Ladies or Women, Occident or Orient:

Clashes and Contradictions in the Egyptian Feminist Movement, 1919 to 1952

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<u>Introduction</u>

The period stretching from 1919 to 1952 is remembered as Egypt's liberal era, which represents a time of critical social, political, and economic change. Over the course of three decades, Egyptian society underwent immense transformations spurred by industrialization, ideological conflicts, nationalist fervor, and two world wars. This period begins with the explosion of Egypt's nationalist movement and the fervent drive amongst political leaders to extract the nation from Britain's oppressive occupation. Questions about political inclusion and the future of the new nation circulated, drawing greater numbers of Egyptians into the political realm. By 1952, Egyptian society was radically different. It was a nation with significant influence in the world, was on the brink of winning true independence from Britain, and was experiencing a military coup. Throughout this period, the primary political struggle revolved around decolonization and the fight to disentangle political elites from the colonial apparatus.

Women in Egyptian society were loyal and vital to the nationalist movement; they were simultaneously committed to achieving their own rights within the conservative, patriarchal Egyptian government. Feminists worked tirelessly to improve conditions in the nation: they expanded educational opportunities, work opportunities, standards of living, and provided social services when the state failed to. Early feminists committed their lives to building the nation, despite continuous political dejection, and did so with women's rights in mind. This thesis analyzes the trajectory of the Egyptian feminist movement and examines feminist participation in the nation-building process.

While uplifting the successes of the movement, I also seek to problematize aspects of the feminist project and address its various limitations, particularly with regards to class and its alignment with Western and colonial conceptions of women's rights. This research demonstrates

that twentieth-century Egyptian feminism was complicated and layered—it was deeply impacted by colonization, anti-imperialism, nationalism, secularism, Islamism, and pan-Arabism—and its priorities, ideological roots, and alliances fluctuated greatly over time. Addressing the contradictions and silences within the movement adds new dimensions to existing scholarship on the subject and rejects the contemporary inclination to essentialize early Egyptian feminism into one cohesive form.

This thesis would not have been possible without the groundbreaking work of six primary scholars of Middle Eastern feminism: Margot Badran, Beth Baron, Laura Bier, Leila Ahmed, and Lila Abu-Lughod. This generation of feminist scholars were the first to correct the male-centric historiography of the Egyptian nationalist movement. They approached topics of race, class, gender, religion, and Orientalism with nuance, and added much needed richness to the legacies of twentieth-century Egyptian feminists.

Traditional accounts of Egyptian nationalism have largely ignored the presence of women activists, or have relegated them to the margins of the mass political movement. In 1995, Margot Badran interrupted the dearth of scholarship on Egyptian feminism with her comprehensive study *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*. In this text, Badran chronicles the feminist movement launched in the early 1900s by Huda Sha'rawi, and demonstrates how feminists advanced nationalist causes while working within the parameters of a re-envisioned Islam. Beth Baron's book, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*, provides a thorough analysis of women's journals and publications that emerged in the years leading up to the 1919 revolution, and draws links between the new feminist literary culture and major social transformations of the time. Baron's second book, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* explores the process by which Egyptian nationalist movements took on a gendered

dynamic, which has been crucial to this thesis.

In *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity and the State in Nasser's Egypt*, Laura Bier addresses the latter half of the twentieth-century through her examination of state feminism, secularism, and the postcolonial period. Bier's analysis of the structures of the liberal-nationalist state and the construction of upper-class feminism is fantastic, and incorporates a critical, intersectional feminist lens. Finally, Leila Ahmed's book *Women and Gender in Islam*, and Lila Abu Lughod's anthology *Remaking Woman: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* enriched this thesis with an immense body of research and have provided me with the anti-colonial feminist frameworks needed to dismantle the assumption that feminism is inherently western and incompatible with Islam and the Middle East.

This thesis synthesizes key analyses from the aforementioned texts, particularly ideas regarding colonial feminist rhetoric, gendered conceptions of citizenship, and the implications of state reform on lower-class women. I analyze the contradictions, ambiguities, and successes within the Egyptian feminist movement during the first half of the twentieth-century through an intersectional femnist lens, while also remaining mindful of the limitations of feminist language during this period. In addition to feminist ideology, I rely heavily on Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, which critiques the tendency to divide the world into two categories, East and West, or Orient and Occident, in which the Occident/West represents civility, modernity, and progress, whereas the Orient/East epitomizes primitiveness, backwardness, and immaturity.

Said's text, *Orientalism*, analyzes a sweeping body of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European literature to demonstrate the West's tendency to denigrate, sexualize, and infantilize the Orient in novels, memoirs, travel guides, and official documents. This literary analysis establishes the foundation for the theory of Orientalism, which describes the way in which the

West seeks to know and master the Orient— its people, customs, geography, language— in order to exert total control over it.[1] Without the language that *Orientalism* provides, this thesis would not be able to articulate the impacts of colonial framings of women's rights on the emerging Egyptian feminist movement, and would lack a crucial analysis of race and power.

This thesis intends to repudiate the notion that Egyptian feminism was simply a byproduct of Westernization. It utilizes translated memoirs, political essays, and newspapers in order to demonstrate both the experiences and politicization of twentieth-century women, and validate the existence of a robust archive of written work by Egyptian feminists. In contrast, I also draw from texts published by American and European travelers to Egypt in the pre-World War I era, and utilize the personal writing of colonial rulers to show Orientalism at work. The primary body of sources are taken from a digitized archive of *Jus Suffragii*, the official monthly publication of the International Alliance for Women. These journals shed light on the international feminist agenda throughout the early 1900s, and exemplify the tensions between East and West that this thesis addresses.

The sources mentioned above have been vital to my research, and I am exceedingly grateful for my ability to access them digitally, and in English. However, language created one significant limitation in the construction of this thesis. While there are plenty of English sources that are highly reputable and readily available, my research would have been able to go deeper and farther if I had secondary language skills. However, the sources at my disposal allowed me to explore the impacts of British colonization on social and political life within Egypt, as well as analyze the discursive environment in which women's rights were discussed.

During the early years of the twentieth-century, Egyptians began to think about their visions for the future of the new Egyptian state. A primary concern was whether the nation

[1] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 32.

should be based on "pure" and "authentic" Egyptian values, or if it should conform to Western imposed conceptions of modernity and respectability. At the same time, colonial rulers looked for reasons to further solidify their domination and resist the nationalist uprising. During this time, elite men began to engage in a new discourse on women that inextricably linked issues concerning women with concerns about the nation and the pace of cultural change. Chapter One analyzes the gendered language that both Egyptian nationalists and British colonizers employed during this time, and provides a critique of Western understandings of the "Other." Additionally, I examine the cultural and technological changes which enabled women to step out into the public sphere, and how men reacted to the new social order.

During the nationalist revolution, women from the upper-class became increasingly visible in the public sphere. They were intensely involved in nationalist organizing, which sparked a newfound political consciousness within a group that had previously been kept silent. As women gained confidence in the political realm they also started to forge a feminist ideology, which complemented their nationalist agenda. Though women's participation during the nationalist revolution is often excluded from collective memory, these activists were vital to the revolution and the formation of the modern Egyptian state.

Chapter Two examines the emergence of major nationalist-feminist actors who resisted both the oppressive colonial regime and also fought for political rights within the Egyptian patriarchal system. This chapter uses a critical lens to analyze the ways in which Western framings of feminism often limited the Egyptian feminist project. Furthermore, I address some of the internal limitations of Egyptian feminism during this period, particularly the failure of early-twentieth century feminists to create a coalition that represented Egyptian women from all socioeconomic classes, and not just the elite. Despite these limitations, women were able to bring

about major transformations in gender-relations, and successfully establish a culture of feminist activism that set the stage for future generations.

The upper-class status of many early Egyptian feminists also enabled them to participate in the widespread international feminist movement, which was highly relevant during the interwar period, when women from around the world were fighting for political and legal rights. Chapter Two delves into Egypt's participation in the International Alliance of Women, and analyzes the complex dynamics that emerged between "Eastern" and "Western" conceptions of feminism. This chapter illuminates the contradictions and ambiguities within the Egyptian feminist movement, and seeks to add nuance to conversations about local, national, and transnational forces that worked to shape the image of the modern Egyptian woman.

In the years immediately before and after World War II, Egyptian society underwent another round of significant change, as new political factions formed to challenge the existing political order. The Egyptian feminist movement experienced a revival during this period, as younger, more radical leaders emerged and sought to actualize concrete changes. Chapter Three introduces a broader range of feminist leaders who disrupted the upper-class vision of Egyptian modernity and rethought Egypt's role in international feminist activism. Women in the 1930s mounted bold campaigns to expand opportunities for women's education, work, and political representation, and drew on new ideologies such as communism, pan-Arabism, and Islamism to actualize their goals. The feminist rhetoric of the 1940s shows an intensification of radical leftist ideologies, and a more visible anger at the government, which still refused to grant women rights.

The years leading up to the 1952 Revolution were highly charged, as new political groups competed to reshape Egypt's trajectory in the path towards modernity. After seventy years of

colonial occupation, Egypt finally won full independence from the British following the 1952 coup. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, women's role in society shifted yet again when a new government and constitution were installed. While the political environment in Egypt throughout the twentieth-century was highly dynamic and often fraught with conflict, one aspect of society that remained constant was the centrality of women in discourse concerning nationalism, imperialism, reform, and modernity. Each chapter addresses these recurring themes, and situates analyses of rhetoric and reforms within an intersectional feminist critique.

During the first two decades of the twentieth-century, increased globalization, colonization, and pressures to assimilate to Western norms catalyzed the formation of the Egyptian Feminist Union, Egypt's first, and most famous, feminist organization. These forces also embedded significant limitations and biases within the nation's evolving feminist consciousness. Despite the nation's consensus on decolonization, the emerging leaders who sought to answer the newfound "woman question" did not share one cohesive voice throughout the twentieth-century. The complexities of colonialism, nationalism, class, and gender, feminism in Egypt must be viewed broadly as a "constellation" of competing social practices and historical narratives that cannot be summarized through one singular vision of Egyptian feminism or womanhood.[2] Local and colonial power structures intersected with various conflicting visions of modernity to create a palimpsest, where the binary of either "colonial" or "authentic" Egyptian feminism cannot exist.

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[2] Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity and the State in Nasser's Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2011), 9.

Chapter One

In Egypt at the turn of the century, feelings of anxiety and fear were palpable as traditional cultural and social arrangements rapidly transformed, and political leaders planned for revolution. In order to alleviate fears of an unrecognizable Egypt, people engaged in constant debate about reforms and the merits of societal change.[3] During this time, prominent thinkers in Egypt began to engage in a new discourse that challenged the status of women's legal and political rights and placed questions regarding gender norms and cultural practices into the public sphere. Despite the passionate debates about women, the majority of the discourse that circulated regarding a woman's role in modernizing society was dominated by male voices. However, through the emerging women's press, expanded access to education, and political organizing, Egyptian women in the early-twentieth century were able to address various forms of patriarchal oppression that they experienced from both colonial systems as well as the local paternalist establishment. In doing so, they created radical opportunities to both theorize and practice their own liberation as women and Egyptian nationalist subjects.

In 1899, Qasim Amin, a well-respected, French-educated Egyptian judge, published *The Liberation of Women*, which identified four areas of society that needed to reform in order to achieve women's liberation: education, religion, family, and the improvement of women's physical and mental conditions.[4] While Amin's text was seen as the catalyst for the feminist movement in Egypt, the first "male feminist" book was actually published by Murqus Fahmi in 1894, though it did not gain much traction.[5] Nonetheless, *The Liberation of Women* triggered widespread debate about women's status in society, and also coincided with the development of a

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[3] Margot Badran, "Dual Liberation: Feminism and Nationalism in Egypt, 1870s-1935." *Feminist Issues* (1988): 19

[4] Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 18.

[5] Badran, "Dual Liberation," 17.

nationalist consciousness, which informed much of Amin's ideology. Amin asserts that "the development of a country depends on numerous factors, the most important of which is the development of women. Similarly, the underdevelopment of a country is a product of numerous factors, the most important of which is the inferior position of women."[6] Amin links women's status in society to the progress (or decline) of the nation. His text suggests that the improvement of these domains— women's education, health, ways of socialization— was one of the most important preconditions for the advancement of the Egyptian national project.

While Amin is often lauded as the "father of Egyptian feminism," in reality his writing denigrates Egyptian culture and people as backwards and unable to improve themselves independently. Much of Amin's rhetoric was grounded in the same Orientalist stereotypes used by British colonialists. In his attempts to improve the nation and bring Egypt into modernity, Amin reinforces Western supremacy and the dichotomy between the ignorant East and enlightened West. Amin uses sweeping generalizations about Muslims and the Middle East to explain Egypt's national challenges. He observes that the "East" is plagued by the

> … backwardness of Muslims in every Islamic country. The prevalence of this phenomenon also suggests that its causes must be in common to all these countries. The national and regional diversity among Muslims is not a major reason for this inferiority. If it were, we would witness major differences among the Turk, the Egyptian, the Indian, the Persian, and the Chinese in their degree of prosperity and in their type of civilization. But we do not find such variation among these peoples. In fact, the only observed differences that can be attributed to regional or national origin are those associated with character and cultural traditions. A Turk, for example, is clean, honest, and brave, while an Egyptian is the opposite. Yet despite these differences, they share the traits of ignorance, laziness, and inferiority.[7]

The arguments for women's rights in *The Liberation of Women* are rooted in Amin's disdain for "backward" Muslim people and his glorification of the West. He held these views while also

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[6] Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women: A Document in the History of Eygptian Feminism* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1899), 72.
[7] Ibid 64-65.

rooting many of his arguments in Islamic modernism, a realm in which he had intellectual training. Despite this contradiction, in this passage, Amin uses condescending, derogatory language to explain the fundamental differences between certain Eastern people, but remains firm that the causes of "ignorance, laziness, and inferiority" have more to do with peoples' adherence to Islam than their national identity. In this text, Amin appropriates British colonial rhetoric by lumping together vastly different nations into the all-encompassing "Orient" and defines this mass of people by their inferiority to the West. Amin argues that the only way forward, the only way to see "progress," is for Egyptians to accept these racist, sexist, Orientalist criticisms and incorporate his reforms into mainstream Egyptian life. If Egyptians accept their backwardness and strive for Westernization, society will finally be able to enter into modernity.[8]

Just as the British justified colonization through white saviorism, Amin uses the question of women's rights as a vehicle to advance his nationalist ideals. Most notably, he centered the veil and the practice of gender-based segregation as major areas for reform. The practice of veiling pertained more to upper- and middle-class urban women or women of the rural gentry, who were expected to cover their faces when they went outside. Most poor and rural women did not wear the veil because it would hinder their ability to work in the fields or perform other labor.[9] Amin's goal of "unveiling" Egyptian women is coupled with his call to abolish gender-based segregation, a practice common in upper- and middle-class "harem culture."[10] Badran uses the term "harem culture" to describe practices which sought to confine women to their homes and render them invisible in public life.[11] Veiling and segregation were both practices that were unique to wealthier members of society, but neither practice was specific to

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[8] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 160-163.
[9] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 4.
[10] Ibid 5; I am borrowing the term "harem culture" from Badran.
[11] Ibid.

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one religion— Muslims, Jews, and Christians practiced domestic seclusion and veiling in Egypt, although Amin focuses his attacks on Muslim women.[12] To upper-class Egyptian men and European colonizers, veiling became the most visible, and most egregious, marker of otherness and backwardness of Islamic societies.[13]

Amin's rhetoric blended Orientalist tropes about the inferiority of Eastern people, culture, and religion with new discourse that pushed for rights for Egyptian women. Throughout the text, Amin reassures his readers that he is not advocating for unveiling, or any of his proposed reforms, because he seeks to emulate the West.[14] He tries to convince his Egyptian audience of his desire to improve Egypt, for Egypt, based on Egyptian terms, rather than because of a colonial imposition. However, Amin's writing repeatedly suggests that reforms in Egypt should view the successes in Europe as a model, and reminds readers that Europeans, specifically Anglo-Saxons, are the superior race. In a demand for improved access to education for women, Amin reasons that

> A woman is not a whole creation unless her physical and mental upbringing are completed. Her physical upbringing is important because it provides her with good health and preserves her beauty. She should therefore receive the same physical training and exercise as men, because a weak body can only be inhabited by a weak mind. Many mental and nervous disturbances that women experience are primarily a result of irregularity in the functions of their physical organs. A sound mind with all its manifestations reflects a sound body. This secret explains the superiority of Anglo-Saxons over other peoples.[15]

While advocating for women's education is a positive action, Amin's justifications are entangled in deeply entrenched misogyny and internalized white supremacy. A woman's mental health is reduced to a fundamental "irregularity" of her organs, which Amin believes can be fixed through rigorous physical training. Furthermore, Amin stresses that a woman's physical health is

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[12] Ibid.
[13] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 152.
[14] Amin, *The Liberation of Women*, 45.
[15] Ibid 70.

important because it makes her more attractive and beautiful, thus beneficial for her mind. *The Liberation of Women* makes sweeping suggestions about how women can become "whole creations" fit for a modernized society, and roots its claims in biological racism and the denigration of Muslim people.

Despite the public response to *The Liberation of Women* in 1899, many of Amin's reforms were far from radical, particularly his recommendations to advance the status of women through education. The expansion of girls' education was already a common topic in public discourse and access to education was rapidly expanding through public and private schools by the time of the book's publication.[16] Moreover, despite his seemingly progressive stance, his plans for educational reforms stopped at the primary school level for girls, rather than advocating for full education for all Egyptian women.[17] Amin's principal goal is to show that improved public education will lead to the modernization and betterment of the nation. In his rationale, educated women will make better mothers, capable of raising strong and smart future citizens. Additionally, as Abu Lughod highlights, educated women have the potential to be better wives to their modern, educated husbands.[18] According to Amin, when a man is married to an uneducated woman "he quickly despises her, treats her as nonexistent, and excludes her from all his affairs."[19] Furthermore,

> an educated woman, in contrast to an ignorant one, is more cautious about the consequences of events and thus jealously guards her good reputation. The ignorant woman is more frivolous and flighty. I have noticed that European women generally keep up appearances, whatever their internal state… when you meet European women on the street, they appear diligent, tranquil, and dignified… on the other hand, our women have

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[16] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 159.
[17] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 156.
[18] Ibid 156.
[19] Amin, *The Liberation of Women*, 17.

become accustomed to idleness; they consider it a necessity of life. Idleness is the source of all evil.[20]

These scathing passages reveal Amin's contempt for women and his firmly entrenched beliefs about a woman's role in public and private life. Ironically, Amin advocates for regressive family structures, rather than actualizing his plan to "liberate" women from the rigid expectations and hierarchies of married life. As with his other reforms, the improvement of Egyptian women is reliant on the harsh comparison between backward Muslims and superior Europeans. Amin's perception of European women and their position in society informed his unattainable standards for success in modern Egypt.

Colonial Rhetoric and the Women's Awakening

Amin and other elite Egyptian men employed colonial rhetoric in their discourse in order to motivate Egyptians to implement reforms that would modernize, thus Westernize, the most "backward" parts and people in society. These reforms would bring modernity and legitimacy to the Egyptian nation, which would, in theory, show the British that Egypt was ready for self-rule, and would elevate the nation's status in the world. At the same time, the British used similar rhetoric to criticize women's (lack of) rights in Egypt and made promises to improve societal conditions as justification for colonial penetration. Lord Cromer, the British colonial ruler of Egypt, wrote a multi-volume collection of his time in Egypt. In Volume Two of *Modern Egypt*, Cromer uses six-hundred pages to describe the disposition, ignorance, backwardness, and inferiority of the Egyptian people. Amin and Cromer use strikingly similar rhetoric to describe the "complete failure" of Islam as a social system, and both indicate that the most egregious manifestation of this inferiority is society's oppression of women.[21] Cromer warns of the

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[20] Ibid 32.
[21] The Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt: Volume II* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1908), 134.

consequences which result from the degradation of women in Mohammedan countries. In respect to two points, both of which are of vital importance, there is a radical difference between the position of Moslem women and that of their European sisters. In the first place, the face of the Moslem woman is veiled when she appears in public. She lives a life of seclusion. The face of the European woman is exposed to view in public. The only restraints placed on her movements are those dictated by her own sense of propriety. In the second place, the East is polygamous, the West is monogamous.[22]

In both texts, the authors juxtapose the inferior status of women in Egypt to the elevated status of women in Europe, and boast of Europe's seemingly egalitarian gender dynamics. Similar to the goals of *The Liberation of Women*, Cromer focuses his criticisms specifically on the practices of veiling, seclusion, and polygamy. While it is appropriate to critique cultural or religious practices and debate the maintenance of certain traditions, there are various other issues that pertain to women's rights that neither Amin nor Cromer address, for example legal and political rights. This shows that the true intentions of colonial feminism are to superimpose Western gender and cultural norms onto the fabric of Egyptian society in order to exert authority over the population.

Despite the blatant imperialist efforts to erase Islam, Egyptian-ness, and culture from the colonized landscape, Cromer's text continually reminds the reader of his benevolence and his desire for Egypt to be governed for Egyptians. He goes so far as to suggest that he is "merely attempting to describe the state of things which the English found in existence when they took in the hand the rehabilitation of Egypt."[23] In this short passage, Cromer successfully neutralizes colonization: by using the word "rehabilitation," he presents himself and his colonial apparatus as helpful, which not only justifies British occupation, but also adds a layer of sympathy to the Englishmen who sought to improve the lives of poor, ignorant Egyptians. Additionally, Cromer self-consciously describes his writing as "merely attempting to describe" the state of affairs in

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[22] Ibid 155.
[23] Ibid 156-157.

Egypt, thus stripping his monumental two-volume work, as well as his role as ruler of Egypt, of all power dynamics and political agendas.

Cromer's text, *Modern Egypt*, is a prime example of Said's theory of Orientalism at work. Orientalists like Cromer seek to "know" the Orient in order to gain a mastery over its people and exert total control over its land. Said explains that

> knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental, and his world. In Cromer's and Balfour's language the Oriental is depicted as something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual). The point is that in each of these cases the Oriental is *contained* and *represented* by dominating frameworks.[24]

Therefore, nothing Cromer publishes about Egypt can be viewed as "merely" a description or a benign categorization. Everything Cromer writes about the Orient is steeped in condescension, denigration, and infantilization. He positions the West as the omnipotent authority over all things Eastern, and uses his knowledge to bring civilization and modernity to the backwards Orient. For example, in his justifications for colonization, Cromer manipulates the language of women's rights in order to transform Egyptian society into a Western patriarchal system that is set up to serve British interests.[25] To Cromer and upper-class elites who were economically allied with colonizers, women's rights, desires for autonomy, and position in Egyptian society did not matter so long as colonial subjects conformed to Western standards of dress, culture, and existence. Cromer does this by presenting the backwardness of the East and civilization of the West as the natural order. He shows that Egyptians should strive for civility, which can only happen through Western colonization. However, Said's framework allows for deeper analyses of seemingly neutral descriptors or "facts" about the Orient, and eviscerates all notions of benevolent colonization.

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[24] Said, *Orientalism,* 40.
[25] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 161.

While many of Egypt's elite members of society benefited from their proximity to the West and the British Empire, the vast majority of the nation suffered, as colonial forces interrupted social and economic developments from the precolonial era and redirected policies to serve British needs.[26] Egyptians saw their country being transformed by British colonial rulers, administrators, bureaucrats, and professionals whose sole purpose was to serve the metropole. These colonial impositions galvanized the rise of a counterforce, which used ideas of secular nationalism as the foundation for its anti-imperialist agenda.[27] As the nationalist movement evolved and its leaders began to formulate different visions for the future nation-state, the previous focus on the "woman question" inadvertently made gender a central issue in the state-building project and thrust women into the political sphere. During the first few decades of the twentieth century, the centrality of gender in the Egyptian national struggle would become even more apparent and women's own demands for reform would solidify.

Despite the widespread dissemination of *The Liberation of Women*, Amin's text has receded as a key text of the era as the works of contemporaneous Egyptian feminists have emerged. His analyses and proposed reforms are appropriately critiqued by authorities such as Ahmed and Abu Lughod, who correctly argue that his version of feminism confirmed British rationales for colonialism and helped to ingrain the Orientalist idea of Western superiority in Egyptian popular discourse. Nevertheless, *The Liberation of Women* incited fiery debate during the turn of the century, and has endured as a symbol of the increasingly visible Egyptian feminist movement. Moreover, the publication of Amin's text aligned with the explosion of the press in urban centers such as Alexandria and Cairo, which was a crucial factor in the text's popularity. The proliferation of newspapers and the emergence of an independent women's press helped to

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[26] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 12.
[27] Ibid.

facilitate this culture of debate and discourse, which enabled the modern feminist movement to flourish.

The political press first emerged in Egypt in the late 1870s, as the ruler of Egypt, Khedive Isma'il (r. 1863-1879), sought to stir anti-European opposition in the face of increased colonial control over domestic finances. Khedive Isma'il championed the construction of the Suez Canal in 1869 and enforced modernizing projects throughout the country; however, these projects plummeted the nation into debt and subsequent bankruptcy in 1876. As a result of these crises, Isma'il was deposed and Khedive Tawfiq, who was considered to be a British pawn, was empowered. The first three years of Tawfiq's rule were extremely unstable, as opposition to his government by the military, landowners, and liberal-constitutionalists grew.[28] The opposition was led by Colonel Ahmed Urabi, who articulated opposition to the British and French, as well as the Turco-Circassian elites within Egypt who dominated the army and government.

Urabi and his fellow Egyptian officers rallied behind the movement, which called for "Egypt for the Egyptians" and demanded equality in the military among all men, regardless of religion or ethnicity.[29] The officers put immense pressure on the Khedive, who was forced to concede to Urabi's demands. However, the British became increasingly alarmed by the Khedive's weakened position and intervened to crush the revolt and, in 1882, formally occupy the nation. While Tawfiq was kept in place to maintain a facade of Egyptian self-rule, British officers were installed in every position of government. With this, Lord Cromer had officially entrenched his colonial apparatus.

The Urabi revolt and subsequent British occupation caused social and political upheaval in Egypt. At the same time, the press proliferated among middle- and upper-class Egyptians,

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[28] Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History*, (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 127.
[29] Ibid 126.

which gave voice to emerging political, cultural, and nationalist movements.[30] Journals and newspapers became important modes for communication, and publishers experienced new freedoms as government censorship was lifted.[31] Women were also able to carve out space in the male-dominated press for the publication of their own journals, which explored new trends, provided forums to debate issues such as marriage and divorce, veiling and seclusion, and education and work.[32]

The growth of the women's press was enabled by improvements to education and literacy in the final decades of the nineteenth century. By the 1890s, the question of whether or not to educate girls and women was largely uncontroversial, and the Egyptian state, Muslim benevolent societies, and foreign missionaries had already begun establishing primary and secondary schools for girls.[33] In the wealthiest families, children were often home-schooled by European tutors. Despite claiming to bring women's rights to Egypt, British occupation actually led to a decline in women's education, whereas Muslim authorities supported it so long as gender segregation was maintained.[34] The expansion of education altered women's lives entirely. It introduced a newfound literary culture to a growing number of women, and created new opportunities for girls and women to leave the domain of the home and participate in public discourse, particularly through the newly founded private presses.

The first exclusively women's journal, *al-Fatah*, was established in Alexandria in 1892.[35] Soon after, other journals such as *al-Firdaus* and *Mir'at al-Hasna'* were published in Cairo.[36]

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[30] Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 14-15.
[31] Ibid 31.
[32] Ibid 2.
[33] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam,* 144
[34] Christina Civantos, "Reading and Writing the Turn-of-the-Century Egyptian Woman Intellectual: Nabawiyya Musa's Ta'rikhi Bi-Qalami," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2013): 7.
[35] Beth Baron, "Readers and the Women's Press in Egypt," *Poetics Today*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1994): 218.
[36] Ibid.

The presence of women's journalism in the years leading up to the twentieth century is indicative of the improvements made in education and literacy among the whole Egyptian populace. According to the census, eight percent of men and only 0.2 percent of Egyptian women were literate in 1897; by 1907 Egyptian female literacy rose by fifty percent, whereas male literacy only increased by 6.25 percent.[37] Over the next ten years, the number of literate Muslim women tripled. While the percentage of readers was still relatively small, the steady upward trend of women's literacy in the pre-war era was a positive sign, and indicated growing support for women's education. As literacy increased among middle- and upper-class urban women, a consciousness of the world outside of the home, and a world where the ability to read was increasingly important, began to emerge among certain groups of women.

While upper-class women participated in journalism and the literary trends of the time, Badran calls attention to the fact that the women's press was originally a middle-class phenomenon and was dominated by this class at each level of production and distribution.[38] Most of the journals published in the pre-World War I era were printed in Arabic— the language of the middle-class— which European-educated wealthy women could not read.[39] The evolution of the women's press also created an entirely new sector for women's occupation and provided an alternative to the traditional role of teaching.[40] The expansion of education and the advent of the women's press transformed Egyptian society. This new mode of communication and socialization fundamentally reordered many women's lives and helped to facilitate the rise of an Egyptian feminist consciousness.

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[37] Ibid 220.
[38] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 61.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid 62.

Elizabeth Cooper, an American traveler who spent time in Egypt pre-World War I, commented on the growing need for women's literacy in her book, *The Women of Egypt*. She argued for women's education because,

> as it is now, not being able to read, not knowing what is going on in the outside world, except as it filters through the gossip of servants and visitors equally as ignorant, the women and children live in a world apart… these conditions are bound to foster in the mind of Egyptian childhood the inferiority of womanhood, at the same time stultifying the youthful mind...[41]

Cooper's analysis and justification for women's education appears to be quite progressive. Rather than arguing that educated women will make more interesting wives, as Amin suggested, Cooper warns that the continued denial of education for girls will result in the internalization of misogynistic biases, which would harm the developing minds of the nation. In order to combat an environment where women's inferiority is accepted as fact, Cooper advocates for the expansion of girls' education throughout the nation. This expansion was already occurring at the time of Cooper's publication, and new opportunities for education fostered an environment among upper- and middle-class women where reading, or even just appearing to be well-read, became a desirable social characteristic.[42] Cooper observes that

> there are many magazines and papers, novels and books of every kind printed in Arabic… and now, when education for the woman has become such a fetish in Egypt, these popular educators are found in every home. If the mother cannot read them— and few of the women of the older day can read— the daughter and the grand-daughters can read to them the news of the world…[43]

This passage is indicative of the proliferation of a women's literary culture that facilitated new forms of socialization and collaboration among women of different generations and social classes. It became common for children to read aloud to adults, and for working people to read to other Egyptians in public. However, though greater access to education enabled girls and women

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[41] Elizabeth Cooper, *The Women of Egypt* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1914), 162.
[42] Baron, "Readers and the Women's Press in Egypt," 222.
[43] Cooper, *The Women of Egypt*, 241.

to read newspapers, books, and magazines, late nineteenth and early twentieth century women were still barred from public libraries, and had to rely on what was available to them at home in order to read.[44]

While many upper-class women had access to education through European tutors, even girls from elite backgrounds, such as Huda Sha'rawi, had to fight their families for permission to learn the necessary grammar and script to master the Arabic language. Sha'rawi was born in 1879 to a wealthy family in Upper Egypt, and was raised in Cairo after her father, Muhammad Sultan Pasha, passed away. Sha'rawi was arranged to be married to her cousin when she was twelve, but at fourteen separated from him and spent the next seven years furthering her education and traveling throughout Europe. These years were formative and introduced her to a life of independence, intellectualism, and adventure. Sha'rawi was a force in Egypt. She formed philanthropic societies, organized lectures for women, participated in the nationalist movement from 1919 to 1922, formed the Egyptian Feminist Union, and lead the feminist movement until her death in 1947.[45]

Sha'rawi's early experiences shaped her feminist ideologies, particularly surrounding education. Sha'rawi remembered the dejection that she felt as a child when she saw her brother advancing his studies, and hers remaining stagnant. She writes in her memoir that "I became depressed and began to neglect my studies, hating being a girl because it kept me from the education I sought. Later, being a female became a barrier between me and the freedom for which I yearned. The memory and anguish of this remain sharp to this day."[46] In order to bypass these gendered restrictions and further her education, Sha'rawi resorted to buying books in secret

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[44] Baron, "Readers and the Women's Press in Egypt," 223.

[45] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 33.

[46] Huda Shaarawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist 1879-1924*, trans. Margot Badran, (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1986), 18.

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as a child, even though she was strictly forbidden.[47] Sha'rawi's experience of differential treatment and exclusion pushed her to become adamant in her demands for education as she grew older and sought education outside of Egypt, and also influenced her feminist goals later in life.

Though girls' education was a relatively accepted idea, many advocates for the expansion of girl's education, including Qasim Amin, positioned the issue within a nationalist framework, and argued that women's education would benefit the welfare of the nation as a whole.[48] One particularly compelling justification was that girls represent "the mothers of tomorrow" and the only way they could raise an educated male population is if the state provided them with one.[49] Within this train of thought, education for girls was linked to the nation's drive to free itself from colonial domination, which could only be achieved through a strong male population. As such, nationalist discourse emerged as an inherently gendered project that relied on women's advancement in society as well as her reproductive capacity.

This new generation of women readers were empowered to establish their own independent publications. Through publications such as *al-Fatah, al-Firdaus, Anis al-Jalis* and *al-'A'ilah,* a significant number of women were able to insert their voices in public discourse, which subverted previous expectations of the submissive, silent, and secluded Egyptian woman.[50] While much of the women's press was not revolutionary in content, its presence in the public sphere was, and its widespread reach throughout urban centers indicates remarkable popularity. Baron explains that while certain reports from the late nineteenth century indicate relatively low subscription, such as *al-Hilal's* 20,000 subscribers, the number of newspaper

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[47] Ibid19.
[48] Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 125.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation* 16.

readers actually amounted to nearly 200,000, since one newspaper might be passed around a group of women, or read out loud in public to those unable to read.[51] This number alone is staggering, and is indicative of the fervor that women felt to know about the world, about the lives and experiences of other women, and to participate in shaping public discourse on their own terms.

While readership was high at the turn of the century, two major events occurred in 1906 which fueled anti-British sentiment and marked a turning point in women's participation in the press. These events also led to an increase of Muslim women's participation in journalism, which had been dominated by Christians during the earlier years of publication.[52] As Baron explains, the first incident, the 'Aqaba incident, occurred when the British attempted to claim territory in the Sinai Peninsula, which sparked conflict with the Ottoman Empire and increased the sense of urgency among nationalists to oust the British.[53] Next, British officers accidentally shot and killed an Egyptian woman, which led villagers to attack the officers. As a result, seven Egyptian men were sentenced to be hanged in an unfair trial.[54] These events highlighted the preeminence of British imperial interests and the reality that British lives were valued above Egyptian lives. People across the nation were increasingly resentful of the British, which further fueled nationalist sentiment and galvanized people to protest against British occupation.

The following year marked a turning point in women's activity in both the press and the political realm. After these two incidents, a variety of women's journals and organizations were established in Cairo that dealt explicitly with issues of nationalism and women's rights. Journalism in the 1910s took on a new dimension as women from various ethnic, religious, and

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[51] Baron, "Readers and the Women's Press in Egypt," 229.
[52] Ibid 218.
[53] Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt,* 27.
[54] Ibid 28.

cultural backgrounds began to establish independent journals to assert their political views.[55] For the first time in Egypt, a cluster of Muslim Egyptian women established journals that promoted women's rights through an Islamic framework. Despite certain religious tensions and other mundane disputes, the tone of the press was discernibly nationalist, particularly as the Ottoman Empire began to crumble in the years leading up to World War I.[56]

Baron explains that, while women were excluded from the political activities of the newly formed political parties, new women's journals emerged that reflected the growing nationalist identification that was present among Egyptians. The British began to feel threatened by the imminent anti-colonial revolution and began cracking down on political meetings and censoring the press, which lasted even after World War I had ended.[57] Women became more constricted as schools, journals, and women's associations were disbanded by the British.[58] The crackdown on women's activities was surprising and is indicative of the suffocating reality of living under colonial rule. As a result of these policies, greater numbers of women were drawn into political activism. Britain's repression of the press, social and intellectual activities, and education worked only to stoke nationalist sentiment, which would soon reach a tipping point.

Revolutionary Women and Nation

At the end of World War I, President Woodrow Wilson declared in his "Fourteen Points" proclamation that, in order to build a peaceful world, all colonial claims must be reevaluated, all questions of sovereignty must take into account the interests of the population, and colonized peoples must be given an equal say in shaping the terms of their independence.[59] Furthermore, in

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[55] Ibid 29.
[56] Ibid 33.
[57] Ibid 31-35.
[58] Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) 109.
[59] Woodrow Wilson, "President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points," Jan. 8, 1918.

response to the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, Wilson assured that nations under Turkish rule would be guaranteed "undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development."[60] Egyptians heard these points and believed that the age of imperialism would be replaced by a new era of peace, self-determination, and finally freedom from British rule.[61] However, Wilson made promises to colonized nations that he had no intention of keeping.

At the onset of World War I, the British declared Egypt a protectorate, and it soon became a major theater of war. Egyptian men, particularly peasants and farmers, were forced to provide labor and supplies to the British and were sent throughout the Middle East and Europe to fight alongside European soldiers. British troops flooded Cairo and Alexandria, exacerbating the shortage of goods and causing immense suffering among Egypt's working population.[62] As the war ended, Egyptians were hopeful that their contributions to the war, coupled with Wilson's message of self-determination, would lead to their liberation. However, the Allies refused to invite Egypt to the Paris peace talks, which crushed hopes of national sovereignty and fueled anti-colonial resentment. Sa'd Zaghlul, the vice president of the Egyptian Legislative Assembly, began a campaign to petition the British government to let Egypt send a delegation to the Paris Peace Talks to present his case for Egyptian national sovereignty. In retaliation, in March 1919, Zaghlul and his nationalist collaborators were arrested and deported to Malta.[63] The subsequent national uprising marked the beginning of Egypt's Revolution and a turning point in the nationalist movement.

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Rogan, *The Arabs*, 164.
[62] Ibid 145.
[63] Ibid 166.

The country's reaction to Zaghlul's exile was immediate and violent. People from different socioeconomic backgrounds organized demonstrations and attacks on British infrastructure throughout the country.[64] Sha'rawi's memoir indicates that this sudden explosion of nationalist activism brought men and women together, particularly husbands and wives who normally led separate lives. Sha'rawi's husband, who she had previously been separated from, became the leader of the Wafd in Zaghlul's absence. Sha'rawi recalls this period as a time of great collaboration between herself and her husband. He trusted her with crucial information and protest strategies so that she could "fill the vacuum" if he was imprisoned or exiled.[65] The beginning of the 1919 National Revolution was a dangerous time, as British soldiers and police lined every street, curfews were put in place, and martial law was declared.[66] These restrictions necessitated the mobilization of all forces, particularly the women's activist network, which was still inconspicuous to British authorities.

Egyptian women were ready for nationalist mobilization. Sha'rawi began to mobilize Cairo's women in increasingly organized and aggressive ways, thus marking their physical entrance into the nationalist political sphere. On March 16, 1919 approximately 300 women gathered in the streets to denounce the violence and repression of the British colonial regime and defend their nationalist leaders. This historic moment is remembered as the "Ladies Demonstrations," and is often looked to as the first act of feminist organizing in Egypt. While it was not the first display of feminism, it was certainly the most visible. Sha'rawi recalls the demonstrations in her memoir. She writes,

> on the morning of 16 March, I sent placards to the house of the wife of Ahmad Bey Abu Usbaa, bearing slogans in Arabic and French painted in white on a background of black— the colour of mourning. Some of the slogans read, 'Long Live the Supports of

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[64] Ibid.
[65] Shaarawi, *Harem Years*, 94; Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 75.
[66] Badran, *Feminist, Islam, and Nation*, 75.

Justice and Freedom,' others said 'Down with Oppressors and Tyrants' and 'Down with Occupation.'[67]

By brandishing banners written in Arabic and French, women signaled to both the Arab world and the West that Egypt was prepared to fight against European occupation and domination. Sha'rawi's memoir reveals the steadfast dedication that women had to the nationalist cause. Her recollections indicate that she was even willing to die in the fight against British colonization. When confronted with armed British troops, Sha'rawi asserts that

> I was determined [that] the demonstration should resume. When I advanced, a British soldier stepped toward me pointing his gun, but I made my way past him. As one of the women tried to pull me back, I shouted in a loud voice, 'let me die so Egypt shall have an Edith Cavell' (an English nurse shot and killed by the Germans during the First World War, who became an instant martyr) … I did not care if I suffered sunstroke— the blame would fall upon the tyrannical British authority— but we stood up to the heat and suffered no harm.[68]

Sha'rawi's open desire to become a martyr for the Egyptian nationalist movement is striking, but not entirely unrealistic— two days prior to the first women's demonstrations, Hamidah Khalil, an Egyptian woman, was shot by a British soldier, making her the first martyr of the women's nationalist movement.[69] British police officers were instructed to use as little force as possible in their counter-protest efforts due to the stigma of violence against "ladies." However, the protestors who were killed were often lower-class women, such as Khalil, who marched alongside male revolutionaries.[70] Their lives were valued less than the lives of wealthy women, who often marched in single-sex processions, and their disposability is what caused them to become martyrs for the nationalist cause.

Despite these dangers, Egyptians across gender and class lines continued their nationalist militancy throughout 1919. While the demonstrating women were not explicitly advocating for

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[67] Shaarawi, *Harem Years*, 91-92.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 75.
[70] Ibid 76.

women's rights and focused their activism on calls for independence rather than feminist advancement, the process of mobilization and public protest is itself a struggle against repressive gender norms and an expression of women's agency and political relevance. In the countryside, women cut railroad lines, raided British supplies, provided food to militants, and embarked on a nationalist education campaign by spreading pamphlets to teachers in Upper Egypt.[71] Young schoolgirls also participated in the struggle by distributing nationalist material in their schools and neighborhoods.[72] In cities, elite women who participated in the nationalist struggle used their status to present petitions to foreign consuls, appeal to the West, and protest the harsh treatment that they had received by the British.[73]

In a desperate plea, Sha'rawi wrote to a long-time friend who was married to William Brunyate, the British judicial and financial advisor to the Egyptian government.[74] In the letter she reminds Lady Brunyate of the British promise "to do service to the cause of justice and humanity, to protect the freedom of oppressed peoples and safeguard their rights. [She asks] would you kindly tell me if you remain convinced of this today? May I ask what you think when your government acords itself the right to impose martial law… and banish people from their own land…"[75] Sha'rawi attempts to appeal to her friend's morality by forcing her to examine the current unrest and injustice that was plaguing the nation. While it might have been unfair to expect Lady Brunyate to answer these questions, particularly because she was not responsible for her husband's actions on behalf of the colonial government, Sha'rawi's unwavering fight for justice and national liberation remain clear.

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[71] Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 46.
[72] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 77.
[73] Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 111.
[74] Shaarawi, *Harem Years*, 96.
[75] Ibid.

While the "Ladies Demonstrations" were not centered around feminist demands, the act of protest is indicative of an evolving feminist consciousness and confidence. These women entirely subverted the gender order. They stepped out in public without their husbands, commanded public attention and put themselves in danger for a political cause. While not explicitly using language of women's rights, many of their demands for national autonomy were presented through a gendered lens that deployed "kinship idioms" and demonstrated a unified Egyptian women's perspective.[76] Many activists conceptualized Egyptian women as a group that was connected through their status as mothers, sisters, and wives of men who suffered as a result of British imperialist interests. This gendered rhetoric gave legitimacy to the women protesters by emphasizing their relational ties to the nation, while not taking up too much space as overtly feminist actors. However, focusing on the role of women as "mothers of the nation," rather than as serious political agents or citizens, enabled the emerging Egyptian nation-state to maintain its paternalistic structure, thus subsuming calls for women's rights. This had consequences for women's rights activists as the nation-building process progressed.

The women's demonstrations of 1919 represented a pivotal moment in women's visibility. Their activism and disruption on behalf of the nationalist agenda established the foundation for impactful, organized feminist activity that emerged in the ensuing years. Within the first year of Egypt's anti-colonial struggle, women began to link issues of national self-determination with women's rights in order to further both revolutionary agendas. In 1920 Sha'rawi and many of the women active in the "Ladies Demonstrations" gathered in Cairo to form a political organization, the Wafdist Women's Central Committee (WWCC). Most of the members of this group were wealthy and politically connected, and sought to assert their voices

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[76] Baron, *Egypt as Woman,* 111.

in the construction of the new nationalist government.[77] By this time, Sha'rawi had established

herself as the leader of the Egyptian nationalist-feminist movement through her central role in

the 1919 demonstrations and was elected to be president of the committee.

The women of the WWCC quickly assumed crucial roles in the nationalist movement,

particularly as many of their male counterparts were jailed for their revolutionary actions. Badran

notes that the WWCC "maintained contact with Wafdist men, as well as with the British

authorities. They handled finances. They kept up morale. They supported workers' strikes,

organized boycotts, sold shares in Bank Misr, the new national bank, and collected money and

jewelry to finance the cause."[78] The Wafdist Women also established networks of women's

societies throughout the country to spread information and organize protests. These networks

broadened the WWCC's base and were crucial in helping to execute a mass economic boycott

against the British.[79] Women's involvement in the national decolonization struggle cannot be

reduced to "Ladies Demonstration." Wafdist Women were militant revolutionaries who

perpetrated massive disruption to the colonial establishment. They successfully filled a major

gap in leadership and sustained the revolution even in the absence of leading Wafdist men.

Without the mass mobilization and militancy of women throughout Egypt, the nationalist

movement would have died.

Discourse about the direction of women's rights had been happening in Egypt for over

four decades. By the mid-1920s, the idea of a feminist awakening was no longer used as a decoy

for British colonization or an elite Egyptian's rationale for the benefits of Westernization. Rather,

women who played crucial roles in the nationalist awakening began to envision the idea of their

own liberation, particularly as opportunities for political and intellectual expression grew with

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[77] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 80.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid 83-84.

the establishment of the Wafdist Women's Central Committee. Developments at the turn of the century created the conditions for new social arrangements which disrupted the status quo and gave women more freedom to exist in the public sphere. Furthermore, male nationalist leaders depended on women's organizations to sustain the mission of the revolution, which presented women with radical opportunities to assert leadership, authority, and autonomy, even under conditions of extreme restraint. The tone in the early years of the twentieth century depicted a country that was anxious and unsure of its future. By the 1920s, the tone had shifted to one of militancy and vigor as Egyptians throughout the nation sought to free themselves from the British Empire. Within this spirit, new ideas about women's role in a newly liberated, modern nation began to emerge, and women began to aspire for greater rights and freedoms as the nationalist movement reached its peak.

Chapter Two

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Egyptians throughout the country

began to develop a collective national political consciousness that was ardently anti-colonial.

This development coincided with extraordinary expansions in technology and communication,

which created an environment where mass mobilization was possible. The anti-colonial fervor

among the general public, coupled with arduous deliberations between the founders of the

liberal-nationalist Wafd party and the British colonial establishment culminated in a declaration

of Egypt's independence in February 1922.[80] However, the declaration was tremendously

disappointing to the nation's liberators; it was clear that Egypt's independence was more of a

symbolic gesture than true policy. Rather than granting full independence, the terms of the

agreement significantly limited Egypt's sovereignty and allowed Britain to maintain control of

vital aspects of Egyptian society.[81] Britain reserved the right to control four contested realms,

which included control of "the security of the communication of the British empire in Egypt; the

defense of Egypt against foreign aggression or interference; the protection of foreign interests

and the protection of minorities in Egypt; the Sudan and its status."[82] These four points

undermined the Wafd's vision of true independence and further entrenched Britain's economic

and military control of the nation.

To Zaghlul, the Wafd party, and the WWCC, this declaration was a "national

catastrophe," which merely substituted "'the word occupation for the word independence.'"[83]

Furthermore, the Wafd's failure to negotiate full independence from the British exacerbated

internal tensions among the political elite who grew increasingly dissatisfied with the Wafd's

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[80] Afaf Lufti Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's Liberal Experiment: 1922-1936* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1977), 61-63.
[81] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 85.
[82] Marsot, *Egypt's Liberal Experiment*, 63.
[83] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 85.

efforts.[84] However, despite conflict and disappointment, the formation of the Wafd party and the establishment of a constitutional committee set the stage for full independence in the future.[85] Additionally, Wafdist women continued to fight for justice, and demonstrated immense courage in the face of military occupation as they fought for the release of nationalist leaders and other imprisoned revolutionaries.

In March 1923, nationalist leader Sa'd Zaghlul was finally released from exile. After four years of sustained activism and anti-colonial resistance, the women of the WWCC emerged as politically seasoned, strategic actors with a profound sense of group-efficacy. Zaghlul's freedom was a huge victory for nationalists, particularly the women who were unwavering in the fight for justice for their men. Soon after, in April 1923, the Wafd, led by Zaghlul, promulgated Egypt's first constitution. The new constitution granted universal suffrage and promised equality among all Egyptians.[86] This was a momentous victory for the women who organized the 1919 Ladies Demonstrations and led the burgeoning feminist movement. However, three weeks after the promulgation, the Wafd passed a restrictive electoral law which stripped women of their hard-fought rights.[87] By disenfranchising women, the men in power firmly entrenched male hegemony into the new state and reinforced women's subordination. Despite their integral participation and the immense sacrifices that women made for the national cause, they were instantly cast aside as second-class citizens. This revealed the infuriating reality that the women who helped liberate the nation from foreign oppressors now had to fight against oppressive patriarchal practices at home.

Limitations of Liberalism

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[84] Marsot, *Egypt's Liberal Experiment,* 64.
[85] Ibid*,* 66.
[86] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 207.
[87] Ibid.

Middle Eastern historian Laura Bier provides a nuanced analysis which suggests that the exclusion of women from the political process was not simply a reactionary measure to suppress women's voices. The Wafd also disenfranchised unpropertied men, which indicates that the governing party sought to exclude all subaltern actors, not just women.[88] Instead of solely attributing women's exclusion to the patriarchal conservatism of politicians, Bier looks to the "set of modern constitutional ideals inherited during colonial rule [which] were gendered in such a way as to depend on a modern, reformed female presence in the home."[89] Even though women took on traditionally masculine roles during the nationalist movement, their purpose in the nation-building process was always framed through their reproductive capacity as mothers.

Women's advancement in society was contingent on their ability to use new skills such as literacy, to raise better, smarter nationalist children— which are almost always assumed to be male. Despite their political rejection, elite feminist women must also be held accountable for their own complicity in the construction of the paternalistic liberal-nationalist government and the gendered construction of the nationalist movement. Wealthy women who participated in the 1919 Demonstrations depicted themselves as "Mothers of the Nation," in order to give themselves "maternal authority" to speak on political issues.[90] Additionally, in letters and petitions, women sought to affirm their upper-class status by indicating that they were daughters of pashas and beys, which gave them socioeconomic legitimacy. Through their advocacy for Egyptian sovereignty, influential women like Sha'rawi promoted a nation-state framework, which inherently granted elite classes authority over subaltern populations. Within this system,

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[88] Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 32.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 111.

lower-class men's and women's voices and demands were either wholly excluded from the national agenda, or became political tools used to advance particular agendas.[91]

Despite presenting an egalitarian, unified portrait of the national liberation movement, neither the newly independent Egyptian state nor the developing feminist movement actively sought to transcend hierarchical class structures ingrained in Egyptian society. This is evident in Sha'rawi's approach to the 1919 Revolution, which did not account for the different socioeconomic situations of nationalist demonstrators. For example, during the height of the nationalist struggle, Nabawiyah Musa, a prominent feminist educator, activist, and intellectual, published a nationalist and feminist manifesto, *The Woman and Work*, where she argued that spreading education among girls and women was the most imperative and effective form of nationalist activism.

She countered the argument that education for women will lead to their moral decline by suggesting that proper, well-rounded education would enable women to guard their morality and public reputation.[92] She wrote "Reading has a good effect on morals and knowledge. The best schools are those that have teachers who work hard to develop a love of reading and intellectual curiosity in the minds of the young so that they will benefit from this when they grow up."[93] Musa argued that teachers needed to engage with students as intellectuals in order to prepare them for life outside of the classroom. Within this essay, Musa implied that fostering intellectual curiosity in girls and women would enable them to operate as self-sufficient and moral members of society, who are able to craft their own thoughts and opinions about public life.

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[91] Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood*, 33.
[92] Nabawiya Musa, "The Effect of Books and Novels on Morals," in *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, ed. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 257.
[93] Ibid 260.

Musa's work was revolutionary. She also took a different approach to nationalist activism than Sha'rawi and upper-class demonstrators. Coming from a middle-class background, Musa and many other working women understood that engaging in militant nationalism would risk their employment in state offices such as the Ministry of Education.[94] Losing her job and the ability to educate women would be detrimental to the nationalist cause, as well as her personal livelihood. Though Musa came to this decision on her own, her situation is indicative of the limitations and tensions within Sha'rawi's nationalist campaign, which did not create room for different socioeconomic backgrounds and needs.

Even so, Huda Sha'rawi and her contemporaries must be recognized for their success in both liberating their nation and establishing a cohesive feminist coalition. Women's visibility in public and political space was still a new and radical concept, and they were exceedingly brave in their activism. Women from all classes unsettled traditional gender roles, were instrumental to the success of the nationalist movement, and inherently challenged European-imposed, neocolonial ideas about women's place in Egyptian society. These accomplishments exist concomitantly with the failures and limitations of the movement to include non-elite populations in nationalist and feminist advocacy.

The rejection of upper- and middle- class feminist leaders by their male peers galvanized Sha'rawi, her lifelong friend and mentee, Saiza Nabarawi, and a handful of other upper-class women to form *al-Ittihad al-nisa'i al-misri*, the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), which is credited as Egypt's first independent feminist organization.[95] In the immediate aftermath of the Wafd's decision to disenfranchise women, the WWCC and the newly formed EFU protested the opening of parliament, and Sha'rawi directly challenged Prime Minister Zaghlul by writing an

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[94] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 78.
[95] Marilyn Booth, "'May Her Likes Be Multiplied': 'Famous Women' Biography and Gendered Prescription in Egypt, 1892-1935," Vol. 22, No. 4 (1997), 830; Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood,* 32.

open letter calling for his resignation.[96] Even though Sha'rawi and Zaghlul started out as allies in the feminist-nationalist movement, the Wafd's betrayal ended their relationship, and necessitated Sha'rawi's resignation from the WWCC.

Feminist historian Margot Badran notes that Sha'rawi and many other Wafdist women held more radical nationalist ideologies than their male counterparts, and were less willing to compromise with the British.[97] However, the Wafd did not want to be challenged by women, and only wanted the WWCC "to function as a rubber stamp."[98] The Wafd essentially crushed any opportunity for women to successfully engage in the political sphere, which pushed women's nationalist and feminist activism into private life. As a result, Sha'rawi dedicated the rest of her life to activism within the framework of the Egyptian Feminist Movement. Her memoir reveals her thoughts and frustrations from this challenging time. She writes

> In moments of danger, when women emerge by their side, men utter no protest. Yet women's great acts and endless sacrifice do not change men's views of women. Through their arrogance, men refuse to see the capabilities of women. Faced with contradiction, they prefer to raise women above the ordinary human plane instead of placing them on a level equal to their own. Men have signaled out women of outstanding merit and put them on a pedestal to avoid recognizing the capabilities of all women. Women have felt this in their souls. Their dignity and self-esteem have been deeply touched. Women reflected on how they might elevate their status and worth in the eyes of men. They decided that the path lay in participating with men in public affairs. When they saw the way blocked, women rose up to demand their liberation, claiming their social, economic, and political rights. Their leap forward was greeted with ridicule and blame, but did not weaken their will. Their resolve led to a struggle that would have ended in war, if men had not come to acknowledge the rights of women.[99]

Sha'rawi displays a consistent dedication to justice and equality throughout the nationalist movement. Even when she was faced with opposition and setbacks, she never accepted defeat, particularly by the hands of the Egyptian male establishment. While her activist ideology was

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[96] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 87.
[97] Ibid 88.
[98] Badran 87.
[99] Shaarawi, *Harem Years*, 109-110.

previously articulated strictly through nationalist and anti-colonial sentiment, by the mid-1920s, her thinking evolved to frame her activism in terms of her own rights as a woman, which could not be separated from the improvement of the nation.

After the formation of the Wafd and the empowerment of male nationalist leaders, Sha'rawi and other feminists began to critique certain internal hierarchies and inequities that had been institutionalized in the 1923 constitution. These shifts facilitated the development of a new tradition of independent feminist organizing and the beginning of a visible feminist movement. Within the framework of justice for all Egyptians, the EFU positioned itself as a movement that transcended class and fought for all women in Egypt. However, the eleven founding members were all from wealthy landowning families in Cairo, and many members of the EFU were comfortably situated among the Western-educated upper-class. These women were the last generation of women who were raised with the tradition of harem culture and embodied the vision of the modern Egyptian woman that Western-centric reformers like Qasim Amin sought to create. While the EFU sought to achieve women's rights for all Egyptians, their reforms often reflected their elite status and revealed biases against women of the lower-classes. These tensions become especially apparent as the EFU's priorities developed and its members focused on inclusion in the global feminist movement rather than solely focusing on the advancement of women's rights at home.

Navigating the International Women's Movement: Eastern versus Western feminism

It is commonly accepted that Sha'rawi established the EFU in response to the Wafd's refusal to grant women the right to vote. However, others suggest that she was incentivized by the invitation to attend the 1923 International Women's Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) conference in Rome.[100] The IWSA held conferences for member nations in a different city each year. The

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[100] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 176.

conferences presented an opportunity for suffragettes and feminists from around the world to gather and exchange ideas, strategies, and bond over common goals. Though Egyptian feminism was part of the larger nationalist project, leaders of the EFU felt that there was potential for "mutually beneficial activism" and cross-cultural solidarity.[101] Therefore, when leaders of the IWSA extended an invitation, Sha'rawi was eager to attend. While both motivations may have been true, the dichotomy of local versus Western motivations for the formation of the EFU is indicative of the confusion and differing opinions about the motivations for feminist movements throughout the colonized world. Analyzing these complex and often contradictory relationships between feminism, nationalism, and anti-colonialism complicates normative assumptions about feminist movements that exist outside of the West, which are too often flattened as either "native" or "Western."

In the late nineteenth century, European imperialists weaponized the language and goals of feminism in order to justify colonial domination. They did so by condemning the oppressive and degrading practices carried out by "Other" men in "Other" places, and labeled the cultures and religions of colonized peoples as inherently backwards.[102] At the same time, local elites such as Qasim Amin began to use women as a vehicle to propose social and cultural changes to lead Egypt into his perception of modernity. Ahmed explains that these ideas of reforming gender, culture, and class were imported into Egypt by the colonizing society and were blended with the ongoing debates over modernity, Westernization, and cultural authenticity. Upper-class men and women became increasingly exposed to European ideas through education, travel, and proximity to the colonial rulers, and began to reproduce the values of "colonial feminism."[103]

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[101] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 72.
[102] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 243; Said, *Orientalism*, 40.
[103] Ahmed, Women and Gender in Islam, 149.

What emerged in Egypt as a "native" feminist movement cannot be disentangled from the imposition of Western ideas into bourgeois society. However, the internalization of Western supremacy and the embrace of feminism was not monolithic, and certain groups, such as Islamists, often condemned feminism as Western.[104] Abu-Lughod aptly explains that since the late nineteenth century when reformers and nationalists began to question women's status and role in society, tensions emerged between those who centered women's liberation as the key to national independence, and those who viewed feminist reforms as colonial impositions.[105] While there was a popular feminist movement and consciousness that erupted in the 1920s, it would be reductive to label it as "pure" or authentic Egyptian feminism or, conversely, as following an imported European model. As Bier suggests, historians must go beyond the binaries of "complicity and resistance, patriarchy and feminism, the traditional and the modern, which do not allow for nuanced understandings of the tensions between local, national and transnational forces" that influence the construction of the idealized Egyptian woman.[106]

Therefore, Sha'rawi's relationship with the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, a Western-centric feminist organization, must be analyzed and complicated. The IWSA was established in 1904 by women's rights advocates from eight countries: The United States, England, Australia, Norway, Holland, Germany, Denmark and Sweden.[107] The establishment of the Alliance occurred concomitantly with the meeting of the International Council of Women in Berlin, which provided an opportunity for its mission to spread and membership to grow. Other than South Africa, every country that joined the IAW in the first ten years was typically associated with the "West"— Europe and the United States— although the women representing

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[104] Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women*, 243.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood*, 11.
[107] Regine Deutsch, *The International Woman Suffrage Alliance: Its History from 1904 to 1929* (London: Stephen Austin and Sons, 1929), 13.

South Africa were associated with the Apartheid government. In an effort to attract women from the "East,"

> The President of the IWSA, Mrs. Chapman Catt, with Dr. Aletta Jacobs, President of the Dutch Women's Movement, had undertaken a voyage round the world in order to become acquainted with the condition and status of women in Asia and Africa. The results of this tour were memorable. We heard for the first time of woman's awakening in the East… it was touching to think of these women, who all lacked the simplest rights, seeking for help through union with the Association whose members were aiming at the highest freedom.[108]

This statement, written in the official history of the IWSA from 1904-1929, exemplifies the Oriental myths and dripping condescension that infiltrate the Alliances' rhetoric and perception of women (and the men who oppress them) of the "East."[109] The author deliberately notes that oppressed women see the IWSA as a beacon of hope in their fight for fundamental rights. It is implied through this rhetoric that the way to achieve those coveted rights is to adopt the practices of the members of the Association who have the ability to aspire to "the highest freedom." This rhetoric reflects the views among upper-class reformers in Egypt who looked to the West as a model for women's liberation.

The urge to emulate aspects of Western culture in the pursuit of women's liberation manifested in discourse around the veil, which had been a subject of debate since *The Liberation of Women*. The conflict of whether women should or should not veil appeared frequently in *Jus Suffragii*, the IWSA's publication. In an update on the status of women in Persia (1928),

> the Persian newspapers anticipate that at the forthcoming session of the Mejliss (Parliament) resolutions will be passed officially emancipating Persian women. The movement for emancipation has already been making steady progress in Persia as in Turkey. Enlightened men in the capital are against retaining the veil any longer, and regard it as contrary to the best interests of morality.[110]

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[108] Ibid 18.
[109] Professor Lipman inspired me to use the phrase "dripping condescension," which he commented in one of his edits on this draft.
[110] "Persia," *Jus Suffragii: The International Woman Suffrage News*, Vol. 23, No. 8, Nov. 1928, 27.

It seems unlikely that one law resulted in the "emancipation" of seemingly all Persian women. In this excerpt it is unclear if the resolution passed in the Majlis addressed anything other than the practice of veiling and is silent on the principal matter, enfranchisement. The intention of this section of *Jus Suffragii* is to keep members up to date on the advances of women throughout the world. While the readers can ascertain that Persian women, grouped with Turkish women, were making progress, this sparse blurb reveals little about the efforts of these women in the struggle for equal rights and suffrage. There is an apparent imbalance in the level of detail, as well as the physical space that reports from the East are afforded in the publication. While an update on the British suffrage movement might span two full pages, news reports from Egypt, Iran, Turkey, and other "Oriental" countries are only a few lines, despite intense feminist mobilization within those nations.

The July 1923 publication of *Jus Suffragii* reflected on the Ninth Congress of the IWSA, which was held in Rome from May 12-19, 1923. In an article titled "How Rome Welcomed the Great Congress," the writer, L. DE Alberti, boasted that representatives from forty-three countries, including "China, Japan, India, Palestine, Egypt, Newfoundland, New Zealand, North and South America, and from most of the countries of Europe" had gathered in Rome, and that "every creed, every race, every class and every profession [was] represented at the Congress."[111] Another point of pride at the conference was the perceived universality of the global women's movement.

The extensive reach of the IWSA and its ability to forge a transnational community of feminist leaders is remarkable. The monthly publication of *Jus Suffragii* and the organization of the annual conferences in different cities each year is indicative of the intense commitment women had to sustaining these relationships. While this is important in the history of

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[111] "How Rome Welcomed the Great Congress," *Jus Suffragii*, Vol. 17, No. 8, July 1923, 146.

international women's movements, the claim of universality and the badge of multiculturalism and cross-class solidarity only goes so far when many of the represented nations were actively colonizing their fellow members' countries. This unspoken reality further complicates Sha'rawi's relationship with the IWSA and problematizes the existence of international women's solidarity in the context of imperialism.

These contradictions also exist alongside certain concrete actions that were influenced by Egypt's interactions with Western women. In 1923, Sha'rawi, Musa, and Saiza Nabarawi represented the Egyptian Feminist Union at the Rome conference and made the first public declaration of its mission to the international community.[112] Nabarawi, who came from an upper-class background, was a founding member of the EFU, the editor of *L'Egyptienne*, the EFU's publication, and Sha'rawi's lifelong friend. Historian Margot Badran provides some of the most comprehensive information on Sha'rawi and her speech given at the conference, which is found only in Nabarawi's private records. Badran explains that "... Egyptian women were calling for a restoration of their lost rights. They were reclaiming their own heritage (*turath*). This was a national enterprise, not an imitative one looking to the West. With these assertions Sha'rawi sent a signal both to Western feminists and to Egyptian patriarchalists."[113] Sha'rawi's entrance onto the world stage was bold. Her statements threatened both Western imperialism as well as Egyptian sexism, and indicate her serious commitment to women's equality. Sha'rawi also alluded to the "restoration" of women's lost rights from an earlier, more equal time in Egypt, which gave the feminist movement historical legitimacy and authority.

After many Western nations granted women the right to vote, the IWSA expanded its prerogatives and changed its name to the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and

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[112] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 91.
[113] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 91.

Equal Citizenship (henceforth IAW), which indicated its commitment to the full inclusion of women in a nation.[114] At the same time, Egypt officially entered the IAW as a member nation. The IAW's publication, *Jus Suffragii* published a blurb in 1925 introducing members to the EFU and its official newspaper, *L'Egyptienne*. The excerpt read:

> Take this opportunity of welcoming a new women's paper, L'Egyptienne, founded by Mme. Hoda Charaoui and edited my Mlle. Ceza Nararaoui, both of whom were delegates to the Rome Congress… its aims are given as: (1) To co-ordinate the intellectual activities of Egytian women and to put them in touch with those of other countries in the cause of justice and humanity; (2) to serve as the organ of the claims of women of Egypt and elsewhere, and so to give force to the international women's movement… the programme of the *L'Union Feministe Egyptienne* as published is in three parts: *Political*, concerned with national independence of Egypt; *social*, dealing with questions of general social interest, such as education, prostitution, etc.; *feminist*, dealing with various aspects of equality between the sexes.[115]

Sha'rawi and other Egyptian feminist voices thus became one of the few members representing women's issues in the "East." The dual goal of national independence and the incorporation of Egypt into the "international women's movement" highlights a recurring tension in the formative years of this movement. The goals and ideologies of the international feminist movement were defined by Western feminists who decided on suffrage as the utmost goal for women's liberation. This mission, along with claims of universality and sameness among all women, ignores the implications of imperialism and colonialism, which often hindered colonized women's ability to achieve suffrage. Even more so, European colonial agendas were inherently in direct conflict with the goals of national liberation set forth by the EFU and other colonized nations. Despite these glaring contradictions, feminists of the 1920s sought to fit international feminist solidarity into their nationalist-feminist agenda, and hoped to form relationships with likeminded women along the way.

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[114] Ibid 92.
[115] "This Month's Miscellany," *Jus Suffragii*, Vol. 19, No.7, April 1925, 100.

Just as Qasim Amin called for unveiling in 1899, on arrival in Egypt after the IAW conference in Rome, Sha'rawi and Nabarawi dramatically stepped out of their train and removed their veils before a large crowd of women who gathered to greet them.[116] This act marked the completion of a twenty year debate over the practice of veiling, and, to some, indicated a new era in women's rights, which spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa.[117] For example, in 1928 Nazira Zain al-Din, a Lebanese woman, published "Unveiling and Veiling: on the Liberation of the Woman and Social Renewal in the Islamic World," which perpetuated tropes of "advanced" Western nations and practices versus "ignorance" and "stagnation" in veiled nations.[118] Ruth Frances Woodsmall, an overseas official for the Young Women's Christian Association, wrote *Moslem Women Enter a New World* in 1936. In this sweeping survey of the status of women throughout the "Moslem" world, she explains that

> Modern Egypt— that is, Cairo and Alexandria— is so entirely Europeanized that the trend away from the veil has come in the natural course of events and has required no special agitation. Madame Sharawi Pasha… unveiled in 1923, giving prestige to the whole movement… Other Egyptian women of the higher class followed her example and since then the number of unveiled women has steadily grown.[119]

Woodsmall's analysis of "Modern Egypt" is quite limited, and is indicative of the notion among Western feminists who viewed unveiling, and by extension women's rights, as products of Westernization.

Woodsmall also indicates that modernity has only reached Cairo and Alexandria, thus rendering anywhere outside of the urban centers as backward. While contradictions and tensions emerged between colonial and anti-colonial feminist agendas, one critique that can be consistently applied to Sha'rawi, the IAW, and the EFU is the elitism embedded in early feminist

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[116] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 92.
[117] Ibid 93.
[118] Nazira Zain al-Din, "Unveiling and Veiling: on the Liberation of Woman and Social Renewal in the Islamic World, 1928," in *Opening the Gates*, 273.
[119] Ruth Frances Woodsmall, *Moslem Women Enter a New World* (New York: Round Table Press, 1936), 53.

movements. This is evident in the rhetoric in Woodsmall's text, Amin's book, as well as the

upper-class membership of the IAW and EFU. While Woodsmall's text seeks to present a factual

account of societal changes occurring in Muslim-majority countries, she cannot escape

Orientalist tropes and classist biases that permeate Western conceptions of women's rights.

Nurturing the Nation

While unveiling came to represent feminist advancement in Egypt, it was not the EFU's

primary goal. The Union had various social and political demands, including improving and

expanding women and girls' education, achieving female suffrage, and reforming the personal

status codes which dictated laws regarding polygamy and divorce.[120] Additionally, the removal of

the veil was part of a large project to increase women's visibility and allow women to find their

own purpose in society outside of the harem. Because women were excluded from the official

governing bodies that could pass laws to advance the EFU's agenda, many upper- and

middle-class women affiliated with the EFU became pioneers in the establishment of

independent, secular social service, and philanthropic associations.[121]

For example, in 1925, Sha'rawi helped to form the Club of the Women's Union, a

cultural center for upper-class women, and in the early 1930s, the EFU moved into a large

headquarters building known as "The House of the Woman" in the center of Cairo.[122] These

establishments were huge reminders of the increasing autonomy and agency that Egyptian

women exercised. The Union also used funds to support "two monthly journals (in French and

Arabic), a clinic and dispensary for poor women and children, craft workshops for poor girls, and

childcare facilities for working mothers."[123] These projects enabled women to take on new

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[120] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation,* 95
[121] Ibid 48.
[122] Shaarawi, *Harem Years*, 110-111.
[123] Ibid 113.

responsibilities, jobs, and identities outside of the home, and helped to advance reforms for the betterment of society. In line with the EFU's mission, these reforms took on a particularly gendered and class-based association and were often aimed at improving the conditions of women and girls in poor parts of Cairo.

While benevolent societies and women's charities were materially helpful and well intentioned, the marginalization of social services to politically disenfranchised women is indicative of the paternalistic structure of the state, and, according to Bier, the complicity of elite women in perpetuating the paternal political order.[124] Bier writes, "As male nationalist elite turned their attention to what would become a continuous struggle with the palace and with the British residency for power and control and the more "masculine" tasks of state-building, the task of "nurturing the nation" was claimed by elite Egyptian women."[125] Similar to the kinship-centered rhetoric of the 1919 Ladies Demonstrations, Sha'rawi's model of activism and inclusion in the nation revolved around creating mothers and wives who could raise men that would serve the modern nation.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the EFU concentrated its efforts on providing social services to poorer women, and by 1926 had largely abandoned the goal of political inclusion and citizenship for all women.[126] Political scientist Mervat Hatem explains that the EFU and the WWCC distributed a pamphlet that indicated a shift in feminist ideology and activism. From the perspective of upper-class women, it seemed more beneficial to address the "social and public standards" of women, rather than begin with demands for political rights.[127] The rationale behind this switch is underlined by the fact that women were "the caretakers of the next generation of

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[124] Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood*, 32.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Mervat Hatem, "The Pitfalls of the Nationalist Discourses on Citizenship in Egypt." In *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, ed. Suad Joseph, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 42.
[127] Ibid.

men and women" whether or not they were members of parliament or voting citizens.[128] These

suggestions seem antithetical to the EFU's proposed goals of gender equality and suffrage.

Furthermore, they represent an incrementalist approach to women's activism that makes poor

women both the objects of charity and social support, and also the targets of social reform.

Upper-class women operated under the assumption that the acceptance of lower-class women

into the new nation and into modernity was predicated on their potential to be reformed.[129]

Even after reforming women so they would be accepted into respectable society, the

leaders of the Egyptian feminist movement continued to embrace "maternal conceptions of

citizenship," so that women were only seen as political subjects through their reproductive and

domestic capabilities, which could enable the formation of the modern nation-state.[130]

Upper-class women who were active in the EFU during the mid- to late-1920s accepted these

claims, and supported paternal discourse that classified women as "not yet worthy" of full

membership in the nation.[131] Furthermore, the EFU embraced and confirmed the discursive

perception of women's future rights, which were predicated on their conformity to domesticity

and normative education.

Egyptian political life in the 1920s underwent huge transformations that affected the lives

of Egyptians throughout the nation. The nationalist leaders achieved their goals of independence

and were able to form a nationalist government and promulgate a liberal-nationalist constitution.

However, these victories were overshadowed by the British Empire's refusal to grant Egypt full

independence, and the Wafd's decision to disenfranchise women. The 1923 election law

disrespected women who were dedicated to nationalist activity throughout the independence

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[128] Ibid.
[129] Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood,* 33
[130] Ibid 31-34.
[131] Hatem, "Pitfalls of Nationalist Discourse," 44.

struggle. Men in power reasserted male hegemony into the new state, and quickly placed newly

politicized and empowered women back into positions of subordination. The exclusion of

women from political institutions acted as a catalyst for the formation of independent women's

organizations, and lead to the formation of the Egyptian Feminist Union. Women were able to set

the terms of their feminist activism, and chose various channels to actualize goals of women's

advancement in society.

However, it became apparent that, due to men's rhetoric and women's framing of political

rights, women's advancement in Egyptian society was contingent on their ability to raise strong

national subjects. This framing created an environment where upper-class women of the EFU

saw themselves as vital reformers who could bring the most backwards women into modernity

through gendered reforms. While women's initiatives, charities, and reforms gave certain women

newfound autonomy, they also allowed class bias and hierarchy to become further entrenched

into this brand of feminism, causing tensions to emerge. Furthermore, the EFU's choice to

become active in the international women's movement created other challenges, as Egyptian

feminists contended with the contradictions of colonial versus anti-colonial feminism. These

tensions continue into the 1930s and 40s, and work to shape the future of the feminist movement.

Egyptians who came of age soon after the 1919 Revolution witnessed an exceptionally dynamic period in Egyptian history. They lived through the militant nationalist movement and were politicized in an era of extreme turbulence, as the nation fought for full independence from the British and promulgated its first constitution. During this period, women emerged as political actors and became increasingly visible in society, particularly as nationalist militants. Huda Sharawi, Saiza Nabarawi, and other upper-class women rose to prominence in Egypt's urban centers as leaders of the burgeoning nationalist-feminist movement. As the feminist movement's priorities evolved and the independent Egyptian Feminist Union was formed, Egyptian feminist leaders also sought to be incorporated into the broader international women's movement via the International Alliance of Women.

The EFU's rise to prominence can be interpreted in several ways. Sha'rawi was extremely privileged within Egypt, and her wealth enabled her to be in close proximity to the West for much of her life. She was educated and socialized amongst Europeans, and was more comfortable speaking French than Arabic. This is demonstrated through her memoirs, which were dictated to her secretary, Abd al-Hamid Fahmi Mursi, and translated into English by Margot Badran.[132] Her status allowed her to enter the international women's movement and pass as an insider, which would have been impossible had she been from a lower-class. While she was still seen as an "Easterner" and was subject to condescension by her European and American counterparts due to her status as an "Oriental." However, Sharawi was able to assimilate, at least partially, into respectable European culture and be accepted by feminists from Europe and the United States. Ahmed notes that the dominant voice of feminism during this period aligned itself with the "Westernizing, secularizing tendencies" of European society, which greatly influenced

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[132] Shaarawi, *Harem Years,* xxii-xiii; Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam,* 178.

Sha'rawi's worldview.[133] Despite her nationalist pride, Sha'rawi's feminism was not rooted in local tradition or Islamic values, but often looked to the "civilized nations" for ideological inspiration and affirmation.

Sha'rawi's dramatic unveiling upon return from the IAW's Rome Conference in 1923 marked a shift in Egyptian feminist discourse and visibility, and her choice to unveil became permanently attributed to time spent in Europe. Despite these perceptions, Sha'rawi was not an agent of the West. She was a fervent Egyptian nationalist and was deeply invested in local politics, and later aligned herself with pan-Arab women's movements and the struggle for Palestinian liberation. Sha'rawi's feminism was full of contradictions: she was, at times, aligned with certain colonial interests and ideologies, while also advocating for women's liberation within an independent, anti-colonial Egypt.[134]

While colonial and anti-colonial feminist ideologies are in conflict with one another, they were not mutually exclusive. Middle Eastern historian Margot Badran presents a fantastic analysis of these complex dynamics. She explains that "looking for an essential 'cultural purity' underlying such debates over feminism is futile. Cultures are constructed; they are fluid and thus continually in the process of construction and reconstruction."[135] Sha'rawi— in her powerful role as the voice of Egyptian feminism and a participant in the international feminist movement— cannot be forced into a binary category, but must be analyzed through a holistic lens that incorporates critiques of imperialism, modernity, Orientalism, and power.

In June 1935, at the IAW's Twelfth Congress in Istanbul, four new feminist organizations were admitted into the movement: The Union of Patriotic Women in Persia, the Union Féministe Arabe of Syria, the Union Féministe Arabe Palestinienne, and the All-India Women's

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[133] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 174.
[134] Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women,* 15; Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 31.
[135] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 32.

Conference. M. I. Corbett Ashby, the delegate from London and president of the International

Alliance of Women, noted in her reflections on the conference that these new additions would

"immensely strengthen our connections with the East."[136] Ashby explained that Sha'rawi and

Mrs. Hussain, the delegate from India, facilitated a session during the conference that

demonstrated the cooperation between the East and West, which "was to show how much we

have in common both in problems and in the opposition to be met."[137] This session intended to

show the commonalities and shared goals of women, despite geographic, cultural, or racial

differences. The IAW appeared to be intentional in their goal to facilitate and strengthen

intragroup solidarity, particularly in light of the increase in "Eastern" membership.

However, this approach was deeply flawed. By using hollow rhetoric to show sameness

between white women and women of color, the IAW inadvertently revealed the assumptions and

biases at the core of the Western-oriented organization. The group held the preconceived

conception that, due to immutable characteristics, Western and Eastern women were

diametrically opposed and in need of unification. While trying to relate to one another through

shared struggles was a positive step towards solidarity, the narrative of sameness flattened the

systemic inequalities within the organization. It allowed the Western women to continue to avoid

confronting their personal and national roles in colonialism and imperial violence, and further

reinforced an Orientalist view of the world— one divided along and defined by the reductive

East versus West binary.[138]

However, the rise of feminist activism in Egypt in the 1920s did not occur in a vacuum,

and Egypt's prominence in the international feminist movement cannot be solely attributed to

Sharawi's proximity to the West. Egypt's feminist movement coincided with the explosion of

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[136] "Twelfth Congress: Istanbul," *Jus Suffragii*, Vol. 29, No. 9, June 1935, 85.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Said, *Orientalism*, 34

suffrage movements, women's rights organizations, and increased participation of women in the workforce across the globe. In that regard, Egypt's feminist movement was within the mainstream, and shared similar goals as European and American activists, which included expanding women's political and legal rights, and access to education. The official history of the organization's activity from 1904-1929 explains that, despite American and British women winning the right to vote, "The Association [still] has a far-reaching purpose before it if it is to help the women of all countries to the attainment of full civil equality. Its second aim is to secure for these women further equality as to occupations and education as in family life."[139] Leadership of the IAW posited the organization as a support for all women in the global fight for gender equality. The passage indicates that, though American and British women had won the right to vote, there was still a great deal of work to be done. The differentiation between American and British women and all other women indicated that the movement's primary goals had been met, but the organization was still committed to the struggle for full equality for "these women," who were implicitly classified as Other or "less than" the two superpowers.

However, Sha'rawi shared these values with the IAW and sought to expand women's opportunities to enter a workforce that was open to and safe for working women. Her memoir indicates that in the 1930s, feminists focused their attention on securing work for women in new textile factories and retail shops, as well as in the expanding health and legal professions.[140] When young women working in pastry shops in Cairo felt exploited, Sha'rawi herself pressured the Labor Office to hire a woman inspector to investigate the working conditions.[141] In these situations, the EFU demonstrated a powerful sense of unity and collective responsibility to protect the lives and rights of working women. Sha'rawi seemed to be in tune with the struggles

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[139] Deutsch, *The International Woman Suffrage Alliance,* 26.
[140] Shaarawi, Harem Years, 113.
[141] Ibid 114.

of working class and professional women, and she even made efforts to expand the movement's base into rural areas. These efforts show a shift away from the sole focus on upper-class issues such as ending harem culture. Furthermore, the request for a women inspector shows significant progress as well. This seemingly mundane request indicates that women were rising in state jobs and other bureaucratic roles, and also that feminists forged a consciousness that was explicitly aware of discrimination against women and internal biases that men held.

At the same time, the model of mainstream, interwar-era feminism employed by the IAW and Sha'rawi created numerous silences and tensions within Egyptian society. Sha'rawi claimed to speak for and represent all Egyptian women, which often did not resonate with society's most marginalized people, particularly as Egypt's political and financial challenges escalated during the 1930s. Mohja Kahf, renowned poet, scholar and activist, writes an excellent article that delves into Sha'rawi's memoirs and illuminates the significance of her ascent to leader of the Egyptian feminist movement. Kahf also complicates Sha'rawi's legacy by using a class-based critique to elucidate the tensions and omissions in her memoir, which adds nuance to contemporary understandings of the movement and its leaders. Kahf uses *Mudhakkirat,* Sha'rawi's untranslated Arabic memoir, as the base of her analysis. This thesis relies on Margot Badran's *Harem Years*, which is an abridged translation of the same work and excludes certain important sections. Kahf demonstrates how Sha'rawi's Arabic diction reveals unspoken feelings of classism, and foreshadows the limitations of her feminist activism.

Kahf explains that Sha'rawi's "use of words shows her early assumption that the experience of very small category of women who are ladies, women of the "great families," represents the condition of "woman" (*mar'a*) in general, and prepares for her later tendency to speak on behalf of the Egyptian "*mar'a.*"" Sha'rawi's distinction between respectable,

upper-class "ladies" and average "women" shows the internalized elitism that marred her social and political outlook. She constructed a rhetorical division that separated herself from lower-class women, which reveals her inability (or unwillingness) to relate or identify with the average Egyptian woman. Her prejudices, no matter how implicit, severely limited her ability to form a cohesive feminist coalition that encompassed the voices and needs of Egyptians from every social class. These limitations became increasingly relevant in the 1930s as Egypt entered into a politically charged period that forced society to grapple with socioeconomic, political, and religious divisions.

Middle-Class Visibility and Women's Work

Despite recognizing Egypt as an independent sovereign nation in 1924, Britain continued to burden Egyptians with military occupation, capitulations that benefited only the most affluent classes, and interference in internal politics.[142] People involved in the nationalist struggle began to realize that Britain had no intention of loosening its chokehold, and that the promise of Egyptian independence was nothing more than "sop thrown to them to keep them quiet."[143] As the 1930s approached, Egypt was launched into a period of political and social instability, as tensions escalated between the monarch, the British, and the Wafd.[144] The Wafd Party failed again to negotiate full independence with Great Britain, resulting in the installation of the authoritarian Sidqi Pasha as head of government in 1930.[145] Sidqi Pasha abrogated the liberal-nationalist 1923 constitution, cracked down on political organizations and the press, and embraced authoritarianism as a means of maintaining power.[146] This period of intense government repression catalyzed *al-jil al-jadid*, the new generation of political actors and the

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[142] Marsot, *Egypt's Liberal Experiment*, 69.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood,* 34; Marsot, *Egypt's Liberal Experiment,* 65.
[145] Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood*, 34; Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation* 210.
[146] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation* 210.

expanding middle-class to challenge the authoritarian and elitist nature of the government and form opposition groups that better represented the needs of a young, politically active, bourgeois class. [147]

Members of the emerging middle- and professional-class in the 1930s and 1940s were often referred to as *effendi*, a term that represented both a social grouping and a label for people who displayed certain kinds of dress or mannerisms.[148] In her article "Egyptianizing Modernity through the 'New Effendiya,'" Lucie Ryzova explains that it is difficult to formulate one concise definition of this phenomena, as the definition and perception of *effendi* or *effendiya* (plural) shifted throughout the first half of the twentieth century. At times the term *effendi* was used as an honorific to describe members of the upper-class, particularly those who became national liberators, and in other moments it was used as a derogatory term to describe the urban poor.[149] Because of these shifts, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly who constituted the middle-class, and what the identifier *effendi* truly meant.

However, Ryzova's article posits that it is more productive to view the *effendiya* as symbolic of new modes of socialization and political identity that emerged in the 1930s. She suggests that, in the abstract, *effendi* is linked to modernity, and is exemplified in the rise of mass politics, in the transformation of social and cultural practices and values, and a shift in conceptions of national belonging, in which the "subaltern subject" becomes a modern citizen.[150] At the turn of the twentieth century, the *effendiya* were the men who fought for national liberation and created the image of the independent Egyptian self. These men were the power brokers during the interwar era and many became statesmen or were granted elite titles of pasha

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[147] Lucie Ryzova, "Egyptianizing Modernity through the 'New Effendiya,'" in *Re-Envisioning Egypt 1919-1952*, ed. Arthur Goldschmidt and Amy Johnson, (Cairo Scholarship Online, 2012), 13.
[148] Ibid 2.
[149] Ibid
[150] Ibid 3.

or bey.[151] The "new *effendiya*" describes the next generation of radicals and revolutionaries who sought to disassemble the structures created by their liberal predecessors throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

Despite witnessing transformations in politics, gender, and class and seeing previously disparate groups join together during the decolonization struggle, this politicized, hopeful generation also experienced great disillusionment in the structures of liberal-nationalist government. The Wafd was perceived to be elitist, often ineffective, and paternalistic, and Egyptians were frustrated by its repeated failure to win full independence from Britain.[152] There were also significant economic developments during the 1930s that led to the disaffection of the professional middle-class: the massive income brought in by the cash-crop economy came to a halt as the global cotton market collapsed, and Egypt was plunged into a recession. As a result, the price of living increased while wages and employment rates plummeted.[153] Bier explains that the social, political, and economic unrest of the 1930s established a need for social welfare programs, and the state began to take responsibility for improving the conditions for its most impoverished populations.[154] These efforts were situated among hopes to modernize the "backward" members of society with the aim of strengthening the nation.

Similar to the rhetoric employed by the nationalist government in the previous decade, women became objects of this reform. Reforms coming out of the newly formed Ministry of Public Health focused on the rehabilitation of impoverished Egyptian families and aimed to instill "the principles, practices, and dispositions of domestic order and sanitation— how to keep a clean home, how to prepare healthy, nutritious food, how to inculcate an ethic of personal

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[151] Ibid 19.
[152] Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 145.
[153] Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood,* 35.
[154] Ibid 36.

hygiene in their children, and so on."[155] While nutrition and hygiene were certainly important matters of public health, the states' focus on "domestic order" as one of the crucial areas of reform is indicative of the government's growing desire to control and regulate "women's" domains such as the home and the family. In addition, the state began to debate the merits of a national birth control program in order to reduce fertility rates and increase standards of living.[156]

Despite debates about women's bodies and practices occurring in the public realm, the discourse excluded women, particularly poor and rural women, from having any voice in the projects that were meant to improve their lives. This followed a long-standing trend of top-down policies that failed to consult or consider the needs of the people the state sought to reform. The reform projects of the 1930s saw motherhood as the perfect vehicle for the nation's physical, mental, and aesthetic improvement. The reforms were not about women's empowerment, let alone giving women a choice in the way they led their lives. The state hoped that these improvements would finally bring modernity to the lower-class and saw women as the best tools to further those goals.

Because many women in the 1930s felt excluded from the states' newly operationalized reforms, the Egyptian Feminist Union began to accelerate the pace of their social welfare programs. In 1932, the EFU opened its first headquarters building, which was built and funded solely through fundraising efforts and private donations. This new building permanently etched the EFU onto Cairo's landscape, and provided expanded opportunities for programs, activities, and mutual aid. The "House of the Woman" became a centralized meeting place for feminists from all generations and all over Egypt, and helped facilitate the EFU's revival in the 1930s. During this time membership grew, middle-class women became increasingly visible in civil

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[155] Ibid 37.
[156] Ibid 38.

society, and feminist activism began to actualize important social changes. The movement

matured past consciousness raising efforts, and focused on more concrete goals. Feminists fought

for labor protections and paid work for women, as well as the matriculation of more and more

women in institutions of higher education.[157]

Education became a primary avenue for feminist activism during the pre-World War II

period. Doria Shafik, a middle-class Muslim woman who emerged as a feminist leader in the

1940s, aggressively sought higher education in the 1930s. Shafik placed second in the nation on

her secondary school exams, which inspired her to seek further education in France.[158] Faced

with financial troubles, Shafik was inspired to write to her feminist inspiration, Huda Sha'rawi,

with the hopes of gaining a scholarship. Sha'rawi was touched by Shafik's letter and invited

Shafik to stay with her in Cairo.[159] Shafik recalls that Sha'rawi

> spoke to me about the causes which led her towards the path of feminism. She told me
> about the unhappiness she had experienced within the harem when a newly-married
> thirteen-year-old girl and almost a prisoner in her own home. For the first time I realized
> that this lady, although rich, beautiful, having everything, had suffered. I also realized
> that there had to be other values beyond the material ones. Liberty was the profound goal
> of her 'feminism.' I left her place with an exalted sense of calm, convinced that nothing
> really worthwhile can be accomplished without suffering. She was an example of how the
> will of a woman can overcome the law. An example which would forever remain in my
> memory and my heart.[160]

This meeting was life changing for Shafik, and marked the beginning of a long relationship

between the two women. Shafik obtained the scholarship from Sha'rawi, which enabled her to

begin her studies in Europe in 1930. She also began to formulate her own feminist consciousness

and visibility within Egypt, and Sha'rawi often invited Shafik to events as her "protegee."[161]

Even with Sha'rawi's help, Shafik faced significant challenges throughout her years in

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[157] Ibid 40.
[158] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 154.
[159] Cynthia Nelson, *Doria Shafik Egypian Feminist: A Woman Apart*, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2015), 29.
[160] Ibid 30.
[161] Ibid 33.

university; the director of the program doubted her abilities, the Egyptian government created obstacles for her to obtain visas, and she was constantly under financial strain.[162] Shafik's tireless pursuit of education demonstrated that, though educational opportunities were increasingly available, women still had to fight for entry in elite institutions.

Similarly, while the public generally supported work for women, women's advances in the workforce also inculcated growing fears about women's role in society, particularly with regards to their capability as mothers. In the early 1930s, the repressive Sidqi government railed against women's education and forbade students from expressing political views or protesting at universities.[163] The regime viewed the intermixing of genders in Egyptian society as a moral crisis and sought to end co-education. Luckily, the Sidqi regime fell in 1933, but anxieties about gender mixing remained in the background throughout the 1930s and became enmeshed with a growing conservatism among the lower- and middle-classes. In this atmosphere, notions of respectability and the desire to control women and their bodies became increasingly prevalent in political discourse and provided new avenues for emerging political groups to enter the mainstream.[164]

During the economic depression in the early half of the 1930s, many lower-class women entered the workforce in order to feed their families. Tensions emerged as "old-world" conservatives mounted campaigns against women's employment. Conservative men in Egypt argued that because the depression caused men to lose their jobs, women should not swoop in and steal jobs that would have otherwise gone to men.[165] These conflicts were not unique to Egypt— the debate over women's work became a central question worldwide, particularly as

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[162] Ibid 50.
[163] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 160.
[164] Ibid 163.
[165] Ibid 170.

nations began to feel the impact of the Great Depression. As a result, IAW and the broader

international feminist movement intensified their activism and strengthened solidarity efforts to

support working women throughout the world. At the Berlin Conference in June 1929, the IAW

adopted a resolution on the basis of economic rights. The resolution declared that

> The Congress, realising that economic necessities and the desire and right of women to work and to secure for themselves the means of life, has made them important and irreplaceable factors in production, demands: that all avenues of work should be open to women and that education for professions and trades should be available for women on the same terms as men; that all professions and posts in the public service should be open to men and women, with equal opportunities for advancement; that women should receive the same pay as men for the same work; that the right to work of all women be recognised and no obstacles placed in the way of married women who desire to work.[166]

The IAW recognized the growing need for legislative safeguards to protect women from

gender-based discrimination in the workplace and ensure equal treatment. This resolution

articulated the issue of equal pay and also affirmed that women were vital parts of the workforce

and the public sphere. The IAW's stance did not compromise its position of full equality for

women, which was strikingly progressive for this era.

While this resolution was highly meaningful, it highlights a fatal flaw in the International

Alliance of Women: a resolution published in *Jus Suffragii* does little to change the material

reality in nations throughout the world. Feminists in Egypt could only enact change by going

through local channels, which was why the EFU was so crucial at this time. Furthermore, as

Badran articulates, Egyptian women were facing different challenges than women in the United

States or Europe. Egyptians in 1929 were still experiencing economic exploitation and the

crippling effects of imperialism imposed by Western nations. While facially positive, resolutions

like these revealed the unspoken contradictions of Egypt's participation in the movement and

ignored the "ills imposed by imperialism on women, their families, and their nations."[167]

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[166] "Berlin Congress: Resolutions Adopted," *Jus Suffragii*: *Congress Supplement*, June-July 1929, 152.
[167] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation,* 171.

Six years later, the IAW was still discussing the issue of women's work. In a report from the Twelfth Congress held in Turkey in 1935, Swedish delegate Ingebord Walin wrote a short column on the "Position of Married Women in the Open Labour Market," which explained the state of salaries, unemployment benefits, and work opportunities in various nations. Walin included a passage explaining the "Basis of Attacks" that feminists received in their pursuit of workplace equality. She wrote, "among reasons other than unemployment, that have been advanced against women's right to paid work, the principal one is, of course, 'women's place is in the home.' Also 'women are temperamentally and physically unsuitable for certain work,' and 'not capable of holding responsible positions.'"[168] Walin mockingly explained the political stance of many men and anti-feminist women who opposed women's rights in the workplace. Badran confirms the prevalence of these antiquated views by explaining that when Egyptian feminists pressured male progressives to take a stance on women's work, men "revealed their allegiance to the patriarchal culture" by stating that the best work for women was in the home.[169]

There was a fundamental conflict between ingrained male conservatism and the shifting dynamics of an evolving, cosmopolitan Egypt, which became particularly apparent during a time of economic hardship when women's work was not just a desire, but a need. In the years leading up to World War II, these rifts became increasingly prevalent, particularly within the religious establishment. Bier draws a connection between trends in Iran and Egypt in the late 1930s. She explains that in Iran the state abolished the chador (veil), which marked a moment in which feminism was linked with the states' secular modernizing project.[170] In Egypt, Bier suggests that the women's liberation project took on a similar political meaning during the interwar era, in

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[168] "Basis of Attacks" in *Proof Of Reports Submitted To The 12th Congress Of The International Alliance Of Women For Suffrage And Equal Citizenship*, in *Women's Suffrage Pamphlets*, 389
[169] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation,* 171.
[170] Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood*, 41.

which feminism (as the state understood it) became associated with secularism and modernity, thus the appropriate path forward.[171] The tensions between religious and secular leadership, coupled with the growing rejection of Wafdist liberalism, created an environment where new political organizations crystallized, and leaders sought new ways to solve society's problems.[172]

Radical Feminists and Anti-Liberal Agendas

Many members of the "new *effendiya*" grew disillusioned with the Wafd, which was seen as corrupt and too willing to appease the British. As a result, groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Young Egypt, and various leftist groups emerged and sought alternate channels for political organizing. Despite the ideological dissimilarity between these groups, they all were united in their rejection of Wafdist-style governing. Furthermore, new political organizations that emerged were influenced by the political and social dynamics in Egypt, as well as international crises, such as the 1929 Depression and the growth of fascism in pre-World War II Europe.[173] The movements that gained popularity in the pre-war era set the tone for political dynamics after the war, which were highly charged, as nationalists, Islamists, communists, and conservatives engaged in protests, disruption, and subversive political discourse.

During the nation-building process in the early 1900s, secular nationalists institutionalized the "woman question" and maternal conceptions of citizenship in pursuit of modernity and self-rule. Secular nationalists saw feminist transformations as a way to end backwardness and prove to the West that Egypt was capable of progress. Islamic modernist movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, also viewed gender relations as a central site for negotiating the nation's understanding of modernity and authenticity, but situated their thinking

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[171] Ibid.

[172] Selma Botman, *The Rise of Egyptian Communism, 1939-1970* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988), XV

[173] Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood*, 34.

through a radically different lens.[174] The Muslim Brotherhood sought to return to an authentic

Islam and Egypt, which rejected Western influences such as secularism and feminism. To the two

groups, feminism was seen either as a corrupting mimicry of European thought, or as an

Egyptian adaptation of a transnational progressive ideology.[175] However, though their ideologies

clashed, both secular liberals and Islamists posited themselves as anti-imperialist and

anti-British, and in both cases, gender politics assumed a crucial role in the effort to define

Egyptian modernity in the 1930s and 1940s.

Though overshadowed by its political activity, the Muslim Brotherhood primarily acted

as a Muslim benevolent society, and dedicated its efforts to providing aid to lower class members

of society. The Brotherhood established schools, mosques, and factories, and sought to address

the needs of the communities that were neglected by the state.[176] During this time, the Egyptian

communist movement also experienced a revival, particularly during World War II. The

movement sought to address Egypt's crippling poverty, counter the rise in fascism, destabilize

the throne, and rid the nation of British occupation. Though the communist movement was

relegated to the outskirts of politics and was technically illegal, it gained traction, particularly

among the student populations. As with other groups, the communist leadership was

overwhelmingly male; however, there was a large faction of women who were active in the

underground leftist movement and dedicated themselves to Marxist ideology and activism.

Bier credits women such as Amina Sa'id, Latifa al-Zayyat, Doria Shafik, Suhayr

Qalamawi, Zaynab al-Ghazali, Inge Aflatun, and Fatma Ni'mat Rashid for invigorating the

revolutionary leftist movement in post-World War II Egypt.[177] These women were primarily from

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[174] Ibid 42.
[175] Bier 41; Walter Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 83.
[176] Botman, *The Rise of Egyptian Communism,* XVI.
[177] Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood*, 45.

middle-class, *effendiya* families, and represented a new brand of feminist activism that departed

from the upper-class model of the interwar period and sought to rearticulate the "woman

question." Inge Aflatun, a well-known activist, artist, and feminist, became politicized during her

studies at the Lycée Française, where she was involved in campus activism, and developed a

political ideology that embraced Marxism, feminism, and anti-imperialism.[178] Aflatun's book, *We*

Egyptian Women, is representative of the increasingly radical and militant tone that the feminist

movement assumed in the 1940s. She wrote

> to deprive woman of her civil rights constitutes not only an injustice toward her, but also
> a harmful obstacle in the path of the development and evolution of the people, a lacuna in
> the country's democratic process. Now let us listen to the wailings of the enemies of
> woman who deceive the public with their lies. From their ivory tower, these gentlemen
> claim that woman should not enjoy the same political rights as man, because this would
> lead to her degeneration… for the nth time let us tell these gentlemen that woman,
> whether they like it or not, has participated effectively in political life in most countries
> of the world.[179]

Aflatun wrote this scathing passage in 1949, during a time of fierce debate between the male

political establishment and the other half of the Egyptian population who were frustrated and

exhausted by the decades-long struggle for political representation in their nation. Aflatun boldly

called out the government's lies and broken promises, and did not moderate herself to appeal to

the politics of respectability that expected women to be pleasant when asking for political rights.

Aflatun's rhetoric reveals her own ideology, which is militantly feminist and also centers

critiques of class and power.

It is apparent that there were radical leftist women with their own political ideologies and

agendas during this period. However, the men of the communist movement and radical leftist

movements often overshadowed women's contributions. While communist men theoretically

supported women's liberation and the feminist agenda, they also cowed members of the

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[178] Badran, Feminists, Islam, and Nation, 152.
[179] Ingi Aflatun, "We Egyptian Women" in *Opening the Gates*, 348.

movement to put women's issues aside until the struggle against British colonization and internal ruling elites was won.[180] Despite women's tremendous sacrifices, including risking arrest, the male leadership continuously refused to cooperate with feminists, and ignored demands for equal treatment. The unwillingness of communist men to cooperate forced Marxist women to form groups outside of the traditional male-centric communist movement. Communist-feminist women sought space to pursue a radical political platform that considered the intersections of class, gender, and national identity.

New women's groups worked to politicize Egyptian women by spreading Marxism and framing societal issues through leftist lenses. They did so by engaging with women in universities who were "most naturally predisposed" to radical feminist ideas.[181] Due to ideological differences, Egyptian communist-feminists could not operate through existing women's channels like the EFU. Instead, in 1944, they formed the League of Women Students and Graduates from the University and Egyptian Institutes.[182] The presence of this group in Egypt was groundbreaking, and the political positions they took were shocking to those in the mainstream. In a pamphlet published by the organization, quoted in Selma Botman's piece on Egyptian communist women, the League sought to "struggle for the widest freedoms, struggle for liberation from oppression, hunger and aggression… struggle to realize democratic freedom which cannot arrive under the shadow of the imperialist and imperialism nor under the shadow of enslavement and exploitation."[183] Women in this organization articulated a radically anti-imperialist, anti-oppressive stance that rejected all forms of oppression and challenged each level of the ruling elite.

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[180] Botman, "The Experience of Women in the Egyptian Feminist Movement, 1939-1954," *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1988), 121.
[181] Ibid 123.
[182] Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood*, 48.
[183] Botman, "The Experience of Women in the Egyptian Feminist Movement, 1939-1954," 123.

While the League of Women Students was silenced in 1946 by the reinstated Sidqi government, the spirit of communist-feminist agitation inspired other women to form political groups that challenged the political establishment and coupled demands for women's rights with demands for broader social reforms. In 1944 Fatma Ni'mat Rashid founded the subversive National Women's Party, which was the first feminist group to advocate for birth control and abortion.[184] In 1948 Doria Shafik founded Bint al-Nil, which rose to become the largest and most influential of the women's leftist groups. Shafik's organization campaigned for women's suffrage and equal political rights, and emphasized the need for health and social services, literacy, and job creation for poor women.[185] Shafik's political presence lasted into the 1970s, and she was able to maintain a revolutionary feminist tenor during increasingly repressive times. These new feminist organizations rejected the antiquated positions on gender that emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century. This new generation of radical women worked to reimagine the Egyptian feminist agenda and adopted new positions that were rights-based, firmly anti-imperialist, and more representative of the needs of the working classes.

During this time, many feminists also shifted their focus away from the western-centric feminism that the International Alliance of Women practiced, and moved towards increasingly visible anti-fascist, anti-imperialist, and pan-Arab feminist movements. The Egyptian Feminist Union played a key role in the outreach and institutionalization of pan-Arab feminism. While there was already discourse that recognized Egypt within a system of other majority-Muslim nations in the region, the development of a strong Arab feminist ideology emerged primarily out of solidarity for Palestinian nationalism.[186] Because the Egyptian feminist movement was the

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[184] Selma Botman, *Engendering Citizenship in Egypt: History and Society of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 42.
[185] Ibid 43.
[186] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation,* 223.

largest, most visible, and most militant nationalist feminist movement in the region, the EFU was best situated to lead the effort to consolidate a pan-Arab feminist platform, which centered around the defense of Palestine. Badran explains that in June 1936, the EFU held an emergency meeting to respond to the needs of the Arab Women's Committee of Palestine. At the meeting the EFU drafted a resolution that condemned the 1917 Balfour Declaration, appealed to the League of Nations to support Palestinian women's demands to end Jewish immigration, and planned a financial campaign to send aid to Arabs in Palestine.[187] As the Palestinian crisis escalated throughout the 1930s, Arab women took their demands to international peace and governing bodies, as well as international feminist communities. However, the League of Nations and the International Alliance of Women did not cooperate with Arab feminists, so many women created their own forums and bodies through which to operate.

Huda Sha'rawi was still president of the EFU at this time and took a leading role in this struggle: she was in direct communication with British authorities, the League of Nations, and women's associations in Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. She facilitated the Eastern Women's Conference for the Defense of Palestine in Cairo in October 1938, and promised both Western and Eastern women that the conference was going to convene to "examine the painful conditions that have afflicted Palestine" in order to "spread harmony among peoples in our countries and to struggle by all legitimate means to prevent war."[188] Despite promises of peace, when Sha'rawi attended her last IAW conference in July 1939, the atmosphere was hostile and divided.

Attendance was low due to the imminent war and fascist crackdowns throughout Europe; however, the mood was tense as divisions around the Palestinian crisis between Arab feminists and European feminists became more acute. According to Badran, after leaving the congress

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[187] Ibid 225.
[188] Ibid 228.

frustrated, Saiza Nabarawi reported in *L'Egyptienne* that "by [the IAW's] refusal to interest themselves in Eastern problems they have proven that their magnificent program addresses itself only to certain peoples of the West, alone deigned to enjoy liberty… There are flagrant contradictions between theory and practice which we pointed out many times in the course of the congress session that rendered the task of the Egyptian delegation particularly difficult."[189] Sha'rawi even contemplated resigning from the International Alliance of Women as a result of Western women's lack of empathy or urgency to address the injustices in Palestine. However, after decades of collaboration with the organization, the Egyptian delegation finally recognized the racism and Eurocentrism baked into the structure of the IAW and expressed great disillusionment in the group's ability to actualize positive change for women of the Orient.

In Cairo in 1944, the Arab Feminist Conference met to collectively articulate a pan-Arab feminist ideology and political platform. A diverse range of women from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Jordan gathered to draft resolutions that addressed political, social, and economic goals that centered around gender equality.[190] Sha'rawi and the Egyptian Feminist Union hosted this monumental gathering. During the opening remarks, Sha'rawi stressed that

> The Arab woman who is equal to the man in duties and obligations will not accept, in the twentieth century, the distinctions between the sexes that the advanced countries have done away with… the advanced nations have recognised that the man and the woman are to each other like the brain and heart are to the body; if the balance between these two organs is upset the system of the whole body will be upset. Likewise, if the balance between the two sexes in the nation is upset it will disintegrate and collapse.[191]

Sha'rawi was forceful in her conviction that women deserve equal rights to men, and that there were no fundamental differences between the abilities of men and women. Furthermore, she reinforced the link between gender and nation that had been articulated in Egyptian feminist

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[189] Ibid 235.
[190] Huda Shaarawi, "Pan-Arab Feminism," in *Opening the Gates,* 337.
[191] Ibid 338.

rhetoric throughout the century. Sha'rawi argued here that the nation can only function as a healthy system if men and women work in cooperation with one another. However, despite the emphasis on gender equality, Sha'rawi still relied on a feminist ideology that affirms Western supremacy. Even at a conference organized by and for Arab feminists— feminists of the Orient— the leader of the movement denigrates Arab nations and juxtaposes them to the "civilized" and "advanced" nations that have achieved true gender equality. While Sha'rawi and the EFU were central to the formation of Arab feminist coalitions, they remained stuck in colonial framings of gender instilled decades prior.

<center>Conclusion</center>

   The social and economic trauma of the post-World War II era fundamentally altered

Egyptian society. The crushing defeat of Arab forces and the establishment of the state of Israel

in 1948, the unstable and often corrupt relationship between the British, the Parliament, and the

throne, and the increased civil unrest caused social tensions from the previous decade to reach a

breaking point.[192] Egyptian society experienced a wave of mass politics that had never been seen

before. The environment of radical political change influenced men and women throughout the

nation to pursue agendas that would fulfill their political demands. During this period women's

organizations focused heavily on the issue of suffrage and staged huge public demonstrations,

including storming parliament and going on hunger strikes, to put pressure on the government.[193]

As they waged these public campaigns against the government, radical women remained

committed to a feminist ideology that was ardently nationalist and anti-imperialist.

   On July 23, 1952, a group of junior military officers led by a young colonel, Gamal

Abdel Nasser, staged a coup, seized control of the government, and forced the king to abdicate.

The "Free Officers Movement" ended a dynasty that had lasted for 150 years, and marked the

beginning of Egypt's transition from "a monarchy purportedly based on liberal-democratic

principles to a republic."[194] The Free Officers were committed to national liberation and social

reform, and sought to finally build Egypt as a sovereign, anti-Western stronghold in the region

and the world. Soon after the coup, Nasser consolidated power, which included banning

independent political organizations.

   The Egyptian Feminist Union was subsumed into the state, and prominent feminists were

persecuted for speaking out against the state. The environment grew increasingly repressive

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[192] Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood,* 44.
[193] Ibid 49.
[194] Ibid 50.

throughout the decade: in 1959, Doria Shafik was put under house arrest, and Inge Aflatun was imprisoned for her communist activism.[195] Alongside these oppressive conditions, Nasser also implemented a slew of left-leaning and socialist policies, that were pursued under the guise of national liberation. As the state became stronger, the independent feminist movement began to disappear, and in 1956 the Egyptian Feminist Union ceased to exist.[196] Nasser introduced what political scientist Mervat Hatem calls "state feminism," which describes the absorption of independent women's organizations into the state apparatus, and the promotion of "women's rights" through guaranteed employment and education.[197] Additionally, women were recognized for the first time as national subjects and citizens. However, because of Nasser's grip on the nation, these rights were conditional on women's participation as cooperative workers and citizens whose efforts were essential to the maintenance of the nation.[198] Women who refused to conform, such as Shafik and Aflatun, were punished severely and stripped of their rights.

These contradictions epitomize the reality of Egyptian feminist activity during the first half of the twentieth-century. Each gain was coupled with a tension, whether it be from internal political pressures, or external assumptions of what Egyptian feminism should look like. This thesis uses a multifaceted, intersectional approach to critique the limitations of different feminist frameworks. Each chapter addresses the various power dynamics at work, particularly the uneasy relationships between upper- and lower-class feminists, and Eastern and Western feminists.

Throughout this study it has become apparent that, at all levels of feminist organizing, Egyptian women sought to link their political and social advancements to the advancement of a strong, independent Egyptian nation-state. While feminists actively resisted European

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[195] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 249.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Mevat Hatem, "Economic and Political Liberation in Egypt and the Demise of State Feminism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* Vol. 24, No. 2 (1992), 232.
[198] Bier, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 59.

colonization, the relationship Eastern feminists had with the West remained complicated and often presented ambiguous and contradictory visions for feminist and national liberation.

During Nasser's presidency, a new form of transnational solidarity emerged: one that sought partnerships with other nations in the Third World, rather than defining international solidarity by Eastern countries' cooperation with the West. During the 1950s and 1960s, Nasser rose as a hero among colonized and formerly colonized peoples. His position on the world stage was further strengthened by his participation in the Bandung Conference and Egypt's leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement, which rejected a bipolar world split between the United States and the Soviet Union. As authors such as Vijay Prashad have demonstrated, the Bandung Spirit of Third World solidarity marked a turning point in geopolitics, as nations that had experienced occupation, exploitation, and violence reimagined their place in the world and sought radical decolonization projects.[199]

While Third World and Afro-Asian Solidarity fall outside the scope of this thesis, the formation of anti-imperial transnational coalitions invigorated the subdued Egyptian feminist movement. The environment following the Bandung conference provided colonized women with a new realm of feminist activism— a realm in which they were able to rearticulate the terms of international feminism to work in tandem with the global decolonization movement. Conferences held in Cairo in 1957 and 1961 established platforms advocating equal political, economic, and social rights for men and women.[200] Despite the radically different political environments, the "woman question" looked quite similar in 1960 as it did in 1919. In both periods, feminists sought to reconfigure the nation in their interests, and visions for justice reached beyond personal and family structures, and were couched within the struggle for national liberation.

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[199] Vijay Prashad, The *Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 31
[200] Vijay Prashad, The *Darker Nations,* 59.

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