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Published by Ahfad University for Women, P. O. Box 167 Omdurman, Sudan
Tel: (+249-187) 554870/553363 Fax (249-187) 579111
Website <www.ahfad.org> E. Mail: ahfadjournal@yahoo.com
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- المجلة: الأحفاد
- المجلة: المرأة والرغبة
- المجلة: المنحى

هذه المجلة تصدرها جامعة الأحفاد للبنات، ص. ب. 126 أمدرمان - السودان
- الهاتف: 0556236236 (87-188)
- لينك البريد الإلكتروني: ahfadjournal@yahoo.com
- الموقع الإلكتروني: www.ahfad.org
"Gendered Resistance, Feminist Veiling, Islamic Feminism"

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مقاومة النوع والتهجين الأنثوي والأثرية الإسلامية
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Prelude

The strand of feminism that assumes a universality of womanhood, often expressed in activists' phraseology by terms such as 'global sisterhood', has been irreversibly challenged by anthropology on systematic ethnographic and theoretical grounds (see Moore 1988: 7; 10-11; 186-195). Moore convincingly demonstrated that "[A]nthropology is in a position to provide a critique of feminism based on the deconstruction of the category 'woman'" (11). Moore goes on to say that cross-cultural data demonstrate a Western bias in much mainstream feminist theorizing. She describes how black feminists, for example, regarded the focus of 'women as women' in politics and writing which assumes a necessary unity and solidarity among all women "privileges one particular discourse about women or 'womanhood' over others" (190). This assumption and privileging have been also critiqued by Arab and Muslim feminists.

Despite the evidence against the "universality claim", some advocates of universality and a few feminist scholars continue to adopt it, overlooking the obvious and significant fact that feminism itself is grounded in culture and that feminists from any society or any particular cultural tradition hold and internalize premises and assumptions stemming out of their culture that shape their orientation to feminist issues. It is contended here that any feminist model, paradigm or framework is largely informed by the frame's culture (or even subculture). The American-based feminist agenda is assumed to speak to issues of concern by, in the case of our
focus here, Arab and Muslim women just as it does to issues of some American women. By accepting this assumption the notion which was already convincingly refuted - that of 'the universal woman' - is propagated further as a legitimate notion. In addition to the convincing anthropological challenges to the efficacy of this notion, some feminists are perhaps unaware of the hegemonic character of imposing their agenda upon women from different cultural traditions. If aware, then it becomes a situation not only of hegemony, but one of a false consciousness of dominance with a subtext of racist arrogance. Consider this quote by Miriam Schneir (1972), an American feminist editing and writing in a collection of essays on feminism: "No feminist works emerged ... out of the Moslem harems; centuries of slavery do not provide a fertile soil for intellectual development or expression" (xiv, emphasis added). I call this hegemonic feminism.

First, Schneir has no expertise on Arab culture, on harems, or on Islam, nor is she versed in any ethnographic knowledge. She represents the nonempirical armchair feminist par excellence -- fanatically ideological. Second, Schneir in the early 1970s writes that Muslim women who grew in "harems" are stunted in intellectual development and therefore are unable to produce feminist works (a claim easily refuted if Schneir had any rudimentary knowledge of Arabic and was versed in the most sophisticated feminist discourse coming out of the Arab world). Third, equating "harems" with "slavery" shows how Schneir neither knows about harems nor slavery as historical institutions (on a more educated analysis of the Arabic notion of harim, of which harem is English distortion, see EI Guindi 1999a: 23–46).

When the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded in 2003 to Shirin Ebadi, a Muslim woman judge from Iran, it was a surprise to many. But to Western, especially American, feminists it must have been a big blow to their condescending posture vis-à-vis Muslim women in general. The message was clear from the award - that there can be a different feminism and that it can be born out of an Islamic State. When the Nobel Committee gave the world's most celebrated prize to a Muslim Iranian woman living in an Islamic state, it sent a strong message that an Islamic state can successfully produce a Muslim feminist. It also made Shirin Ebadi exemplary -- a model for other Muslim women (see EI Guindi 2003).

The feminist Nobel Laureate, Shirin Ebadi, is homegrown through and through. Ebadi's mission has been to defend human rights and women's rights in Iran and within Islam. "She neither left Iran to fight for her homeland in exile, nor has she tried to win the support of American feminists who effectively demonize her culture and religion" (EI Guindi 2003). Ebadi has endured punitive measures in the course of her struggle, yet she has countered obstacles from within. When Islam was used against her mission, she found the strongest source of support in that same Islam.

Ebadi was aware that mastery of Islamic knowledge is fundamental to navigating Islamic society and, in most cases, so is the mastery of Arabic, the language of worship of more than 1.2 billion people today (on that point see EI Guindi 1999a: 177–184). Ebadi showed pride in
being Iranian and a Muslim woman and worked to preserve the integrity of her country. She was critical of U.S. intervention in her country's internal affairs. She worked within Islam, within the culture and within the system.

The Emergence of a New Islamic Veiling

An analytic empirical study of the veil as dress form and veiling as practices rooted in historical contexts led to the differentiation between the traditional (historical) veil and the religious veil. The religious veil is further differentiated into Christian forms and meaning of veiling and a different Muslim form of veiling and meaning. This study proceeds from systematic observations on the new and innovative form of Islamic veiling and dress code. It is part of a phenomenon that became noticeable in the mid-seventies in the streets of Cairo, Egypt that at the time seemed incomprehensible to many observers of the Egyptian scene and bewildering even to the local people. This was the strong and growing presence of a new Egyptian woman, with an appearance unfamiliar to contemporary urban Egypt and to her own parents. The new woman was a young urban college student completely "veiled" from head to toe, including the face. Confused at the thought of a future "veiled" physician, engineer or pharmacist, many observers speculated as to the cause of this development. Was this an identity crisis, the Muslim version of American's hippie movement, a fad, youth protest, or ideological vacuum? An individual psychic disturbance, life-crisis, social dislocation, or protest against authority?

The Veil Becomes a Movement In Egypt

This new veil became the focus of an empirical field-based study of this new phenomenon which led to a research exploration of the veil as an element in the larger subject of dress and veiling practices over time which led to an analytic differentiation between the traditional veil that is the function of societies in time and the religious veil which was associated with Christianity and later with Islam. This recent phenomenon of veiling that began in Egypt in the 1970s is referred to here as Islamic veiling.

It is approached as a dynamic process that passes through phases. This contemporary veiling movement passed through several transitional phases after the 1970s, spreading all over the Arab world and among Muslims worldwide (see Wallace 1956 on processual phases in similar movements). It is concluded in my study that the Islamizing of life, politics and resistance is directly related to the colonial/imperial assault on Arabs and Muslims. Today the Islamic movement continues to grow strong as it enters the new millennium. Dress has played a pivotal symbolic, ritual and political role in this dynamic phenomenon. The new vocabulary and dress style embodies a moral/behavioral code. Islam has struggled to position itself vis-a-
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vis the Islamic veil. The response of secularists and Western feminists shows how threatening this trend is to their ideological position. Egypt (with other Arab countries) has accommodated the new movement and put effort into integrating it politically, despite initial attempts by the state to suppress it. Today the veiled and unveiled interact normally in daily life. Some mothers who originally objected to the veil have adopted it. The Islamic zaiy (dress) goes almost unnoticed in Cairo by the local population.

As some young Egyptian women took up veiling in the mid-1970s, the government increasingly felt the threat of Islamic militancy and looked for solutions. In 1993, the education minister, Husain Kamal Baha’ al-Din, sought to combat the spread of Islamic activism by imposing changes in the area of education, such as the transfer or demotion of teachers with activist leanings, a revision of the curriculum, and restrictions on the wearing of the veil (Barraclough 1998:246). However, a ban on wearing the veil at universities was thrown out by the courts. By 1994, attempts to limit the wearing of the veil in schools to students who had their parents’ permission were receiving heavy criticism. The minister of education started back-pedaling - conceding that schoolgirls could wear the veil even without parental consent. State interference focusing on the veil remains controversial in Egypt. Hijab has often been politicized by states. In Egypt following former President Sadat’s assassination the Hijab became linked with security matters and today the hijab ban in France is linked to secularism.

As mentioned earlier, by the mid-1980s in Egypt some of the women who were reluctant at first to wear the khimar (a head covering that covers the hair and extends low to the forehead, comes under the chin to conceal the neck, and falls down over the chest and back) began to wear turban-like head covers that resemble Turkish ones which became considered chic. In the 1990s women’s veiling became routinized and stabilized. The hijab, while not numerically more prevalent, was integrated in mainstream society. The assault on the Palestinians, on Iraq and on Afghanistan and the Israeli-British-American occupation of Arab and Muslim lands is sure to fuel a resurgence of Islamizing in the region. Whether in its exemplary form of appearance or in political mobilizing at the grassroots, it has shown to be an effective expression of resistance.

AI-Z;yy al-Islam; (Islamic Dress) : The Code

Women's Islamic dress, known as al-ziiy al-Islami, is an innovative construction that was first worn in the mid-1970s by activists. It does not represent a return to any traditional dress form and has no tangible precedent. There was no industry behind it—not one store in Egypt carried such an outfit. Based on an idealized Islamic vision gradually constructed for the early Islamic community in the seventh century, it was made in the homes by the activists themselves. Privacy, humility, piety and moderation are cornerstones of the Islamic belief.

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system. Luxury and leisure await Muslims in the next world. Some elements of this vision can be supported by reference to the Qur'an others find support in the secondary source of Islamic information, the Sunna, through the Hadith The 'Prophetic vision' had become idealized through the ages, developing into a model to be emulated via recurring revivalist purifying movements within Islam, just as in the Islamic movement of Egypt in the 1970s. In the Qur'an (considered the primary and divinely revealed source), but mostly according to the Hadith (a worldly source), evidence suggests that the Prophet Muhammad had paid much attention to a dress code for Muslims in the emerging community, with a specific focus on Muslim men's clothing and bodily modesty during prayer. By comparison, reference to women's body cover is negligible. One such reference, al-Ahzab in sura (33:59), distinguishes the status of the Prophet's wives from the rest of the believers, and the other (33:53) protects their privacy from growing intrusions by male visitors.

Men and women in the contemporary Islamic movement who argue for the Islamic dress and behavioral code use as support for their argument two specific suras in the Qur'an - al-Ahzab, mentioned above, and al-Nur. Al-Nur, translates as follows:

> And say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their genitals (and) say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their genitals, draw their khimar to cover their cleavage (breasts), and not display their beauty, except that which has to appear, except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves, or eunuchs or children under age; and they should not strike their feet to draw attention to their hidden beauty. O ye believers turn to God, that ye may attain bliss (Qur'an 24: 30, 31).

Several points can be drawn from this text: (1) the Arabic notions of lowering the gaze and covering the genitals are central to the code; and (2) men are first mentioned as having to abide by these two prescriptions, to control their gaze at women and suppress their passion and forwardness when interacting with "strange" women. In the Hadith men especially are enjoined to cover their genitals during worship. Unlike other religions, Islam accepts sexuality as a normative aspect of both ordinary and religious life (Mernissi 1975; Marsot 1979; Nelson 1974) and fluidly accommodates both sacred and worldly activity in the same biorhythmic space. There is no contradiction between being religious and being sexual. Sex is to be enjoyed in socially approved marriages.
However, outside marriage, behavior between men and women must be desexualized. Both body and interactive space need to be regulated and controlled and both men and women are required to abide by this temporary de-sexualization to make public interaction between them possible. This presumes that cross-sex interaction would potentially be sexually charged. Islam accepts sexualized, reproductive men and women and guides them to regulate their public behavior.

As the same *sura* al-Nur shows, concealing and revealing is very much tied to cultural notions of respectability or the body parts that are considered sexually charged. Islamic mores were being formulated as the *suras* were revealed. The reference to drawing the head veil to cover a woman's cleavage may have been a reaction to the way women in the region prior to birth of the new community seem to have worn clothes that exposed their bodies. Images from what is now modern Yemen, for example, show women from the low-status group of *alakhdam* (servants) wearing clothing that revealed the breasts. These suggest, not seductive sexuality, but slovenliness. Another prohibition concerns anklets. The phrase "not to strike the feet" is a reference to the practice in which women wore decorative jingling anklets made of heavy metal (silver or gold). It is not the ankle *per se* that is erotic, but the jingling that evokes erotic passions.

Early (1993), in her ethnography on baladi (traditional urban) life in Cairo, describes the traditional baladi dress, milaya laff (a wrapped black over sheet) draped over a house dress to cover the hair and entire body when in public; the ends of the long wrap are tucked under the arm. From underneath, a tightly knotted scarf covers the hair (p. 70). El-Messiri notes the dimension of sensual playfulness: with high-heeled sandals and tinkling anklets, the dress can combine sexual glamour with modesty (1978: 526, 529).

Within Islam, a woman's sexuality does not diminish her respectability. Islam in fact supports this combined image in womanhood. The *Hadith* mentions an incident in which the Prophet Muhammad told a woman to color her fingernails with henna so that her hands were not like the hands of men. What Islamic morality forbids is the public flaunting of sexuality. In general, the Islamic code would consider the behavior of the urban baladi women in Egypt described in El-Messiri's and Early's ethnographies as exhibitionist. Dressing and moving in a way that draws sexual attention to the body is tabarruj (exhibitionist dress and behavior.) It is associated in Islamic perception with Arabian women of al-jahiliyya (the Days of Ignorance or pre-Islamic days) and was frowned upon during the formative years of the Islamic community in the seventh century.
The Dress

In the contemporary revival, the dress code was translated this way: men and women wear full-length gallabiyyas (jilblib in standard Arabic), loose-fitting to conceal body contours, in solid austere colors made of opaque fabric. They lower their gaze in cross-sex public interaction and refrain from body or dress decoration or colors that draw attention to their bodies. The dress code for men consists of sandals, baggy trousers with loose-top shirts in off-white, or alternatively (and preferably) a long loose white gallabiyya. They grow a lihya (a full beard trimmed short), with an optional mustache. Hair is to be kept shoulder-length. This last feature has not been sustained, and was eventually dropped. The general behavioral code of austerity and restraint has support in Qur'anic segments that repeatedly stress the undesirability of arrogance and an exhibitionist demeanor.9

Similarly, women wear the hijab which consists of al-jilbab (ankle-length, long-sleeved, loose-fitted dress) and al-khimar, a head covering that covers the hair and extends low to the forehead, comes under the chin to conceal the neck, and falls down over the chest and back. The common colors used by women during the first decade of the movement were beige, brown, navy, deep ovine, white and black. This dress is worn while engaging fully in daily affairs in public social space in which not only their gender is accepted but also their sexual identity. Austere dress form and behavior therefore are not accompanied by withdrawal, seclusion, or segregation.

The voluntary informal dress code extends beyond clothing to a general demeanor characterized by serious behavior and an austere manner, an ideal applied to both sexes. Some women more conservatively add al-niqab, which covers the entire face except for the eye slits; at the most extreme, a woman would also wear gloves and opaque socks to cover her hands and feet. This trend has been spreading throughout the Arab world, particularly among university students. Chatty describes a similar trend occurring in south-eastern Arabia (Chatty 1997).

During the first decade of the movement in Egypt the dress code for women corresponded to the degree of Islamic knowledgeability and reading, as well as to a step on a scale of leadership among women. The more intensely covered the college woman, the more "serious" her public behavior, and the more knowledgeable she is in Islamic sources, the higher she was on the scale of activist leadership among women. She would lead discussions, for example, in mosques and in women students' lounges between lectures. This correspondence dissolved as the movement spread outside the university campuses and as the hijab became part of normal life and was integrated with secular life in Cairo and the other major cities.

This Islamic dress was introduced by college women in the movement and was not imposed by the al-Azhar authorities, who ordinarily prescribe Islamic behavior by issuing decrees.
Instead, this was a bottom-up movement. By dressing this way in public these young women conveyed their vision of Islamic ideals by becoming exemplary contemporary models. Encoded in the dress style is an affirmation of an Islamic identity and morality and a rejection of Western materialism, consumerism, commercialism, and values. The vision behind the Islamic dress is rooted in these women's understanding of early Islam and, as earlier presented, in primary and secondary textual sources. But it is a contemporary movement about contemporary issues.

Clearly, the movement is not simply about a dress code. Like early Islam in Madina, this activism espouses egalitarianism, community, identity, privacy, and justice. It condemns exhibitionism in dress and behavior, which was characteristic of al-jahiliyya (the pre-Islamic era). Hence, al-jahiliyya is not just a historical moment, but a state and a condition of society that can recur at any time. Reserve and restraint in behavior, voice and body movement are not restrictions- they symbolize a renewal of traditional cultural identity.

Veiling in Two Feminisms

The Egyptian feminist movement at the turn of the century was described as a secular movement that "brought together Muslim and Christian women of the upper and middle classes' who identified [themselves] as Egyptians" (Badran 19951: 4.5). Leila Ahmed does not see it in such monolithic terms. In a discussion linking Western colonialism and feminism, Ahmed distinguishes two strands of feminism propounded by Egypt's "First Feminists" (1 992: 169-188). There is the Westward-looking feminism espoused by Huda Sha'rawi (1879-1947) and another, advocated by Malak Hifni Nasif (1886-1918), that did not affiliate itself with Westernization (see Bad-an 1995b: 44-46 and also 1995c: 229-30).

Groundedness of feminists in their own culture has been largely overlooked in the discourse on feminism. Fundamental to a genuine Arabo-Islamic society are mastery of the Arabic language (formal not colloquial) and access to Islamic knowledge. These two cornerstones of the culture had gradually become the domains of men- a masculinization process that distanced many women from the core of their culture. This process is connected to the valuation for "foreign" languages at the expense of the Arabic language; that has developed among the urbanized ascribed aristocracy and spread among urban achieved-status groups. Speaking "soft" Arabic with French loan words became feminine and chic. A corollary practice was the informal adoption of a husband's last name in lieu of one's maiden name. It should be noted in this regard that Arab women have financial autonomy. The legal system requires that a woman should keep her maiden name after marriage. Officially, the state in Arab society does not recognize a husband's name even when it is informally adopted by women. It stands for a woman's autonomous personal and financial identity. Nasif, true to her views and her self-image, continued to use her natal family name after marriage, whereas Huda first simplified her name.
name from Nur al-Huda (her name at birth) to Huda, and then upon marriage changed her last name from Sultan (her father's name) to Sha'rawi (her husband's name)- a social (not an official or a legal) practice borrowed by urbanized women to validate their modern, feminine, and chic image.

A superficial familiarity with Islamic knowledge acquired casually through male relatives also became the norm among women. One can only speculate about the factors that led to this state of affairs. Women identified with French culture at the expense of Arabic, which was considered declass. Lacking the necessary command of the Arabic language, Huda Sha'rawi, the pioneer feminist of the Arab world, did not write her own memoirs. Instead she dictated a chronicle of events to her male secretary, who had a command of the Arabic language (see Kahf 1998:65).

Despite her prominence as a feminist leader, she was distanced from her native language, and therefore not a complete insider in her own culture. Instead, she mastered foreign languages. “She was educated at home by tutors in both Turkish and French, the languages of a lady of the time” (Fernea and Bezirgan 1977: 193). One must note that those "ladies" (see Marsot 1978) made up an insignificant percentage of the Egyptian population, and their programs were relevant only within their own circles not for the wider Egyptian public. While Huda was tutored in foreign languages her brother was receiving private Arabic lessons.

This had not always been the case in Egypt. Al-Sayyid Marsot mentions that in the eighteenth century the greater masses of both sexes were illiterate, but "among the elites both men and women were literate in religion and in language [and] the ulama (male religious scholars) and a'imat (female religious scholars) were more educated than any other sector of society" (1995: 14,15). Colonial and missionary pressures at the turn of the century as well as consumerist and secularizing trends in the twentieth century led women away from rights they already had in Islam- most importantly the right (with precedents in Islam) to full participation in the Islamic process, teaching, and worship.

By submitting to these distancing trends, women excluded themselves from the two most relevant spheres (the Arabic language and Islamic studies) that most crucially regulate and sanction their lives, engender dignity and respect, and legitimize their rights and privileges. These became dominated by men.

As early as the 1870s and 1880s, before Egyptian organized feminism developed, Egyptian women were publishing their writings and were engaged in public speaking. They wrote poetry, prose, biographies, articles, and essays and published them in the mainstream press at a time when publishing was new to Egypt. By the 1890s an emergent "sisterhood" of exchanges of letters and circulation of books expanded and took new forms. Badran describes the
environment of the turn of the century in Egypt as "an urban harem culture, the site of the first emergence of women's feminist awareness and nascent feminist expression" (Badran 1995a:4). Collective debate grew through "salons" held by the women of the aristocracy and expanded with the founding by non-aristocratic women of a women's press.

Egyptian women, Muslim and Christian, were positioning their liberation vis-à-vis the simultaneously rising nationalism that grew up in response to colonial intervention. Colonial domination was complete and humiliating, particularly in its very denial of Egyptianness. The British colonizers referred to Egyptians as "natives" or the "native race." Their avoidance of the term "Egyptian" made Egyptians seem nameless and nation less. It was in this climate that both nationalism and feminism took hold. Egyptianness and women's rights rose simultaneously. Paradoxically, the degree of political or personal affiliation with the colonizer became a barometer of commitment to nationalist activism (see Badran 1995a for further discussion).

It is significant in this regard that, according to Badran, Huda Sha'rawi's father, Sultan Pasha, was implicated in assisting British intervention in Egypt (1951: 11) (Sha'rawi 1981: 119). Women had already begun to debate their position on these issues when men, in search of factors behind the demise of their country, began questioning existing social practices with regard to gender and formulated what many considered to be feminist positions in the process. These men were highly educated, had legal training, and had been exposed to European thought. Consequently, a men's discourse on women's issues (questionably characterized as feminist) emerged in the Arab world (Badran 1995a:13-16). Unlike women's organized feminism, the veil was central to men's "feminist" discourse. Women were drawn into the debate and popular periodicals became partisan publications. Three periodicals were "staunch defenders of the veil" and two "condemned the veil ... Muslims, Jews, and Christians all wrestled with the question of veiling" (Baron 1998: 372, 379).

A prominent Egyptian man who provoked heated controversy and debate was Qasim Amin, who came to be regarded by many as the founder of feminism in Arab culture. The response to his book Tahrir Al-Mar'a (The Liberation of Woman), published in 1899, was intense, and opposition to its message was vociferous. In the book, he advocated primary school education for women and reform of the laws on polygyny and divorce. Were these considered radical proposals at the time? Ahmed notes that they were not new. These issues had been proposed in the 1870s and 1880s, perhaps even earlier, by Muslim intellectuals who argued for women's education and called for reforms in matters of polygyny and divorce "without provoking violent controversy" (1992: 145). By the 1890s the issue of educating women beyond the primary level was uncontroversial and girls' schools were established. So why was there such a strong reaction to Amin's work?
A closer look reveals that Amin called, not for feminist reforms, but rather for a fundamental social and cultural change for Egypt and other Muslim countries, a Europeanization of Arab culture as it were, in which women's issues were embedded. Central to this reform, proposed as the key to change and progress in society, was the call for abolishing the veil.

Tal'at Harb, a wealthy Egyptian industrialist entrepreneur who pioneered modern banking in Egypt, responded strongly to Amin. He is described as having "defended and upheld Islamic practices" (Ahmed 1992: 1641. But in fact Harb Used Islamic language and selected quotations from Christian and Muslim scriptures and Western and Muslim men of learning to defend and uphold a perspective that is not much different from Amin's Western vision of female domesticity: that the wife's duty was to attend to the physical, mental, and moral needs of her husband and children (Harb 1905 [1899]: 21).

First, these are the same duties ascribed to her by Amin. To modernize Muslim society Amin wanted to abandon its "backward" ways and follow the Western path, which of course required changing women. His call for women's education was based on the idea that women needed education in order to manage the household, a responsibility that entails many skills. "It is the wife's responsibility to establish the family budget ... to manage servants .. to make her home attractive and appealing to her husband, to enjoy food, drink and sleep, and not seek comfort elsewhere, with neighbors or in public places. But her first and most important duty is to raise and socialize the children, physically, mentally, and morally" (Amin 1916, Vol. 2: 31, my translation). Borrowing from Western notions of domesticity and womanhood in order to validate what is characteristically an Arab quality of family relations, Amin wrote that the adult man is nothing but what his mother made him to be from childhood. "The essence of this book and the message I wish to impart to all men . . . is the special relationship between a man and his mother . . . it is impossible to produce successful men without mothers capable of enabling them to be successful. This is the noble duty that advanced civilization has given to woman in our age and which she fulfills in advanced societies" (J 976, Vol. 2: 78-79; translation mine, emphasis in original) (see Badran I 995a). Most significantly, Amin reaffirmed the special and unique mother-son relationship already inherent in Arab society by using European notions of female domesticity.

Second, it is questionable whether Tal'at Harb's views would be characterized as Islamic. Qasim Amin, on the other hand, was explicitly positioned outside the Islamic spectrum. He was a French-educated lawyer whose rationale in calling for change in the position of women and for abolishing the veil was not much different from the colonial/missionary agenda. The ideas espoused by the British colonial official Lord Cromer, who embodied the colonizer's posture and agenda, and the missionaries, whose strategy was to undermine Islam and Arab tradition, were reflected in Amin's book. Amin's text also assumed and declared the inherent superiority of Western civilization and the inherent backwardness of Muslim societies: he wrote that anyone familiar with "the East" had observed "the backwardness of Muslims ... wherever they
are." Among Muslims he saw a hierarchy that put the Egyptians at the bottom. Muslim civilization in general is represented as semi-civilized compared to that of the West. As Ahmed put it: "In the course of making his argument, Amin managed to express ... a generalized contempt for Muslims ... often in lavishly abusive detail" (Ahmed 1992: 156). Veiling was not a practice confined to Muslims; it was an urban phenomenon associated mostly with the upper classes. The Coptic intellectual Salama Musa noted in his memoirs that his mother and two married sisters wore the long veil until about 1907 or 1908, and that it was through missionary influence that Christian women began to drop the practice. Also Qasim Amin's wife continued to wear the veil. He tried to enforce unveiling on his daughters despite efforts to the contrary from his own uncle (this observation was made by Baron: 1989:379).

Both Amin and Harb claimed to be concerned with women's liberation. They differed in their frameworks but reached similar conclusions. One exception is the veil. Harb's women must veil, and Amin's must unveil. The argument between Harb and Amin was not, as it is commonly characterized, feminist versus antifeminist but rather reflected two muddled versions of domesticity, a Western female domesticity versus an indigenous man's vision of female domesticity (see Ahmed 1992:136). Islam was not in any serious way the ideological basis for either position. Contradictions abound in both. In appropriating a women's issue, men polarized discourse surrounding the veil.

Amin's book, then, can be seen as fueling feminist debate rather than simply pioneering feminist reform in Egypt. It put on center stage the colonial narrative of women, in which the veil and the treatment of women epitomized Islamic inferiority, and entered the colonial agenda of appropriation of resources and culture into mainstream Arabic discourse and programs of reform. The opposition it generated similarly marks "the emergence of an Arabic narrative developed in resistance to the colonial narrative. This narrative of resistance appropriated, in order to negate them, the symbolic terms of the originating narrative" (Ahmed 1992: 164).

By 1910 sensitivity toward the nuances of veiling and unveiling was established. The newspaper al-Afaf began publication in Cairo in 1910 "proclaiming itself the mouthpiece of women" (Baron 1989:30). In the twenty-sixth issue of its first volume it used as a frontispiece a drawing of a woman standing in front of the pyramids and the sphinx, holding her arm aloft with a banner that read "modesty is my motto." Across her face she wore a light, translucent veil. The mouth and nose were revealed through the transparent fabric and the eyes were not covered. Baron (1989: 28 ) notes that the paper was criticized (see al-Afaf 1911: 1) (Cited in Baron 1989:383) and that three issues later the image was revised. The redrawn veil was thick and nontransparent, and the nose, face and chin were not revealed through it. Revealed, however, are the complex subtleties entailed in the reaction to this visual imagery of the veil and womanhood.
Interestingly, removing the veil was not part of the official feminist agenda at the time. According to Badran (1995a), unveiling, which had been of concern only to urban women, "had never been part of the EFU's (Egyptian Feminist Union) formal agenda" (pp. 94-96). The phrase used in the discourse surrounding the context of lifting the "veil" was *rafal-hijab* (the lifting of the hijab). Interestingly, what secular feminists lifted was the traditional face veil (*burqa*), which is rooted in cultural tradition, and history rather than in Islamic sources, not the hijab. In her speech at the Feminist conference in Rome, Sha'rawi specified the face veil (*barqu* or *yashmik*), not hijab, as a barrier to women's advancement (253, 254; see Kahf 1998:79). When Huda Sha'rawi dramatically cast off the veil in 1923, it was the face veil she removed, not the hijab. Further, the act mirrored a change already taking place, as the debate over the issue of veiling and unveiling shows.

It is not trivial that Huda Sha'rawi only removed the face cover (*burqu* or *yashmik*) but kept the head covering. Technically, therefore, Sha'rawi never "lifted the hijab." Some attribute her success in feminist nationalist leadership, compared to Doria Shafiq (1914-1976) for example, to the fact that she respected this tradition. In her *Memoirs* there is a segment in which she mentions being congratulated for "my success in arriving at lifting the hijab... but wearing the hijab shar'i" (lawful hijab - used specifically to mean the Islamic hijab) (Sha'rawi 1981: 291). The distinction made is important, and becomes central to the debate on contemporary veiling. Sha'rawi lifted the traditional customary veil and wore the hijab in the manner that finds support in Islamic sources (see Baron 1989:371). Significantly, she was decorated with the state's highest honor, *Nishan al-Kamal* (Medal of Perfection). Badran (1995a) describes how in the first two decades of the twentieth century Egyptian feminism women like Huda Sha'rawi and Malak Hifni Nasif (Bahithat al-Badiya) retained the veil, because "uncovering the face was premature [and] society was not ready for it" (Badran 1995a: 22, 23).

Of the early feminists, Nabawiyya Musa, the first college graduate and the one who was not from the aristocracy, removed her face covering unceremonially around 1909. "Bahithat al Badiya died in 1918 without having unveiled" (Badran 1995a: 23). The comment by Nasif that after social change "I would approve of unveiling, for those who want it" (Nasif 1962: 27.5279, emphasis added) confirms, contrary to falsely publicized claims, the tolerant stance of early twentieth-century Egyptian feminism with regard to veiling. It also brings out an element in Nasif's feminism absent in other programs - choice on the part of women.

Huda Sha'rawi unveiled ceremonially in a public political feminist act in 1923 upon returning from a feminist meeting in Rome - an act of far-reaching symbolic significance. Its impact and ripple effect was felt beyond her narrow circle of the elite (Baron 1989). The gesture has entered the lore on women's liberation and, as lore, is alive and is continually embellished. Evidence in photographs and reports reveals how girls had begun to appear unveiled in schools (Baron 1989) in the streets (Shaarwai 1987: 1-15) and in protests between 1910 and 1919 (Baron 1989:379). It has been observed that in Cairo before the First World
War Egyptian women were far more advanced than their Lebanese counterparts. Egyptian women, it was observed by a Lebanese writer, are "more emancipated than us ... they saw the world with unveiled eyes [unlike our women] who did not see the world except from behind black veils" (Khalidi 1978: 64). So unveiling was already publicly visible before 1914. While Sha'rawi's dramatic gesture did not mark the beginning of unveiling, her social and political position in society gave the process celebrity and legitimacy.

The hijab worn by Muslim and Christian women at the turn of the century is different in meaning from the hijab worn by college women in the 1970s. The first was characterized as "a national Egyptian dress for upper-class women, then called al-habara" (Nabarawi 1979). It consisted of a full-length skirt, a head cover, and al-burqu' (a face covering from below the eyes down to the chest) and was worn by Muslim and Christian women. In her memoirs, Huda Sha'rawi used the term 'izari (my cloak) in referring to what she commonly wore as a wrap when she went out. She did not seem to use the term hijab except in the context of the political act of lifting the veil (Sha'rawi 1981: 89). Ahmed notes that Amin's book, the debate it generated, and the issues of class and tradition with which the debate became inscribed, may be regarded as the precursor and prototype of the debate around the veil (Ahmed 1992: 164). This is not quite so, however, since by the time Amin published his work in 1899 the debate had already begun in the press.

Reacting to the writings of European-influenced Egyptian men who advocated the lifting of the veil for women, Malak Hifni Nasif saw a nuanced "male domination enacted through [their] discourse of the veil" (Ahmed 1992: 179). She opposed mandatory unveiling. Badran - does not distinguish between the feminism of Nasif and that of Sha'rawi. She sees the latter as a continuation of the same struggle. After Nasif's death at a young age "Sha'rawi publicly pledged to continue her struggle on behalf of women" (Badran 1995c: 230). But Ahmed does.

The two leading women espoused two feminist views: one more authentically Egyptian, the other Western-influenced. This differentiation is important because research increasingly shows that feminism is rooted in culture. It challenges Western feminism's claims of universality, which dominate discourse and research in the West. Differences exist among feminisms and multiple feminist strands can exist within the same society. Background, upbringing, education, social class and political ideology all influence the content of feminism and feminist goals. And just as Western feminism is solidly rooted in European and American cultures, the Egyptian feminism of Western-influenced Egyptians can be different from a feminism that is more deeply and authentically rooted in the culture and tradition of Egypt, despite apparent similarities.

The Arabic language and Islamic knowledge mattered to Malak Hifni Nasif, but were not included in the official feminist agenda as it developed under the leadership of Huda Sha'rawi, which stressed women's suffrage, education reform, health services, and employment.
opportunities. Nasif, in contrast with Huda Sha'rawi, was highly proficient in the Arabic language. She gave lectures in fluent Arabic and was a prolific Arabic writer. She was comfortable with her roots and well grounded in her native (Arabic) language and Arab culture.

In her Memoirs Sha'rawi recounts how the Egyptian delegation to the International Women's conference in Rome in 1923 vowed "that we would follow in the footsteps of the women in Europe in the awakening of our women so that we could take our land to its rightful place among the advanced nations" (1981: 252). The same frame of reference is used in the language of the agenda submitted by the Sha'rawi-led Egyptian Feminist Union to the government. The rationale for the feminist program was couched neither in terms of absolute feminism and women's entitlement, nor in terms espousing the preservation of tradition. Rather, the rationale was in order for Egypt "to reach a level of glory and might like that reached by the civilized nations" (1981: 262).

As indicated by Ahmad (1992) looking up to Europeanization of behavior and culture was made integral to the inscribed culture of the aristocracy. Internalizing a valorization of European culture while undermining native culture, its members presented a "gallicized" public social self. That was the way to convey and validate their class. However, the implication of this colonization of selves and minds is an area of research that has not received sufficient attention.

The principal beneficiaries of the British reform measures and the increased involvement in European capitalism were the European residents of Egypt, the Egyptian upper classes, and the new middle class of rural notables and men educated in Western-type secular schools who became the civil servants and the new intellectual elite. Whether trained in the West or in the Western-type institutions established in Egypt, these "modern" men with their new knowledge challenged the traditionally and religiously trained 'ulama (the al-Azhar authoritative scholars of Islam), displacing them as administrators, bureaucrats and educators to become transmitters of the newly valued secular scholarship and secular approach to society. Traditional knowledge itself became devalued as outmoded and backward. The resulting proposals seemed to have adopted the weaknesses in both cultures, the colonizing and the colonized.

Nasif's agenda stressed two significant elements absent in Sha'rawi's feminist agenda. First, she demanded that all fields of higher education be opened to women. Information on the specific fields that were reserved for men is significant here. In the West the fields that were "open" for women were mostly the "soft" fields of art and home economics. American women until recently did not tend to go into the professional schools of medicine and engineering or majors such as mathematics or economics. In the Arab world, studies of patterns in higher education (El Guindi 1985, 1986) show that, when higher education became widely accessible in the 1950s, enrollments were balanced between the sexes. The distribution in "soft" fields and professional majors was similar for both sexes. Yet while women were significantly present in
medicine and engineering (valued for modern society), they were absent in two particular majors: Arabic Studies and Islamic Studies. This is where cultural context is important in determining which obstacles facing women are relevant for their liberation. When Nasif demanded that all fields be made open to women, was she concerned about Arabic and Islamic Studies? This very issue would become relevant several decades later in the 1970s.

Second, she demanded that space be made in mosques for women to participate in public prayer. By demanding that mosques be made accessible to women, Nasif had established an agenda that recognizes what is core in the culture (see Nasif 1909). Her agenda was Islamic, her goals feminist. These premises presupposed a strong populist movement that is Islamic feminist.

Clearly, whereas Sha'rawi was socialized into a world that attached high value to French culture above local tradition, Nasif was firmly rooted in Arabo-Islamic culture. But one cannot easily characterize Nasif as a traditionalist. In their ultimate goal of advancing women's rights, Nasif and Sha'rawi did not differ. However, had Nasif lived longer it is very likely that two parallel organized feminisms would have developed -- one grounded in Arabo-Islamic culture, the other in European culture and western feminism.

The discourse of colonialism incorporated a language of feminism and used the issue of women's position in Islamic societies as the focus of attack on those societies. Men serving the colonial administration, such as Cromer in Egypt (Cited in Ahmed 1983), who ironically opposed feminism in his own country, England, espoused in the colonial context a rhetoric of feminism that attacked Egyptian men for upholding practices that degraded their women. This posture of subversion and appropriation of the colonized culture can be interpreted as the colonizing power's attempt to legitimize its own domination and justify its occupation policies. The kind of feminism emerging out of this colonial context becomes an alternative form of dominance that gives its men and women a sense of superiority. By adopting it, Egyptian men accepted and Egyptian women reproduced their own subordination within their culture as well as their country's subordination to European dominance.

Two Notions of Gender

In the course of my analysis of Islamic activism (El Guindi 1998) two conceptions of gender emerge. The first individuates society, secularizes culture, and feminizes social, political, and moral issues (see Nelson and Olesen 1977). Its agenda prioritizes women's problems, mostly independent of cultural constructions, and often segregated from society as a whole and from political affairs. While it assumes universality, this notion originates in
Western thought and is embedded in cultural values constructed out of a Euro-Christian ethos, relations of domination, and the colonial encounter. It is based on constructs of polarities. Filtered through lenses of Christo-European constructions, efforts to understand the Middle East have resulted in distorted perspectives about Islamic constructions of gender, space and sexuality. For example, gender roles are described as domestic (private) versus public - a division that better describes Western European society but distorts understanding of Arab and Islamic society. Also, piety is mistakenly separated from worldliness and sexuality, leading to the ingrained focus on seclusion and virginity and thus missing nuances characteristic of Islamic space and privacy as they pertain to veiling. Looking at Islamic culture through these lenses of distortion reveals violations of ideal separations between the worldly and the religious, between Church and State, between domestic and public.

Instead of the polarity that characterizes Western constructions, Islamic principles insist on the integration of dualities. Hence we encounter a modality of polarity (Western) versus a modality of relational integration (Arabo-Islamic).

It is within the latter model that we locate the second conception of gender, which is embedded within cultural tradition and Islamic activism and is contextualized in local, regional and cultural history. This conception is more relevant to an objective understanding of Muslim women's activism. Approaching Muslim women's rights through liberal feminist agendas cannot be effective because these agendas are based on the Western experience and derive from Western values; hence they are irrelevant to most issues of concern to Muslim women. Matters pertaining to women and the family are based on scripturalist-derived decrees and laws. To be effective, these issues must be dealt with within the same framework that created them. Feminism within the context of Islam can provide the only path to empowerment and liberation that avoids challenging the whole of the culture (Mir-Hosseini 1996).

But there is another point. Reaffirmation of traditional values and identities also feeds from the same Arabo-Islamic source. One can choose either the liberal feminist or the Islamic feminist path, but in neither can reform be effected or goals be achieved without direct access to primary Islamic knowledge in Arabic. This point had not escaped Doria Shafiq, who struggled to find legitimacy for her feminism even among feminists. She recognized the need to master Islamic knowledge and to communicate in the Arabic language. Any Europeanized activities were considered marginal (see the ethno-biography of Doria Shafik by Nelson 1996).

The Egyptian college women who pioneered the Islamic movement in the 1970s penetrated precisely these culturally relevant realms. They were reading primary sources, although much of their energy was spent in justifying their newly constructed dress and defending their posture vis-a-vis society. Their dress gradually became a uniform and a model for public demeanor and cross-sex relations. Mainstream society and Islam began to accommodate them. Increasingly, Egyptians dressed more conservatively. Islamic dress was mass-produced and
made available at a low cost. Commercial stores specialized in its sale, thereby making it chic and appealing, and hairdressers opened special sections for the muhaggabat.

Islamic Feminism

A third feminism, which I label in many of my writings on Islamic feminism set itself unambiguously apart from the two feminisms of Nasif and Sha'rawi when the prominent pioneer, Zaynab al-Ghazali, carved an alternative path. Al-Ghazali was born in 1917, the daughter of an al-Azhar-educated independent religious teacher and cotton merchant. She was privately tutored in Islamic studies in the home, and afterwards attended a public secondary school. Her father encouraged her to become an Islamic leader: She obtained certificates in Hadith and Tafsir.

Al-Ghazali had first begun her activist career by participating in the activities of the secular feminist organization founded by Huda Sha'rawi, who was her mentor, as she was to many prominent women. After joining the Egyptian Feminist Union she became dissatisfied and sought another path for women's rights - one from within Islam. Rejecting the Western woman as a model for Muslim women, Zaynab al-Ghazali abandoned the secular Egyptian Feminist Union and founded, at the age of eighteen, Jama'at al-Sayyidat al-Muslimat (the Muslim Women's Association), which was active from 1936 to 1964 (Ahmed 1992: 194). She published and gave weekly lectures to thousands of women at the Ibn Tolon Mosque (Hoffman-Ladd 1995: 64-66). "The Association published a magazine, maintained an orphanage, offered assistance to poor families, and mediated family disputes" (1995; 64). Her public activism and mastery of and leadership in Islamic issues set her apart, and qualified her to lead women within the Islamic fold.

An autonomous, strong-minded woman who was dedicated to learning Islam from childhood and gained credentials that qualified her to teach it, she divorced her first husband who allegedly interfered with her Islamic activities. She espoused Islamic ideals that supported family values while she also developed into a prominent activist leader in Islamic teaching and organizing (Hoffman-Ladd 1995; Hoffman 1985). Neither she nor the Islamic leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood saw her combined roles as contradictory.

When al-Ghazali first joined the Association of Huda Sha'rawi she had established her commitment to women's rights and to serving women's interests. When she switched from the secularist feminist path to the path of Islam to reach these goals, she revealed her own conviction of Islam and awareness of its importance in ordinary people's lives. The movement's success and wide appeal legitimized Islam as potentially liberating for women. When Hassan

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al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (for detailed discussion see Mitchell 1969), sought her cooperation and suggested that both associations work together to unify - the movement, she insisted on keeping her organization autonomous. Her leadership was not questioned by men or women in the general movement. However, she obviously posed a threat to the state - sufficiently so that she was arrested, imprisoned, and reportedly tortured. She describes her experience in her prison memoirs (al-Ghazali 1977). The seeds of Islamic feminism were sown long before al-Ghazali formed the organization for Muslim women in 1936. In 1908 some Muslim women in Egypt led by Fatima Rashid, wife of Muhammad Farid Wajdi, owner of the nationalist newspaper al-Dustur (The Constitution) formed an organization, Tarqiyat al-Marfa (Refinement of the Woman), through which Rashid urged women to adhere to religion and veiling as "the symbol of our Muslim grandmothers" (Rashid 1908a: 76; 1908b: 84). Modesty, morality and Islamic principles (i.e., the view that Islamic law gives advantages to women) were its founding principles. The newspaper al-'Afaf endorsed this affirmation of culture and religion against foreign intervention and customs (Baron 1989: 380).

The movement led by Zaynab al-Ghazali was modeled after Ute other contemporaneous organized feminist groups and, like them, it was characterized by having a charismatic female leader at the helm. There was a large difference in the size of the organizations' memberships. Records show that membership in the Islamic organization was exponentially larger than in Huda Sha'rawi's. Smaller still was that of Doria Shafik, who was seen as an extremist secularist Europeanized feminist. Her core supporters were from Europe or were family and friends.

The movement that emerged in the 1970s is different. Above all, it is populist. It is also grounded in culture and in Islam, and never had any formal organization or membership. It erupted everywhere in the main urban centers of Egypt, particularly in the universities, ultimately spreading outward. It was a grass-root, voluntary youth movement, possibly begun, by women, which mixed backgrounds, lifestyles and social boundaries. Its impact was powerful. Out of it emerged a grassroots Islamic feminism (El Guindi 1982a, 1982b, 1983, 1987,1995,1996,1998, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c). This thread of Islamic feminism is left out of chronicles of Egyptian feminism. Secularist-bound scholars either deny its existence or ideologically dismiss any, scholarly discussion of such formulations (even empirical studies) as apology. Nevertheless, it is feminist because it seeks to liberate womanhood; it is Islamic because its premises are embedded in Islamic principles and values. Yet, in some senses, the liberal Western influenced feminism of the aristocracy, and the Islamic one are nor far apart. Both are about emancipation of women. The early feminist lifting of the face veil was about emancipation from exclusion; the voluntary wearing of the hijab since the mid-seventies is about liberation from imposed, imported identities, consumerist behaviors, and an increasingly materialist culture. Further, a principal aim has been to allow women greater access to Islamic literacy.
In the 1980s the movement shifted from establishing an Islamic identity and morality to asserting Islamic nationalism, engaging in participatory politics, and resisting local authoritarian regime, colonial occupation and Western dominance. Embedded in today's hijab is imagery that combines notions of respectability, morality, identity, and resistance. Women (and men) who oppose the hijab are opposing the absence of choice, as in Iran, Turkey, Algeria, and Palestine. Resistance through the hijab or against it, in tangible form as attire or in intangible form as a code of behavior, has generated a dynamic discourse around gender, Islamic ideals, Arab society, and women's status and liberation.
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ii These were: Tarqiyat ai-Mara (1908), al-'Afaf (1992), and Fatat al-Nur (1913).

iii These were: al-Jins ai-Latif (1908) and al-Sufr (1915). The writer and editor Abd ai-Hamid Hamdi founded the latter, which endorsed complete unveiling, progress and reform in all domains (1915: 1(1), 1,2).

iv Egyptians were "lazy and always fleeing work," left their children "covered with dirt and roaming the alleys rolling in the dust like the children of animals." and were sunk in apathy, afflicted, as he put it, "with a paralysis of nerves .so that we are unmoved by anything, however beautiful or terrible" (1976, Vol. 2: 134). Nevertheless, over and above such differences between Muslim nationals, Arvin asserted, the observer would find both Turks and Egyptians "equal in ignorance, laziness and backwardness" (1976, Vol. 2: 72).