally degenerate. It is the behavior of those feminists that causes the rejection of the term *feminist*, not the ideology it refers to.

Islamist participants showed admiration for Western feminist struggles to bring gender equality and justice to Western women, while condemning the acts themselves. For example, the Islamist participant Amira Elhefnawy described the bra-burning actions in the 1960s as the immoral realization of a good intention. Although Elhefnawy respected the motives of Western feminists protesting for women's rights during the 1960s, she disagreed with the way they communicated their ideas and demands:

> Yes, Western women in the 1960s needed to start protesting for equal rights and change the Western notion of women as just housewives and mothers and nothing else, but their way of presenting their idea was not the right one. They are giving up their morals for the sake of gender equality. If I want to be like them, well, I think I should burn my Hijab, and give up my Islamic identity as a symbol to demand for gender equality! No, I will not do that and I do not need to do that.

A priority for Islamists is to prevent any threats to their Islamic foundation. Therefore, they believe that Islam is jeopardized by liberal political and social movements,

and they are sensitive and careful to accept any ideology that could cause harm to their Islamic standards.

Western feminists' opposition to Islam. According to the Islamist participants in my study, the Western feminists' perspective on the Arab and the Muslim world would reveal Islamophobic tendencies. As Amany Saleh elaborated:

> I do see the misunderstanding of our movement by Western feminists. But believe me, this is because of the lack of knowledge and information about Islam. It is not just their mistake; it is the mistake of a lot of Muslims who give a bad image to Islam. However, I believe that if we keep our Islamic identity and present our movement to the world, this will correct the wrong image of Islam.

As the Islamist participants expressed, the message Islamists hear from Western feminists is that all Arab and Muslim men are oppressing their wives and daughters, and that Muslim women are passive because they are loyal to Islamic teachings that do not grant their rights and freedom. For Islamists, it does not make sense to share the same name with people who are against Islam. Islamist participant Amira Elhefnawy, for example, showed me some offensive images of Muslims and Islam posted online by Western feminists. She commented, "I cannot believe people are judging other people based on their beliefs." For Islamists, to identify as a feminist would imply acceptance of the Western feminist discourse against Islam and agreement on the notion that Islam infringes upon the rights of women.

Avoiding secularism. Another reason participants offered for their rejection of the term feminist is the notion of secularism. For Islamists women it is very important to assert the presence of Islam in the women's liberation movement, and accepting a secular identity would be unthinkable. For these women, the Western feminist movement embraces

secularism and therefore contradicts the principles of Islam. Participants Riham Bahi and Amany Salah mentioned this issue as a reason to be cautious in describing the Islamic women's rights activists as feminists. Salah said, "We should stick to our Islamic principle." And Bahi added, "We try to avoid any contradiction or oxymoron with our Islamic identity." She continued:

> It is important to keep our Islamic identity from being misunderstood. I would rather keep our movement's identity clear. I will give you an example: Imagine if I told you that I am a Muslim, but I go and pray in the church. I might do the Islamic rituals and do what Muslims should do, but people would get confused. Since I am a Muslim, I should go to the mosque to do my prayer; why should I confound people? We are Muslim activists; why should we confound people and call ourselves with secular terms?

Therefore, Islamist participants were keen to avoid any confusion between the Islamic feminist movement and the secular feminist movement. As Kawther Alkholy stated, "Everybody knows we are Islamists, and it is not good to be associated to secular terms." For Islamists, the term secularism presents a threat for the Islamist women's liberation movement. Even if some participants like Amany Saleh have a different opinion about the connection between secularism and feminism, she thinks the Islamist movement should avoid being involved in skeptical arguments. Saleh said: "I do not want to argue if there is a connection between secularism and the term feminism. However, as I told you before, remember the culture matter. In Egypt, the term feminism will be understood as a secular term."

Connection to the Islamic culture. Islamic culture is important for Egyptian people. The abundance of ancient Islamic art and architecture in Cairo clearly indicates the long and important history of Islam in Egypt. The presence of many historical Islamic mosques in the city - the Mosque of Amir al-Maridani, the Aqsunqur Mosque, Al-Azhar Mosque, and Al-Hussein Mosque - and other ancient Islamic buildings clearly indicates how intrinsic Islamic culture is to Egyptian society. Even in everyday conversation with Egyptian men and women, it is common to hear expressions like, "If God is willing," "I swear to God," "This is God's will," and many other Islamic religious idioms. Additionally, Islamic posters are everywhere: in taxicabs, grocery stores, private homes, and surprisingly even in places that serve alcohol. The strong attachment to Islamic culture in Egypt partially explains the influence of Islam on the Islamic women's liberation movement. As Fawkia Ayad told me, "I grew up in a place where I could hear the Adhan Islamic call to prayer from five mosques around our house… My father used to take us to Al-Hussein Mosque every weekend." For Ayad, as for many Egyptian people, practicing Islam is part of one's daily routine.

Therefore, the threat of losing their Islamic identity because of Westernization—or, as the Islamists call it, the "Western cultural invasion"—made the Islamist women activists strongly hold onto their religious identity. For example, Fawkia Ayad stated:

> You are talking about identity; well, our identity has been stolen by the West. Not just the identity, our culture is been stolen as well. Look around you, look at the Egyptian youth, you cannot even know if they are Egyptian; they have changed. They dress like Westerners, eat Western food, and on top of that, they dream to go to the West because the West for them is the dreamland where they will find happiness and success. We need to save our culture from the Western culture.

Amira Elhefnawy had similar feelings toward the strong influence of the West over the Egyptian culture, which she expressed in this way: "I understand the difficulty to be an independent country in these difficult current political, economic, and social circumstances. However, we must keep fighting to survive the huge waves of change we are experiencing."

According to Islamists, the Islamic feminist movement is an Islamic social movement that emerged from Islamic Egyptian culture. Therefore, they believe that their women's liberation movement should not be attached to the terminology used by the Western feminist movement, which emerged from Western culture. The two movements are not and cannot be the same. Amany Saleh noted, "Our culture is the source of our Islamic feminist movement." Kawther Alkholy echoed these sentiments when she repeated many times that "Islamic culture is the backbone of the Egyptian culture."

The Islamist participants understand feminism as an ideology that evolves. In their opinion, they have developed a new feminist ideology that fits the cultural environment of Egypt. The respect for Islamic culture and the use of the term Islamic in naming the women's liberation movement make the feminist movement acceptable to the Egyptian population. As Kawther Alkholy explained:

> In our organization, which is a feminist organization, we do not use the term *feminism* to define our work. I think we Egyptian women do not feel the terminology of feminism is the right one to describe the women's movement in Egypt. Not because we are not feminists, but because we are different feminists than they are in the West. We are Muslim women, and I think the term *feminism* is highly attached to the secular Western feminist movement. I do not condemn secularism or Western feminists—it is their choice and it is not our business—but we prefer to come up with

> an authentic terminology to describe our feminism movement. We are activists, women activists, and that is it. That is why we call ourselves Islamic feminists.

Islamic feminists have succeeded in adopting Western secular feminists' identity and turning it into a new Islamic feminist identity. Although Islamists insist on maintaining the Islamic identity of their women's liberation movement, they are also open to accept some Western ideas, but only after filtering them in a way that fits their Islamic standards. Amany Saleh noted that although Egyptians learn from the West, they are still a Muslim nation. For Saleh, the Islamist movement should remain based on the Islamic paradigm to keep alive the Islamic culture. In her own words: "I need to remind you, our movement is based on bringing back the right Islamic culture. Therefore, the Islamic culture has to be the backbone of the women's liberation movement."

Secularists

Independence. Secularists believe that the women's liberation movement in Egypt is independent from the Western women's liberation movement. They do not want to be identified with the Western term *feminist* because this would give the impression that Egyptian women depend on the West to establish a liberation movement and to be involved in social and political activities. For secularists, the use of the Western term *feminist* erases the Egyptian women's history of social and political activities, including women's rights movements. For example, Salwa Mohsen stated the important role of Egyptian women within social and political movements since the early nineteenth century. Mohsen said:

> Egyptian women have a long history of struggling for social justice and women's rights. Egyptian women participated in most of the uprising and revolutions in Egypt—remember that in the 1919 Egyptian revolution the Egyptian women's role

> was fundamental. The participation of Egyptian women in the societies uprising and activities is not new; it has been so for a long time.

The participation of Egyptian women in the political uprising after the 2011 Egyptian Revolution was mentioned several times as an example of women's involvement in political activities. For secularists, identity is a matter of affiliation. Being identified with the Western term *feminist* would mean that their women's liberation movement is affiliated with the West. For secularists, secularism is a universal political ideology that any nation can adopt. For example, Salwa Bakr noted:

> Who owns secularism? Secularism is a belief; no one can claim to own beliefs. Even if the secularist ideology was invented by Westerners, they cannot prevent people from believing in it. We are secularists, but being secularist does not mean we must be Westerners.

Sociocultural and economic background differences. Other reasons for which secularists avoid using the term *feminist* are the differences in social and cultural background between Egypt and the West. The women's liberation movement in Egypt emerged in very different social, economic, and cultural circumstances than those in which the Western women's liberation movement arose, and therefore was framed differently than the latter. For example, Egyptian secularists believe that the mission of women's rights activists goes beyond fighting just patriarchy. For Egyptian secularist women, the duty of Egyptian women is to fight all the social conditions that cause women's oppression in Egypt.

As Salwah Mohsen observed, the economic crisis that impoverished the Egyptian population is an important factor in creating a patriarchal society in Egypt. Mohsen stated, "There is always action and reaction for everything. When you are poor, you act differently

than you do when you are rich." For Mohsen, the difference in the level of poverty between the West and Egypt has shaped differently the Egyptian and the Western women's liberation movements:

> We women and men around the world are all the same. However, we have different approaches to things based on our cultural experiences and beliefs. I think it is a mistake to name or hold signs or even use terminology in our movement that represents other people's culture.

Secularists are aware that high levels of poverty affect women more than men. Through the interviews I conducted for this study, I came to understand what Egyptian feminists mean when they say that women's rights activists should focus on the bad economy and on finding solutions to the problem of high poverty in Egypt. As Salwa Mohsen observed:

> Whereas the Western feminists' duty is mostly to end the patriarchal system in the West, the duty of Egyptian women's rights activists is to end more than just the patriarchal system in Egypt. The duty of Egyptian women's rights activists is to help not only Egyptian women but also the entire Egyptian society, women and men. Unlike in the West, where feminists are focusing on women's issues and not on the whole society, we Egyptian women are focusing on the issues and problems of the Egyptian population. I work to end poverty in Egypt and lift the level of education of both genders.

For secularists, poverty is the cause of the deterioration of the status of Egyptian women. Because of widespread poverty, Egyptian women are subject to much violence. Salwa Bakr recounted many incidents of domestic abuse of which Egyptian women were

victims, and she pointed the finger at poverty, not at the men who perpetrated the abuses. Secularists do not see Egyptian men as the cause of women's oppression; they perceive men as victims of poverty.

According to Salwa Bakr, therefore, the circumstances faced by the women's movement in Egypt are very different from the ones in which the Western feminist movement staged its battles against unequal wages in the workplace and unequal distribution of the benefits of a healthy and flourishing economy.

> We do not have a women's liberation movement like the liberation movement in the West. For example, in the West the women's liberation movement started when Western women joined the labor field. The connection of Western women with the industrial field has shaped the feminist movement in the West. The feminist movement started when Western women in the workforce demanded to end the gender wage gap. The motive behind their movement was capitalistic, and it was a movement of ordinary women who felt that because they were women they were getting less financial compensation.

Bakr's words highlight the deep influence of poverty on the Egyptian culture. Because both the level and the causes of poverty in Egypt are different than they are in the West, the Egyptian women's liberation movement has evolved differently. Yet according to the Egyptian secularists, differences between the West and the East are natural. As Salwa Bakr explained:

> You lived in the West; do you see we have the same cultural background? I totally believe we have differences. But you should understand differences in culture as something normal. People have different histories, social and economic

> environments, religions, and beliefs. It is impossible to make all the people around the world share the same culture. Cultures travel and impact each other, but the impact is limited and the main culture remains the dominant one. This is unless you are talking about cultures that vanished and disappeared because of occupation and colonialism. In that sense, we need to stay vigilant and keep our culture from dying out.

Cultural pride. According to the research participants, the history and culture of Egypt make Egyptian people highly attached to and proud of their identity. In particular, both Islamist and secularist participants insisted that Egyptian women have a unique and great history. As Salwa Bakr stated, "In ancient Egypt women were highly privileged and had a high social status. They were not just queens—they were considered goddesses." In that sense, the history and the mythology surrounding ancient Egyptian women are still deeply rooted in Egyptian society.

Secularists are proud of their heritage and history, and they prefer to rely on their own traditions rather than on external sources for their social and political movements. During my interviews, the participants repeatedly expressed their cultural pride with phrases like, "We are the Egyptian women," "We are the history," "We are the queens," and "We are the daughters of the ancient Egyptian queens." These statements indicate that the history of Egyptian women is still deeply important and explain why for secularist women it is hard to be identified with a foreign Western term such as *feminist* that does not originate from their authentic Egyptian culture. In my last interview with Sahar Tawfiq, she said:

> If you think we are Western feminists you are wrong. We are Egyptian women's rights activists, and that's it. Why should we be identified by their terms Why don't

> they use Arabic or Egyptian terms to describe their women's liberation movement? Why should we be called and identified with a Western term? We, Egyptian women who go back thousands of years, are being identified with Western feminists who are only a few decades old! We will not dump our language and will not give up our history and heritage.

As Tawfiq articulated:

> Each people, each nation, and each race has its own history that they are proud of or they should be proud of. And when one of those peoples or nations decides to follow another nation's culture and erase their own, they erase their history, not just their present, and they will be nothing.

For secular participants, being proud of the Egyptian history does not mean looking down on Western culture. Indeed, secular participants acknowledged and showed respect for Western culture and the history of Western civilization. At the same time, secularists resisted the impact of Westernization and strongly affirmed their Egyptian identity. This point was made clear by Salwa Bakr when she stated that her admiration for Western culture did not mean that she wanted to abandon her Egyptian identity:

> We should understand that Western culture is deeply amazing. The West has tremendous civilization. Just think of the Roman civilization and ancient Greece. How come we should not look up to those civilizations? Even now, the West has an amazing civilization and beautiful culture. Let us be honest, look at Western achievements. Look at the women's status in the West. We have to admit, they have surpassed us. However, even if Western culture is more advanced than ours, this does not mean that our culture is inferior to the West. Our culture and civilization are

> not less than the West. It is true that at present, the West has advanced beyond us in terms of technology and other social aspects; we have just undergone very difficult social and political circumstances that have prevented us from being advanced like the Westerners.

Summary

Islamist and secularist women offered similar definitions of feminism. For both Islamists and secularists, feminism is a Western ideology, and *feminism* is not necessarily the right term to describe the women's liberation movement in Egypt. Egyptian women believe that each nation has its own ideology, history, and culture as well as its own sociocultural and economic circumstances, which cause women's liberation movements to differ from one another. Thus, it is not realistic to identify all women's rights activists around the world by one term that describes just one liberation movement and does not convey the diversity of the struggle of women in non-Western contexts.

Research Question 2: How Do They Use This Definition in Their Activism?

The second research question revealed the obstacles, such as poverty and the concept of modernism, that secularist and Islamist Egyptian women encounter when pursuing their liberation. The research participants defined their activism as a part of their duty as Egyptian women; they all agreed that the current status of Egyptian women required them to be involved in social and political activities that would enhance the status of women in Egypt. However, each participant had her own way of participating in social and political activities. For example, Amira Elhefnawy utilized her social networking skills and connections to spread information about demonstrations and social activism opportunities. Reham Bahi built upon her position as a professor to educate female students about women's rights and

Islamic feminism. Ebtihal Salem used her writing skills to educate the Egyptian population about the suffering of Egyptian women.

Two major themes emerged from the analysis of the obstacles encountered by the women's liberation movement: (a) poverty and modernism, and (b) ideological contradictions between secularism and Islamism. Although secularists and Islamists agree on what prevents women from enjoying their rights, there is tension between the secularist and the Islamist ideology within the Egyptian women's liberation movement.

Theme 1: Poverty and Modernism

Egyptian secularist and Islamist women face a shared set of obstacles when they seek to improve their economic and social status. The first obstacle is poverty, and the second is the prevalence of an old traditional interpretation of Islam. In what follows, I use the term *women's rights activists* to refer to both secularist and Islamist women's rights activists.

Poverty and classism. Egyptian women's rights activists believe that poverty in Egypt is the main obstacle for the women's rights movement. As the Islamist participant Riham Bahi stated:

> Poverty is the biggest cause dragging down Egyptian women to the bottom of the Egyptian society. You cannot imagine how strong a role poverty plays in placing Egyptian women as second-class citizens. Unfortunately, in low-income Egyptian families, men have the priority to go to school, work, and even move or relocate. Therefore, women have to stay home or are forced to get married in order to get rid of the expenses that place a burden on the family's finances.

As mentioned before, the Egyptian economic crisis has led to extreme poverty in Egypt, and poverty has become the main reason for the deterioration of the status of Egyptian

women. According to both secularists and Islamists, poverty has hindered the desire of Egyptian women to join or pay attention to the women's liberation movement, because the impact of severe economic hardships has forced them to focus on their financial problems. Poor Egyptian women do not care if they have rights or not; they are worried about their survival. They are struggling with basic needs such as food and shelter and are desperate to get help for themselves and their families.

As Salwa Mohsen said, "When women see their children starving, they do not think of human rights, they think of any job that can put food on the table." For poor Egyptian women, the women's liberation movement is useless. Indeed, in Egypt the women's liberation movement is monopolized by upper-class women, and Egyptian women living in poverty do not feel any connection with women's rights activists. Salwa Bakr elaborated, "I do not expect the woman who cleans my home for 20 Egyptian pounds ($2.80) each week to come to my office and participate in our women's rights activities." The social gap between Egyptian women divides their interests and goals. Whereas women's rights activists who are from the middle and upper class are interested in issues of women's rights, poor women's primary interest is to earn money in order to survive.

Old tradition and modernity. In Egypt, gender is still defined on the basis of old traditional values. Participants totally reject the old tradition that constrains women's rights and supports patriarchy in Egyptian society. For example, Ebtihal Salem commented on the role of Egyptian tradition: "These are traditional roles written by misogynist men. These roles must be erased from our culture." The participants noted that from the lens of Egyptian tradition, it is still the woman's duty to stay at home and raise the children. Egyptian women's rights activists view this fact as an obstacle that prevents women from moving

forward. Salwa Bakr described in detail the old tradition against which Egyptian women struggle:

> Egyptian Women are trapped in the notion that women are the creators of life, and men are the creators of the world. This notion divides the duties of the two genders. The duty of women is to deliver life to the world—to deliver babies, raise kids, and take care of them until they grow up. On the other end, men are the workers who build the world. The men go out, work, take decisions, make plans, and shape the entire world.

The participants' comments align with the findings of the literature on this topic. For example, the idea that women have certain duties in life was promoted by both the Islamist Rifaa al-Tahtawi and the secularist Qasim Amin. In particular, their idea revolved around the notion that liberating women would generate better wives and mothers and provide for a more modern Egypt. These men wanted to educate Egyptian women to generate good men for Egypt; it was all about educated women producing a better breed of man. Since that time (early twentieth century), Egyptian people have remained trapped in a tradition that jeopardizes the status of women.

Secular participant Ebtihal Salem, discussed Qasim Amin's book *The Liberation of Women.* She said, "I wish Qasim came back to life so I could tell him: 'Thank you for your call to educate women but you are wrong, we women are not supposed to go to school to be just good mothers and better wives.'" In this tradition, Egyptian women who are not married or cannot have children are considered useless and helpless, because they cannot bring new men into Egyptian society. Salwa Bakr added some observations on how women are seen by feminist men:

> Since the good Egyptian women can only give birth and bear men, the image of the sister is ugly, because she represents singleness. The sister is not the mother, who takes care of children, or the daughter, who will get married and have children. For example, the image of sisters as useless and worthless is clear in the secularists' intellectual works. Novelists depict lovers, wives, mothers in beautiful images because they are going to married or will get married and have children in the future. For example, in many of the novels of prominent Egyptian writer Tewfiq Alhakim, the sister is a jealous person who hates her brother's lover or her married sister. The Egyptian intellectual secularists or Islamists have not created the right image of women and are complicit in keeping Egyptian women trapped in the notion of motherhood.

According to the participants, Egyptian women's rights activists want to be equal citizens, and not just mothers and wives. They do not deny their feminine identity, but they want to keep that identity at home. In the home women are females—mothers, wives, and sisters—and do what women should do in their home, like cooking and taking care of children; but when they leave the home, they should be considered Egyptian citizens. As Amany Saleh said:

> When I am outside my home, I want to be just a person who is walking, not a woman who is walking. People should not deal with me as a woman and see me as a female; I want to be seen as an Egyptian citizen. As I walk on the street, people watch and judge my outfit, the way I walk, or the time of the day I am out. However, when a man is walking outside, no one pays attention to his dress or asks why he is out or where he is going.

Secularist women are highly critical of the social customs in Egypt. They mentioned several times during our interviews how hard it was for them to function as women within Egyptian society. They described how difficult it was to walk around by themselves or how using transportation was a daily struggle. Because women are seen as sexual objects in Egyptian culture, it is very common to see men who are doing nothing else than sitting on the street, flirting with women and bothering them. Salwa Bakr provided an example of how the old traditions are deeply rooted in Egyptian people's minds:

> Imagine a woman who is working at a high level in the government, and a journalist wants to make an interview with her. This important woman will defiantly be asked questions that revolve around her femininity, such as does your job affect your marriage, is your husband okay with the fact that you work, do you have time to cook for your children, etc.

Ending the old traditions of Egyptian society is the top priority for both Islamists and secularists. As the Islamist Riham Bahi said:

> You just mentioned the old traditional methods. Great, because this is the core of our mission—to get rid of the old fashioned tradition. We as Islamist women's rights activists are fighting to clean our society from wrong methods that are presented as tradition. These are not traditions; these are methods and prejudices that women have to end. Otherwise women will stay in the dark and will not see the light of freedom.

The previous quote reveals how the two groups of participants share the same goal of ending the old traditional beliefs in order to seek women's liberation.

Modernism. The notion of modernism is another matter on which both Islamist and secularists have similar opinions. For both Islamists and secularists, modernism is about

rejecting the old traditional notions that have placed women in restricted social categories such as those of wife and mother. Egyptian women believe that the times have changed, and that people should adjust their lives according to new needs. For example, Kawther Alkholy stated:

> Women in the past could not travel alone and required a male escort, who had to be her relative. This was because the environmental and geographical circumstances of the past required the male escort. For example, people used to travel in the desert by camels, whereas now people travel by planes. Women do not need protection anymore.

The two groups have a different approach on how to modernize the Egyptian society. Islamists seek to modernize Islam, whereas secularists seek to modernize the Arab secularist ideology. However, both secularist and Islamist women's rights activists agree that the repetition of old traditions fundamentally results in women's oppression. Both groups of participants blame Egyptian intellectuals for not seeking modernism in a way that would guarantee the liberation of women. They agree that the Egyptian intellectuals of the past reshaped the old tradition into a new modern framework that kept gender inequalities intact. As Salwa Mohsen stated, "None of our old Egyptian writers or educators of the past provided a good discourse to modernize the new Egypt; actually, they were focusing on modernizing Egyptian men more than modernizing women."

Theme 2: Ideological Contradictions between Secularists and Islamists

This theme explores the divisions between secularist and Islamist women's rights activists. Although both secularists and Islamists stand fast to their Egyptian identity, reject the adoption of Western denominations, and agree on many obstacles that hinder the

women's liberation movement, they are divided about the strategies and methods to seek women's rights.

Islamists. Islamists believe that the women's liberation movement in Egypt must be de-secularized and then Islamized. According to Riham Bahi, "We Islamists seek to make Islamic feminism the hegemonic discourse of the women's liberation movement." The reason behind this is the idea that secularist ideology has failed to bring liberation and freedom to Egyptian women, and that secularists will not provide solutions to the Egyptian women's problems. The failure of secularism ideology to provide solutions is a popular discourse among Islamists in general. Kawther Alkholy explained how Islamic ideology became a solution to the women's problem in Egypt:

> I have personally experienced the relief of Egyptian women from the ideology of secularism. I mean, when we organize Islamic social events, I see how Egyptian women feel more comfortable when we address the Islamic discourse as a solution to the women's problems in Egyptian society.

Islamists believe that Islamist women's rights activists need the opportunity to participate in the Egyptian political and social arena in order to implement their ideas and solutions. As Amany Saleh stated, in the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution of 1952, Egypt became a secular dictatorship. Since then, according to Saleh, Islamist women have not enjoyed the opportunity to assume leadership positions in Egypt. In that sense, Islamist believe they have the right to be given the opportunity to take over the leadership, including the lead of the women's liberation movement. During my interview with Riham Bahi, she repeatedly stated that "it is our turn to be in power and to take over." Additionally, the crackdown against Islamists in the aftermath of the 2013 Egyptian military coup augmented

the feeling of ideological conflict between Islamism and secularism among Islamists. According to the Islamist participants, the secular ideology is a form of oppression. Fawkia Ayad described the fear of the secular regime: "To be an Islamist in Egypt is to risk being under surveillance by the secret Egyptian authorities and being convicted on terrorism charges." Additionally, due to the denial of Islamist participation in the political field after the secular political party took power following the 2013 military coup, Islamist women's rights activists believe that the secular regime is a form of women's oppression. According to the Islamist participants, Islamist women do not feel secure and free under the secular regime in Egypt, and they believe they would have more freedom and rights under an Islamist regime. Amira Elhefnawy addresses the situation of Islamists under a secular rule with these words:

> The status of Muslim women in Egypt is worse than before because of the military coup. Since the 2013 military coup, not all Egyptian women are suffering at the same level. Islamist Egyptian women are the ones who have to suffer the most. Right now in Egypt, to be a Muslim or to look like a Muslim is not safe. We are subjected to arbitrary arrests and arbitrary detentions based on how we look. Wearing the veil or going to the mosque could be a reason to be arrested.

Islamists believe that the Islamic women's liberation ideology is a modern ideology that fits the modern time in Egypt. According to Amany Saleh, the Islamist women are presenting a modern and new version of Islam that is in tune with modern times and will provide a solution to the women's question in Egypt. The new Islamic ideology reinterprets the Quran and tries to bring this modern interpretation to Islamic jurisprudence by analyzing the philosophical rationale of the Islamic law and the procedures by which the law applies to

women's cases. According to these women, the new Islamic feminist ideology provides more flexibility and leniency than secularism. As Amany Saleh stated, "Secularists stuck to the old secularist ideology without evolving and adjusting it according to the modern needs."

Indeed, for the Islamist women's rights activists, the Islamic feminist ideology goes beyond the notion of dualism and tries to avoid binary oppositions such as Western vs. Eastern or Islamism vs. secularism. For example, Riham Bahi noted that Islamist activists criticize secularists for carrying a "with us or against us" attitude. This point echoes the Islamists' broader criticism of the traditional secular discourse, which similarly imposes a single way of understanding Islam.

According to Islamist women's rights activists, secular women's rights activists are using an approach that limits the participation of Islamic women. According to the Islamist participants, since Islamic culture dominates Egyptian society, using the Islamic discourse in the process of women's liberation is fundamental to attract and welcome Islamic activists and to understand their specific needs.

For example, Alkholy stated, "When secular women appear in front of Egyptian society and present their solutions to women's problems, they get rejected because their solutions are seen as something that is not related to Egyptian society. They are considered solutions that derive from Western secular standards." Similarly, Fawkia Ayad observed, "Egyptian people believe that secular feminists are trying to Westernize Egyptian society and destroy the Egyptian culture by poisoning Egyptian people's mind with Western methods."

For Islamists, even if the secularists are not Westernized or motivated by Western ideologies, the secular message is still perceived by the Egyptian people as a discourse of Westernization. Any use of Western terminologies or examples by the secularists is

perceived by the Egyptian population as a confirmation of this belief. As Amany Saleh pointed out, "Secularists are citing the United Nations charter regarding women's rights. However, these citations are considered by the Egyptian people a Western intrusion in their culture."

On the contrary, Islamists consider the Islamic discourse as a local discourse emerging from Egyptian culture. Islamic feminists are talking to Egyptian people in a language they feel comfortable with and understand. Egyptian people perceive Islamist women's rights activists as part of the Egyptian culture, not as someone who is imitating or adopting Western's ideas and criteria. According to Amany Saleh, "We are using authentic criteria that rose from the authentic Egyptian heritage. We Islamists tell Egyptian people that women should have their rights based on God's will, not based on United Nation charters." In addition, the women who most need the women's liberation movement are those living in poverty. These women are often highly attached to the Islamic culture and do not identify with the secular discourse. For them the Islamic discourse is more familiar and therefore easier to understand. As Amany Saleh explained:

> When we talk about the women's liberation ideology, we need to tell the public what instrument we should use to be effective. In this case, we found the most effective instrument is to talk to the public in a language that is familiar to them. People are skeptical of foreign ideologies. Also, do not forget that we talk mostly to Egyptian women who have a low level of education, especially poor Egyptian women. To those women, you cannot give examples of Western or even Eastern secular women as role models for women's liberation. You need to give examples from inside our culture. For example, once I presented the prophet Muhammad and his wife Aisha as

an example of how a man should treat his wife. It was better to use Prophet Muhammad as an example rather than a Western man.

Moreover, in my conversations with Islamists, the fear of secularism emerged repeatedly as a crucial issue. Islamists do not fear the concept of secularism in itself, but rather the Egyptian secularists. They believe that the attitude of secularists is aggressive toward Islamists and does not show tolerance and openness to disagreement. Amira Elhefnawy mentioned the military coup against Mohammed Morsi, Egypt's first civilian and Islamist president, as an example of the fight of the secularists against Islamists: "When Islamists selected a president who represents the Islamic ideology, secularists stood up to him and put him and his followers in the jail."

Secularists. For secularist women, Islamic ideology interferes with the Egyptian women's liberation movement. Secularist women believe that the influence of Islam on the women's liberation movement in Egypt poses a threat to the natural progress of the movement, which dates back to the early nineteenth century. For example, the secular participants, Ebtihal Salem, Safaa Abd Elmenem, Salwa Mohsen, Salwa Bakr, and Sahar Tawfiq all blamed the Islamist movement in Egypt for diverting the secular women's liberation movement from its social and political aims. As Salem said, "Everything was going well for Egyptian women until the rise of Islamism in Egypt." She believed that Islam is bringing women back to the Dark Ages, when they were oppressed and prevented from being part of society. Sahar Tawfiq agreed with Salem: "Due to the Islamization of Egyptian society, women have become more isolated and marginalized in Egypt. Egyptian Islamists oppose women's participation in politics and limit women's participation to specific social fields such as teaching or being a family physician."

By rejecting the Islamic ideology in general and the Islamic women's liberation movement in particular, secularists such as Salem and Sahar are up for a big challenge. To reject the Islamic ideology in a society in which Islam is the dominant culture, deeply rooted in history, is a difficult mission. For this reason, secularists are trying to separate Islam as a culture from Islam as a particular form of religious practice. Secularists use the terms "extremism" or "radical Islamists" to describe those who apply Islam in ways that discriminate against women or harm them. Any action by Islamists that does not meet the secularists' standards is associated with the stigma of extremism. In conversations with secularists, they repeated the phrases, "This is not Islam," "They are not Muslim," or "They are radical Muslims." The idea of a separation between Islam and the behavior of extremist Muslims gives secularists a pretext to reject the Islamization of the women's liberation movement: Because Islam has been radicalized by extremists, they believe it is better to exclude it altogether from the women's liberation movement.

Secularist women refused to associate Egyptian culture with Islamic customs; they repeatedly stated that Egyptian culture is secular, not Islamic, and emphasized that the Islamic trend (or, as they described it, Islamic extremism) is new in Egyptian society. Secular participants believe that the Islamic tradition was imported into Egypt from other Islamic countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. For example, Salwa Mohsen connected the extremist Islamic trend in Egypt to Islamists from the Gulf countries, stating, "I believe that unfortunately the Saudi Wahhabis ideology transformed the Egyptian culture." She believed that Egyptian people who traveled to Saudi Arabia for work came back carrying the radical Wahhabist beliefs, which in her view represent extremism and Islamic fundamentalism:

> The Wahhabist phenomenon started after Anwar El-Sadat became the president of Egypt. El-Sadat started an open global economy policy that put Egypt in the hands of the global economy. Due to El-Sadat's open global economy policy, the Egyptian economy collapsed and poverty became rampant in the Egyptian society. Because of the lack of jobs and the bad economic situation, Egyptian people started to travel overseas in order to find a better job market. Most of the jobs are in the Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, where Wahhabis are concentrated.

For secularists, even if the Islamic culture is rooted in the Egyptian history, it is hard to restore it in the modern time. For example, Salwa Bakr did not deny the presence of Islamic culture in Egypt; however, since Egypt has been modernized by secularism, she believes that bringing back the Islamic culture will damage Egyptian society:

> Here is the issue: Islamists claim that we should go back to the original and authentic Islamic culture in order to move forward toward modernism and also toward women's liberation. I totally understand, and to a certain degree I agree with them, but what is the authentic Islamic culture and how will it apply in our society? It is hard to bring things from the past and apply it again. Islam is misunderstood in our time, and we need to avoid looking in the past to bring truth or the right Islam. Why don't we use new modern methods that are practical and have been proven already?

Summary

Responses to the second research question illustrate the similarities and deep divisions between secular and Islamist conceptions of women's rights. Both secularists and Islamists are seeking to modernize the women's liberation movement in Egypt. For secularists, secularism is a modern movement that will bring an end to the old traditions; for

Islamists, the women's liberation movement must use existing cultural norms to accomplish the same goal.

Research Question 3: How Does the West Influence Egyptian Feminists' Participation in National and Political Conflicts?

The third research question unravels the complexity of the impact of Westernization on the women's liberation movement's ideology. This topic is divided into three subtopics: (a) liberation ideology and its connection to culture, (b) cultural globalization, and (c) Western colonialism and the consequences of imperialism.

The Connection between Liberation Ideology and Culture

As stated above, Egyptian women believe that the criteria and the methods used to pursue the liberation of women should mostly emerge from Egyptian culture. Both participant groups stated that each nation in the world has its own cultural characteristics and, therefore, its own methods when it comes to women's liberation. Both participant groups agreed on the notion that in the West, the women's liberation movement mostly revolves around gender equality. By contrast, the women's liberation in Egypt mostly focuses on reforming the economy and politics in order to end poverty and the low level of education among Egyptian women.

According to the research participants, these cultural differences between the West and the East mean that any single standard of liberation is mistaken. In that sense, the notion that the liberation of women in Egypt should follow the Western model is rejected by both groups and generated an irritated reaction from the participants. For example, secularist Sahar Tawfik angrily stated:

> I get really frustrated by this subject. If we do not have our own liberation methods and are imitating the Western ones, that means we are slaves and do not understand liberation, and need to import it from others. If we say the liberation methods are Western and belong to the West, it means we Egyptian people are not humans and do not know how to live as humans. Because if we say we do not know what liberation is and do not have liberation standards, then we are just animals or primitive people who do not belong to humanity. I doubt that the Egyptian people, who have one of the longest histories of civilization, are primitive people and do not know what liberation is.

Both participant groups believed that liberation ideologies in general belong to all humans. As secularist Safaa Abd Elmenem stated, "Every woman in the world has the right to be free and liberated." Hence, the desire for liberation is a human instinct; to be liberated from oppression and to live free is a longing common to all people. The mechanism will vary from one nation to another, but no one can monopolize liberation ideology. Safaa Abd Elmenem illustrated this argument by giving the story of the Arab Spring revolution as an example of the universal desire for liberation:

> Look what happened here in the Arab world. Mohamed Bouazizi is not a Westerner. He belongs to us, he is Arab. Bouazizi set himself on fire because someone took his freedom from him, because he wanted to be liberated and live free. When the Tunisian people revolted against their dictatorial regime, the desire for liberation spread in the whole Arab world. The Tunisian revolution had a big impact on Egyptian women. I noticed that many times participants mention the Tunisian revolution as a role model for liberation.

Additionally, standards of liberalization change over time. Therefore, the criteria that guide women's liberation are never stable but always vary according to the society's development and culture. For example, as secularist Salwa Bakr observed, "Values that were rejected in the past would be acceptable in the present. For example, the first woman in the West who wore trousers was criticized by the Western public. Now, Western women are wearing bikinis." For Egyptian women, ideologies evolve with time, and new methods of liberation are needed to match new lifestyles and changing needs.

Cultural Globalization

Despite their insistence on the need that liberation movements adapt to their cultural contexts, the Egyptian women I interviewed were also aware that exchanging ideas and methods between nations and civilizations is unavoidable. Participants agreed that in the age of globalization, transmission of values and ideologies has further intensified, and Egyptian women should recognize the necessity to adopt some of the Western aspects of liberation. As the Islamist Riham Bahi stated: "We live in the same world, and right now we cannot avoid the interaction between civilizations and cultures." This point may seem to contradict the strong rejection of the idea of copying Western criteria of liberation; however, the participants tempered this recognition with the idea that although Egyptian women might have adopted some Western liberation methods, the West in the past has also adopted many social and educational criteria from the Arab world. For example, Salwah Bakr mentioned the impact of Arab civilization on the West when the Europeans were ruled by the Arabs:

> History repeats itself. We Arab people taught Europeans many things during the age of Arab colonialism in Europe. Arabs taught Europeans many etiquette behaviors.

For example, the Arabian guy Ziryap invented the fork, and then Arab people taught Europeans in Spain how to use it.

In the Arab world, people are constantly yearning for the old days—their golden history and the legacy they have lost. When I addressed the topic of civilization in our conversation, participants mostly mentioned the history of the Arab empire and the flourishing history of the Arab world in order to give examples and justify their current views on globalization. Therefore, both participant groups agreed on the need to be careful when learning from the West and on the risk of adopting Western methods. As Sahar Tawfiq said, "Globalization could be good or bad. It depends on how you approach it. We should approach globalization to learn from others. But to learn in order to develop ourselves, not to be followers." Similar to the secular participants, Islamist participant Amany Saleh stated, "As long as you believe in yourself and you believe in your culture, you will be immune from the so-called cultural invasion."

Colonialism

The history of Western colonialism in Egypt can be approached at various levels, from the most elementary to the most complex. The following sections compare the positive and the negative effects of Western colonialism on the Egyptian women's liberation movement.

The positive side

Islamists. When the Islamist women's liberation movement started around the 1970s, Egypt was already independent from Western colonialism. Therefore, the influence of Western colonialism on the Islamists has been different than for the secularists. Islamists adopted the notion of liberty from the West, but not its secular ideology. The main influence

of the West came with the adoption of the Western concept of freedom of thought. Islamic feminists applied the notion of freedom of thought to the interpretation of the Holy Quran. This allowed Islamic feminists to develop their religious ideas and thoughts without being constrained by the old traditional interpretation of Quran, with its degradation of women and repudiation of women's rights.

As Riham Bahi said, "In Egypt, people are not allowed to think and to come with new ideas. The Islamic women's liberation movement is encouraging people to broaden their horizons." Or, as Kawther Alkholy stated, "We bring a new technique and instrument to the reading of Islam." For Islamists, the modernization of the Islamic women's liberation movement gives more credibility to their message. The adoption of Western methods, therefore, is a proof of the movement's modernity. Alkholy, for example, did not deny the advancement of the West compared to the Arab world; for her, learning from the West is unavoidable in order to develop the Islamic women's liberation movement. However, most of the Islamist participants did not see any positive impact of Western colonialism over Egypt.

Secularists. Secular participants were cautious in addressing the positive influence of Western colonialism on the Egyptian women's liberation movement. Admitting benefits from Western colonialism would have been embarrassing and shameful. Despite the apologetic tone of our conversations, however, participants acknowledged that being colonized by the West had brought many benefits. Although they were not proud of the Western influence on the women's liberation movement in Egypt, they perceived colonialism as a useful learning experience. As Salwa Bakr stated, "There is no good in colonialism,

colonialism is ugly; however, we have to admit that we learned a lot from Western colonizers. Colonizers' impact on the colonized people is unavoidable matter."

However, according to the secular participants, the positive influence of Western colonialism was restricted to the period between the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It began when Egyptian women were exposed to the French colony in Egypt; as Ebtihal Salem said, "French people made Egyptian women understand liberty." Meeting with French people was a turning point in the life of many Egyptian women. They felt enlightened by the French colonizers and developed a desire for development and modernism.

My research participants often mentioned this positive influence. In her novel *The Man from Bashmour* (2007), the secular participant Salwa Bakr wrote about the relationship between Napoleon Bonaparte and the daughter of one of the Egyptian elites. Bakr's novel highlighted Egyptian women's high regard for the French colonists. The French men's attitude toward women was a key influence on the women's liberation movement in Egypt, and it inspired women to demand more rights and better treatment. Salwa Bakr's story starts when Neno, a French colonial leader, falls in love with Zobaida, an ordinary Egyptian woman. In Bakr's words:

> Due to the Islam rule that forbids non-Muslim men from marrying Muslim women, Neno converted to Islam in order to be able to marry Zobaida. Then Egyptian women started to visit Zobaida in her house and they were amazed by the polite behavior of her husband towards Zobaida. For example, at the dinner table Neno pulls out a chair for Zobaida to sit down; sometimes he hand-feeds her; and if she's carrying something heavy, he offers help. Egyptian women loved the way French men dealt

> with and treated their women. Then they started to demand a better treatment from their husbands. Colonialism is evil, but there are good things we can learn from it.

Therefore, secular participants acknowledge that although the French campaign in Egypt only lasted three years, the French left behind good things for Egyptian people and Egyptian women in particular. For example, Salwh Mohsen stated that French people prompted Egyptian people to establish theaters; after that, the vaudevillian art, drama, and musical studies started to grow in Egypt. As Mohsen also noted, moreover, Egyptian women learned about modern fashion from French women and started to follow the French style, especially in regard to clothing, footwear, accessories, makeup, and even furniture. (I personally experienced French architecture in Egypt. Running through the heart of downtown Cairo, I saw amazing buildings in the French neoclassical style, which characterizes most of the streets' design.)

Finally, the direct interaction with Western colonialism secularized the Egyptian women's liberation movement. The secularist influence was mediated by the elites. As Salwa Mohsen stated,

> We need to remember that the beginning of the women's liberation movement was handled by elite Egyptian women such as Hoda Sharawy. Sharawy was educated according to Western pedagogies and used to travel to the West. She interacted with Westerns and was influenced by the Western ideology of secularism.

The negative side

Secularists. Although secular participants acknowledged the benefits of Western influence on the Egyptian women's liberation movement, they agreed upon their rejection of current Western imperialism. Secularists believe that the Western intrusion into Egyptian

affairs eventually led to the disbanding of the women's liberation movement in Egypt. According to the secularists, Western imperial policies in Egypt planted the seeds of religious radical ideology; this, in turn, caused the deterioration of the status of Egyptian women. For the women I interviewed, the notion of women's liberty propagated by the West hid imperial intentions. Financial aid given by Western powers to some Islamic and secular women's organization is considered by secularist Salwa Bakr as an imperial tactic to control the women's liberation movement in Egypt.

Indeed, secularists mentioned several times the notion of dependency, and voiced their frustration with the strong financial dependence of social and humanitarian organizations in Egypt from the West. This dependency was purposefully imposed on Egyptians through the notions of modernization and development. Secularists are aware of the hidden agenda behind Western financial aid and support, and they condemn even the social events and programs launched by Western humanitarian organizations as a form of imperialism.

The role of the West as a peacemaker in the region and its influence through conferences and international meetings are seen as nothing else than propaganda to cover up the imperialism of the West over the Arab world. For example, secularists observed that the international meetings and dialogues between the West and the East are useless and lead to nowhere. Salwa Bakr mentioned a story told by an Arab intellectual about how these kinds of activities are in reality a façade for Western imperialism:

> I remember Yemeni intellectual Zaid Motaa's response when he was asked to lead one of those dialogue conferences between the West and the East. Motaa said to them, let me tell you a story. Once a cat told a mouse, let us dialogue in order to

> make peace between us. The mouse said, I would love that! What a great idea to solve the problem between us through a dialogue! So the mouse asked the cat, where and when do you want us to meet to dialogue? And the cat replied, tomorrow in my stomach. My idea is that it is impossible to have a dialogue with someone without having equal power and without having good intentions and desire for peace.

In conclusion, Western imperialism over the Arab world makes it hard for Egyptian women to trust Westerners' actions when it comes to human rights topics. Therefore, Egyptian women who believe and trust the human rights messages coming from the West are seen as Westernized.

Secularists discussed Westernization as a negative result of Western imperialism in Egypt. According to these women, many prominent Egyptian women's rights activists have fallen into the Western imperialist trap. When Egyptian women become Westernized, they believe to the Western discourse that says that women in Egypt are oppressed because of Egyptian culture. In this case, Westernized Egyptian women internalize an inferiority complex that makes them believe that Egyptian culture is inferior to Western culture. Then, Westernized women disconnect from their own Egyptian culture and adopt Western culture as the answer to Egyptian women's suffering.

As mentioned earlier, many Egyptian women believe that women's suffering in Egypt is primarily due to poverty, and not to cultural issues. When we were discussing the patriarchal system in Egypt and its causes, secularists put the blame on the economic crisis. For Salwa Mohsen, when a country experiences economic crises and poverty, society turns to a patriarchal system that oppresses women:

> What do you expect from a society when the majority of people live in extreme poverty. The percentage of poverty in Egypt is 80 percent: 40 percent living on over two dollars a day and the other 40 percent surviving on less than a dollar a day. In this kind of environment, it is clear that women will become the scapegoats. The economic crisis in Egypt is the essential cause of women's suffering. I am not excusing or justifying the patriarchal and aggressive acts by men over women, but when Egyptian men are grappling with joblessness, poverty, depression, and government oppression, this will definitely reflect on their attitude and behavior toward women. Poverty is the problem, not Egyptian men.

According to secularists, Westernized Egyptian women who look at this problem from the perspective of the West are far from providing a real answer to women's suffering in Egypt. The best example to illustrate this argument was given by Salwa Bakr in her critique of prominent Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi:

> Let us take Nawal El Saadawi as an example. Although I admire El Saadawi's works and I respect her personally, I disagree with her idea of delivering the feminism discourse to Egyptian people in order to end the patriarchal system in Egypt. It is true that El Saadawi is trying to find solutions for women in Egypt; however, she searches for solutions to problems that are insignificant or do not even exist in Egypt.

For Bakr, Westernized Egyptian women like El Saadawi are discussing Egyptian problems as if they were Western women's problems, ignoring the real situation of women in Egypt:

> El Saadawi believes that the social problems Egyptian women have are a result of sexual repression. According to El Saadawi, sexual repression is the main problem

> between men and women in Egypt. El Saadawi idea is that, since sexual repression is the main problem Western women have, it must be the main problem Egyptian women have, too. Of course sexual problems in general are some of the problems women have in Egypt. However, in Egypt women have bigger problems than sexual repression. The sexual problem is a big issue in the West, but it does not mean it is the biggest issue in Egypt. I attended one of El Saadawi's conferences and they were talking about the issue of male circumcision. El Saadawi's argument was that male circumcision is a form of violation against men. Well, let us say yes, it is an act of violence against men, but is men circumcision the main problem men have in the Arab world? In Egypt, men practice circumcision since the era of Pharaohs. Circumcision has never been an issue in the Arab world. Perhaps circumcision is an issue in the West, but not in Egypt or in the Arab world.

For secularists, when Westernized activists attempt to help Egyptian women, they actually hinder the women's liberation movement. In fact, Westernized Egyptian women are encouraging Western imperialism in Egypt. As Salwa Bakr argued, "Unfortunately the West uses radical Westernized feminists like El Saadawi as a tactic to interfere in Egyptian society. The West always supports whoever carries out its methods and ideas; for example, El Saadawi is funded by a Western organization."

Westernization carries a stigma in Egypt, due to the suffering imposed on Egyptian people by Western colonizers, especially the British. Westernized Egyptian women are often stigmatized by Egyptian people. Even when Egyptian women believe in adopting and using Western liberation instruments and methods, they are highly apologetic in the way they justify their adoption of Western criteria.

Islamists. Islamists reject Western interference in Egypt. In the Islamists' opinion, the negative influence of the West started with colonialism. During my interviews, Islamists participants repeatedly discussed the role of colonialism in secularizing the women's liberation movement in Egypt. For example, Islamist Fawkia Ayad repeated that "This is what British people did to us, secularizing our women." Islamists blame Western colonialism in Egypt for creating a secular trend, and they believe that Islam is the solution to cleanse the women's liberation movement from Western contamination. Ayad used the term "poison" many times in her critique of the impact of the West on Egyptian society and women's affairs. In her words, "The West's goal it to spread its poison in Egypt."

Additionally, for Islamists the secularists' aggression against Islamists is a result of the Western interference in Egypt. In other words, the West is using secularists as an instrument to destroy the Islamic movements in Egypt and to maintain its imperial power over the country. Fawkia Ayad and Amira Elhefnawy repeated many times the phrase *Westernized secularists* to describe secularists who are aggressive against Islamists; and Ayad believes that if it were not for the Egyptian secularists, the West would not be able to interfere in Egypt.

Summary

The findings discussed above highlight the positive impact of colonialism during the French campaign in Egypt as well as the negative impact of Westernization during the postcolonial period. Although all participants agreed that for the women's liberation movement learning from the West is unavoidable, they are aware of the West's intention of Westernizing Egyptian culture by implanting Western methods of women's liberation.

The participants believe that modernization was shaped by the West; however, this does not mean that modernization should transform the Egyptian culture into a Western one. Participants were determined to maintain their identity and not to lose their history by adopting Western culture.

Summary of Overall Research Findings

In this chapter I presented the findings of my research by focusing on the ideology of feminism, on the participants' feminist identity, and on the impact of Westernization on the women's liberation movement in Egypt. This chapter demonstrated the complexity of the term *feminist* and its rejection by both Islamist and secularist participants. Both groups defined feminism as a Western ideology and argued that feminism is not the right term to describe the women's liberation movement in Egypt. Indeed, the duty of women's rights activists in Egypt is to go beyond the gender equality discourse to seek political and economic reform.

This chapter, however, also illustrated the divisions between secular and Islamist conceptions of women's rights. For example, although they both share the goal to modernize the women's liberation movement in Egypt, secularists think that only secularism can bring liberation to Egyptian women; whereas for Islamists the women must be liberated through a modern reading of the Islamic text.

This chapter also presented the positive and negative influence of Westernization on the women's liberation movement. For example, although the secularists acknowledged the impact of secularism on the women's liberation movement, they showed a strong rejection of Western interference in their movement. Moreover, although they learned secularism from the West, secularist women referred to it as a universal ideology that should not be

considered exclusive to one culture. Secularist Egyptian women reject Islamic culture as an obstacle to modernity and freedom and believe the Islamic tradition should be replaced by secularism.

Islamists, too, rejected the Western intrusion in the women's liberation movement in Egypt, in spite of the fact that they also had learned from the liberation methods adopted in the West. Unlike secularists, however, Islamists believe they should put an end to the secularist ideology, which cannot provide liberation for women because it contradicts the authentic Egyptian culture, and go back to Islamic culture—although they do believe that Islamic culture should be reformed.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Summary

I have conducted this study in order to answer three essential questions: (a) How do women in Egypt who self-identify as feminists define feminism? (b) How do they use this definition in their activism? (c) How is Westernization influencing Egyptian feminists and their participation in national and political conflicts?

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Egyptian feminists navigate the political and social influence of the West. Therefore, my intent was to bring Egyptian feminist voices into academia in order to (a) understand the current division between Islamist and secular feminists in Egypt and (b) understand the complex relationship between Egyptian feminists and the influence of the West. This study examined the development of the feminist movement in Egypt and offered a critique of secular and Islamic feminist theories. Readers will gain an understanding of the rise of the women's liberation movement in former Western colonies.

This study applies postcolonial/Islamic and transnational feminist theory to the analysis of the modern Egyptian women's liberation movement. I have focused on the influence of Westernization on the Egyptian women's liberation movement by presenting the reactions of various factions of the movement to Western colonialism.

The major finding of this research is that the according to women's rights activists, Westernization in Egypt is the result of a colonial project aimed to insure Western imperial interests. By Westernizing Egyptian society, the West has deeply influenced the ideology and behavior of Egyptian feminists. The reaction to the influence of the West is the major

source of divisions and conflicts between secularists and Islamists within the Egyptian women's liberation movement. Therefore, this study concludes that the influence of the West has had tragic consequences for the women's liberation movement in Egypt.

Discussion

In this study I have utilized the framework of postcolonial/Third World feminism (Mohanty, 1984, 1991; Spivak, 1988) to analyze the presence and deep impact of Westernization on Egyptian feminists and to explore what it means to be feminist in part of the Third World in the era of postcolonialism. The most notable finding was that the women's liberation movement in Egypt has developed based on Western influences; at the same time, Egyptian feminists reject the phenomenon of Westernization. This fact has created contradictions in the ideology of the women's liberation movement and confusion among Egyptian feminists. Postcolonial feminist theory can help us make sense of these contradictions by explaining how colonialism has affected non-Western women in the postcolonial world. Mohanty (1984) argued against the continuation of Western imperialism over the Third World's culture:

> The inherence of politics in the discourse of "culture" in the West and how contemporary imperialism is a hegemonic imperialism that exercising to maximum degree a rationalized violence action through fire and sword, and also through the attempt to control hearts and minds. (p. 335)

This study is in agreement with Mohanty's suggestion that feminists in the Third World are still suffering from the continuation of Western imperialism. Moreover, in relation to the notion of modernism and its influence on the Egyptian feminists, I agree with Samman (2011), who described the Western discourse of modernity as follows:

> Colonial modernity is obsessed with the constant judgments of people in accordance to a radicalized scheme of progress and regression, placing some as advanced and other as underdeveloped, where the West and its others were positioned in linear scale of civilization, religions, and race. (p. 186)

In this sense, the main finding of this research is that the Western discourse of modernity has influenced the ideology of women's liberation movement in Egypt and the behavior of Egyptian feminists.

Categorization

Samman (2011) has categorized Middle Eastern societies according to their approach to modernism and development. Samman's argument is that Middle Eastern people can be divided in several categories, such as radical Westerners, secularists, nationalists, moderate Islamists, and radical Islamists. This characterization helped me divide my participants into two groups: secularist and Islamist feminists. The secularist group fits the category of nationalism because of their national interests and their rejection of Western imperialism. The other group, the Islamist feminists, fits under the category of moderate Islamism. According to Samman (2011), moderate Islamists believe that any religion has certain essential principles that cannot be changed, such as creed or faith, in addition to others that are open to change, such as practices that were once applicable but are now outdated and irrelevant.

Samman's (2011) interpretation aligns with my research findings. For example, the Islamist feminist Kawther Alkholy described Islam as flexible and capable of adjusting certain aspects of practice according to what is appropriate to a particular time and place. This study narrowed down Samman's (2011) categorization to investigate the division

between Egyptian feminists that resulted from their different responses to the notions of development and modernity shaped by the Western imperial standards.

Influence of Western Discourse

Samman's work (2011) addressed the question of women in the Arab world and the transformations brought about by the Western discourse of modernism. However, Samman did not address the women's liberation movements and the voice of feminists. In this study, I have attempted to provide a more in-depth discussion that includes the voices of women living under the influence of Western modernism. The interviews I conducted provided tremendous research data to validate scholarly discourses such as Samman's (2011). According to the scholarly literature, the Middle East was highly targeted by Western colonialism since the eighteenth century. Therefore, the modernity discourse that was equated with Westernization penetrated the discourse of the women's liberation movement. By including the voices of Egyptian activists participating in the women's liberation movement, I have brought more details to Samman's argument and provided more contextual information about the status of women in the Middle East. Due to the long history of Westernization in Egypt, the choice of the Egyptian women's liberation movement was particularly appropriate to analyze the influence of Western modernity on Middle Eastern women.

The Elite Secularist Egyptian Women

Ahmad (2011) argues that British colonialism continues to influence many Egyptian feminist intellectuals. For Ahmed, the notion of Western superiority has traumatized many Egyptian feminists and still affects the discourse of women's liberation. This point came up during my interview with the secular feminist Salwa Bakr when she criticized the Egyptian

feminist Nawal El Saadawi. For Bakr, El Saadawi's discourse represents the notion of the superiority of Western feminism.

My study further demonstrated that the Egyptian secularists' violent behavior against Islamist feminists is based on a similarly narrow and degrading understanding of Islam. This point was also illustrated by the way Egyptian secularists justified the brutal crackdown against Islamist political and social parties after the 2013 military coup. During my interviews, the Egyptian secular feminists were very clear about the Egyptian military's aim to end all Islamic trends and secularize the Egyptian political and social parties, even if this required the use of force.

As discussed in Chapter V, the Westernization of the women's liberation movement initially increased the status of some women in Egyptian society. The clearest progress was in the level of education among Egyptian women. However, these gains were exclusive to an elite group of wealthy Egyptian women, who were the only ones who benefited from Westernization. Egyptian women in lower socioeconomic classes saw few improvements in their lives. According to the literature review, at the beginning of the rise of the secular trend in Egypt, secular elite women were the only ones who were able to gain education as well as access to health care and work.

The exclusion of lower-class Egyptian women from the privileges enjoyed by secular elite women enhanced the inequality between the two groups. The Egyptian secularist elite became the superior class, which explains why today Egyptian secularist feminists still see Islamists as inferior and agree on the need to get rid of them even with the use of force. According to the findings of this study, many secular feminist participants see the brutal

actions against Islamists of secular dictatorial President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as an expression of the noble duty of cleansing Egypt of the dirt of Islamists.

Switching from Radical to National Westernization

This research contributed additional insights to our understanding of modernity and progress. Until the mid-20th century, Western culture was the model for Egyptian feminists. However, the research findings illustrate that today Egyptian feminists do not believe that the West represents the ideals of modernity and civilization. This belief is a consequence of Western imperialism over the Arab world: As Ahmed (2011) argues, Western colonialism in the mid-20th century was a turning point that changed the way Egyptian feminists considered the West—not as a modern civilization but rather as an imperial colonial power.

According to Ahmed (2011), the events that turned Egyptian feminists' view of the West were the Arab-Israeli wars in 1967 and 1973. However, this study showed that other factors, in addition to the Arab-Israeli wars, were key in ending the view of the West as a role model. These factors include the local economic and political crises that resulted from Western imperialism over Egypt. In this sense, my study illustrates the impact of the local crises as a key factor in rejecting Western imperialism.

Rejecting All Aspects of Islam

As discussed in Chapter V, Egyptian secular feminists reject any form of Islamization of the Egyptian women's liberation movement. This fits the argument of Abdul Latif (2007) that Arab secularists view the ideology of secularism as the solution to the negative impact of religion on Arab societies. According to Abdul Latif, secularists believe that religion constrains freethinking because it inhibits the formation and expression of individual opinions. This study provided confirmed Abdul Latif argument: Although secularist

participants tried to show their respect to Islam, they made it clear they were rejecting Islamism because it does not fit the image of modern Egyptian women. They even made negative statements toward Islamist women, such as "They are filthy," "ugly," or "stupid." This confirms that secular Arabs are influenced by the Western modernity discourse that places Western modernism above other cultures.

Islam and Feminism

This study contributed to a deeper understanding of the link between Islam and the women's liberation movement. Mohanty (1984) argued that linking Islam to the discourse of women's liberation movement is bringing back the notion of Orientalism into current times. According to the scholarly literature, the Western perspective is that Islam is a patriarchal system and will not provide liberation to the Muslim women. On the other hand, Islam is already linked to the women's liberation movement by Egyptian Islamist feminists. My argument here is that Mohanty did not mean to isolate Islam from the feminist movement in the Third World; rather, she intended to illustrate the way the West negatively links Islam to the women's liberation movement. Indeed, whereas Mohanty criticized the West for linking Islam to Third World feminism, Egyptian Islamist feminists insisted that Islam is an integral part of the process of women's liberation. Therefore, this study helps to contextualize Mohanty's argument about the connection between Islam and the women's liberation movement.

Contradictions of Islamic Feminists

In this research, I have highlighted the connection between the political Islamic revival and Islamic feminism in Egypt. According to the literature review, the Islamic revival is an Islamic intellectual response to the Western colonial influence in the Muslim

world and to the political decline of Muslim power since the collapse of the Islamic empire in the 18th century. According to Jamal (2008), the Islamic revival is about rejecting the Western colonial exploitation of Muslim countries, and Islamic feminism is part of the Islamic revival. However, as my findings show, although the Islamic feminists are rejecting Western imperialism as Jamal (2008) noted, their financial dependence on the West contradicts this rejection. Egyptian Islamist feminist organizations like the Noon Center for Quran Research and Studies are receiving financial aid from the West in order to move their women's liberation movement forward.

The Islamic women's liberation movement is based on the notion of rereading and reinterpreting the Islamic texts to revise the patriarchal reading and provide new meaning that will provide justice and fairness to Egyptian women. However, in order to reread the Islamic text and come up with new interpretations, Islamists women are adopting a distinctive Western concept (freedom of thought). The adoption of this concept from the West suggests that Islamist women do not see the possibility to find an ideology of liberation in the Islamic culture itself. In the Islamists' opinion, adopting a Western method in this case is necessary and unavoidable. This implies while Islamists may not want to give up Islamic culture, they still want to bring Islamic culture within a Western paradigm.

Identity

This study's findings show that Egyptian women are proud of their Egyptian identity. They demonstrate this by avoiding the use of the term *feminism*. McBroome (2013) similarly illustrated how Egyptian women who participated in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution avoided the use of this label. For McBroome, the Egyptian women's participation was motivated by broader political reasons that went beyond women's issues. This study added more

complexity to the reasons behind the rejection of the term *feminist*. As the findings show, Egyptian women refuse to use the term *feminist* because they do not want to be labeled by a Western term. Egyptian women accept feminism as an ideology; however, they refuse to label their women's liberation movement using a Western term.

What Feminism Means to Egyptian Women

As mentioned above, Egyptian women avoid the stigma of Westernization by rejecting the term *feminist*. The feminist identity is stigmatized in Egypt, which explains why the research participants were careful to define themselves instead as women's rights activists or social activists. However, Egyptian women still make demands that are hallmarks of Western feminism, such as equal pay for equal work and the capability of doing things other than raising children and being housewives. For Egyptian women, Western feminism revolves around gender; it is all about blaming men for oppressing women. However, for Egyptian women issues such as the economy, politics, and foreign invasion are the main causes of the rise of patriarchy and women's oppression. Egyptian women do not see men as natural oppressors, but rather as victims of a social deterioration that turned them into the agents of a patriarchal system. (Note: I believe this is why I was welcomed among my participants as a man and not considered as a threat.)

Additionally, Egyptian women see Western feminists as aggressive women rights' activists who are exaggerated in their behaviors and messages. For Egyptian women, the way to attain women's rights is not by fighting men; it is by fighting poverty and political corruption, by reforming the old traditional religious and social system, and by being independent and autonomous. In the perspective of Egyptian women, being a women's

rights activist is not about burning one's bra or being short-haired or a man-hater; instead, it is about working (even with men) in order to reach gender equality and liberation.

I believe Egyptian women see Western feminists from an old stereotyped perspective. Perhaps some Western radical feminists' discourse still echoes in Egyptian society. For example, the research participant Amira Elhefnawy made it clear that she was rejecting the term feminism because she did not want to be associated with the radical feminist organization FEMEN. However, I believe that the research participants are making generalizations and broad statements about Western feminists. Just as there is a radical Western feminist discourse about gender and Eastern women, there are also Western feminists who focus more on systemic oppression. One example is the women-led grassroots organization CODEPINK: Women for Peace, which aims to end U.S. wars and militarism and supports peace and human rights around the world.

The Rise of Radicalism

The beginning of Western colonialism, which brought about the phenomenon of Westernization, started seeding the complexity that characterizes the women's liberation movement in Egypt. Based on the literature, initially the opening to the West was not a problem for the women's liberation movement in Egypt. According to Abu-Lughod (2011), contact with the West in the late 19th century sparked Egyptians to start the social and political developments that in turn made possible the advent of the Egypt women's liberation movement. Additionally, that time in the 19th century (before the start of British colonialism) was an era of moderate women's rights reformers, such as Refaa El-Tahtawi, Sayyid Jamal Al-Afgani, and Muhammad Abduh. However, since Western colonialism spread into Egypt, radicalism also started. By radicalism, I mean intolerance; radicalism is

the unwillingness to accept views and beliefs that differ from one's ideology. However, radicalism at that time was rampant not only among Islamists but also among liberals.

Based on the literature on this topic, the presence of British colonialism in Egypt divided the society into two radical trends: (a) radical Islamists who reject all aspects of the Western culture and seek to de-Westernize Egyptian women, and (b) radical Westerners who reject all aspect of the Islamic culture and seek to de-Orientalize Egyptian women. In regards to radical Islamists, I agree with Asik and Erdemir's (2010) argument that British colonialism in Egypt is what caused the emergence of Islamic radicalism in the country. Therefore, this study adds to Asik and Erdemir's (2010) work by demonstrating that the Islamic feminist movement is also a result of the rejection of Westernization in Egypt. However, as the findings of this research imply, even though Islamist feminists rejected the traditional interpretation of Islam in regard to women and showed openness to Western methods within the struggle for women's liberation, their opposition to all secular methods place them under the category of radical, rather than moderate, Islamists.

In regard to secularists, I agree with Samman's (2011) belief that the Oriental-Islamist methods fail to develop Arab societies. This study contributes to this perspective by adding more details on the ideology of secular feminists and by placing them under the category of radical Western nationalists. Egyptian secular feminists apologetically tried to show that they were not against Islam like the secular feminists of the past; however, they shared with them radical views against Islam and Islamists and rejected Islam as part of the women's liberation movement based on Western beliefs about Oriental-Islamist culture.

Elitism Dilemma/Class Divisions

Westernization has created class divisions among Egyptian women. Classism exists in all societies around the world; however, as mentioned in Chapter II, classism in Egypt is an external project developed by the Western colonial powers and intended to serve Western imperial interests. Initially, secularism was exclusive to the Egyptian elite class; additionally, since it was a Western project, it was totally shaped by Westernization criteria. Therefore, certain privileges such as education were restricted to the minority elite class and left out the majority of women who were in need of more help due to their low economic and education level.

In this case, Westernization was not more than a false facade of women's liberation; a project that favors a single category of people and marginalizes the others is a discriminatory project. The marginalization of lower-class Egyptian women (who are the majority) was a major cause of the rise of radicalism against secularism (which later led to the rise of Islamic feminism).

According to this study's findings, Egyptian women living in poverty felt abandoned by secularist Westernized Egyptian women and lost faith in secularism as an ideology of women's liberation; instead, they came to see it as an imperial project. The division between elite and lower-class Egyptian women continues to this day. For example, while we were discussing the role of secular elite feminists in teaching Egyptian women about women's liberation, the secular feminist Salwa Bakr asked: "Do you think my cleaning lady would listen to me if I talked to her about her human rights? No, she would not listen to me; she does not trust me." This loss of confidence in secularist feminism contributed to the rise of the Islamic women's liberation movement.

Recommendations

My recommendations for further research include conducting (a) a comparative study of the difference between the feminist movement in the West and the women's liberation movement in Egypt, and (b) a study of the role of capitalism on the women's liberation movement in Egypt.

Difference between the Feminist Movement in the West and the Women's Liberation Movement in Egypt

This topic relates to the increasingly important divisions and interconnections between women's movements in the context of globalization. In the first interview with the secular feminist Salwa Bakr, she said: "You have to know we do not have the same women's rights movement as the West; our movement is different." For Bakr, the women's liberation movement in Egypt faces different sociopolitical circumstances than the Western feminist movement does. Bakr's idea was that the women's liberation movement in Egypt has different mechanisms because Egypt is different from the West in terms of history, economy, politics, and culture; therefore, the ideology of women's liberation in Egypt is different from the Western ideology.

For my research participants, the woman's movement is about fighting for social, political, and economic equality more than about degrading men as the root of all evil. For example, the participants had no problem with me as a man; rather, they all welcomed me and provided me with all the help I needed. If the participants had believed all men are evil, I would have had a major problem interacting with them. In conclusion, I believe the concept of women's liberation in Egypt is different than it is in the West. In Egypt, it is actually a women's movement more than a feminist movement. This is why I think that

conducting a comparative study of the feminist movement in the West and the women's liberation movement in Egypt would be crucial to understand the complexities of feminism in an era of globalization.

Role of Capitalism in the Women's Liberation Movement in Egypt

To understand the feminist movement in Egypt, it is fundamental to expose the sociopolitical and economic circumstances that have characterized the recent history of Egypt. Egypt's economy went through several stages since the Egyptian women's liberation movement started. For example, the economy shifted from the public sector to the private sector in the 1970s, marking the rise of the capitalism system in Egypt. Further studies are needed to demonstrate how the participation of Egyptian women in the labor force under a capitalist system influenced the women's liberation movement. The participation of Egyptian women in the labor force shifted the economic imbalance between the secular elite and the non-secular Egyptian women. Since non-secular Egyptian women have started to improve their financial status, it is no longer just the elite secularists who occupy the higher ranks of the class hierarchy. However, as I learned from my interviews with Egyptian feminist participants, a superiority complex still exists in the Egyptian secular discourse. I believe that it is deeply important to investigate how shifts in the capitalist system have affected notions of class among Egyptian feminists.

Conclusions

Westernization Is Two-Faced

As discussed above, the opening to the West since the French campaign in Egypt (1798) paved the road to knowledge, modernity, and the start of the modern women's liberation movement. Dealing with Western people is a privilege that Egyptian women do

not deny. The presence of Western people in Egypt sparked Egyptian people in general, and women in particular, to seek progress and development. According to secular participants such as Salwa Bakr, following the footsteps of Western people brought about progress in the fields of education, art, knowledge, and law; in that sense, interacting with Western people was fundamental to lift up the Arab people from the swamp of ignorance that they had inherited from the deteriorating Islamic Empire. Therefore, Westernization played a positive role in spurring the women's liberation movement in Egypt.

However, this research also showed the negative side of Westernization. For example, participants rejected the colonial domination associated with Westernization, refused to define their identity based on Western categories, and acknowledged that replacing their cultural identity with a Westernized one is an imperial act of violence.

Common Ground between the Two Groups

Although this study showed an ideological conflict between Islamists and secularists, both groups of women's rights activists share the same goal—the liberation of Egyptian women. Both secular and Islamist Egyptian women's rights activists agree on the need to free women from the restrictions that led to the patriarchal system in Egypt, including old traditional beliefs, political corruption, misinterpretation of religious texts, poverty, and all cultural values that prevent Egyptian women from enjoying freedom.

In particular, all of the participants agreed that poverty is a major cause of the deterioration of women's status in Egypt; therefore, all of the participants believed that women's liberation must include the end of poverty in Egypt. The recent economic crises, high unemployment rates, lack of economic opportunities, and political corruption have led to a high level of poverty in Egyptian society, which was the major motivation behind the

2011 Egyptian Revolution. For the participants in this study, as long as poverty afflicts them, Egyptian women will be forced to stay home, have a low level of education, and have limited access to political and social equality; in other words, they will continue to be subjugated to prejudice and patriarchy.

The Road to Freedom

According to this study, the women's liberation movement in Egypt has been affected by both insider and outsider influences. The findings showed that the authentic culture of Egypt is the backbone of the women's liberation movement; for example, participants showed a strong attachment to their Egyptian identity. On the other hand, the phenomenon of Westernization was a major outsider influence on the women's liberation movement. This research discussed the reaction of the two major women's liberation groups—Islamist and secularist— to the influence of Westernization, which had both positive and negative aspects. In the end, and despite all their divisions and disagreements, the women's rights activists are moving forward in liberating Egyptian women from all that prevents them from attaining their social and political rights, and they are courageously forging the path to women's freedom.

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APPENDIX A

Release and Consent Form:

I,…….(full name) hereby give permission for Assim Alkhawaja to record, transcribe, and consider this interview for publication.

I understand that I have complete control over how my interview can be used, and can choose to remain anonymous if the interview is used in any form. (This includes, and is not limited to, text excerpts of the interview in newspapers, magazines and the internet).

I will receive a transcript and/or recording of my interview from Assim Alkhawaja for my personal use upon my request.

Assim Alkhawaja will not publish anything without my consent, and will do everything to protect my privacy. Assim Alkhawaja will not share my identity or personal information with anyone else.

……..
Signature

……
Date

…….
Address

……
City, Sate, Zip

……
Phone #

…….
Other way of getting in contact

(Adopted from a sample consent form from *Voice of Witness*)

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH SUBJECTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

The rights below are the rights of every person who is asked to be in a research study. As a research subject, I have the following rights:

To be told the extent to which confidentiality of records identifying the subject will be maintained and of the possibility that specified individuals, internal and external regulatory agencies, or study sponsors may inspect information in the medical record specifically related to participation in the clinical trial.

To be told of any benefits that may reasonably be expected from the research.

To be told of any reasonably foreseeable discomforts or risks.

To be told of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment that might be of benefit to the subject.

To be told of the procedures to be followed during the course of participation, especially those that are experimental in nature.

To be told that they may refuse to participate (participation is voluntary), and that declining to participate will not compromise access to services and will not result in penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

To be told about compensation and medical treatment if research related injury occurs and where further information may be obtained when participating in research involving more than minimal risk.

To be told whom to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research, about the research subjects' rights and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject.

To be told of anticipated circumstances under which the investigator without regard to the subject's consent may terminate the subject's participation.

To be told of any additional costs to the subject that may result from participation in the research.

To be told of the consequences of a subjects' decision to withdraw from the research and procedures for orderly termination of participation by the subject.

To be told that significant new findings developed during the course of the research that may relate to the subject's willingness to continue participation will be provided to the subject.

To be told the approximate number of subjects involved in the study.

To be told what the study is trying to find out;

To be told what will happen to me and whether any of the procedures, drugs, or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice;

To be told about the frequent and/or important risks, side effects, or discomforts of the things that will happen to me for research purposes;

To be told if I can expect any benefit from participating, and, if so, what the benefit might be;

To be told of the other choices I have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study; To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study;

To be told what sort of medical or psychological treatment is available if any complications arise;

To refuse to participate at all or to change my mind about participation after the study is started; if I were to make such a decision, it will not affect my right to receive the care or privileges I would receive if I were not in the study;

To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form; and

To be free of pressure when considering whether I wish to agree to be in the study.

If I have other questions, I should ask the researcher or the research assistant. In addition, I may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS by calling (415) 422-6091, by electronic mail at IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to USF IRBPHS, Counseling Psychology Department, Education Building, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1071. References: JCAHO and Research Regulatory Bodies.