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The Making of the Modern Muslim Woman Self In Iran and Egypt

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Abstract

The “Woman Question” has been one of the most troubling and yet inspiring issues that both women and men have been grappling with in modern times. The presence and contributions of women as individuals, citizens and mothers to society have either been overlooked or not rightfully acknowledged. Today, it is widely agreed that the advancement and empowerment of women in different social, economic and political realms of activity have a direct affect on the overall improvement of life in different societies. In different parts of the world, women empowered through international regimes and mechanisms are beginning to emerge in the public sphere as actors and agents who wish to take control of the events and factors that influence their lives. In the Middle East, as well, particularly in Iran and Egypt there is a new generation of women in the making who, empowered and influenced by discourses and values in modernity, feminism, and revivalist Islam, are creating a new identity and self-hood for themselves. These women seek to be conscious participants in the process of producing and changing norms and policies in the political, social and religious spheres of activity.

The making of the modern Muslim woman self will be seen through the unfolding of the women’s movements in Iran and Egypt as women come to internalize and apply notions in the triad of modernity, feminism and revivalist Islam in the actions that they take. Each theoretical and intellectual discourse provides women with mechanisms to better understand themselves as individuals capable of rational thought and action, who can consciously present themselves to their societies and to the world, as modern Muslim women. Following the women’s movements in these two countries, the author of this thesis will consider whether the manifestation of the modern Muslim woman self, as a self-conscious individual who acknowledges her womanhood and muslimness as parts of her being, is the result of a greater discourse that is taking shape in Iran and Egypt.

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PREFACE

What a woman!. I thought. The passionate, well-articulated, and highly critical comments given by this member of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) captured the attention of all the participants in the conference. A lawyer by profession and an activist in an armed nationalist movement and today a committee member to CEDAW¹, this individual was indeed the embodiment of the modern Muslim woman. She had put her black hair in a small bun behind her head, had a string of pearls around her neck and was always wearing a smile. The questions and comments that she posed to the presenting delegation meticulously targeted the shortcomings and challenges they faced in changing the social, economic and political means necessary for improving the life of their women citizens. Despite her criticisms, her optimistic tone and powerful call for a better future for women brought a peculiar feeling of hope and warmth to the otherwise chilly conference room # 3 of the United Nations.

As individuals, we are molded by our unique life experiences which give meaning and direction to our lives. Our interactions with the life stories of others provide us with visions of how we can become who we want to be. Being a student in academia and in life I have come across multiple, at times opposing value systems that have encouraged me to become a self-conscious and politically aware agent. Throughout the years, my sex, religion, nationality, political ideas, life style and other “personal baggage” have not impeded my efforts in pursuing an individual narrative. It is within the framework of our

¹ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women ratified in the UN in 1979, and currently has 161 states party to the Convention.

personal narratives that we formulate the image of the “agent” that we wish to be. The contour of the modern Muslim woman is that which I seek to fit into.

But, the woman that I am writing about is not a hero indeed. She is an ordinary citizen, some can even say, she is part of the masses. But what makes her different or perhaps distinguished from the rest of the women out there, is the confidence that she has in herself as a modern Muslim woman. She is conscious of her multiple identities and is comfortable enough to be able to communicate every aspect of her being with those around her. This modern Muslim woman is an individual who is able to think and act autonomously. Womanhood is part of her personhood. For her femininity and sexuality are attributes that are to be celebrated and respected. It is wrong to say that she exposes her sexuality or radically puts it on display, but, she does not shy away from celebrating her womanhood either. Muslimness and being part of the Muslim community is another component of her. She is not apologetic about expressing the observance of her faith, which has been under much criticism from orientalist both inside and outside the Muslim community. Her ability to participate in the modern world through its social, economic and political mechanisms allows her to communicate her ideals, aspirations and needs with others. She is no hero, this modern Muslim woman, but, she is not to be taken for granted either, because, not every woman is like her. She is distinct from other women by the radiant sign of confidence that she carries within herself, one that all can see and respect. Intelligent and confident, yet humble and egalitarian, a self-conscious woman and socially aware citizen, this modern Muslim woman is a self worth paying attention to. She is no hidden face of Eve; rather she is an individual who is visible and publicly vocal about social and political issues that affect women and men in society. She

is articulate and capable of communicating needs and interests, and that is what makes her an agent worth looking up to.

Fertile ground and a certain degree of freedom and respect give birth to women as such; who are able to communicate with their own self-hood as women, adherents of a faith and as modern citizens. This thesis has been an intellectual journey and in the process I have been inspired by individual women whose wisdom, intellectualism, zest for life and enthusiasm for change and empowerment have left an everlasting impression on my mind and soul. I have been moved by these women, whose tireless efforts, often met by obstacles from governments, religious authorities, individuals, and cultural norms, have not discouraged them from their quest for equality, justice and dignity. Either through radical revolution or cautious action through political and legal institutions these individuals have sought to bring new ideas and outlooks on the position of women in their societies. Commitment to their cause and the ability to communicate goals and aspirations with their countrywomen and countrymen, and with the international community, raises the question, of whether there is a new generation of Muslim women in the making? Women who are empowered with modern and reformist discourses that value individual worth, womanhood, and place great emphasis on participation and inclusion. To answer this question, one has to look at the different discourses that could have influenced the thoughts and actions of these women either in their capacity as individuals or through the different women's movements that (could) have served as a repository/mechanism for the creation of modern Muslim women selves. It must be noted that the purpose of this thesis is not to provide a prototype of "the Muslim woman." As "woman" is itself a fragmented and highly contested category where multiple individual

women fit into simply because of their gender: the category “Muslim woman” is not solid either. Nevertheless, the goal is to seek out and identify those historic events, movements and discourses that have provided women in Muslim countries (especially in Iran and Egypt) with mechanisms that have enabled them to become self-conscious, autonomous and vocal agents of change.

As every intellectual project also reflects the inner passions and aspirations of its author, in the process of formulating and writing this thesis many have helped that I acknowledge their contributions. I would like to mention the members of my committee Professors Christine Gabriel, and Doris Buss for their helpful comments and contributions. I extend my appreciation and humble gratitude to Professor Farhang Rajaei, my advisor on this intellectual journey. In the numerous discussions that we have had he has tirelessly listened to my thoughts and comments, provided his thoughtful insights and guided me through every step of this project. I have learned greatly from his wisdom and thoughts and am forever indebted for his kindness and patience with me.

My parents deserve special thanks. Maman Adeleh’s wisdom and confidence along with her motherly love has enabled me to be the young woman that I am today. My father, Baba Ahmad has always been patient and optimistic. It was his calm and hopeful tone that has inspired me to have faith and aim for the clouds. I would also like to thank the helpful comments of my brother Alireza who patiently listened as I read parts of this work for him, and of course Mahdi my younger brother, who has inspired us all as a family.

The main contributors are those individual women whose words of wisdom manifested through the actions they take in their daily lives as daughters, mothers,

academics, lawyers and politicians have inspired me and taught me that being a Muslim woman in this modern world is to be celebrated. Thanks to those women whose very presence along with radiant and confident smiles have given me hope about the dawn of a new era where women can and shall be recognized and respected as modern Muslim women.

INTRODUCTION

The “Woman Question” has been one of the most troubling and yet inspiring issues that both women and men have been grappling with in modern times. The presence and contributions of women as individuals, citizens and mothers to society have either been overlooked or not rightfully acknowledged. It might well be the legacy of the twentieth century that has succeeded in providing men and women with a new worldview that acknowledges and appreciates the presence and contributions of the “other” half of a population. Today, it is widely agreed that the advancement and empowerment of women in different social, economic and political realms of activity has a direct affect on the overall improvement of life in different societies. The establishment of institutions, policies and norms at national and international levels that seek to include women in decision-making processes further testifies to the recognition that the empowerment of women is indispensable to global peace and stability. Attaining gender equality has become an important indicator in measuring the political and economic development of nation states. For instance, the Gender Empowerment Index (GEM) of the United Nation’s Human Development Report reveals “whether women take an active part in economic and political life. It focuses on gender inequality in key areas of economic and political participation and decision-making.”² In addition, the Arab Human Development Report identifies gender empowerment as a critical aspect of human freedom and an important project in the process of establishing efficient systems of governance.³ This new emphasis on the need to focus and invest on issues that influence women’s public and private lives can be seen as part of a bigger modern process that recognizes and

² *Human Development Report 2004*, (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2004), 217.

³ *The Arab Development Report 2002*, (New York: United Nations Development Programme, Regional Bureau for Arab States, 2002).

respects the presence and contribution of each global citizen regardless of age, sex, nationality and religion. Nevertheless, despite new frameworks and orientations, the issue of women's rights has been the source of much contention and dispute between different political, religious and social groups.

“A specter is haunting the Middle East—the specter of modernity and women's rights,”⁴ writes Val Moghadam, the Director of Women's Studies at Illinois State University. In the Middle East, along with other regions in the world, everyone seems to be talking about the need for the greater participation of women in public life. The source of this newly empowered voice which raises concern about the presence and inclusion of women in society must come from self-conscious, politically and socially aware women who are breaking barriers and pushing for changing laws and norms within their societies. In a region where the majority of the populations adhere to Islam, Muslim women are the main actors in a revolutionary process that is taking place there. According to Fatima Mernissi, a prominent scholar and a contemporary feminist-activist from Morocco, the politicization of Muslim women and the new perception that they have gained about their problems—previously identified and labeled as being emotional—allows them to diagnose and verbalize the obstacles that they face as being essentially political.⁵ As a result, women who are either religiously or culturally Muslim have taken it upon themselves to establish a new venue in the public political realm where through their inclusion and activism they seek to change long established norms and beliefs about the position of women in society.

⁴ Valentine Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*, (Boulder, Co.: Rienner, 2003), 227.

⁵ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), xiii and xiv.

However, the Muslim woman is one individual whose image and presence is often victimized not only by her peers but also by those “others” who do not understand what constitutes her being. In fact talking about *the* Muslim woman is problematic in its own lieu. Women who are Muslim come from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, with diverse interpretations and understandings of the laws and traditions of Islam. As a result, it is very difficult to provide a unified and holistic prototype of “the Muslim woman.” Nevertheless, it is not wrong to say that women living in Muslim societies and women who consider themselves Muslim do share and indeed talk about similar obstacles and negligence of their rights and personhood either due to misinterpreted religious edicts, or like other women around the world by the explicit and implicit norms of patriarchy.

The black chador that envelops and enshrouds a woman offers different mechanisms and provides different meanings to the women and men who have invoked the significance of its use. For centuries Muslim men have used the tradition/law of hijab, which requires that women cover their bodies and hair from men as a means to isolate women to the private realm. Invoking the idea of *hijab* and the need to keep women away from the eyes of “unrelated” men has justified the establishment of sex-segregated societies. However, women, especially in modern times, are using the hijab as a means to define and establish borders of their own choosing. In essence, Muslim women empowered with modern notions of individuality, self-consciousness, freedom of choice and independent thought, are defining the parameters by which they choose to participate in society. Seen as either isolated and repressed or liberated and in control, the woman in the black chador is nevertheless an individual who is self-consciously defining the

contours of her identity as an independent woman self who happens to be a mother and citizen as well. The emergence of the voice of this new Muslim woman self who is claiming a spot in political, social and economic realms of activity raises the question of “whether there is a Modern Muslim Woman Self in the Making?” I propose to consider the proposition of the emergence of the modern Muslim woman through a historical unfolding of three distinct discourses that I claim have contributed to the rising of this ideal type person. I refer to (1) the unfolding of the process of modernity, (2) the historical rise of women’s consciousness and along with it the organizational arrangement for the assertion of women’s rights, and (3) the revival of Islam which has asserted and pronounced Muslim indigenous voices. These three have influenced all aspects of life in the Muslim world, including the life and identity of women. As a result, similar to the fate of Western women, the notion of selfhood has become important among women who celebrate autonomy and individuality, as well as being Muslim. The quest here is to see whether the modern Muslim woman is the manifestation of a greater movement that is taking place in the Middle East. It must be noted that the term Muslim is capitalized solely because the noun denominates association with a certain faith. However, the term Muslim as it is used in describing the modern Muslim woman does not carry anymore weight than modern or woman throughout this thesis. Muslimness is simply another attribute of this person that the author claims is in the making.

The human condition is a narrative of the life of individuals, the collective will of a community, the goals of a society, the interests and aspirations of nations, and the survival and cohabitation of different contending groups alongside one another. Among them, “narratives of the life of individuals,” appear as the hallmarks of the modern world.

In his seminal work, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Charles Taylor, contemporary Canadian philosopher, states that “in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become and where we are going.”⁶ In verifying the claim of whether or not there is a modern Muslim woman self in the making it is necessary to identify and understand the discourses and historic events that have influenced the process of how Muslim women have come to where they are today. In this regard, it is necessary to mention, that given the volatile and at times un-restful nature of politics in the Middle East, many women have never had the chance to solely focus on issues relating to women only. Women’s involvement with nationalist movements against imperialist and colonialist regimes, in addition to the continued existence of ethnic or religious tensions have at times diverted the attention of women to focus on bigger, more important causes, such as “national solidarity”. As a result, women were not able to focus on issues such as gender equality, political and economic advancement and the social emancipation of women. For example, the involvement of Palestinian women with the Israeli occupation and the weight that was placed on Pan-Arabism in countries such as Syria, Jordan and Iraq, have served as ‘national’ obstacles to the creation of spontaneous women’s movements. However, women in Iran, Turkey and Egypt have been successful in establishing and maintaining momentous and fruitful women’s movements. It must be noted that women in the three mentioned States have played a significant role in struggles for national independence as well. But due to the geo-political status of these nations, which have provided them with relative power and stability in the region, women in these countries have been able to create new spheres of activity and new discourses focused

⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 47.

only on the female members of society. A greater degree of similarity exists in the political and religious events and factors that have influenced women's activities in Iran and Egypt. As a result, the activities and contributions of Iranian and Egyptian women will be looked at and discussed in creating the contours of the modern Muslim woman self.

There is a widely agreed upon myth about the existence of a gap between what is discussed in academia and what actually takes place on the ground. Nevertheless, upon closer observation we can see that the actions of individuals stemming from the internal workings of society reflect the operationalization of the very theoretical discourses developed and discussed among academics. In other words, it is a mistake to see philosophical and political theories as only observations of the human condition, or idealistic assumptions about how humans should act and what society must look like. It is the goal of this thesis to try and elaborate that politics is indeed part of everyday life, and that Muslim women in particular more than ever are making the conscious choice of being politically active and self-aware agents. Looking at the women's movements in Iran and Egypt, the ideas and principles in the discourses on modernity, revivalist Islam and feminism form the angles of a triad that women have been invoking and utilizing throughout their movements. While the goals that women were working towards are different at each phase of their movements; nevertheless, their actions must be seen as part of a greater goal in pushing for inclusion and becoming part of the process of making history in their nations as mothers, citizens and simply as women. Hence, it is necessary to observe different moments in the movements to understand how the modern Muslim woman has reached to her contemporary stage.

As the idea is that theory influences practice, this thesis is organized in a manner that highlights the operationalization of theory through women's activism. The first section entitled "The Unfolding of Theory through Practice" consists of three chapters. Each Chapter begins with a discussion highlighting the main debates and ideas in an intellectual discourse. Modernity's emphasis on self-knowledge and the importance of communication and articulation of needs and interests is reflected through women's demand for education. My attention to the discourse of modernity is limited to those aspects that have influenced Muslim male and female thinkers and activists in seeking ways to rationally interpret religious norms and values as they have come to influence modern life. Feminism is highlighted as a discourse that has opened the door to criticisms about the patriarchal system of male domination, which has led to discrimination and inequality based on sex. As a result, feminism will be used as a discourse to draw attention to women's activities as they have sought to change or modify views about the inferiority of women. Ethos in modernity and frameworks in feminism have influenced the male and female revival of Islamic thought, as modernists have sought to rationally re-read and re-interpret laws and norms in Islam as they play a role in the daily lives of women and men in the Muslim world, particularly in Iran and Egypt.

From the Enlightenment's motto "dare to know" to debates on communicative action, Chapter 1 highlights arguments put forth by key Western philosophers, such as Kant, Hegel, Habermas and the contemporary Charles Taylor, all who emphasized freedom of thought and expression for each individual human being. Discourses in modernity call attention to the rationality, autonomy and self-worth of each human being. Hence, every individual armed with self-knowledge and the ability to communicate

his/her thoughts in a free and pluralistic environment is a “knowing agent.” In the earlier decades of their movements, women in Iran and Egypt emphasized the need for education and sought to raise consciousness through writing articles and founding publications. An educated woman was an enlightened woman, who would be able to enter the sphere of knowledge and power.

Having been educated and achieved the ability to articulate and communicate needs and interests, women were ready to organize and participate as women citizens for the cause of the nation. Chapter 2 begins by looking at the origins of ‘feminism’ as a term widely used by women and men who wished to change the patriarchal system of male dominance in favor of equity and equality between women and men. Looking at the women’s movement in the United States, which is characterized by different phases, each with a discourse and goal of its own provides a good framework for analyzing the political organization of women in Iran and Egypt. The feminist slogan, “the personal is political” was embodied in the organization and mobilization of Iranian and Egyptian women as they participated in nationalist and anti-colonial movements. In a period spanning from the early 1900’s to the latter decades of the twentieth century, women have used the card of nationalism to justify their participation in politics as women citizens. Regardless of concern for the independence of their nations, Iranian and Egyptian women have also pushed their own “women’s agenda” forward. By establishing schools and organizations and lobbying for the recognition of their activities as legitimate by different governments, feminists in Iran and Egypt have mobilized to mark their presence in the public sphere. It is during this stage of their movement that discussions

about women's rights and the need for women-focused laws are raised by women parliamentarians and other women who were active in the political scene.

The ascendance of women into the process of making and changing laws and norms in society in their capacity as modern women selves is best seen through the efforts of contemporary women in questioning the religious basis of certain laws and traditions. In this respect, Muslim women are following the footsteps of early Muslim male modernists who sought to bridge the gap between Islam and modernity in earlier periods. Modernist men such as Mohammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman have argued that the egalitarian norms and laws of Islam are in harmony with modernity's call for individual rights and the recognition of human dignity. Following the methodology of male modernists, today, in Iran and Egypt, women are taking it upon themselves to re-evaluate and reinterpret certain verses of the Quran from a woman's point of view. In essence, this nuance in viewing religion as compatible with the demands of modern times, especially with regards to women's rights and the issue of the hijab or veiling is women's way of continuing an early revivalist/reformist project initiated by Muslim men. The first section of Chapter 3 looks at the arguments and methodologies proposed by reformist men who sought to attenuate the challenges posed by modernity's ethos on individual rationality in establishing norms and values. By accepting the modern view of humankind as capable of rationally devising a plan for achieving 'the good', Muslim modernists have sought different means to authenticate their claims with Islamic discourse. As Islamic laws and norms are thought to be applicable to all modes of life at all times, any deviation from "divinely" sanctioned mores can be seen as blasphemy. Hence, Muslim modernists have created a discourse that, on the one hand, maintains and

respects the divine character of religious edicts and norms, while opening the door to new readings and interpretations on the freedom and independence of thought that is sanctioned by religion as well. Similar to the action of male modernists, Iranian women have sought to re-visit certain verses of the Quran that they see as incompatible with the egalitarian essence of religion and with the rights of women either. In using the veil as a tool for expressing individuality and freedom of choice, Egyptian women are also creating new discourses as modern Muslim women.

The second section entitled “Praxis” looks at the Modern Muslim woman in action today. As Iranian and Egyptian women have tackled with the triad of modernity, feminism and revivalist Islam in defining their sense of self-hood, it is then important to see whether the envisioned modern Muslim woman self really exists or not? This section looks at the actions of some contemporary women in Iran and Egypt who are consciously participating in the process of making policies and changing laws that relate and affect the status of women in the social, economic and political realm. The discourses treated in the first three chapters have had a history and a trajectory that could be traced, identified and documented. The findings of the three chapters in Part I combine to constitute my theoretical framework for the hypothesis of this thesis. The theoretical dimensions have been tested against the historical unfolding of the triad, as the impact of each theoretical discourse is observed in a specific area of focus. Part I explains the components of the category of the modern Muslim woman self which this thesis is discussing the creation of its agency as it unfolds through modernity, feminism, and Islamic authenticity. In Part II, I hope to test the combination of the discourses in practice by observing the actions of contemporary women in Iran and Egypt. My findings are tenuous at best, but there are

enough indicators to enable me to claim the emergence of a new generation of Muslim women who act differently than before. The women that are identified in Chapter four as modern Muslim women are samples of women who seem to have been influenced by notions in the triad. These women are trendsetters, as they are setting precedence through their public actions, and pursuing women-focused agendas as they carve a space for the political inclusion of the next generation of women in Iran and Egypt in their respective societies. A short conclusion follows hoping to tie the argument together.

Finally a short explanation about the sources of Chapter four is in order. Since the emergence of the modern Muslim woman self in contemporary Iran and Egypt is in the making, the reader may note that most of the sources in Chapter four are from the new library, public sphere and source, i.e., "the internet." The reason is that the topic covered in the chapter is new and little work has appeared in traditional print form. Thus, I have consulted the web page of the individuals and retrieved actual documents from various web stations for the purpose of this work.

Part I

THE UNFOLDING OF THEORY THROUGH PRACTICE

CHAPTER 1

MODERNITY AND ITS IMPACT ON MUSLIM WOMEN

“Every man beareth the stampe of the whole human
condition”
Montaigne

A. Emergence of the Knowing Agent

From Plato’s Allegory of the Cave to Charles Taylor’s theories of the self, it can be clearly seen that throughout its history, Western political thought has sought by different methodologies and theories to explain and understand the place of humans in the universe. Plato discusses the enlightenment of the caveman upon realizing that behind the shadows real objects exist, and that there is an order in the universe. In the Age of Enlightenment, Descartes talks of the Cartesian self who is self aware and consciously creates a vision of the order of the universe. From Ancient, to Christian, to the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and to the current Modern or as some like to say Post-Modern age, every historic period has contributed notions, values and modes of thought that have transcended their time and have become part of our modern everyday rhetoric, mode of thought and living. A wide variety of terms are used to describe the society, social life, driving force, symptomatic mentality, or some other defining aspects of modernity. They include: bureaucracy, disenchantment of the world, rationalization, secularization, alienation, commodification, individualism, subjectivism, objectivism, universalism, industrial society, diversification, democratization, mechanization, and so on.¹

It is my contention to view modernity as a process, and not a project whose mission has already been accomplished. This Chapter will trace the development of some

¹ Wikipedia online Encyclopedia. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernity>).

key concepts of modernity as discussed by different philosophers from the Enlightenment to present times and how they have left their mark on women in the Muslim world. While there are many philosophers and theorists whose ideas have contributed to the discourse on modernity, this section will selectively discuss some of the main arguments of Western philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Habermas and Taylor. Considering that modernity has been discussed in its different aspects, the goal is to show how subjectivity and selfhood constitute the heart of the message of modernity.

The spirit of modernity is a process of constant births and rebirths. From the ancient to the present, the process of modernity has initiated and set into motion the evolution of different political, religious and secular ideologies that have brought about new modes of thinking about the human condition and the place of the individual person within it. In the Twentieth Century this process has been expanded to include a novel world order. With the birth of modernity and the modernization process, different modern political, economic and social institutions came into existence, which embodied the modern notions of freedom, independence, equality, self-determination, and the right to dignity and respect for all human beings. Contrary to the belief of many political scientists, philosophers and sociologists, modernity is not a project that has reached the ends of its aims. Indeed, it is a process in the making, whose values and ethos are transcending the borders of its place of birth (namely Western countries) to geographical areas where these values are being discussed, translated and transformed to fit into the local language of people within the area.

Sapere aude! "Dare to know!" That is the motto of enlightenment. This is perhaps one of the most pronounced conceptions of modern times; man's ability to use his reason

to decide over his own fate in freedom and independence. In his essay "What is Enlightenment?" submitted to the German periodical *Berlinische Monatschrift* in 1784, Immanuel Kant, defines enlightenment as "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another."² In essence, what Kant argues throughout this short yet seminal essay, is that for enlightenment to occur, men should be able to use their reason free from political, social and religious dictums to pursue their aspired goals through their own determined means. For enlightenment, nothing is required but freedom.³ Respect for human thought, independence and dignity only ensues in a society where individuals "have the freedom to make public use of their reason"⁴, and are able to state their opinions and voice their criticisms without fear of being penalized. The 'public use' of one's reason in freedom stands in contrast with the 'private use' of one's reason. The public use of reason refers to voicing concern and airing criticism as a private citizen or as Kant puts it as a scholar before the reading public. The 'private use' of reason is limited to the bounds of a particular civil post or office. So, according to Kant, the duties and freedoms of a person as a private citizen and as an occupant of a civil post differ, and hence a boundary is to be observed and respected.

Kant continues to argue that "a greater degree of civil freedom appears advantageous to the freedom of mind of the people; yet, it places inescapable limitations upon it. A lower degree of civil freedom, on the contrary, provides the mind with room

² Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?". (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/kant-whatis.html>).

³ Kant, "What is Enlightenment?"

⁴ *Ibid.*

for each man to extend himself to his full capacity.”⁵ Along with encouraging unlimited freedom to think, he again calls for the respect of a certain sense of consciousness, regarding the free expression of one’s opinions. It is only when certain limitations define the parameter of the rule of interaction that people gradually become capable of managing freedom. When the freedom and dignity of humans are respected, people then become conscious of their ability and capacity to hold different views and thoughts. It is perhaps a hallmark of modern society to emphasize on freedom of thought and expression, while instituting laws that provide a certain boundary that define how and where is it appropriate for one to express views different or in opposition to accepted norms. In essence, while Kant argues for a society where freedom of thought and expression is encouraged he also raises the issue that diversity of thought can be tolerated only upon the establishment of institutions and laws that maintain and manage the freedom of all.

The key philosopher of the Enlightenment who followed Kant and whose works have greatly influenced the mode of thought of later philosophers is Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). Hegel was perhaps the first to offer the most penetrating analysis of the state of mind of a modern person. For Hegel, the modern person is one who is not merely part of history, but, conscious of history as part of himself.⁶ In this sense, the person sees herself as an agent who is aware that her self-consciousness and action in the making of history matter and are indeed important. The modern person exists in conscious relation to history, and because the new and modern world is distinguished from the old by the fact that it opens itself to the future, the epochal new

⁵ Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”

⁶ “Hegel” *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edited by Donald M. Borchent. (New York: Macmillan Reference, 1996), 353.

beginning is rendered constant with each moment that gives birth to the new. Thus, it is characteristic of the historical consciousness of modernity to set off “the most recent period” from the modern age. Within the horizon of the modern age, the present enjoys a prominent position as contemporary history.⁷

Hegel sees the modern age as marked universally by a structure of self-relation that he calls subjectivity: He vividly expresses that “The principle of the modern world is freedom of subjectivity.”⁸ In this context, the term ‘subjectivity’ carries primarily four connotations: a) individualism: in the modern world, singularity particularized without limit can make good its pretensions; b) the right to criticism: the principle of the modern world requires that anyone is to recognize shall reveal itself to him as something entitled to recognition; c) autonomy of action: our responsibility for what we do is a characteristic of modern times; and finally d) idealistic philosophy itself: Hegel considers it the work of modern times that philosophy grasps the self-conscious (or self-knowledge) Idea.⁹

According to Hegel, the principle of subjectivity like Kant’s notion of enlightenment recognizes the human potential to use reason in pursuit of personal goals and, communicating ideas and thoughts in an environment that recognizes and respects diversity. The spirit of modernity at once celebrates individuality and universality. It recognizes each person’s potential to be an autonomous individual capable of pursuing self-determined goals and ends conscious that they have to be in harmony with the welfare of others. Hegel thought of the ethical whole as the “unity of individuality and universality.” For a subject that is related to itself in knowing itself encounters itself both

⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses on Modernity*. Trans. Fredrick G. Lawrence, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990), 7.

⁸ G.F. W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of History*, (442), cited in *The Philosophical Discourses on Modernity*, 6.

⁹ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses on Modernity*, 17.

as a universal subject, which stands over against the world as the totality of possible objects, and at the same time as an individual 'I'.¹⁰ In essence, as German philosopher Habermas puts it, "the subjective will gains autonomy under universal laws."¹¹ The modern aspect of this discourse is that unlike the ancients who viewed only an elite group of people capable or rather worthy of freedom of thought and individuality, with Kant and Hegel everyone enjoys that condition and egalitarianism reigns. All humans should taste freedom to understand their selves and society through their own process of thinking. Kant and Hegel have indeed secularized St. Augustine's notion that the truth lies within, that is, it is only by looking inside that one can find God. What Kant is really asking for in his essay, is that society and political infrastructure should provide individuals with the freedom to look within and discover the worlds that they are!

While celebrating the freedom and self-hood of the individual 'I' and working towards attaining its good, one must also be conscious that the order of society must be maintained. As a result, cooperation, harmony and dialogue between the selves are necessary for maintaining the order of the whole. Aristotle argues in the *Ethics*, that "while it is desirable to secure what is good in the case of an individual, to do so in the case of a people or a state is something finer and more sublime."¹² Hence, as members of different societies, pursuing individual interests should and perhaps can be aimed at attaining the overall 'good' of society. For Aristotle as well as for Kant, freedom of thought and choice comes with a certain sense of responsibility to the society that provides and maintains stability and order where freedom flourishes.

¹⁰ Jurgen Habermas, "Hegel's Concept of Modernity" in *The Philosophical Discourses on Modernity*, 40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹² Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Trans. J.A.K Thompson, (New York: Penguin Classics, 1955), 64.

Parallel to the ancient outlook on politics, where Aristotle deemed man as a political animal, whose existence and identity was dependent upon action in the polis and in association with others, Jurgen Habermas, the modern German philosopher also views politics as the sphere that attempts to cultivate a virtuous character ready for praxis. In *The Discourses on Modernity*, Habermas argues, that in the concrete universal, the subject as universal maintains a primacy over the subject as individual. For the sphere of the ethical, the outcome of this logic is the primacy of the higher-level subjectivity of the state over the subjective freedom of the individual.¹³ Habermas, connects the consciousness and action of the individual to that of an ethical whole. For him man is a zoon politikon: politics is the social place where individuals realize their nature as rational beings. The universal application of technological rationality to social life drains the social world of its normative core. A fully depoliticized society would necessarily be a fully heteronomous society: in it no one would be truly free.¹⁴ In this context, freedom implies and requires pure praxis or action. Political community exists only through the intersubjectivity made possible through communicative action. On this accounting freedom is being imaged as pure politics.¹⁵

Intersubjectivity and the theory of communicative action are methodologies by which Habermas tries to reconcile the existing division between (public) 'political' life and personal 'depoliticized' life. By trying to utilize modern notions of self-awareness, freedom, egalitarianism and human dignity Habermas seeks to envision a society of self-conscious, politically active citizens who are able to pursue their own ends and desires in

¹³ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses on Modernity*, 40.

¹⁴ J. M. Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life: Jurgen Habermas and the Future of Critical Theory*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 41.

¹⁵ Bernstein *Recovering Ethical Life*, 37.

a way which is beneficial to the well-being of society as well. In essence, it is a reconciliation of an ancient view of politics with a modern view of the individual self/agent.

Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor adds a new dimension to the argument by situating the self within the collective. As he explains in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, a self exists only in 'webs of interlocation', and so the modern independent self presents no negation of the fact that the self only exists among other selves.¹⁶ In this lieu, it is interesting to note, that emphasis on rationality and the absolute independence of individuals from creating webs of interlocation has been a project in the process of modernity. However, as experience with one project leads to another, the current project sees the possibility of maintaining a sense of self-hood and independence while conscious that self-awareness does not arise through isolated, private acts of introspection or self reflection. Similarly, according to Habermas, all human subjectivity, that is, all experiences by individuals themselves as distinct persons, is grounded in intersubjectivity. This means that, self-consciousness, and hence subjectivity, is a social accomplishment. Through acts of reciprocal acknowledgment individual subjects (I) become aware of themselves as different from other subjects (you) all of whom are linked together through a recognition of their individuality in relation to other groups. In such conditions, there can be subjects who can assert their individuality in opposition to other individuals and against the demands of the collective. This complex accomplishment occurs above all through language. The framework of communicative action is that

¹⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 35, 36.

within which human beings are constituted as self-conscious subjects.¹⁷ Taylor also argues that linguistic articulacy is a necessity in the expression of our selves as independent and autonomous beings, which can also serve as a vehicle and bring us closer together.¹⁸

The ability to articulate and communicate thoughts and desires occupies an important space in modern times. Habermas believes that autonomy, responsibility and self-recognition are interconnected and their full realization becomes possible through communicative action. Similar to Taylor's argument, it is only when citizens are able to articulate their needs and desires free from coercion or dogmatism, that one can have a society of self-aware and socially conscious agents who are thoughtfully active in politics, as the realm for activity and communication "Only in an emancipated society, whose members' autonomy and responsibility have been realized, would communication have developed into the non-authoritarian and universally practiced dialogue from which both our model of reciprocally constituted ego-identity and our idea of true consensus area always implicitly derived."¹⁹ A distorted communication on the other hand is the inevitable concomitant of the ideological suppression of social needs. In addition, without real consensus and true communication the appearance of freedom must be illusionary.²⁰ The formation and crystallization of communicative action among citizens is possible in an ideal speech situation, where all the participants have an effective equality of chance to take part in the dialogue; which itself presupposes freedom from all forms of coercion

¹⁷ Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life*, 43.

¹⁸ Taylor, *Sources of The Self*, 91.

¹⁹ Bernstein, 51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

and constraint.²¹ Hence, “not only does the ideal speech situation depend upon agents not being self-deceived, but positively, agents can attain a true understanding of themselves, of their needs, wants, and interests, only in the context of ideal communication.”²² It is important to note that even in a society where freedom and tolerance of diverse or perhaps opposing viewpoints are not accepted, the efforts of women in trying to articulate their needs and aspirations reflects self-consciousness and agency. As an example, the efforts of Iranian and Egyptian women in demanding the right to education will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. However, it must be noted that these women had realized that education would provide them with the means to become independent actors in society, where their words would no longer be discounted as being superficial and un-educated. As independent and aware (knowledgeable) women selves, women would be able to legitimize their activities in the public realm by being able to articulate and show that their contributions to the greater good of society should be taken into consideration. Hence, communication would not only prove to be a vehicle for the presence and participation of women in society, but, it would also raise awareness about the role that women play in the progress of society. The web-of interlocution, where women and men are connected by in society would be better articulated and appreciated by both men and women.

In *The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Taylor also seeks to explore the diverse faces of ‘modern identity’ by tracing the various strands of the modern notion of what it means to be a human agent.²³ He places great emphasis on the moral sources that have had and still continue to have an influence on the development

²¹ Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life*, 5.

²² *Ibid.*, 53.

²³ Taylor, *Sources of The Self*, 3.

and formation of the 'modern self'. Moral sources imply those frameworks and value laden systems of thought and practice that provide us with an understanding of 'the good'. (In its classical sense, 'the good' is those thoughts and actions that provide for a meaningful and ethical life.) In order to make sense of our lives and have an identity, we need an orientation to the good. This sense of 'the good' has to be woven into our understanding of life as an unfolding story, as a narrative in the making.²⁴ He continues by emphasizing that in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have an idea of how we have become, and where we are going.²⁵ In other words, he invites us to a conscious re-reading of religious and philosophical discourses about leading the good life which have evolved from the ancient to the present to provide us with our modern notion of the autonomous, self-conscious, and responsible individual.

As Taylor traces the arguments presented by Plato, St. Augustine, Descartes, Locke, Hobbes, Kant and Montaigne, he illustrates how there has been a movement within Western philosophy to call upon the individual human to look inside herself, to objectify the surrounding world, and to deem self-knowledge and self-awareness as the most important elements towards leading a good life. In the modern world, the idea of "the good" once embodied in the form of the Christian God, is now replaced by the individual human being.²⁶ St. Augustine warned "Do not go outward; return within yourself, in the inward man dwells the truth," that is literally, inward lies the road to God.²⁷ In modernity, human rationality and will are deemed to be the god that are to lead us in the pursuit of 'the good.' Our visions of the good are tied up with our

²⁴ Taylor, *Sources of The Self*, 47.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

understandings of the self. We have a sense of who we are through our sense of where we stand in relation to the good. But this also means that radically different senses of what the good is also go along with different conceptions of what a human agent is, or in Taylor's words "different notions of the self."²⁸

While the idea of the self is novel in the modern world, it is nevertheless a universal notion that manifests differently among the different populations that reflect and draw upon it. For example, Muslim women in Iran and Egypt have consciously or unconsciously drawn upon the notions of individuality and self-expression while they mobilized efforts in creating a voice of their own in the public sphere. Expression of their individual thoughts and opinions through articles and letters published in newspapers and journals further testifies that Iranian and Egyptian women were becoming aware of the worth and importance of their individual voices in changing norms and traditions that had long ignored their presence in society. This will be discussed further in the subsequent section.

As we are called to look within ourselves to define what 'the good' means for each individual self, we are also reminded that there are different narratives around us which help us make sense of what and how it is to be an agent among other human agents. Indeed it is part of the process of modernity that calls for self-consciousness and independent action, while at the same time emphasizing on the need to pay careful attention to the discourses taking place in our surrounding. While, the human agent is self-conscious of what defines the good life for her and can think autonomously, she nevertheless, has to be able to communicate her goals and desires with the outside world.

²⁸ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 105.

Hence, the modern self is one who is self-aware, capable of rational and independent thought and deems it important to communicate her individual thoughts and opinions with others. The Iranian and Egyptian women activists that will be looked at in the next section sought to acquire and establish some of these modern aspects of the self through their activities. Emphasis on education stems from the realization that in order to be heard women had to rationally articulate and communicate their needs and interests. Hence, access to education and establishing schools and publications was the strategy that Iranian and Egyptian women consciously or unconsciously adopted in making themselves part of the process of making history in their respective countries. The call for women's education was initially proposed by male reformists who thought that educated mothers and wives would raise better children for society. However, later on, women took control of the issue and formulated it in a manner that best fit the progression of their own agenda, which included greater participation in society as mothers, wives and socially and politically aware women citizens. As the manifestation of the "modern self" unfolds through the activities and actions of Iranian and Egyptian women through subsequent chapters in this thesis it is interesting to keep in mind that these women took the concept "dare to know" to the heart of their activities in becoming modern Muslim women selves.

B. Educating the Daughters of the Nile and Persia

It is not an exaggeration to state that education has been and continues to be the most important prism through which women have sought to escape the confines of the cave and become the 'enlightened women selves' of society. The ability to read, write and develop a rational thinking process that can articulate positions and posit questions is

an empowering and liberating tool. In Iran and Egypt, women realized that through writing they enter the field of power and knowledge.²⁹ As a result, one of the very first efforts of women in both Iran and Egypt was consolidating efforts and support in establishing girls' schools and voicing opinions and concerns by writing for journals and newspapers and establishing newspapers of their own.

In both Iran and Egypt, upper and middle class girls were educated in religious studies and more often than not, girls from wealthy families had English and French tutors who taught languages, literature and sometimes music. Girls from poorer families could attend *maktabs* or *kuttabs*³⁰ where the Quran was taught by rote together with some reading and writing.³¹ The issue of girls'/women's education gained ground in the latter years of the nineteenth century in both countries especially when young European educated men came back home and saw 'backwardness' and lack of progress in their societies. One of the main factors for this lack of progress was associated to the 'backwardness' of women. "Pro-feminist" men linked the lack of national progress to women's lack of education and the imposition of social constraints, such as veiling and seclusion of women from society. The main argument of these early "male feminists" was that "the status of women is inseparably tied to the status of a nation. When the status of a nation is low, reflecting an uncivilized condition for that nation, the status of women is also low, and when the status of a nation is elevated, reflecting the progress of civilizations of that nation, the status of women in that country is also elevated."³²

²⁹ Margot Badron and Miriam Cooke Eds., *Opening the Gates. A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, (London: Virago Press 1990), xxvii.

³⁰ The place where young girls would attend to learn religious studies.

³¹ Leila Ahmed, "Egyptian Reformism and Women's Rights" in *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movement*, Edited by Abida Samiuddin and R.K Khanum, (Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House, 2002), 139.

³² Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women and the New Woman*, Trans. Samiha Sidhom Peterson, (Cairo: The American University of Cairo, 2000), 6.

Arguments proposed by Qasim Amin in Egypt and Mirza Agha Khan Kirmani in Iran in late nineteenth century, came out of their belief that women in their roles as wives and mothers were not educated and so they did not qualify for the training and upbringing of the children of future generations.

Qasim Amin (1865-1908) has been considered the “father of Arab feminism” through the publication of *The Liberation of Women* (1899) and *The New Woman* (1900). Amin, a disciple of modernist Muslim scholar Mohammad Abduh, was educated in France and was a judge by profession. He called for women’s education insisting that “according to Islamic law, women are considered to possess the same legal capabilities in all civil cases pertaining to buying, donating, and disposal of goods, unhindered by requirements of permission from either their father or husband.”³³ In his opinion, education would allow the Egyptian women to develop independent thought and would enable them to accept sound ideas and discard the superstitions and myths that occupy the minds of women. He continues by stating that “If a woman was led by the hand into the community of the living, if her energy was directed toward active participation in society, and if she was to use her mental and physical abilities, she would produce as much as she consumes. A woman needs to be educated so that she can have understanding and a will of her own.”³⁴ Amin’s arguments produced a lot of debate among men and women some of whom welcomed his call for educating women. And some who rejected his work as contrary to the teachings of Islam. However, he argued that it was not religion that hindered women’s education and participation in social life, rather it was the unchallenged application of long-established traditions that kept women from becoming

³³ Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women*, 7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

active participants in society. The debate surrounding his work continues to this day, where critics see that his final goal was to advocate for the education of women so that they would be better mothers and better companions for their educated husbands.

Other “male feminists” such Ahmed Fares El Shidyak published *One Leg Crossed Over the Other*, one of the first books to support women’s emancipation in 1855. Shaikh Ahmad Rifa’i Al Tahtawi also wrote in *A Guide to the Education of Girls and Boys* in 1872 on the need for women’s education and redress of the injustices to which women were subjected. He used the Quran and the *hadith* to Islamically justify his claims.³⁵ In this regard, contributions by these early pro-women reformers are important to consider because as men they were able to express and publish their opinions; and by so doing they brought the “women question” to the foray of public discussion. Reformers began to promote women’s education and openly challenged and criticized the social and cultural practices oppressive to women.³⁶ Their arguments opened the door for women activists to publicly call for the funding and support of girl’s schools.

Considering male contributions to feminist discourses and activities in Egypt, it is important to note that women’s “feminist” activities, including their efforts to educate themselves and interpret certain religious texts preceded Amin and the call of other male reformers for women’s liberation and education. Already in the 1860’s and 1870’s, women were writing to each other, transcending the highly segregated and secluded world of the nineteenth century that even cut women off from each other.³⁷ As early as 1892, Zainab Al Fawwaz protested in *Al Nil* magazine, stating: “We have not seen any of the divinely ordered systems of law, or any law from among the corpus of (Islamic)

³⁵ Leila Ahmed. “Egyptian Reformism and Women’s Rights”. 143.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

³⁷ Margot Badran, *Opening the Gates*. xxvi.

religious law ruling that woman is to be prohibited from involvement in the occupation of men.”³⁸ While women’s early activism is important to consider, yet, it was Qasim Amin’s books for example—rather than women’s writings and their debates in the harems—which were seen and discussed. Therefore, his arguments have been considered as pioneering the discourse on women’s education and liberation even though he was not the first.

In Iran, the partial translation/adaptation of Qasim Amin’s book *The Liberation of Women* in 1900 by Yusuf Ashtiani initiated the first public debate about women’s education in Iran. It’s interesting to note that Ashtiani published the book under the title: *Education of Women* and he eliminated the second chapter dealing with women and the veil.³⁹ Prior to Ashtiani’s translation of Amin’s book, Mirza Agha Khan Kirmani (1853-96), an advocate for women’s education and un-veiling, argued in his *Sad Khatabeh* (One Hundred Saying) at great length that the first school, the womb of the mother, was the most important and most influential school in which every man gains his ethics and perfects his temperament and character.⁴⁰ He further argued that “one needs to pay special attention and care for women and their rights so that children will not become ill-tempered and bad-natured.”⁴¹ Whether they were to be educated to become better mothers or better companions as wives, these male advocates for women’s education were convinced that the evidence of history confirms and demonstrates that the status of women is inseparably tied to the status of a nation.⁴² The call for reforming women for the sake of elevating the nation was criticized and dismissed by some women, such as

³⁸ Margot Badran, “Feminist Consciousness and the Islamic State” in *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movement*, 157.

³⁹ Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Feminist Potential of Women’s Awakening” in *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movement*, 110.

⁴⁰ Cited in Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Feminist Potential of Women’s Awakening”, 96.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴² Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Feminist Potential of Women’s Awakening”. 110.

Bibi Khanum, an Iranian Intellectual. In an essay entitled "The Chastisement of Women and the Vices of Men" (1896) she argued that "the creators of the misfortunes of society were men. The least they could do...was to stop going around advising women" and instead, seek "a remedy for their own corruption" she admonished.⁴³ Regardless of arguments about women's inability to raise good children due to their lack of education, women seized the window of opportunity that provided a venue for the pursuit of goals that sought to change and improve the life of women in general.

In the latter decades of the nineteenth century, women had taken the matter of education in their own hands. In Iran and Egypt, women had established girls' schools and were publishing articles and journals of their own either advocating for women's education to become better, informed mothers or to become aware citizens of society. As Abu-Lughod argues, women's active writing in the press enabled them, instead of the men, to control the discourse on women's right to education and emancipation.⁴⁴ The first women's journal published in Iran entitled *Danish* (Knowledge) was edited by Dr. Kahhal, a woman ophthalmologist with an active practice. *Danish* began publication in September 1910, with a banner that read: "This is an ethical journal of the science of housekeeping, child rearing, husband keeping; useful for girls' and women's moral development. It will not say a word on national politics."⁴⁵ Perhaps, the masthead of the journal had to read as such as a way to legitimize that it is operating in the 'approved' realm of activity for women. *Shukufah* was another journal that began publication in 1914. It was oriented toward production of a new type of mother and envisaged new

⁴³ Cited in Ellen L. Fleischmann, "The Other "Awakening": The Emergence of Women's Movements in the Modern Middle East, 1900-1940," in *Social History of Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East*, Edited by Margaret Lee Meriwether and Judith Tucker, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 100.

⁴⁴ Lila Abu-Lughod, "Feminist Longings and Post-Colonial Conditions" in *Remaking Women, Feminism, and Modernity in the Middle East*, Edited by Lila Abu-Lughod, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 6.

⁴⁵ Afsaneh Najmanadi, "Feminist Potential of Women's Awakening", 122.

marital relationships. *Shukufah* was edited by Muzayyan al-Saltaneh, an active educationalist who established three elementary schools and one vocational school for girls during the same period as she was publishing *Shukufah*.⁴⁶ It's noteworthy to point out the strategy that the women pursued through their publications as they were at once disciplinary and emancipatory. By emphasizing their nurturing aspect they were accepting a certain ascribed role that nature/society had granted them, namely that of the nurturing mother and caring wife. On the other hand, they were moving towards the attainment of the new role of the citizen who is aware of the woes and interests of the nation. Therefore, they were juggling between their ascribed roles which they embraced, and were seeking ways to redefine and gain recognition as citizens of society as well. Najmabadi argues that the success of this double work made woman's place in the nation possible. They would be ready to become citizens as they trained to become better wives and mothers. In fact it was within the space of the girl's schools that women had already begun to constitute themselves as citizens from the time of the Constitutional Revolution.⁴⁷ In Iran, although it was individual women who took the initiative in founding girl's schools during the first constitutional period, "the new schools were in close organizational relationship with the woman's *Anjomans*." By 1913, there were sixty-three private girl's schools with a combined enrollment of 2,500 in Iran.⁴⁸

In Egypt, as part of efforts to modernize Egypt under the reign of Mohammad Ali (1805-48) steps were taken to introduce a systematic plan for industrialization and social restructuring. Modern education was introduced to produce a suitably skilled labor

⁴⁶ Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Feminist Potential of Women's Awakening", 124.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴⁸ Fleischmann, "The Other 'Awakening'", 107.

force.⁴⁹ A school for midwives was opened in 1831. The first government-sponsored school for girls in Egypt was opened in 1874, which admitted 400 girls. Egypt's pioneer activist Huda Shaarawi, who came from a wealthy family and was educated at home in French, Turkish, Persian and Arabic, established *Mabarat Mohammad Ali* (Mohammad Ali's Institution) in 1908, which provided sewing classes for needy women and a medical clinic for women and children. In 1910, she opened a school which provided general education for girls.⁵⁰ By 1920, there were still only five government primary schools for girls, and the Egyptian government made no attempt to provide more advanced schooling. Private schools run by individual women in contrast were more thriving, such that when the Egyptian University opened its gates to women in 1928, six women were in a position to enroll in the medical faculty, and a number of others in the faculty of arts and sciences.⁵¹

The first women's periodical *The Young Woman (Al-Fatah)* was published in 1892 in Alexandria by Hind Nawfal, followed by the publication of *Al-Fatah al-Sharh* by May Ziyaada and Labibeh Hashem, which critiqued the official Egyptian policy toward girl's education in 1906.⁵² In 1911, Malak Hifni Nassif (1886-1918) writing under the penname, *Bahithat Al Badiya* (Searcher of the Desert) spoke in the Egyptian Legislative Assembly, putting forward a ten point-program for the improvement of women's situation, including demands for universal elementary education for girls, the need to train women as medical doctors and teachers, and women's rights to participate

⁴⁹ Homa Hoodfar, "The Feminist Movement in Egypt" in *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movemen*, 130.

⁵⁰ Ghada Talhami Hashem, *The Mobilization of Muslim Women in Egypt*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida 1996), 12.

⁵¹ Leila Ahmed, "Early Feminist Movements in the Middle East" in *Muslim Women*, Edited by Freda Hussain, (Australia: Croom Helm Ltd, 1984), 18.

⁵² Margot Badran, *Opening the Gates*, xxvii.

in congressional worship in mosques.⁵³ Shaarawi also published *L'Egyptienne* in French which had limited readership. It was only in 1937 that *Al-Misriyah* (The Egyptian) was published in Arabic with greater accessibility to non-elite women. By 1914 there had already appeared in Arabic fourteen specialized magazines on women's issues, founded and edited by women.⁵⁴

The establishment of girl's schools and women's journals was an important step in materializing "feminist" goals in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in Iran and Egypt. The shrewd use of the male call for education as a way for desensitizing the public to their presence is a commendable strategy that women activists adopted. In establishing schools for girls and writing for different journals and newspapers, women slowly, but surely paved their way to the public arena, first in their capacity as concerned "mothers" and "wives" who wanted to become educated to serve the national cause, and later as citizens concerned for the welfare of their nation.

The education of women was both considered a necessity and a danger to society. According to some men and women, educating women was necessary for the progress of society. The need for educated mothers and wives was seen as instrumental to the modernization process. To some, the education of women threatened long established traditions, such as the seclusion of women from public life and the illiteracy of women, which they Islamically justified. So, whether women really believed that they could become "better" mothers and wives through education matters very little. Rather, what is interesting is that they picked up the rhetoric, and dared to think, write and express their concerns and desires. In doing so, women were tapping into one of the most fundamental

⁵³ Margot Badran. "Feminist Consciousness and the Islamic State", 158.

⁵⁴ Philip Thomas, "Feminism and Nationalist Politics in Egypt" in *Women in the Muslim World*, Edited by L. Beck and N. Keddie, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 280.

aspects of modernity and that is developing independent rational thought and the ability to communicate thoughts and interests with the rest of society. At the same time that they were arguing for education and participation, based on their common humanity, they were fully aware of the challenges that they faced as women. Iranian and Egyptian women both knew that by gaining access to education at least they themselves would no longer accept their secondary status in society. Because, they could no longer be cajoled into a position that was dictated to them by men with religious and social biases against them. Having the ability to read, write and critique in a way proved that they are just as powerful and capable as men in understanding the social and political situation of the nation and were now able to openly voice their opinions empowered with the knowledge and skills to do so. “The new mother and wife had begun to make a different claim to womanhood. Having been entrapped by the very discourse that had opened up education to them in the first place, women now opted to enlarge their notion of domestic duties to mean national service. As managers of the house they were beginning to transform the house into a social space of citizenship. Having mothered the nation, they could now serve the state.”⁵⁵ Enlightened women were now ready to criticize national political and economic policies, and question the prevalent religious beliefs—such as seclusion due to veiling—that had for long kept them away from participation in society. In essence, the enlightened mothers and wives of society were emerging as independent women selves, who were consciously ready to participate in the process of making history as the women citizens of Iran and Egypt.

⁵⁵ Afshaneh Najmabadi, “Feminist Potential for Awakening”, 129.

CHAPTER 2 AND THE WOMAN REVOLT!

"Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that' twixt the negroes of the South and the women of the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! I have borne thirteen children, and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head: what' this they call 'it? [Intellect, somebody whispers]...That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a point, and your holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure-full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From *God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with him. If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say."
Sojourner Truth⁵⁶

"If Absolute Sovereignty be not necessary in a state, how come it be so in a family? Or if in a family, why not in a state? If all men are born free, how is that all women are born slaves?"
Mary Astell⁵⁷

A. Feminism

The birth, evolution and spread of feminism and consequent women's movements from individual countries to the creation of a new, powerful discourse about womanhood, equality, and independence, has been a phenomenon that has and continues to affect the lives of many women and men. Efforts to challenge patriarchy in the public and private realm of activity by women and men, has opened doors to new challenges and obstacles for women, who want to take charge of their lives free from any discrimination based on

⁵⁶ Sojourner Truth, Speech given at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, 1852.

⁵⁷ Mary Astell, "Some Reflections Upon Marriage" in *Six Familiar Essays*, (London: Tho Bennet, 1730), 106-107.

sex and gender. Acknowledgment of one's humanity and personhood before awareness of one's sex is a notion that has paved the way for the development of a new discourse solely focused on women as they are to be recognized as active participants in shaping the human condition in the twenty first century. It is rightly observed that "discourses in feminism clearly arise out of and are made possible by those of enlightened modernity and its models of reason, justice and autonomous subjectivity as universal categories."⁵⁸ Hence, feminism can be seen as the female embrace and continuation of modernity's emphasis on self-knowledge, autonomy and communicative action.

Feminism is a politically and socially loaded term, which has produced a lot of ingenuity, controversy, debate and scholarship not only among academics and social activists but also among everyday ordinary women and men who have found a new mechanism to voice their opinions through. The origin of the term is unknown, but its root comes from the French word "femme" meaning woman, and the modern suffix 'ism'.⁵⁹ The word began to be widely used in France around the 1890's as a principle synonym for the pursuit of equality, emancipation, and rights in the political, social and economic milieus of society.⁶⁰ Since then, the term has manifested itself in different women's movements and organizations all over the world. However, it is curious to note that although the term was dubbed or created in the nineteenth century and gained recognition as an ideology and momentum in women's movements all over the world, the practical implications of feminism is not a new phenomenon. Throughout centuries, women, as queens, courtiers, peasants, wives, daughters and even slaves have sought to

⁵⁸ Patricia Waugh, "Modernism, Post-Modernism, Gender: The View from Feminism" in *Feminisms*. Edited by Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, (New York: Oxford University Press. 1997). 206.

⁵⁹ Margot Badran, "Understanding Islam, Islamism and Islamic Feminism", *Journal of Women's History*. Volume. 13. No. 1 (Spring 2001), 49.

⁶⁰ Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach". *Signs*. Vol. 14. No. 1 (Autumn 1988). 9.

make their voices and demands heard. Through visible and often 'invisible' methods they have influenced policies and decisions either in the kingdom or on the farm. However, it must be noted that femaleness and feminist consciousness are not equivalent terms, and feminism is not a "natural" thing; rather it is developed as a consequence of women's struggles and experiences.⁶¹ If we are to take one of the most important principles of modern feminism, the personal is political, then we can see a direct relation between sociality and subjectivity, between language and consciousness, or between institutions and individuals.⁶² Thus, the personal is political is at once an attempt to make women public individuals who are able to communicate with society at large. In this context, the 'private' connotes the realm of feeling, domesticity, and the body which has and continues to be seen as the realm of the feminine.⁶³ The "public" realm implies the rational, masculine world of work and production (as compared to reproduction). It is indeed by emphasizing on the need to shed light on certain areas concerning women's lives that have always been taboo that feminism seeks to make the private realm of woman's life a matter of public discourse and political debate.

As a social and political discourse feminism may contribute to understanding and changing the "socially constructed experience" of women around the world.⁶⁴ Moreover, as a conceptual framework, feminism enables women activists and scholars to provide a coherent discourse on issues affecting the lives of women based on their observations and personal experiences. As a discourse, feminism can be used as a tool by women (and

⁶¹ Linda Gordon, "What's New in Women's History," *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*, Edited by de Teresa Lauretis. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1986), 30.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶³ Patricia Waugh, "Modernism, Post-Modernism, Gender: The View from Feminism" in *Feminisms*, Edited by Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 206.

⁶⁴ Teresa de Lauretis, "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts" in *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*, 5.

men) to better articulate and communicate their ideas about issues important to women in different parts of the world. In addition, it can be argued that the widespread recognition and application of “feminism” or “feminist” as terms, with welcome or unwelcome consequences reveals greater consciousness about the situation of women in local and global contexts. The fact that these terms are recognized and are in great use shows that there is greater consciousness about the subject, and that the issue of women’s rights and freedoms is sensitized due to the existence of such a phrase. And “consciousness is not the result but the term of a process, and is therefore never fixed, never attained once and for all, because discursive boundaries change with historical conditions.”⁶⁵ Hence, feminism, as a political critique of society, enables women and men, to practice self-consciousness in understanding their gendered subjectivities and prejudiced behavior in the hope of changing frameworks and attitudes towards women in society.

Feminism, as a theory with its practical manifestation in women’s movements, has originated in Western countries such as France, Britain, Germany, and the United States. But, similar to the ethos of modernity (which were developed in the West), the visions of feminist women have transcended boundaries to mobilize women in the South since the early decades of the twentieth century. Aside from the origins and practical implications of the term feminism in the creation of women’s movements and organizations around the world, it is important to have a clear definition of what feminism means? Who is a feminist and what does a feminist want? Any answer to these questions, must take note of the fact that there are many different schools of feminism ranging from radical feminism to liberal, essentialist, Marxist and post-Structuralist

⁶⁵ ⁶⁵ Teresa de Lauretis, “Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts” in *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*, 8.

feminism. Radical feminists emphasize the primacy of women's subordination to men, which they regard as key to changing society as a whole. Liberal feminists, on the other hand focus on access to equal employment and education opportunities for women.⁶⁶ It is not within the range of this paper to discuss key theories in feminism or concepts such as gender and sexuality in understanding the impact of feminist thought on women's activities in Iran and Egypt. What has guided me has been to identify the ways in which these key concepts have influenced the emergence of the modern Muslim women self. Here it seems the way feminism unfolded in the United States has had a more direct influence, since the United States has been the model of social development in the Muslim world in the past few decades. Thus, this section will briefly discuss the goals of first and second wave feminists in the United States. It will then, discuss the methodology and meaning of post-modern feminism which seeks to deconstruct and critique a single feminist vision or standpoint about women's emancipation, and instead embrace different emerging feminisms around the world. Contemporary generations of Muslim women appear to welcome a combination of feminism and post-modernity.

Thus, this Chapter will look at the women's movement in the United States and use the actions and standpoints that American women have put forth in their movement as a framework for analyzing the organization and mobilization of women in Iran and Egypt. Women's movements have been about politicizing and actualizing "the personal is political", by bringing personal issues into politics. "The personal is political was a slogan taken from the American left. It made sense to young women drawn toward women's liberation groups because so many problems they faced were outside existing

⁶⁶ Shiela Rowbotham, *Women in Movement Feminism and Social Action*, (London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall Inc., 1992), 7.

political definitions."⁶⁷ Much has been written in analyzing and identifying the goals that women were seeking through their movement in the United States. In addition, Iranian and Egyptian women were not only influenced by the Suffragists, but during the 60's and 70's a wave of female students from Muslim countries were educated in the United States, who experienced the political milieu of feminist activism and subsequently contributed to women's activities in their own nations as well.

With regard to theory, it is important to take into consideration that many of the theoretical discourses that have developed in the West (Northern countries) have been picked up, transformed, redefined and applied by women in the South in theory and in practice. Nevertheless, this section seeks to look at the key areas of focus and activity of women activists in the United States to better understand and reflect upon the organization and mobilization of women in Iran and Egypt which will be looked at in the subsequent section. A short account the emergence of the discourse of feminism in the United States is in order.

As discussed earlier, it is rather difficult to pinpoint exactly where and when feminism as a theoretical and practical discourse came into being. However, it is evident that discussions regarding the rights of women began in late eighteenth, early nineteenth century. Contributions by political theorist John Stuart Mill in the *Subjection of Women* published in 1869, and the earlier writings of Mary Wollstonecraft in *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) raised attention and initiated debate about the subordination of women in their roles as mothers, wives and citizens, and called for the liberation and equality of women with men. In her essay "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach" Karen Offen describes two different modes of feminism, which can

⁶⁷ Shiela Rowbotham, *Women in Movement Feminism and Social Action*, 275.

help explain the different waves of feminism as they occurred in the United States. Offen characterizes these modes as “relational” and “individualist.” The relational feminist tradition proposed a gender-based, but egalitarian vision of social organizations. They featured the primacy of companionate, non-hierarchical male-female unit as the basis of society. The relational tradition emphasized the contributions of women to the broader society in their roles as mothers and individuals. They highlighted women’s rights as women, taking their childbearing and nurturing capacities along with their ability to be politically and socially active.⁶⁸ In other words the relational feminist tradition did not separate woman from their ‘feminine capacities.’ The individualist argumentation on the other hand, posited the individual, irrespective of sex or gender, as the basic unit of society. It emphasized more abstract concepts of individual human rights and celebrated the quest for personal independence (or autonomy) in all aspects of life, while downplaying, deprecating or dismissing as insignificant all socially defined ‘feminine’ roles, and minimizing discussion of sex linked qualities or contributions, including child-bearing and its attendant responsibilities.⁶⁹ Taking these two modes of characterizing feminism into consideration, we can characterize the first wave of the feminist movement, which took place in late nineteenth/early twentieth century as relational and the second wave of the feminist movement, which took place in the 1960’s as individualist.

In the United States, the first wave of the feminist movement is characterized by the actions of the Suffragists, who demanded the right to vote for women. The origins of the Suffragist movement is seen in the first formal convention that they held in Seneca

⁶⁸ Offen, “Defining Feminism”, 134.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 135, 136.

Falls, New York in 1848. These women mobilized their efforts to gain the right to vote in addition to their desire for the right to equal rights in education, women's right to hold property even after marriage, and other matters. The women that were part of the movement invoked liberal ideas such as equality and liberty in demanding the recognition of their individual sovereignty and personhood by having legal recognition from the political institutions of society, but, they nevertheless considered themselves mothers and wives. To many the Suffragist movement failed to move beyond achieving the right to vote, because of their inability to articulate their needs and interests in the 'public language' of politics.

The private realm of the house is the place where women have traditionally been assigned to; and women's work in this realm is not recognized as productive (paid) work or labor. Whereas, work in the public realm, is recognized as productive work, as labor is recognized through compensation. Considering the public-private dichotomy, critics of the Suffragists' failure in attaining other political goals claim that it was because they approached the political process with a moral (feminine/motherly) private language, rather with the public (male) language of politics. The Suffragists claimed that it was time to throw the mantle of private morality over the public sphere, and incorporate the purity, virtue and morality of women into politics, in an effort to moralize politics.⁷⁰ In a speech given in 1869, Elizabeth Cady Stanton argued: "because men and women are complements of one another, we need women's thoughts in national affairs to make a safe and stable government."⁷¹ In essence, the Suffragists and the activists of the women's movement wanted to purify politics with their pure, motherly assets. In essence

⁷⁰ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman Women in Social Political Thought*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 231.

⁷¹ "Women of the Hall of Fame: Elizabeth Cady Stanton", (www.greatwomen.org).

argues Elshtain in *Public Man Private Woman*, they “sentimentalized politics” because they had for so long been socialized to think of themselves only as caring, loving, and moral women, that they had implicitly accepted a set of beliefs about themselves and their society.⁷²

Looking at their actions and thoughts with the benefit of hindsight one can see how they were unsuccessful in changing the gendered view of society after so long a battle. They did not see themselves as individual women demanding the right to vote and equal opportunity for political participation. Applying Offen’s argument about the relational feminist tradition, we can see that according to these feminists the nurturing characteristics of motherhood could be applied to the public realm of politics, and this would benefit both women and men. The right to vote was granted to women in the United States in 1920 with the passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution.

Second wave feminism took charge in the early 1960’s. The main theme of this movement was the recognition of the equal rights of women relative to men, in the workforce, in the legal system and in access to political institutions. A great number of educated, single women were active in this movement that sought to make women’s presence in the public more visible. Using Offen’s framework, this movement was individualist in that women were demanding the recognition of their rights and their equality as citizens in their capacity as individual, independent, autonomous women who were seeking to live according to their own personal decisions and standards. Offen argues that “the individualist argument served especially the cause of single women to justify an independent, non-family based existence in a world that remains male

⁷² Elshtain, *Public Man Private Woman*, 235.

dominated.”⁷³ Second-wave feminists used the rhetoric of liberalism to emphasize equality, freedom and equal opportunity for the political, social and economic participation of women in society. Independent, self-conscious women saw themselves as socially recognized agents who eulogized the public ‘career woman’ and dismissed motherhood as a private affair that ‘could wait’ because public success was (is) deemed more important than private success. Second-wave liberal feminists “located the sources of women’s woes in her privatization and saw her salvation in going public.”⁷⁴

Liberal feminists’ viewed mothering or holding a job essentially as roles that one would assume. This approach was reflective of a rational approach to different walks of life. In an effort perhaps bring about equality by giving equal weight to the role of the mother and the role of the scholar, liberal feminism fell into the trap of devaluing the private sphere and woman’s place within it.⁷⁵ Although liberal feminists were not the only active group of women pursuing their ends and goals, but, nevertheless, they were the most powerful in setting the agenda of feminists in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Despite our criticisms to their emphasis on individuality and recognition of women’s worth through the approval of the public male view, nevertheless, liberal feminists were able to mobilize women in attaining access to public offices that were never before open to women.

In contrast to first and second wave feminism, many feminist scholars are talking about third wave feminism or post-feminism, which holds that women (and society) have moved beyond the early demands for the political, social and economic recognition of women’s rights to participate as equal individuals and citizens in these realms, and that

⁷³ Offen, “Defining Feminism”, 137.

⁷⁴ Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman*, 241.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 243.

women's ability to bear children should be celebrated and respected not to be disregarded or overlooked. Post-modern feminism draws much of its theoretical foundation in the works of Simone De Beauvoir who in her famous book *Second Sex* coined the question "why is woman the Other?" De Beauvoir argued that: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman; no biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society."⁷⁶ Recognizing that femaleness and sexuality is socially constructed, this leads to the idea that there is no one way of being a woman, or perhaps one right way of asserting womanhood and personhood in a world where patriarchal norms are imbedded in the social, economic, religious, and political super-structures. As a result, postmodern feminism takes woman as the "Other", and interprets this condition as something to be transcended. "Postmodern feminists proclaim the advantage of the condition of otherness which enables women to stand back and criticize the norms, values, and practices that the dominant culture (patriarchy) seeks to impose on everyone, including those who live on its periphery—in this case, women."⁷⁷

It can be argued that postmodern feminist thought has greatly gained from the contemporary era of globalization and communication, where different feminist voices are emerging from women all over the world. Southern feminists such as the renowned Indian feminist Chandra Talpade Mohanty, discuss the "limitations that are evident in the construction of the (implicitly consensual) priority of issues around which *all* women are expected to organize."⁷⁸ She criticizes the hegemonic implications of Western feminist writings which she argues: "discursively colonize the material and historical

⁷⁶ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (New York: Knopf, 1952), 90.

⁷⁷ Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought a Comprehensive Introduction*, (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1989), 217.

⁷⁸ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", in *Feminisms*, 91.

heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/representing a composite, singular 'third world woman'—an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse."⁷⁹ In fact, it is women in developing or third world countries today that are providing and establishing their own visions of womanhood and selfhood conscious of the political and cultural milieu that they are working in.

Patriarchy in its visible and invisible forms is the overarching framework and mindset that women either in the North or the South have been battling with for years. As will be seen in the next section, Iranian and Egyptian women were influenced by first and second wave feminism as they demanded the right to equal educational and political opportunities, such as the right to vote. Although the focus of women in Iran and Egypt is different from that of women in the United States, nevertheless, it is important to note how they picked up debates that were taking place in the West for example, and used it to create their own indigenous version of feminist thought and mode of action. Because there is relatively little or no theoretical discourse developed in analyzing and compartmentalizing women's movements in Muslim countries, using the theoretical framework of the women's movement in the United States will serve as a useful tool in analyzing the challenges, objectives, and methodologies of the actions and stances taken by women in the Iranian and Egyptian women's movements.

⁷⁹ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", 92.

B. The Meeting of Nationalism and Feminism

You who talk about rights of the nation, who talk about law, who speak of honor and zeal—we are also part of this nation, we ask for our share in these rights too.
Anonymous Iranian woman, 1907⁸⁰

God has not endowed them with the ability to be electors. Moreover, in our religion, Islam, they are under supervision: 'Men are in charge of women.' They are in our charge. They will have absolutely no right to elect.
Muddaris, clerical leader and deputy of Majlis?⁸¹

Is it not a shame that one's male cook is given the right to vote, while his mistress is denied that right?
Dr. Durriyah Shafiq⁸²

A woman! Who does she think she is? She is not wearing her veil! She must be out of her mind/crazy! Her poor husband! What will the Sheikh say? What a Woman! These exclamations must have been thought and expressed by men and women when they saw and heard Dowlatabady in Iran (1927) and Shaarawi in Egypt (1924) publicly unveil and talk about women's right to education and suffrage, the social recognition of women's needs and the necessity of women's political organization and participation. The significance of their bold actions lie in the sensitivity of the issues they were addressing—women's demands for education, economic rights and political participation—and more notably in their physical public presence in a sex-segregated society without the *hijab* (the veil). Their actions mark the beginning of a new era in the history of the women's movement in Iran and Egypt. Having considered Habermas's theory of communicative action, the articulation and communication of aspirations, thoughts, and needs by women through newsletters, protests and speeches, marks greater understanding of the challenges and obstacles facing the achievement of goals and aspirations. It also signifies the conscious process of wanting to create new methods and discourses that invite change for women's empowerment and equality. The actions of

⁸⁰ Fleischmann, "The Other 'Awakening'", 107.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁸² Durriyah Shafiq writing in an editorial in 1948, in Ghada Hasehm Talhami, *The Mobilization of Muslim Women in Egypt*, (Gainseville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 17.

women such as Dowlatabady and Shaarawi serve as a prelude to the claim 'the making of the Modern Muslim Woman Self.' by showing that women were consciously/unconsciously juggling and negotiating with modern, Islamic and feminist concepts in order to make their presence felt and have their voices heard.

The women of Iran and Egypt have a long history of pushing for inclusion as equal participants in making the political and social history of their countries. From the inception of women's organizations and journals to running for parliament and holding cabinet posts; Iranian and Egyptian women have come a long way in making their presence felt and their words heard by their fellow countrymen. The women's movements in these two countries were and continue to be among the most vocal, well organized and well documented women's movements in the region. Movements on such a grand scale involving women from different social and ethnic classes in different parts of a country are hard to localize and even more difficult to distinguish the center of their organization. However, it is interesting to note that the women activists in Iran and Egypt have focused their energies on the attainment of one pronounced goal at different stages in their movements. As a result, what is meant by movement in this paper is a "series of organized activities working toward an objective or an organized effort by supporters of a common goal." ⁸³ In this lieu, the women's movements in Iran and Egypt share the common goals of improving the social, economic and political status of women and their subsequent empowerment through different means in their societies.

Times of national crisis are moments when leaders of movements deem the presence and active participation of every member of society necessary. The participation of women in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911) and the Islamic

⁸³ Fleischmann, "The Other 'Awakening'", 115.

Revolution (1979), and the involvement of Egyptian women in anti-colonial demonstrations in 1879 and participation in the march against British occupation in 1919, were the first steps taken towards political participation and mobilization. It was through the card of nationalism and patriotism that women justified their presence in these political movements. "Women's participation in nationalist movements demonstrated their commitment, courage, strength and ability, serving as a major source of personal and collective development."⁸⁴ Unlike debates on education, this time women's active participation in the initial stages of the movements were not only welcome but also encouraged by secular and religious leaders. The entrance of women into the national decision-making process not only gave them experience and taught them the language of political and social communication, but, in addition, through the establishment of organizations and expansion in the scope of written material they were creating a public political sphere for themselves. Unlike efforts at establishing schools where the rationale of the early male and female reformers were to train educated wives and mothers beneficial to the domestic sphere; political participation in nationalistic movements enabled women to take part as citizens. It is an important distinction to draw attention to, because, unlike the women's movement in the United States for example, where women were demanding suffrage and education, for many women in Iran and Egypt, it was the national situation that became 'intolerable' and national identity that was threatened. The question of gender inequity invariably was postponed or considered divisive, and the national issue seen as a priority. Hence, the issue of suffrage and further request for funding and support for education were put aside. Yet, women used their entry into public life through that "most honorable door," the nationalist struggle, and begin to

⁸⁴ Fleischmann, "The Other 'Awakening'", 110.

challenge cultural, social, and political norms. By acting at all, they transgressed these norms. Nationalism had a releasing effect on women.⁸⁵ In that climate, women were able to become political critics and active participants in producing debates on nationalism, independence, citizenship and womanhood.

I. Zaneh Irani (The Iranian Woman). “What shall we say of the veiled women of the Near East who overnight become teachers, newspaper writers, founders of women’s clubs and speakers on political subjects?”⁸⁶ Contrary to what Morgan Shuster, the British financial advisor to the Qajar government observed, Iranian women did not suddenly emerge as participants in the revolutionary cause. Women joined the constitutional movement as latecomers rather than as newcomers. The Constitutional Revolution in Iran (1906-1911) marks a new era in the history of Iranian women where a new radical women’s movement, composed of semisecret women’s councils called women’s *Anjomans*, emerged.⁸⁷ During the Constitutional Revolution the population was mobilized in demanding the right to establish a Parliament and a Constitution from the Qajar King Mozaffar-i- Din Shah. Women were active in street protests against food shortages and hoarding. They also played a vital role in distributing secret leaflets called “*shabnameh*” meaning letter of the night, which contained the agenda, plans and even speeches of the Constitutionals. Their role in supporting the movement and vocally expressing their desire for establishing a Parliament that would free Iran from the intervention of British and Russian forces is noteworthy. In October 1906, soon after the formation of the *Majlis* (Parliament), the creation of a national bank was proposed in

⁸⁵ Fleischmann, “The Other ‘Awakening’”, 92.

⁸⁶ Morgan Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia*, cited in Janet Afrey, “On the Origins of Feminism in Twentieth Century Iran” in *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movement*, 28.

⁸⁷ Janet Afrey, “On the Origins of Feminism in Twentieth Century Iran”, 28.

order to decrease Iran's dependency on foreign loans. The bank project became an issue around which women, who had actively supported the revolution, began to organize. Women workers turned in their wages, others parted with their jewelry (often their only tangible asset in life), and some turned in their inheritance.⁸⁸ In addition to their vital role in establishing the National Bank, when Parliament had received an ultimatum from the Russian government to expel Morgan Shuster as the government's financial advisor, 300 women rushed into parliament, hiding guns under their chadors and threatening their sons and husbands that if they agree to the ultimatum they would shoot them at gunpoint. The participation of women in this movement is considerable, and, it was through their conscious participation in the nationalist struggle that they learned about the rules of governance and the rights that as citizens they were entitled to. However, as with many national movements, the contribution of women was welcomed only in their capacity as contributors and not as benefactors. When the Constitution was written in 1906 women, along with children and the mentally handicapped were denied the right to vote. Despite setbacks, women did not give up. It is interesting to note that on December 30, 1906, the very day the Constitution was signed by Muzaffar al-Din Shah, *Majlis*, the newly established journal of Parliament, printed a women's petition where the author of the article demanded that the newly formed government act responsibly and take the necessary steps for female education and social participation.⁸⁹ In response, women were told that they had the right to demand education, but only one which would prepare them for the 'raising of children' and domestic chores. They were advised to keep out of politics and affairs of the government, which were deemed a prerogative of men.

⁸⁸ Janet Afray, "On the Origins of Feminism in Twentieth Century Iran", 32.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

In spite of parliamentary setbacks, women continued their efforts in establishing *Anjomans*, which were focused on establishing schools and discussing national politics in their gatherings and voicing their concerns through the press. By 1907 in Tehran alone, nearly 200 *Anjomans* were formed. One of the first women's meetings of the period was held in January 1907 where 10 resolutions were adopted, including the call for education for girls and abolition of onerous dowries. In 1910, 50 girl's schools were established in Tehran, and a women's congress on education was organized in that city.⁹⁰ What is interesting to note about the early phases of the women's movement in Iran is that women's activities were not limited to the capital city of Tehran. Autonomous regional *Anjomans* were established in Tabriz and Isfahan as well.⁹¹ In fact, Siddigeh Dowlatabady, who is considered one of the most important women in the feminist movement in Iran, first established a girl's school in 1917 in Isfahan called *Umm Al-Madaris* (Mother of Schools). In 1919, she started *Sherkat Khavateen Isfahan* (Isfahan's Women's Cooperative), whose purpose was to change practices she believed harmful in Iran, such as the marriage of girls before the age of fifteen and the import of foreign fabrics. She started the first major women's magazine, *Zaban-i-Zanan* (Women's Voice) in Isfahan. Through this magazine she argued against the imposition of the veil, for economic and emotional independence of women, for the education of women in ethics, literature, and science and against the political dependence of Iran on other countries. The aim of this journal was both feminist and nationalist.⁹² The Sorbonne educated Dowlatabady attended the Tenth Congress of the International Alliance for Women's

⁹⁰ Janet Afroy, "On the Origins of Feminism in Twentieth Century Iran", 34.

⁹¹ Fleischmann, "The Other 'Awakening'", 121.

⁹² Zohreh T. Sullivan, "Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern? Transformations in 20th Century Iran" in *Remaking Women, Feminism, and Modernity in the Middle East*, 227.

Suffrage in Paris (May 1926). There she met and started a friendship with Margaret Ashby, the President of the International Alliance of Women's Suffrage.⁹³ Upon her return she addressed the crowd without wearing the veil, an act considered daring and shameful at the same time.

Having been excluded from the right to vote, even when an appeal was made before Parliament in 1911 by Haji Vakil al-Roaya, deputy from Hamedan, who also called for the recognition of legal equity between men and women, women did not sit back. Instead, they continued with their campaign for girls' education. In March 1908, Mirza Murtaza Quli presented a petition on behalf of *Anjuman-e Nisvaen* (Women's Anjuman) calling for the recognition of women's societies. He posed the issue as a question, whether the women's demands were "in accordance with the laws of the Shari'a." Several delegates to the Majlis argued that 'such matters' were not to be discussed in the Majlis. They demanded that the Interior Ministry, or the police, intervene and forbid the formation of such *Anjomans*. Vakil al-Ru'aya, the delegate from Hamedan, asked "What is the danger if a group of women organize and learn good conduct from one another?"⁹⁴ He argued that *Anjomans* were not contrary to the laws of Islam so long as women did not discuss issues that were harmful to religion and society. After much heated debate finally, the religious authority, the *Imam Jume'h* (the Friday prayer leader) concluded that, according to Islamic Shari'a, women could have their gatherings, however, because of the sensitivity of the matter, certain debates were prohibited for discussion in the *Anjomans*. They insisted on the non-political nature of the women's

⁹³ Zohreh T. Sullivan, "Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern?", 228.

⁹⁴ Cited in Zohreh T. Sullivan, "Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern?", 228.

Anjomans and refused to provide them with any legal or financial support for protection.⁹⁵

Women's participation in the Constitutional Revolution opened the door for the politicization of the "woman question." Having fought and marched alongside the men for the nationalist cause, women could no longer be told to remain aloof to national issues. Once they became enlightened, or rather aware of their own potential and capabilities as women or perhaps as citizens of a nation, who could also discuss political issues, they did not settle back into only being the educated wife and mother. Although, throughout later years, especially under the imposed state feminism of Reza Shah Pahlavi and his son Mohammad Reza Shah, the autonomous activities of women's organizations were restricted, and at times completely suppressed. Nevertheless, it can be argued that through their participation in different capacities as members of organizations, publishers, authors, poets and organizers of charity auctions women created a space for their activism that would function differently under different circumstances. Autonomous women's organizations remained active underground, but immediately when the space was available they burgeoned onto the surface. For example, after the Second World War when Reza Shah, the king of Iran, was forced into exile, the precariousness of the state resulted in the relaxation of censorship and attempts were made to rebuild political parties and women's organizations. So, for example, in 1942 Badrulmuluk Bamdad founded *Jamiyat Zanan Iran* (The Iranian Women's Society) and started the publication of *Zan Emrooz* (Today's Woman). Fatemeh Sayyah, a prominent intellectual who became the first women professor at Tehran University and later represented Iran in the

⁹⁵ Janet Afroy, "On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th Century Iran", 40.

United Nations.⁹⁶ actively participated with other women's organizations of the time in consciousness raising activities advocating for improving women's social and legal status and suffrage.⁹⁷

During the Pahlavi era, under the leadership of both father and son, efforts were made to 'modernize' Iran. Many critics of their attempts, rightfully state that efforts to modernize society was more a process of westernization, remaking Iranian society so as to look Western, civilized and modern. In this regard, the issue of women, the wearing of the veil (which will be discussed in the next section), family protection laws and the legal status of women were issues of great debate. Many new laws were introduced such as the 1963 law that granted suffrage to women and the 1967 Family Protection Law which granted women many rights in the family. Nevertheless, the voice of women in this era, contrary to their activism in the constitutional era was not independent; rather it was guided by state agendas. In essence, women were not crafting their selves by themselves, rather, the women activists from this era were following state goals and guidelines. Nevertheless, their contributions should not be overlooked; as it was during the reign of Reza Shah that women gained access to university education, and under Mohammad Reza Shah women had more opportunities for employment and education.

However, the issue that many intellectuals, especially the famous Iranian intellectual Ali Shariati raised was that the modern Iranian woman was not authentic to her roots. In that the image of woman that the state had molded for women did not speak to the cultural values of the Iranian society. Shariati who is considered a key intellectual contributor to the Iranian Revolution (1979) in a series of lectures called "Fatima is

⁹⁶ Minou Reeves, *Female Warriors of Allah: Women and Islamic Revolution*, (New York: Dulton, 1989), 91.

⁹⁷ Homa Hoodfar, *The Woman's Movement in Iran: Women at the Crossroads of Secularization and Islamicization*, (Grabels Cedex: Women Living Under Muslim Laws, 1999), 17, 18.

Fatima” sought to provide an authentic modern “Islamic” role model as an alternative to the “wextociated” images of women promoted under the Pahlavi regime. He offered a new and revolutionary model of Islamic womanhood. For Shariati, woman was at once the greatest hope and the greatest threat to revolutionary possibility.⁹⁸ In his attempt to link the historic image of Fatima, one of Prophet Muhammad’s (pbuh) daughters, Shariati criticizes the traditional and western images of Iranian women, saying that one is prisoner to idleness and traditional values that limit her “knowing herself”, and the other is trapped in the vortex of consumerism, sexual freedom and confusion about her identity. The image of Fatima was to serve as an ideal type of woman, whose life story could be followed by any woman who wished to become herself through her own choice.⁹⁹

The language put forward by the leaders of the Islamic Revolution (1979) all seemed to be aimed at ‘remaking’ woman by providing women with a new image, which to their mind best fit the mold of the modern Iranian woman. Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian revolution claimed that “Ladies whose previous situation was quite different, whom the monarchical regime distracted and preoccupied with other problems, underwent a transformation and became women who stood up to the regime and who shoulder-to-shoulder with the brothers, or rather at the forefront of the brothers, participated in this movement. These changes are nothing short of a miracle” he said.¹⁰⁰ According to many of the intellectual leaders of the revolution, the new government, the Islamic Republic would be able to provide women with employment and educational

⁹⁸ Zohreh T. Sullivan, “Eluding the Feminist” 217

⁹⁹ Ali Shariati, “Fatima is Fatima” in *Shariati on Shariati and the Muslim Woman*. Edited by Laleh Bakhtiar, (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1996), 146.

¹⁰⁰ Speech given by Ayatollah Khomeini on 21 July 1979 in *The Position of Women from the Viewpoint of Imam Khomeini*, Trans. Juliana Shaw and Behrooz Arezoo, (Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works, 2001), 89.

opportunities that would be suitable to women under Islamic Shari'a law. Apparently a new era had dawned on Iranian women, who would not only be Iranian but Muslim as well.

Under the aegis of the Islamic Republic of Iran's (IRI) Islamic constitution, women's political activism and organization has picked up a different language, which has been categorized as Islamic feminism. In the previous moments of the movement, women had to prove the Islamic authenticity of their actions and claims. But, justifying actions and positions under the Islamic Republic is an essential factor that has to be taken into consideration by women activists in Iran. Whether they are secular and are only culturally Islamic or believers and practicing Muslim, both groups have to authenticate their actions by having recourse to religious norms, laws and traditions. The actions of "Muslim feminists" will be discussed further in the next section. However, it is important to take into consideration, that throughout their actions in the course of their movement, Iranian women have had to deal with the triad of modernity, revivalist Islam and womanhood differently. The 'self' that Iranian women have been trying to understand, create and present to society has gone through different politico-historical moments which have challenged its authenticity and presence in different ways.

After the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911), women were barred from entrance to Parliament as citizens. They were only allowed to enter Parliament accompanying their delegate husbands. In the first Parliament after the Islamic Revolution in 1980, Azam Taleghani and Maryam Behrouz were among the four women members of parliament. The entrance of women into the political process has marked a significant change in the political climate surrounding women's active participation in

politics. From the first Parliament to the current eight Parliamentary session, women have been elected as Members of Parliament's. In addition, since the presidency of Khatami, Masoumeh Ebtekar, who was the editor of the woman's studies journal *Farzaneh*, was appointed as Vice President in charge of Environmental Affairs, Azam Nouri as Deputy Culture Minister for Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, and Zahra Shojai as the first Director-General for Women's Affairs. All these official political posts show that women have been able to ascend into the political sphere and gain a platform through which they can voice their thoughts, concerns, and opinions. More will be discussed about the selfhood of Iranian women, as their confrontation with the issue of Islamic authenticity has provided them with a new sphere where they can re-formulate debates to be gender-neutral and more human-oriented.

Nevertheless, women's experience with modern institutions of politics and their entrance into the political sphere as women, with specific needs and desires marks a significant awareness about modern womanhood, which although unstated is reflected in the publications that have been prevalent in Iran. The fact is that both rejection of the Shah's Eurocentric vision and the resistance to compulsory veil (under IRI) represents women's active resistance to the imposed gender role envisaged for women by the state.¹⁰¹ Throughout their years of organization, mobilization and participation in the public sphere, Iranian women were ready to overcome any obstacle that would deign their womanhood as a "natural" reason to their subjection either to the moral codes of men or religion.

¹⁰¹ Homa Hoodfar, "The Veil on their Mind and our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women" in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, Edited by Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 265.

II. *Al-Maraa al-Misriyah* (The Egyptian Woman). From the nascent days of their public appearance to their present state, the Egyptian women's movement has developed into an organized and effective political force that other political groups could/can not afford to ignore.¹⁰² The participation of women in the historic 1919 march against British colonialism marks the entrance of women into the public political sphere. From then, Egyptian women, similar to Iranian women, embraced the "nationalist cause" initially as a means to justify and legitimize stepping out of their narrowly prescribed roles in the name of patriotism and self-sacrifice for the nation and, ultimately, as a way to "earn emancipation."¹⁰³ Moving from the matter of the right to education and obtaining funds for establishing schools, women's open political agitation and action began with their cooperation and mobilization through the Wafd Party,¹⁰⁴ which was the foremost national party against British colonial occupation. The establishment of the Women's Wafd Committee as an auxiliary to the Wafd Party marks a significant development in the political organization of women. Safiyah Zaghlul, the wife of Sa'ad Zaghlul (the head of the Wafd Party), whom the Egyptians called "*Um al-Massriyun*" (The Mother of all Egyptians), held the first chairmanship of the Wafdist Women's Central Committee (WWCC), created in 1920.¹⁰⁵ Huda Shaarawi, whose husband Ali Shaarawi was also a founding member of the Wafd Party, organized women to boycott the purchase of British goods, and collected women's signatures for a petition to the British High Commissioner. They condemned the shooting of the demonstrators (1919, 1920) and exile of the Egyptian leaders, stating that: "We the women of Egypt, mothers, sisters and wives of

¹⁰² Homa Hoodfar, "The Veil on their Mind and our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women". 252.

¹⁰³ Fleischmann, "The 'Other Awakening'", 108.

¹⁰⁴ Leila Ahmed, "Egyptian Reformism and Women's Rights", 149.

¹⁰⁵ Ghada Hashem Talhami, *The Mobilization of Muslim Women in Egypt*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), 10.

those who have been the victims of British greed and exploitation...deplore the brutal, barbarous actions that have fallen upon...the Egyptian nation. Egypt has committed no crime except express her desire for freedom and independence.”¹⁰⁶ Similar to the failure of the Iranian Constitutionalist movement women had a rude awakening when it became clear that liberal men were not prepared to implement their promise to integrate women into public life after nominal political independence in 1922. With formal independence in 1923, the Constitution declared “All Egyptians are equal before the law”, but an electoral law restricted suffrage only to males.¹⁰⁷

Following their nationalist agenda, in 1923, Huda Shaarawi founded the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), which was the foremost women’s organization in the Arab World that had a feminist and nationalist agenda. In a significant move in 1924 the EFU whose agenda focused on women’s political rights, in conjunction with the Women’s Wafd Committee, presented the Egyptian Parliament with a set of demands for increased educational opportunities for women and girls. In addition, the petition asked that election laws be modified to permit the women to vote and serve in Parliament, even if the female franchise were to be limited to literacy and financial qualifications.¹⁰⁸ The establishment and active political involvement of these two women’s organizations provided Egyptian women with a publicly accepted space where in their capacity as women they could pursue nationalist and feminist goals. The WWCC eventually separated itself with the Wafd Party when it came to power over disagreements on both nationalist and feminist issues. What is also significant to note is that in Egypt by the early 1920’s the term “feminist” was used though mainly through Shaarawi’s French-

¹⁰⁶ Leila Ahmed, “Egyptian Reformism and Women’s Rights”, 149.

¹⁰⁷ Margot Badran, “Feminist Consciousness and the Islamic State”, 161, 162.

¹⁰⁸ Ghada Hashem Tahlami, *The Mobilization of Muslim Women in Egypt*, 25.

language journal *L'Egyptienne*, which circulated among some elite women. Nevertheless, as Badron argues from 1923, feminism crystallized around a set of demands, a broad agenda of claims for political, social, economic and legal rights.¹⁰⁹ In the early decades of their political organization and mobilization, women activists dealt with nationalist and feminist issues seeing themselves as concerned women citizens. In this regard they were gaining knowledge about the political verbatim needed for the expression of their needs as women in society. Through later decades, and under different governments, Egyptian women gained more rights and slowly climbed the “greasy pole” in making their voices heard. However, in the early period of their organization they tackled with the legitimacy of freedom of expression and participation in the nationalist movement as women citizens in autonomous women’s organizations. Regardless of the challenges they faced, it was the collective action of individual women, such as Shaarawi who played an inimical role in the pursuit of greater goals: the independence of the nation and its women.

While the nationalist card was used by women in both Iran and Egypt to legitimize participation in the formation of national policies, Egyptian women had a comparative advantage to Iranian women in expanding the scope of their involvement to international politics. Arabic provided the connection between women in Egypt and other Arab countries such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. In 1938 the Eastern Women’s Conference took place in Cairo, where the issue of Palestine was discussed and statements were issued to world leaders and Arab heads of state.¹¹⁰ Although the Conference did not produce any tangible results. However, the mere fact that a regional conference took place where Arab women attended without male escorts is significant.

¹⁰⁹ Margot Badron, “Feminist Consciousness and the Islamic State”, 163.

¹¹⁰ Ghada Talhami Hashem, *The Mobilization of Egyptian Women*, 17.

Women showed that they were not willing to settle back and not discuss 'hot politics' and that indeed their thoughts and concerns should be taken into consideration as well. In 1944 a purely feminist Arab conference was convened in Cairo, where the social agenda of Arab women was discussed, and the Arab Feminist Union was established with representatives from most Arab countries.¹¹¹ The establishment of this regional organization marks the rise of a feminist consciousness in other Arab countries, with Cairo acting as the center for interaction and organization.

"We had organized marches, held conferences, distributed pamphlets, trained scouts, and occupied the parliament. There was nothing left but for women to fight with men in a civil war, a thought we never contemplated naturally. For our fathers, brothers, husbands and sons, are not our enemies no matter what they do and no matter how fast they hold to absolute tradition."¹¹² An angry Shafiq made these remarks while on a hunger strike and staging a sit in the Cairo headquarters of the Journalists' Union in 1954. Women's demand for the recognition and granting of political rights continued although with little avail. Two years after the formation of a new government (1952) under the Free Officers, the Egyptian Feminist Union called for a meeting of all women's groups (secular or Islamic) where the discussion revolved around problems of the family, the need for a new personal status law, and the serious need for governmental effort toward devising a family planning campaign. Since the establishment of *Itihad Bint al-Nil* (Union of Daughter of the Nile) in 1949, Dr. Durriyah Shafiq, had focused her attention on calling for women's right to franchise and participation in parliament. In 1953 Shafiq along with other secular liberal politicians submitted "The White Paper on the Rights of

¹¹¹Ghada Talhami Hashem, *The Mobilization of Egyptian Women*, 17.

¹¹²Durriya Shafiqh, "Al-Mar'a al-Misriyya (Cairo, 1955) cited in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History*, (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1982), 55.

Egyptian Woman”, a compendium of pro-suffrage arguments to parliament when a proposed revision of the Electoral Law was under review. However, the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the Senate rejected women’s suffrage and the Fatwa Committee of Al-Azhar University issued a decree saying that Islam does not condone woman’s suffrage. The Mufti of Egypt, Shaikh Hasanayn Makhluf, contended that Islam opposed political rights for women. The ‘religious’ legitimacy of woman’s demand for suffrage was further discussed by Islamic organizations, who held a conference in the office of the Muslim Brotherhood, the powerful Islamist party that was established in 1952 by Hasan al-Banna, a religious zealot. In a lengthy statement, the Islamists demanded that the government close once and for all the door to this *fitna* (literally chaos), claiming it had been proven that political rights for women were contrary to religion, the Constitution, and the public interest.¹¹³ It was during the 1950’s, with the consolidation of the pro-nationalist Nasserite government and the subsequent burgeoning of Islamic organizations, such as the powerful and highly organized Muslim Brotherhood, that the issue of the Islamic validity of women’s issues became a highly politicized debate.

Finally, after thirty years of endless campaigning, Egyptian women were granted the right to vote in 1956 in the new constitution, presented to parliament by Jamal Abdel Nasser. Paradoxically however, in that same year, 1956, the state started to curtail the independent activities of women’s organizations such as the EFU and Union of the Daughter of the Nile and suppress the expression of feminist views. By 1959, the state had dismantled the EFU, but allowed it to function as a social welfare society under the name of the Huda Shaarawi Association.¹¹⁴ The autonomous action of women’s groups

¹¹³ Margot Badron, “Feminist Consciousness and the Islamic State”, 172, 173.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

came to be seen as a political threat to the formation of the new government under the Free Officers. The significant degree of organization and mobilization that women had achieved at once revealed them as a political force, which could not be ignored but had to be maintained.

From 1952 to early 1970's was a time when independent feminist voices were suppressed. Similar to the situation in Iran, under state feminism, women were provided with new educational and employment opportunities. As a result, women's literacy increased and a greater number of women graduated from university and entered the labor force. It must be noted that Egypt underwent tumultuous times in the 50's and 60's, with Nasser's pan-Arab policies and Sadat's "open door" policy to Western investments, where the gap between the rich and the poor had increased. Increased disillusionment and dissatisfaction with contradicting policies, which encouraged Western style consumerism and life style alongside support for radical Islamic groups, created a "socially confused" population. Government investment in two and at times opposing value systems further pushed the educated students of the early 80's towards Islam, which they saw as providing them with a framework, an identity and sense of authenticity that they longed for. In this respect, both young women and men joined organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood and its sister organization the Muslim Woman's Society headed by Al-Zeinab Ghazali, who was imprisoned on charges of ties to communism.

Regardless of political and religious obstacles, women in Iran and Egypt had succeeded in establishing a visible space for themselves in the public realm, which could no longer be neglected or overlooked. Women's political organization and mobilization provided them with the mechanisms for raising consciousness about women's rights to

political participation and subsequent women related issues such as education, maternal health, specific employment opportunities and others. So, although women took part in nationalist struggles as individual members of a national collective, it is important to recognize the establishment of autonomous organizational structures within which women also participated. The women's movements that emerged during nationalist eras gained valuable organizing experience, enabling them to consolidate their strength and extend their agendas.¹¹⁵ From demanding educational opportunities to a vocal and visible demand for political recognition shows that Iranian and Egyptian women have come a long way in demanding rights, which reflects their own acknowledgement of their personhood. The fact that women now feel empowered to demand changes to their social position is linked to their self-conscious acknowledgement that as members of society they can contribute to the greater "good" of society.

Though, as Kandiyoti remarks, women's stake in nationalism has been both complex and contradictory. On the one hand, nationalist movements invite women to participate more fully in collective life by interpellating mothers, educators, workers and even fighters. On the other hand, they reaffirm the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct and exert pressure on women to articulate their gender interests within the terms set by nationalist discourse. In that sense feminisms are never autonomous but bound to the signifying networks of the contexts which produce them.¹¹⁶ So, it is by disassociating from the nationalist cause and perhaps focusing on the cause of women only that Iranian and Egyptian women will be fully embracing their sense of womanhood

¹¹⁵ Fleischmann, "The Other Awakening:", 114.

¹¹⁶ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Middle East Studies" in *Gendering the Middle East Emerging Perspectives*, Edited by. Deniz Kandiyoti, (New York: Syracuse University Press 1996), 9.

and the interests and needs that they require as women. However, as Muslim women, Iranian and Egyptian women have also had to encounter the challenges posed by Islamic traditions and norms, both of which they adhere to as Muslims and are critical of as women and persons. It was by visibly and vocally entering the public political realm that women have slowly but surely been able to change patriarchal orientations towards themselves. Hence, it is by women entering the tradition of reforming Islamic practices and traditions that they can change certain religious notions regarding women, while remaining authentic to the essence of the faith.

The tradition of revivalist Islam was initiated by male modernists who sought to create dialogue between the views that Islam and modernity offered about humanity and personhood. The challenge of remaining authentic to the religion while upholding the claim that some traditions and views can change was what early male modernists and later women revivalists have had to face with. By looking at some of the main debates and methodologies proposed by male modernists, the actions of women in Iran and Egypt in claiming Muslimness and demanding change can be better explained and analyzed.

CHAPTER 3

THE REVIVAL OF ISLAM

A. Modernity and Muslims

Had modernity's process not become a global story with the French revolution, its central idea of the intersubjective self would not be seen as a "blessing in disguise." Thus, it is not an exaggeration or indeed a farce to state that Muslims¹¹⁷ have had to confront and react to the philosophical discourses and practical implications of 'modernity.' The encounter, however, has had an eventful venture, to say the least. Not all segments of the Muslim World had agreed, and agree even today with my contention that modern selfhood constitutes a blessing in disguise.

As a process, whose values and ethos have evolved to its current state, modernity and its outlook on the individual human being and on political, social, and religious institutions and practices have had a great impact on what is today categorically called the Muslim World.¹¹⁸ As discussed and highlighted earlier, emphasis on individuality, self-consciousness, rationality, freedom of thought and expression along with a tendency to universalize notions of human freedom and dignity are key values and mores that the spirit of modernity carries within itself. Although its ethos may seem benign and in fact plausible, nevertheless, modernity's call to rely on the god within, meaning, the power of human will and rationality instead of the dictums of religion have the potential to be regarded as nothing less than blasphemy and heresy. In other words, the modern emphasis on autonomy of thought and action, and its belief that individuals are capable of being rational agents in their own right, without the need to rely on traditional religious

¹¹⁷ Note: In this context Muslim is understood as anyone who adheres to Islam as a faith and way of life.

¹¹⁸ Muslim World encompasses states in North Africa and the Middle East where the majority of the population is Muslim.

and cultural norms and practices can pose a threat to the (absolute) authority of long established religious and political institutions.

In addition to its theoretical outlook on individual action and human life modernity's values have been operationalized in the process of modernization, which is a collection of changes in the political, social and economic institutions and practices of society. This process includes: the formation of capital and the mobilization of resources; the development of the forces of production and increase in the productivity of labor; to the establishment of centralized political power and the formation of national identities; to the proliferation of rights of political participation; of urban forms of life, and of formal schooling; to the secularization of values and norms.¹¹⁹ As the professor of the science of religion, at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, Waardenburg argues "whereas modernization implies a rational change in the objective realities we live in, modernity implies a change of mind through the acceptance of a new kind of rationality. Modernity can be called the subjective experience and elaboration of modernization and its rationality. The experience of modernity forces people to reorient themselves individually and socially."¹²⁰ Understanding that the theoretical and practical manifestation of the ethos and values of modernity are two separate, yet complementary categories, it is interesting to note that Muslims in different countries, and in different historical epochs responded differently to modernization as a process affecting the exterior mode of life and modernity as a process influencing mode of thought and worldview.

¹¹⁹ Habermas, *Discourses on Modernity*, 2.

¹²⁰ Jacques Waardenburg. "Some Thoughts on Modernity and Modern Thinking in Islam" in *Islam and the Challenge of Modernity Historical and Contemporary Contexts*, Edited by Sharifa Shifa al-Attas, (ISTAC: Kuala Lumpur, 1995), 317. 318.

Before discussing the different reactions and responses of Muslim scholars and advocates to modernity, it must be noted that in Islam, the Quran, the statements and actions of the Prophet (*hadith*), consensus among jurists (*Ijma*), juridical reasoning by invoking reason (*ijtihad*), and analogy (*qiyas*) are five sources that combine to make the Shari'a or the Islamic legal system. The Shari'a was formulated in the early seventh century by a group of Muslim jurists and has evolved through time to become the basis of legal institutions in different Muslim countries today. The Quran, the revealed text, and the statements of the Prophet are considered to be absolute sources where there is no doubt in the authenticity of their words. *Ijma* means consensus among Muslim jurists. It is a legal principle of authority that can be used to circumscribe the range of permissible belief and practice. Within limits it is also a principle of toleration, which rests on the conscience of the whole body. It follows that no one group of Muslims holding a particular view, however powerful it may be, are entitled to declare the views held by any other group to be heretical or, if it should do so, to attempt to suppress the other views by force.¹²¹ The counterpoint of *ijma*, is *ijtihad*, "exercise of judgment", which has been called by Mohammad Iqbal, the Muslim modernist, considered the intellectual father of Pakistan, as the principle of movement in Islam. The word literally means "exerting one's self" in the sense of striving to discover the true application of the teachings of Quran and tradition to a particular situation.¹²² As a result of the different legal mechanisms at the disposal of Muslims to interpret and read the verses of the Quran and the *ahadith* (plural of *hadith*) there exist different schools of thought in Islam. The two main schools (branches) of thought are the Sunni and the Shiite schools of thought. The majority of the

¹²¹ Hamilton A.R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), 12.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 12.

Muslims call themselves Sunni, and in this denomination other schools of thought exist, which have slightly different legal and juridical readings of the Quran and the *hadith*. The Shiites are a minority in the Muslim World, who have nevertheless greatly contributed to the spread and dominance of Islam through art, literature, juridical readings, architecture and military and political expansion in different parts of the world. Realizing that there is no one Shari'a or one monolithic legal system which all Muslims agree and adhere to, nevertheless, it must be noted that, both schools of thought the Sunnis and Shiites, agree on basic tenets of the faith and its legal and moral injunctions. Since the Shari'a is a compilation of laws that were put together by a group of jurists there is great debate among Muslim scholars as to whether the Shari'a is to be seen as an absolute set of laws and norms; or whether it is possible to subject the Shari'a to reform and re-evaluation, so as to make its laws responsive to the changing needs of society. Indeed Aziz Al-Azmeh a contemporary Muslim scholar argues that:

[T]he Shari'a itself has evolved in parallel with societies; and as far as one can tell an objective examination of history, it is not now—nor has it ever been—a unanimously accepted code, but only a collection of principles and guidelines on what is legal, deriving what unity it has from its relation with the governmental authorities in whose name it is enforced. For the Shari'a is an emblem rather than a reality: just a name, not an objective historical entity, and certainly not—whatever the claims of people who don't really know anything about the history of Islamic Shari'a—a collection of articles of law which can reasonably be viewed as 'applicable.'¹²³

Diversity in interpretation and application of Islamic thought through laws and traditions further testify to the relative openness and flexibility of Islam as a religion, which claims to serve as a guide to everyday life. Seeing that different cultures have adopted the faith in ways that best suit their cultural norms and practices, it is not possible to refute that Islamic norms and legal injunctions can be suited to the demands

¹²³ Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, Second Edition, (London: Verso, 1996), 50.

of modern life. Following the Muslim encounter with modernity and modernization, Muslim scholars, jurists and ordinary people have taken upon themselves to a) understand what modernity is and what are its theoretical and practical implications; and b) develop methodologies to make Islamic norms and values compatible with their mode of thought and life. Abdol Karim Soroush, a contemporary Iranian modernist, argues that “reconciling eternity and temporality; the sacred and the profane; separating constant and variant, form and substance; reviving innovative adjudication in religion; finding courageous jurisconsults; reinvigorating religious jurisprudence; changing the appearance while preserving the spirit of the religion; acquainting Islam with the contemporary age and establishing the new Islamic theology¹²⁴ were the goals of the Muslim modernists and revivalists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The challenge facing the Muslim modernists in maintaining their faith and arguing for change in a tradition that saw its values as absolute and eternal, applicable to all humans at all times and places was the task that the modernists faced with. In this lieu, they have had to conduct a twofold campaign: on the one hand, they had to bring out all the progressive tenets of Islam to prove that it is in essence a religion of freedom, justice and prosperity for mankind. On the other hand, they had to subject the attitudes, values and modes of thought of the Muslims to a searching reassessment which ends up by stigmatizing the whole of Islamic history. Historical criticism has thus proved to be an integral part of political revisionism.¹²⁵ Hence, from their early interaction with modernity, Muslim modernists have both been challenged and inspired to devise new methodologies and

¹²⁴ Abdol Karim Soroush, “Islamic Revival and Reform Theological Approaches” in *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam*, Edited by Mahmoud and Ahmad Sadri (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 30.

¹²⁵ Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), 15.

strategies in interpreting the religion such that it would remain faithful to the authentic spirit of the religion and be practical to adhere and apply in everyday life.

More important than maintaining the historical significance and integrity of the Shari'a, taken either as absolute and unchangeable, or malleable and possible to reform, lays the significance of re-reading and re-interpreting the Quran. Because the Quran is accepted as the revealed word of God to humanity, the process of interpreting the Quran with an outlook that has been influenced by modern values has been an imperative task in the success of the modernist Muslims' project. Throughout their efforts to make Islamic laws and norms compatible to modern demands, great emphasis was placed on re-reading and re-interpreting the Quran and contextualizing the meaning and injunctions that its verses could have to modern situations. In this regard, prominent Muslim thinker, the former professor at the University of Chicago, and modernist Muslim whose works have greatly contributed to current debates on Islam and modernity, Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), proposes two steps in interpreting the Quran. The first step— includes the understanding of the Quran as a whole as well as in terms of the specific tenets that constitute responses to specific situations. The second step is to generalize those specific answers and enunciate them as statements of general moral-social objectives that can be “distilled” from specific texts in light of the socio-historical background and the often-stated *rationes legis*.¹²⁶ In essence, he is calling for a reading that would enable scholars, historians, and ordinary Muslims to understand and systematize the general principles, values and long term objectives of the Quran in order to be able to apply and operationalize in everyday life. Rahman and the earlier Muslim modernists of the past two centuries place great emphasis on the “high place of reason in their scale of values

¹²⁶ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 6.

and try to show the perfect compatibility of 'true Islam' with the findings of a mind free from the scourge of ignorance, prejudice, and superstition."¹²⁷ The early philosophers of the Enlightenment called for recognizing the benefits that freedom of thought and human rationality would bring to the creation of a pluralist society, where freedom and individuality would be respected and celebrated. Muslim modernists also called and continue to call for a rational reading and analysis of the tenets of Islam as an all-encompassing faith which affects all facets of daily Muslim life, in recognition of the need to accommodate Islamic laws and injunctions to the rational, individualistic demands of modernity.

In reaction to modern, at times argued Western-Christian notions about the individual human being and the political and social institutions of the modern West, we have witnessed the rise of new Islamic discourses by scholars and individuals who can be categorized as tradition sensitive reformists (modernist), apologetic assimilationists, and fundamentalist Islamists (rejectionist). What ties these together is that they consciously wanted to make Islam relevant to contemporary life. In other words, they tried to see whether it is possible to be Muslim and modern, rational and spiritual at the same time. It is interesting to note that both the reformist and fundamentalist Muslim scholars and activists were 'rationally' seeking ways to better understand and apply Islam in the modern world. According to Al-Azmeh, two different approaches to modern knowledge have been adopted by modern Muslim theorists: a) that Muslims without fear acquire not only western technology but also intellectualism, since no type of knowledge can be harmful, and b) that the acquisition of modern knowledge be limited to the practical technological spheres since at the level of pure thought Muslims do not need Western

¹²⁷ Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 8.

intellectual products. Indeed, some argue that these should be avoided, since they might create doubt and disruption in the Muslim mind.¹²⁸ Thus, the tradition sensitive modernists can be placed in the first category and the Islamists placed in the second category, which will be further elaborated on.

It is important to emphasize that “every critique or modification of a tradition involves a consciousness of what is being criticized or rejected and hence, to that extent, self-awareness.” In view of some of the revolutionary changes wrought by some men in their traditions, it is therefore not proper to say that “the self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life.”¹²⁹ The Muslim response to modernity, how best to preserve “Muslimness” and how to accommodate, learn or even assimilate to modern times implies a process of self-reflection and redefinition of values which open the doors to further inquiry and innovation. One can even argue that reformist or rejectionist, reaction to or against modernity and modernization is actually an expression of modernity,¹³⁰ given that any reaction implies the understanding and consciousness that something new has occurred/developed which solicits a response. While, the Muslim World is very diverse and fractured, nevertheless both the reformists and fundamentalists have sought to make Islamic norms and ethos relevant to modern life, each with a rationality and methodology of its own which have been welcomed and rejected by different societies.

The tradition sensitive reformists, who in many texts are also called ‘modernist’ Muslims, are those who openly embraced the social theories of modernity and called for

¹²⁸ Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 50.

¹²⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (Seabury Press), 1975 xxi, cited in Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 10.

¹³⁰ Ira M. Lapidus, “Islamic Revival and Modernity: The Contemporary Movements and the Historical Paradigms” in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Volume 40: No. 4 (1997), 444.

the application of the scientific process of modernization. For the modernists “modernity with its attendant goals of progress, autonomy, freedom, education, and justice, was quite simply reread as always already a part of true Islam.”¹³¹ The development of the modernist discourse has not been continuous. There is no one single era that one can highlight as the glorious days of Islamic reformism. Since the latter years of the nineteenth century to the present, the Muslim response to current events have oscillated with the modernist discourse gaining momentum over the rejectionist camp, and vice versa. Tradition sensitive reformist (modernist) Muslim theologians, scholars and activists such as Jamal al-Din Al-Afghani and Mohammad Abduh in Egypt and others, sought to bridge Islam and modernity, enhancing understanding and communication between the two discourses. “These scholars critically examined the classical conceptions and methods of jurisprudence and devised a new approach to Islamic theology and Quranic exegesis. The central theological problem that engaged these thinkers revolved around the question of the validity of knowledge derived from sources external to Islam.”¹³² Writing in the latter years of the nineteenth century, Mohammad Abduh, who was trained at Al-Azhar University (Cairo), the premier theological university in the Muslim World, argued that “Islam itself is consonant with reason and that reason in the end has a religious orientation.” The main reason why Muslim civilization declined, according to Abduh, was the fact that Muslims stopped taking their lead from reason and followed doctrines and practices simply because they were sanctioned by authority. Abduh insisted on the need for rational education on all levels, which stimulate people to

¹³¹ Zohreh T. Sullivan, “Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern?” in *Remaking Women, Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, 216.

¹³² Mansoor Moaddel and Kamran Talattof, Eds. *Contemporary Debates in Islam an Anthology of Modernist and Fundamentalist Thought*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 1.

act rationally instead of merely obeying the authority of others or by following tradition. Abduh rationalized Islam for the sake of social reforms which he saw as an indispensable in the modern age.¹³³ The discussions introduced and carried on by Abduh's students are important to emphasize, as they gave rise to a movement in the Muslim World, which allowed Muslims to critique and discuss religious injunctions without fear of being called a heretic. In fact, in the tradition of Al-Afghani and Abduh, Muslim modernists in later years, attempted to rationally observe Islamic laws and norms, in the spirit of making Islam relevant to modern demands. One can argue that these early modernists broke the taboo that was placed on critiquing religion. In this regard, they gave birth to a movement where non-apologetic scholars and activists in the Muslim World, who were either authentic adherents to Islam or culturally Muslim, were able to propose changes to religious 'traditions' without the intention of undermining or deprecating the religion itself.

In contrast to the tradition sensitive modernist response to modernity, the secularists (assimilationist) reacted to the innovations and progress of the modern West with great admiration, and saw a thoroughgoing Westernization as the best way to 'catch up.' In this regard, they not only advocated a change in the political and social institutions of society, but also called for secularization. They ascribed a private, personal status to religion, with little or no manifestation or influence on social and political life. According to the secularists, Western societies had progressed because they had separated religion from the institution of the state, and that it was only in a secular society

¹³³ Jacques Waardenburg, "Some Thoughts on Modernity and Modern Thinking in Islam" in *Islam and the Challenge of Modernity Historical and Contemporary Contexts*, 330, 331.

that modernization would succeed.¹³⁴ According to Haddad, “the secularists were ready to surrender to Western influences and comprise with Western ideology.¹³⁵ The difference between the modernists and the secularists was one of focus. The secularists were concerned with the influence of religion on the political structure; hence, they ascribed a preservative function to religion that continued to maintain obsolete, decadent, or oppressive institutions. Their primary concern was with ‘appearance,’ and, so the changes that some of the secularist statesmen such as Ataturk in Turkey, Reza Shah in Iran, and Mohammad Ali in Egypt, introduced were superficial changes that influenced the surface/exterior presentation of society, without really changing long held norms and beliefs. “They did not hesitate to relinquish the ‘old’ in favor of what was new or fashionable. They appropriated Western methodology or technology for its own sake, rather for its proven efficacy”¹³⁶ in society. They were apologetic Muslims, as they saw their Islamic mode of life inferior to that of modern Europe.

The fundamentalist or Islamist Muslim scholars and activists on the other hand, are those who find the authority of the past valid for the present and the future. They refuse any compromise on changing religious laws and norms. For the fundamentalist the past is ideal, and if Islam were to re-appropriate it, it would regain its ascendancy to the world.¹³⁷ In essence, for the Islamist minded Muslim, Islam as it is understood and practiced today has been corrupted by Muslim leaders and non-Muslim imperialists, who have sought to deprecate the glory of Islam by making it “Western.” In other words, they see that the purity of religion has been violated and they seek to redeem it by going ‘back

¹³⁴ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

to the roots.’ The Islamists saw the answer to modernizing or catching up with the West only by relying on Islam and its methodologies. They saw the salvation of the Islamic society in upholding the laws of the Shari’a and by instituting an Islamic state. Indeed, they are modern in their rational approach to religious interpretation; in that they claim that Islam is compatible with modern demands. But, their insistence on observing the Shari’a wholeheartedly limits the scope of their communication and interaction with those who do not dogmatically follow the Shari’a. However, it must be noted, that they have no problem with adopting modern technology to improve life economically and scientifically. But they reject any form of modern political and social changes. Abu-Lughod argues that the Islamists of today are often branded as “medieval” by their opponents. Though, they invoke the past and self-righteously denounce certain versions of modernity; yet they are very much a part and product of modernity and are best seen as striving—like all contemporaneous social movements—for an alternative modernity.¹³⁸

We can see the manifestation of these modern fundamentalist readings of Islam in the goals aspired to by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the (later) revolutionaries in Iran. These Islamists insist on the establishment of an Islamic state which would uphold and implement Islamic laws. Islamists see any nuance in religious practice as Western infiltration, deemed at corrupting the purity of the faith. Many argue that the fundamentalists have politicized Islam in that they are using religion as a tool to establish states with strict political codes sanctified by religious injunctions. One can almost see the religious social and political agenda of the Islamists as a rational approach in the interpretation and application of religion, in order to establish it as a new all-

¹³⁸ Lila Abu-Lughod, “Feminist Longings and Post-Colonial Conditions” in *Remaking Women, Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, 4.

encompassing social, political, and economic system that will influence all aspects of daily life for people living under Muslim laws.

In the spirit of revival and reform, the contributions of modernists, secularists and Islamists are important to take into consideration as their thoughts have come to influence the position of women in different Muslim societies. Either by calling for changes in the educational system and advocating education for women like Abduh who argued that: “We wish that our daughters should be educated. For Allah the Almighty... to them are due to same goods that we expect from them.”¹³⁹ and later by Qasim Amin, as discussed in the previous chapter. Or, by establishing secular policies that deemed wearing of the ‘veil’ as backward and not modern, to the fundamentalist call for women to veil and stay obedient to fathers and husbands, the emergence of these movements have had important reverberation on the position of women in different Muslim societies. Just as the modernists and Islamists initiated the task of re-reading and re-interpreting the Quran and the *hadith*, Muslim women have also taken it upon themselves to read the Quran from a woman’s point of view and rationally analyze and interpret the laws on marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance, and the concept of *hijab* arguing for change and improvement in a spirit that would uphold the individuality, freedom and dignity of women living in Muslim countries. The rational approach of women, especially in Iran and Egypt in claiming that religion constitutes *an* aspect of their selfhood and that it should not limit their participation in public political and social life can be seen as a new extension to the earlier male modernist approach to interpreting Islam.

¹³⁹ Cited in Leila Ahmed, “Egyptian Women and Reformism” in *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movement*, 145.

B. The Feminine Revival of Islam

“Tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms.”

The Holy Quran 24:31

Authority and authenticity in interpreting Islam are the two key terms that highlight the new venture that Iranian and Egyptian women, as conscious and concerned Muslims have focused their attention onto. The wearing of the veil or having *hijab* and the interpretation of certain verses of the Quran that address the issue of women’s rights, and *hadith* which focus on women have become new playing fields. Islam-conscious women are challenging both men and long established religious and cultural norms. Just as the modernist male movement had sought to re-read Islam so as to make it complementary with modern times, today, Muslim women are doing the same. Not only they are busy unearthing the egalitarian nature of Islam as a religion that grants both women and men rights, but they are also critiquing traditions that they see as un-Islamic.

In Iran and Egypt women are claiming their right to interpret Islamic sources and want to leave behind or go beyond classical formulations to develop new paradigms by reformulating Islamic concepts and laws. The strong identification of cultural authenticity with Islam has meant that feminist discourse could only legitimately proceed in two directions: either denying that Islamic practices are necessarily oppressive or asserting that oppressive practices are not necessarily Islamic.¹⁴⁰ By entering the realm of understanding and re-evaluating Islamic discourse, women, have consciously chosen to include themselves in a tradition that they either have faith in, or simply recognize as being part of their culture. By choosing to become active participants in contemporary

¹⁴⁰ Deniz Kandiyoti, “Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Middle East Studies”, 9.

debates on Islam and modernity, women have moved away from their established role of being passive recipients of male injunctions. As a result, there is a lively debate over competing visions of male-female relations and the status and roles of women in Islam and in Muslim societies, yielding new understandings of spiritual, professional, and social equality.¹⁴¹ This new field that women are claiming to be their area of interest as well is a novel approach in expressing a sense of belonging or association with a religious tradition that for long women have felt disassociated from. So today, women in Iran and Egypt are making Islam the religion of women as well, as it has been seen the territory that only men were allowed to discuss and critique. In claiming authority in interpreting Islamic texts and norms women are also using Islam as a discourse that would greater attest to the authentic nature of their feminist activities. By going back to early Islamic history and elaborating on the actions and sayings of women such as Fatima (the Prophet's daughter) and Aisha (the Prophet's wife), Muslim women are making the claim that they are indeed upholding and practicing the true vision of Islam, which in their narrative, includes women's social and political participation in society. So, it seems that Muslim women today sense that mission that revivalist male modernists had earlier. The need to elaborate on the position of women in Islam by and for women marks a significant departure from the tradition of blind acceptance of faith. While Muslim women revivalists in both Iran and Egypt are reinterpreting religious texts and re-evaluating the idea of *hijab*, this section will look at the interpretation of Islamic laws and norms by Iranian women and the phenomenon of re-veiling by Egyptian women. This choice of methodology is mainly due to the difference that exists between the

¹⁴¹ John L. Esposito, "Women in Islam and Muslim Societies" in *Islam, Gender and Social Change*. Edited by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), xix.

government imposed policy of *hijab* for all women in Iran and the relative freedom of Egyptian women in choosing to veil or not to veil. Therefore the field of exerting one's opinions and thoughts slightly differ in each state, notwithstanding, that both women have a stake in re-evaluating both issue areas.

Interpretation of Islamic sources requires a degree of knowledge that women for long have been excluded from attaining. However, thanks to increased educational opportunities and recent sensitivity surrounding the issue of women's rights in Islam, today, women are not only keen but also have the knowledge to interpret the laws and norms that affect their lives with authority. The most common issues in the contemporary feminist reinterpretation of Islamic sources are: 1) re-evaluation of Islamic sources; 2) criticism of the use of Islamic sources; 3) criticism of interpretations of Islamic sources, and 4) equality of men and women in the Quran.¹⁴² Women in both Iran and Egypt have been actively working towards changing certain legal norms especially in the areas of marriage, divorce, inheritance and child custody. In Iran for example, Islamic feminist re-readings of the Quran were underway since the early 1990s. The non-gender egalitarian and misogynist constructions of Islam are being dismantled through interpretative methodologies that include classical Islamic and modern (secular) social science approaches. In a country where the Quran virtually functions as the constitution, this re-thinking and new positioning of Islam have direct implications for the practice of citizenship.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Ane-Sofie Roald, "Feminist Reinterpretation of Islamic Sources: Muslim Feminist Theology in the Light of the Christian Tradition of Feminist Thought" in *Women and Islamization*, Edited by Karin Ask and Marit Tjomsland, (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 25.

¹⁴³ Margot Badran, "Understanding Islam, Islamism, and Islamic Feminism", 12.

In *Zanan*, an Islamic and explicitly feminist journal published in Iran, writers engage in scriptural interpretation as “public intellectuals.” Reading the Quran as women, they aim not merely to produce new legal interpretations for a small group of religious scholars, but rather to “awaken women so that they will proclaim their rights” and thus transform society.¹⁴⁴ In a way, women’s interest in studying religious texts can also be seen as their desire to learn the workings of a language that is widely used in society. Since Islamic injunctions are commonly used by ordinary people and as part of state policies, understanding and knowing how and when to use the Islamic teachings provide for greater access and legitimacy for women. In other words, women can use their knowledge about Islam to legitimize their activities as being authentic and not inherently contradictory to the teachings of the Quran or the traditions of the Prophet (pbuh). By juxtaposing religious texts with all sorts of Western feminist writings they are blending the “comforting categories of the Islamic and the secular, and are making West and East speak in a new combined tongue in dialogue rather than as negating each other. Their radical interpretations are reconfiguring space in such a way that “women of different outlooks can have a common stake.”¹⁴⁵ The attempt to interpret Islamic texts, reveals not only greater desire on behalf of women to understand and authenticate their position in Islam, but also shows the opening of a greater degree of tolerance on behalf of men to allow for this venture that women have undertaken. By asserting their right to interpret religion they are opening a new chapter in the modernist tradition of understanding and applying religion to everyday life. By doing so, they are also making religion more

¹⁴⁴ Afsaneh Najmabadi, *The Story of the Daughters of Quchan: Gender and National Memory in Iranian History*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998) 72, 66, and 71.

¹⁴⁵ Miriam Cooke, “Multiple Critique: Islamic Feminist Rhetorical Strategies”, *Nepantla: Views from the South*, Volume 1: No. 1 (2000), 106.

accessible and understandable in addition to their efforts to make laws and norms on women more relevant to the daily life of new generation of Muslim women.

When Huda Shaarawi and Siza Nabarawi returned to Cairo in 1924 from attending an international feminist conference in Rome. in a symbolic act they threw their veils into the sea at the port of Alexandria. By doing so they opened the door to a new debate questioning whether veiling was sanctioned by religion, or whether it was a cultural practice that was highly revered by religion as well. It must be noted, that as upper class women in ancient Persia would also veil so as to distinguish themselves from women from the lower classes. In addition, the claim that many Muslim women who do not believe in the religious authenticity of the veil argue that veiling was initially only required for the wives of the Prophet. so that they too could be distinguished and respected in their own lieu. Apart from its religious injunctions, women rejected the veil because they associated it with an ideology or practice that supported their seclusion from society.¹⁴⁶ Leila Ahmed, an Egyptian feminist who has written extensively on women in Islam, argues that it “is the idea of the veil much more than the veil’s material presence that is the powerful signifier; of women’s proper seclusion and relegation to a private world, of their proper non-participation, passivity and even invisibility—metaphorically signified by the veil—in the public domain.”¹⁴⁷ So, by de-veiling they were objecting to a rigidly enforced system that had for long isolated women to the inner quarters of the home, apart from daily social life. Thus, in 1924 Egypt became the first country to de-veil without state intervention.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Homa Hoodfar, “The Feminist Movement in Egypt”. in *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movement*, 132.

¹⁴⁷ Leila Ahmed, “Early Feminist Movements in the Middle East” in *Muslim Women*, 119.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

It was rejecting the ideology of seclusion and isolation that Egyptian women chose not to veil, and the same idea of wanting greater freedom of mobility and visibility and perhaps affirming authentic identity that modern Egypt is experiencing a re-veiling phenomenon. What is significant to note, is that with the idea of *hijab*, which literally means establishing a boundary, either physically or mentally, Egyptian and Iranian societies for that matter, are fundamentally sex-segregated. This means that there are certain underlying cultural norms and values that uphold and even respect a certain distance or separation to exist between women and men. Hence, with the resurgence of a wave of Islamic fundamentalism under the aegis of the Muslim Brotherhood, the notion of the *hijab* and veiling were once again brought to the foray of public discussion in the early 1980's. Veiling has become a tool for associating one's identity with a greater whole, and in that regard, in Egyptian society, which has experienced periods of disillusionment with imposed modernization and Westernization, associating with the Islamic culture perhaps proves greater social acceptance. In addition, contrary to the situation of Iranian women under the Islamic Republic who have to veil whether they like it or not, Egyptian women have the choice to veil or not to veil. So, freedom to think and decide gives women more power in the way they want to affirm their selfhood through their veiled or unveiled presence.

According to Nadia Wassaf, people consider a veiled woman in Egypt as someone who has chosen to wear it. By so doing, she is carving out her private space within the outer public space and ensuring greater mobility in a society that does not welcome women's participation outside of delineated boundaries.¹⁴⁹ Veiling at once

¹⁴⁹ Nadia Wassaf, "On Selective Consumerism: Egyptian Women and Ethnographic Representation," *Feminist Review*, No. 69 (Winter 2001), 118.

becomes way for affirming ethical and social customs, while maintaining autonomy and individuality. Given that there are certain notions that are deeply rooted within the culture: Egyptian women have sought to work within it, instead of seeking ways to fundamentally change social perceptions about the public presence of women in society. So the adoption of the dress code does not declare women's place to be at home. On the contrary it legitimizes their presence outside it. Consequently the prevalence of the Islamic mode among women cannot be seen as a retreat from female autonomy and subjectivity. The availability of education, the entry of women into universities and professional occupations cannot be considered regressive, no matter how conservative the appearance of the uniform that helps them achieve these goals may look.¹⁵⁰ In addition, the anthropologist and Concordia Professor, Homa Hoodfar points out that veiling is a lived experience full of contradictions and multiple meanings. While it has clearly been a mechanism in the service of patriarchy, as a means of regulating and controlling women's lives, women have used the same social institution to free themselves from the bonds of patriarchy. Muslim women, like all other women, are social actors, employing, reforming, and changing the existing social institutions, often creatively to their own ends. The static colonial image of the oppressed veiled Muslim woman thus often contrasts sharply with the lived experience of veiling. To deny this is also to deny Muslim women of their agency.¹⁵¹

Although this was a short account of two modern trends that are taking place in Iran and Egypt, often labeled as "Islamic feminism" by which women are seeking Islamic solutions to eliminate gender based discrimination and inequality. What is important to

¹⁵⁰ Soroya Duval, "New Veils and New Voices: Islamist Women's Groups in Egypt" in *Women and Islamization*, 62.

¹⁵¹ Homa Hoodfar, "Veiling Practices and Muslim Women" in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, Eds. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 249 and 250.

consider about this new modern venture that women have undertaken either as believing Muslims or as religiously conscious women is that they are carving a new space for themselves in the process of formulating a new debate in Islamic history. Their active and conscious presence within Islamic discourse can be seen as one way that they can legitimize their quest, and be able to communicate with a larger target group, which includes Muslim men and women, reformist or fundamentalist. As Islam is deeply rooted within the Iranian and Egyptian culture, whether one is secular or religious, perhaps the best strategy to legitimize presence within the public sphere is by maintaining a conscious presence within the Islamic framework of thought. In essence women's interpretation of Islamic sources signals that a progressing revolution is on its way that does not require an overhaul of the value system, but only a slight change in its orientation towards women.

Since the visible inception of women's activism and organization in Iran and Egypt in the latter years of the nineteenth century it can be argued that women have been rationally defining their sense of individuality and demanding for the recognition of their common humanity with their fellow countrymen. In addition, as Muslim women, they have sought to re-visit, re-articulate and re-interpret Islamic norms and claims that they saw as contradictory to the egalitarian essence of the religion. Women's realization and communication with these frameworks was not evolutionary in that they did not come into contact with each discourse through a sequential process. Rather, from early on women were mediating between the three angles of the triad—modernity, feminism and revivalist Islam—seeking ways to mold them into one holistic and tangible discourse, or perhaps one identifiable Self. Although, at different moments one notion was more

pronounced and more vivid than the others, it can be argued that at all times notions of rationality, individuality, equality, autonomy, Islamic authenticity and womanhood were at play in the different actions taken and discourses produced by Iranian and Egyptian women activists. The historical unfolding of the different concepts in the triad has provided Iranian and Egyptian women with good ammunition to challenge and seek to change the cultural and political manifestations of patriarchy. Recognizing that there are structural impediments to the advancement and inclusion of women in public political life, the next section will see how contemporary women in Iran and Egypt are developing strategies to change the system from within, without resort to radical, revolutionary means.

As discussed earlier, in contemporary post-modern feminist thought, competing images of womanhood is recognized and welcomed; similar to the different manifestations of the universal notion of the self. Today, women are defining different notions of what it means to be a woman in a particular society. In addition, mass communication in the era of globalization has enabled women in different parts of the world to better connect and communicate their visions and interests with one another. It can be argued that the impact of globalization on women can best be seen by globalization's potential for "indiscriminate empowerment."¹⁵² As a result, postmodern feminism as an inclusive and empowering discourse has taken advantage of the wide reach of the technological, political and economic reach of globalization by spreading the ethos of women's equality and quest for political inclusion to women all over the world. So, whether movements are established and shaped in the North or the South, today

¹⁵² Farhang Rajaei, *Globalization on Trial: The Human Condition and the Information Civilization*, (West Hartford, Conn.: Kumarian Press, 2000).

women all over the world are seeking ways to merge the gap between the socially, at times religiously ascribed status of privately situated wives and mothers, to becoming active and conscious agents who seek to participate in the public social, economic and political life. As will be seen in Chapter four, women in Iran and Egypt are adamant public participants who are working on multiple levels, using different, at times competing discourses to define and establish their position in society. The significance of their mode of action is that they are consciously trying to remain authentic to certain cultural values, such as the role of motherhood, while penetrating the overall system of male dominance and discrimination through a piecemeal strategy of modification and adjustment. While earlier in their movements, women activists dichotomized between the public and private, today, women are trying to universalize their demands, as they affect their lives in the public and private domain. In fact, they are developing ways to publicize and at times politicize certain private issues such as women's rights in marriage, divorce and child custody as they seek to make certain public debates relevant to private life as well. Thus in the next Chapter we will see how modern Muslim women in Iran and Egypt are trying to establish their identities along with their objectives in societies where patriarchal norms are rampant in different political, cultural and religious institutions.

Part II

PRAXIS

CHAPTER 4

MODERN MUSLIM WOMEN IN ACTION

Parading down the streets of Tehran (capital of Iran) young women in lavender and light pink *manteau*'s¹⁵³ giggle along as they pass young men usually dressed in jeans and well cut shirts. As the wind blows, they are careful that the colorful silk scarf that covers some of their carefully highlighted hair doesn't fall. Are you going to a party? No, they say, we are going out for a stroll! While observing the Islamic Republic's dress code, which is sanctioned by law. Iranian women are giving this rule a flavor of its own. A few capitals to the West, on the busy streets of Cairo, women wear a variety of dresses. Some wear long white scarves that fall over their loose *jelbab*'s and some young women wear jeans and a tunic along with a matching scarf. Then there are some women who simply let the wind blow through their hair. The irony strikes an observer right away. In both situations, women are consciously expressing their individuality and acknowledging their womanhood either by exposing or covering it up; and by so doing stigmatizing religious and political groups who see their actions as acts of defiance. Despite the different degrees of freedom that is afforded to them, these women are pushing boundaries and establishing new parameters for the expression of their self-hood as women and as citizens of a nation.

The advancement of women in public and private life was never linear and perhaps will have to go through more oscillations before the presence of women in society becomes accepted and normalized. Contemporary women in Iran and Egypt can

¹⁵³ Manteau is usually a long, loose and light overcoat worn by women. Jelbab is similar to a manteau worn by women in the Arab world.

be seen as inheritors of the legacy of women who dared to act. Through their bold and conscious actions, women activists and feminists have pursued different strategies in paving their way into the process of history making in their countries.

Part I looked at the life narrative of “the woman self” in Iran and Egypt who under different circumstances utilized notions in modernity, Islam and feminism on their way towards gaining acceptance into society. Breaking into the public scene as conscious, independent individuals required women to establish the pillars of their identity and pronounce the contours of their being. Modernity, womanhood, and Islam were the three pillars that held the structure of their movements together. In order to be able to walk and take steps in an Islamic community, by law and order in Iran and by tradition and norms in Egypt, they needed to carry the Islamic flag. The flag allowed them passage through alleys that they could not enter had they not identified themselves as Muslims in those countries. Femininity and womanhood was of course the inseparable part of their being and revival of its integrity was the essence of the movement. Modernity was the string that stitched the pieces together through adaptation of Islamic laws while respecting the integrity of women and considering the needs of the times. As a result, conscious or unconscious of the methodologies that they were devising, women, have utilized one angle of the triad of modernity, revivalist Islam and feminism as the *modus operandi* of their movement.

As the parameters of the modern Muslim woman self have been highlighted as the self-conscious individual who proudly acknowledges womanhood and Muslimness as part of her identity, this section aims to focus on the pragmatism of the modern Muslim woman self, rather than her activism. In other words, the nature of the women’s

movement in Iran and Egypt has changed from being a semi-consolidated, united effort to packets of activity by self-conscious active women who are working towards inclusion in the process of making norms and policies. In the early periods of their movements women had to mobilize their forces in order to make their voices heard and make their presence felt. However, today we are living in a world, where the presence of women is not only acknowledged but is recognized as necessary by men and women who see the economic, political, and social benefits of women's participation. Although, becoming part of the mainstream carries the stigma or fear of losing the importance or significance of an issue, nevertheless, it can be argued that today, it is perhaps the conscious effort of women to become part of the mainstream tide of society. In becoming "just another member" women can gain the benefit of being able to voice their concerns without having to justify or legitimize their presence in that realm in the first place. It can be argued that the successful campaign of modern Muslim women comes about when they have actually made their issues part of the mainstream dialogue as an issue that is always part of the agenda.

This section will highlight some of the actions that contemporary women in Iran and Egypt have taken to raise attention about the position of women in areas such as laws on divorce and child custody, women's human rights, political participation and the establishment of organizations. The women that are looked at draw upon a number of discourses and take up a variety of subject positions; where they invest and make emotional commitments in multiple, even mutually competing, discourses on gender and inclusion in society. Reading within this frame of reference invites reflection on the relationship between resistance and complicity in ways that emphasize gender specific

experience as a historical process adopting the fundamental feminist notion that the personal is political.¹⁵⁴

As discussed earlier, women have used the banners of womanhood and Muslimness conscious of the dominant discourses of their time. As they have emphasized on educated mothers and active citizenship in nationalist movements, and well-read Muslim women who understand Islamic injunctions, today, women in Iran and Egypt operate under different modes of social thought and government policies. Egypt and Iran have been intentionally selected as they provide two differing, yet culturally similar milieu for women to play their role and take part in the public sphere. While in both Iran and Egypt the participation of women in the different political, social and economic spheres is deemed essential, nevertheless, Iranian women have had to emphasize on their religiosity more than Egyptian women as the Islamic Republic of Iran's official language is couched in religious rhetoric. In Egypt on the other hand, social norms and values have religious underpinnings, as Egypt houses Al-Azhar University (the most important Islamic institute in the Sunni world), where the Grand *Mufti* of Al-Azhar's *fatwa*'s (religious injunctions or rulings on different situations) serve as a guide for the action of millions of Muslims around the world. While the Egyptian Constitution upholds Islam as the official religion of the state, there is no officially sanctioned religious code of conduct that Egyptians have to adhere to as Muslims. Therefore, the line of argumentation of Egyptian and Iranian women differ as womanhood and gender equality is more pronounced for Egyptian women and attaining equality in the framework of Islamic thought is seen necessary for Iranian women.

¹⁵⁴ Fatima Memissi, *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory*, (London: Zed Books, 1996), 16.

A. The Case of Iran

The awarding of the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize to Shirin Ebadi, a lawyer, human right's activist and mother of two daughters, inspired much debate among those who felt joyously proud of her achievements, and those who were dubious about the "political" connotation of the award. Upon accepting her award, she made it plain that she spoke as an Iranian Muslim woman striving to be modern. As she put it "the people of Iran have been battling against consecutive conflicts between tradition and modernity for over 100 years." However, she argued, "the people of Iran, particularly in recent years, have shown that they deem participation in public affairs to be their right, and that they want to be masters of their own destiny." In addition, she raised concern about the issue of women's rights in Iran, and that "the discriminatory plight of women in Islamic states, too, whether in the sphere of civil law or in the realm of social, political and cultural justice, has its roots in the patriarchal and male-dominated culture prevailing in these societies, not in Islam."¹⁵⁵ In her statements and throughout her activities Ebadi emerges as one conscious, politically aware woman who is ready to pay the price for what she believes in.

Throughout her campaigns as a lawyer and human rights activist, she has been raising awareness about the rights of women and children and the need for the greater participation of women in society. She was the first woman to become a judge in Iran in 1975. After the 1979 Revolution, she was expelled from her position, but did not give up and continued practice as a lawyer. "She is a popular figure in Iran and also a key figure in the reformist movement and like many other key figures in the movement she's been

¹⁵⁵ Shirin Ebadi, "Noble Lecture," Oslo, December 2003, (<http://nobleprize.org/peace/laureates/2003/ebadi>).

harassed by the conservative forces who control the judiciary.” says Ziba Mir Hosseini of the School of Oriental Studies in London.¹⁵⁶ In the past year, the name of Shirin Ebadi has become a household name among Iranian women both inside and outside Iran. She is ardently praised as an expert in her field who has been able to utilize her professional successes in the courtroom to raise consciousness about sensitive social issues such as the rights of women and children. She has written extensively on different human rights issues such as *The Rights of the Child: A Study in the Legal Aspects of Children’s Rights in Iran* (1987); *The Rights of Women* (2002); *The Rights of Refugees*(1993), and more. Moreover, what is interesting to note is that her vocal participation and presence in the public sphere is accepted, and her image as a headstrong and determined woman is softened by her conscious expression of her role as the mother of two daughters. In other words, Shirin Ebadi’s calls for granting women more rights and freedoms in the political and economic sphere is accepted by women in Iran, and perhaps elsewhere in the Muslim world, by her acknowledgement that she is a woman who believes in Islam as an egalitarian and just religion which respects the human rights of all individuals and allows for greater freedom of thought and expression even within a religious context. In essence, Ebadi represents a modern Muslim woman who at once expresses her individuality in the way she chooses to practice and display her religiosity by not veiling when she is outside Iran for example; and acknowledging her womanhood by working towards improving the status of women as a concerned woman and as a mother.

While Ebadi’s profession has opened doors to her vocal activism, Faezeh Hashemi wisely used her status as being the daughter of the former President Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (1989-1997) to make headway into the political realm and attract

¹⁵⁶ “Profile: Shirin Ebadi”, (www.news.bbc.co.uk).

public attention about gender discrimination. She succeeded in establishing The Islamic Countries Women's Sports Solidarity Games in 1993, and owned the newspaper *Zan* (Women), which was shut down after publishing an interview with Farah Diba, the former Queen of Iran in 1999. In the fifth parliamentary elections in 1996, Hashemi won the second-highest number of votes in the election to enter *Majlis*. During her term she had objected to women's exclusion from the judiciary and their arrest for improper *hijab*.¹⁵⁷ Regardless of her pseudo-liberal views on women, Faezeh Hashemi also fits the category of the Muslim woman who seeks to create change by working through the system. Shadi Sadr, a lawyer and talented female newspaper columnist who was recently awarded the Ida B. Wells Award for Bravery in Journalism at the Women's eNews 21 Leaders for the 21st Century Gala, distinguishes between two groups fighting for women's rights. First, there are those who believe that piecemeal legal reform, underpinned by an enlightened approach to Islamic jurisprudence, can solve women's problems. Second, there is the more radical group that "takes issue less with laws than with the whole legal superstructure."¹⁵⁸ Even these radicals, such as the lawyer Merhangiz Kar, who has written extensively on the need for legal reforms and the compatibility of the provisions of CEDAW with the laws of the Islamic Republic, do not really call for an overhaul of the system. Although, Kar rarely expresses herself as a Muslim, nevertheless, she continues to write avidly in women's Islam-minded journals such as *Zanan* and *Payameh-Hajar* about the need to reform and modify Personal Status Laws, which include laws on marriage, divorce and child custody, so that they reflect women's rights as wives and mothers in society today.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Faezeh Hashemi, (<http://www.zan.org/lit2.html>).

¹⁵⁸ "Shorn of Dignity and Equality: Women in Iran", *The Economist*, (October 18, 2003).

While parliamentary representation may seem to be elitist, or not representative of the needs and interests of the population as a whole, it is nevertheless through establishing laws that governments reflect their policies. It is through legal norms that tangible changes to women's situation can be made. Women parliamentarians, such as Maryam Behrouzi, Jamileh Kadivar, Elaheh Koolayi, and Fatemeh Haghghatjoo, have all realized the power that was invested in them by their women constituents. While it is not in the scope of this paper to review the legislation that has been put forward or adopted by and for women, it is important to make note of the changes made to the Personal Status Laws and lobbying efforts to adopt CEDAW by women MP's and by individual women as well.

Maryam Behrouzi, a former Member of Parliament was quoted in *Zan-e-Rooz* (Today's Woman) stating that "we don't believe that every social change is harmful. Cultural refinement of some traditions, such as patriarchy, anti-women attitudes, and humiliation of women must disappear. These have been fed to our people in the name of Islam."¹⁵⁹ In this lieu the ignominious article 1133 of the Iranian Civil Code (ICC), which granted men the unilateral right to divorce was reformed in 1992. According to this law, the husband also has to go to court and apply for divorce registration and bring reasons for his desire for divorce. Although in practice the grounds by which men can claim divorce is more, but, nevertheless, it makes divorce a costly endeavor for men too as they have to compensate the wife for childrearing and housework if the grounds for divorce are not seen as legitimate. The marriage contract reforms of 1994 also give women the right to half the wealth and property of a husband who decides to divorce his wife

¹⁵⁹ Maryam Behrouz quoted in *Zan-e-Rooz*, Issue 4, 1994 in Valentine Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Volume 27: No. 41, (2002), 1141.

without good cause.¹⁶⁰ In addition to changes in divorce laws, amendments were made to child custody laws where after twenty years of campaigning, divorced mothers won the right to custody of their sons up to the age of seven, instead of two. In December 2003, divorced mothers finally gained the same rights over their sons as that of their daughters.¹⁶¹ These changes in the Personal Status Laws have come about after years of hard campaigning on behalf of women and men, who wanted to change the social orientation towards the role and capabilities of women in society, and can be counted as the success stories in women's campaigns towards improving the status of women. What makes the amendments and changes to these laws significant, is that the economic independence of women has finally been recognized by law, as women are also seen capable to provide for the welfare of their children. In addition, claiming compensation for "housework" goes back to Islamic traditions, which states that a woman does not have to do housework if she doesn't want to and has the right to request compensation from her husband. This legislation at least formally recognizes women's contribution to the good of the family in addition to being completely in sync with Islamic norms. In effect, it is a nuanced way of using religious discourse to the benefit of woman.

During their terms in *Majlis* MPs, Fatemeh Haghightjoo, Elaheh Koolayi, and Jamileh Kadivar, were very vocal on the issue of women. Upon her election to the sixth Parliament (2000), Kadivar, who is a university professor and head of the Association of Women Journalists, stated that "The issue concerning the civil rights of women, must be addressed with appropriate laws that consider women's current social conditions, while

¹⁶⁰ Haleh Afshar. *Islam and Feminisms: An Iranian Case-Study*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 186-191.

¹⁶¹ "Iranian Women Win Better Child Custody Rights" *Feminist Daily Newswire* (December 5, 2003, www.feminist.org).

heeding religious jurisprudence and the viewpoints of legal experts.”¹⁶² Jamileh Kadivar is among the most prominent “Muslim feminists” in Iran who has written books ranging from analyzing the Palestinian Liberation Movement, and the Iranian Revolution’s encounter with American foreign policy, to the issue of women and their rights in Islam. It is interesting to note that on a web-site that she shares with her husband Ataollah Mohajerani, former Minister for Cultural Affairs and a contemporary Muslim reformist, they each write about their personal experiences in public life and share family pictures with their audience.¹⁶³ To many, this might seem like a trivial act, but, the fact that Kadivar has established her own public-cyber space as a “public intellectual” where she publishes and communicates her independent thoughts speaks of a greater degree of consciousness and comfort about being a Muslim woman. This means that her name, her family history, her childhood pictures can be shared with a greater audience. In addition, the fact that she and her husband share this site and write commentaries and post articles on it, somehow makes her look like a good, and intelligent companion. Kadivar is seen as an independent journalist who freelances and because she is in a position of power she is able to portray an image of a modern woman who is authentic to religion and culture while maintaining her autonomy and independence of thought.

Fatemeh Haghighatjoo was another MP during the sixth Parliament who took bold steps in expressing her opposition to the way the government treated students during and in the aftermath of the student riots in Tehran, in the year 2000. In fierce statements before Parliament, she criticized the Spiritual Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei and President Khatami for their inability to handle the event, and for harassing one of the most

¹⁶² “Kadivar Hopes that Women hold Seats in the Executive Assembly” *Zanan*, (March, 2000: www.badjens.com).

¹⁶³ www.maktoub.ir

important segments of the population, that of the student body. She was brought before the court accused of “propagating against the Islamic regime” and was threatened to 22 months in prison. However, she did not sit back. While being pregnant, she participated in a parliamentary sit-in against the Guardian Council’s disapproval of the standing of incumbent MPs for the next round of elections in Parliament in 2004. Interestingly, she brought her husband along with her, to avoid any accusations of her wanting to mingle with men! She was among the candidates who were disqualified by the Guardian Council to run for the next round of elections. As a result, she resigned from serving the last couple of months of her term. Her actions were bold and unique, and by so being, she expressed her fierce opposition to any imposition of force as a citizen and as a woman. To many, she symbolizes the independent actor who when in a position of power is able to stand by her principles and cross boundaries without fearing the consequences of her action.

Despite efforts to raise consciousness about the issue of women, it has to be realized that for greater change to take place, all the apparatus of the state need to cooperate in the process. Meaning, the individual or even collective actions of some MPs cannot be the only tools that show the other women in society that indeed new windows of opportunity are being opened, and that they should seize the opportunity. In Iran, many expected more than just the appointment of a single woman minister and vice-president on women’s affairs from the pro-reform government of Khatami. Both Haghghatjoo and Kadivar voiced criticism to President Khatami’s choice of ministers for his second cabinet. “We believe everything should be done according to a meritocracy, but there is a stream of thought that considers being a man one of the most important merits,”

Haghighatjoo argued. Kadivar, who along with Haghighatjoo are considered reformist, said “that women faced a classic catch-22 in which men complained that women lacked sufficient management experience to lead government agencies, but at the same time the men refused to promote the women and give them the experience.”¹⁶⁴ It’s interesting, or perhaps unfortunate to see that women are again asking for a chance to prove themselves. Although, this time around they are more vocal and powerful, as the issue of women’s rights and interests has become part of the general consciousness of civil society, and there are international regimes, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) that also acknowledge the universal human rights of women. Even so, more is expected from governments who claim to be pro-women and who act otherwise.

The proposal for the adoption of CEDAW has been sent to Parliament a number of times. However, the Guardian Council states that the articles of the Convention stating that full equality between men and women be maintained is against the nature of humans and against the doctrines of Islam. The Director-General of the Center for Promoting Women’s Participation, Zahra Shojai, which has been established under presidential decree, serves as the president’s advisor on women’s affairs. The Center acts as think-tank where women who are sympathetic to the Islamic government, yet want reform act through and push women’s issues on the government’s agenda. As an individual, Zahra Shojai is a woman whose wits and cleverness grab the attention of those around her immediately. I had the opportunity to meet her at the house of a family friend. She had come to attend the Beijing+ Five Conference in New York (2000). She was well-read in

¹⁶⁴ John Ward Anderson, “Iran’s New Cabinet: 15 Old Faces, No Radicals,” *International Herald Tribune*, (August 13, 2001).

religion and politics, most obviously on issues pertaining to women's status in Islam and in the political sphere. What was remarkable about her was that although she appears to be a genuine believer in Islam (she was wearing a *chador* when she came to the US), nevertheless, she associated with both men and women, very comfortably and at ease. She really embodied a modern Iranian woman who is genuinely Muslim, but believes in progressive change in changing society's view of its women citizens. While she also adamantly favors the adoption of CEDAW by the Islamic Republic, she too expresses reservations about the "equality" clause in CEDAW. As a believer she too thinks that women and men are equal, but different, and that they compliment each other in their differences. Hence, the norms and laws of society should be reflective of this difference and uphold equity with justice rather than equality. Similar to Shojai, many Iranian women, would also argue that women want equal opportunities and equal access but, nevertheless, they too want their differences to be recognized. As the mores of Iranian culture uphold differences between the sexes in the public and private realm, improving the overall status of women requires one to work within, and through the system. Women like Shojai, Kadivar and Ebadi, understand how the system works and they have become a vocal voice within it. Though, it must be noted that this notion of "becoming part of the system" should by no means be seen as giving into the demands of the system, but it is the recognition that you can't liberate women by radically shedding one's veil (what Dowlatabady did) in a culture that views having *hijab* a tradition worthy of upholding.

B. The Case of Egypt

"It is the right of a Muslim woman to vote for and speak her opinion about whoever serves public or greater interests," states Mohammed Sayyid Tantawi, Grand

Sheikh of the prestigious Al-Azhar mosque and university in Cairo.¹⁶⁵ The secular and arguably Western façade of modern Egyptian society should not deceive the eyes of the observer about the existence of a clear dichotomy between religion and state in Egypt. Despite the different degree of religiosity that the Egyptian government reflects in its official policies, Islamic norms and values play a predominant role in the daily lives of Egyptian men and women. In fact, as Azza Karam, author of *Women, Islamisms and the Contemporary State in Egypt*, and an active feminist in international organizations such as the UNDP and the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), argues that there are certain similarities between the views of gender promoted by the state, as these are contained in law for example, and those of the Islamists. This, she says, is the area in which the Islamists and the state are currently most in agreement, and where ideological struggle, if it takes place, is least fierce.¹⁶⁶ Egypt has and continues to have a strong secular feminist wing, which seeks to pursue change by donning any influence of Islam and heavily relying on international norms and regimes. However, in the recent decades from the 1980's until now, the Muslim Brotherhood has emerged as a highly organized and religious organization which draws Egyptians from all walks of life to return to a mode of life prescribed by Islam. The visible increase in religiosity, evident in women taking up the veil and observing full hijab does not make the issue of women's rights in Egypt only a religious issue. In fact, many of the organizations and issues that focus on women's issues can be seen as pursuing a secular feminist agenda. Nevertheless, it must be noted that because Islamic traditions have been imbued in the fabric of society, despite

¹⁶⁵ "Egyptian Cleric Backs Equal Voting Rights for Women" The Arab Resource Center on Violence Against Women, (www.amanjordan.org).

¹⁶⁶ Azza Karam, *Women, Islamisms, and the Contemporary State in Egypt*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

the secularity of the initiative, the religious obstacles must also be considered. It is in this milieu that Egyptian women, like their Iranian counterparts are pursuing their women centered agenda's as conscious Muslims trying to maintain authenticity while being progressive and forward looking.

One of the most important areas that Egyptian women have invested their efforts on is on changing the Personal Status Laws. The Law on Reorganization of Certain Terms and Procedures of Litigation in Personal Status Matters grants women the right to divorce without the consent of their husbands if they give up some of their financial rights. This type of divorce, known as khul' is legitimated in Islamic law. The law also creates a new family court system, establishes a fund to provide child support for impoverished families, authorizes the government to garnish the wages of fathers who renege on alimony and child support, and facilitates divorce and the resolution of paternity claims in increasingly popular urfi (unregistered) marriages.¹⁶⁷ The approval of this law in 2000 proves to be a milestone for Egyptian women. Mona Zulfikar, a lawyer and women's rights advocate said that the family courts will replace the century-old institution of personal status courts and mark a significant breakthrough for Egyptian women. In 1979, Jehan Sadat, the wife of the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, succeeded in pushing for the adoption of the personal status reforms that incorporated new grounds for divorce by a woman if her husband took another wife without her consent. She was to be informed if her husband divorced her and was allowed to obtain a notarized certificate of divorce. The divorced wife retained custody of her children—until the ages of 10 for a boy and 12 for a girl—and was to be awarded the family apartment as

¹⁶⁷ Diane Singerman, "Women and Strategies for Change: An Egyptian Model" *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Volume 2: Issue 7 (July 2004).

a residence until she remarried.¹⁶⁸ However, r this law was revoked in 1985 as arguments were put forth about the unconstitutional method of its adoption. After years of campaigning, Islamist author Safinaz Kazem and Zulfikar argue, that “this new law simplifies the legal procedures and groups all the different steps in one place.”¹⁶⁹ These laws not only seek to curtail or perhaps limit the activities of men, but in granting women certain rights in marriage and divorce also show a change in the way the law at least looks at women. no longer as the victim, today, an Egyptian woman can claim the right to be compensated from a marriage that has been unfaithful to her.

Amendments to child custody laws, which grant the full custody of both daughter and son to the age of fifteen to a mother, after which the child would decide where to continue to live, outraged many who consider custody a fathers right under Islamic law. However, Zeinab Radwan, a member of the Shura Council, states that Islam does grant women child custody given that the mother has the means to support her children. Radwan is also member to the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood, as well as a member of the executive committee of the National Women's Council (NWC). She is well versed in Islamic jurisprudence especially as they pertain to women's rights, and has been campaigning for child custody rights, and women's freedom to travel without the consent of the husband for years. Throughout the years she has been quite vocal criticizing the political use of Islam as a way to promote party lines.

As an MP, Radwan, initiated the drive for the new child custody laws arguing that the needs of children today are different from what they were. After the law was

¹⁶⁸ Sherifa Zuhur, “The Mixed Impact of Feminist Struggles In Egypt During the 1990's”, *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 5: No. 1 (March 2001).

¹⁶⁹ Diane Singerman, “Women and Strategies for Change: An Egyptian Model” *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Volume 2: Issue 7 (July 2004).

discussed in the People's Assembly it was then sent to the Shura Council, which subsequently sent the issue to Al-Azhar to gain the final approval from the Islamic Research Center. This is a prerequisite process for the establishment of any law dealing with family issues.¹⁷⁰ Noting the long process that family laws have to go through, only highlights the fact that the family, deemed as the most important unit of society in the Islamic tradition still maintains its sensitive position even in a seemingly secular-legal atmosphere.

What is interesting to note about Radwan is that she describes herself as a modern Muslim, whose instinctive cultural reference is the Qur'an.¹⁷¹ Though judging by her activities, Radwan seems like another bureaucrat who is actively engaged in running the institutions that she is active in work better. But, perhaps its her occupation as the Dean of Cairo's Dar al-Ulum University that makes her womanhood stand out, as she has been able to reach a standing that provides her with many opportunities to implement change. She is a Muslim woman who does not believe in veiling and thinks that it was prescribed for the wives of the Prophet (pbuh) only. Like other feminists in Egypt, she is aware that religion plays a vital role in the Egyptian value system, and to know its language is an asset in the struggle for change. Dr. Suad Saleh, who is the Dean of Al-Azhar's Women College and a regular contributor to the weekly newspaper Al-Ahram which is the most established and well read periodical in Egypt, argues that "women under Islam have reached a level that no other (woman) has reached in fourteen centuries" which strikes a

¹⁷⁰ Manat el-Jesri, "Who Keeps the Kids The Recent Amendment to the Custody Law", (www.egypttoday.com).

¹⁷¹ Gamal Nkrumah, "Zeinab Radwan A Woman's World", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Issue No. 419 (July 2000), <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg>.

defiant note of pride and confidence that is heard among many young women today.¹⁷² Dr. Saleh advocates that a woman has just as much right to rule as does a man, provided that she fulfill the same conditions that he needs to fulfill: that she is capable and elected by the population.¹⁷³ While there have been a few instances of women rulers in Islamic history, most religious scholars would disagree with Saleh's viewpoint. This points to her innovative thinking, and to the new brand of Muslim feminism, whereby highly educated female religious scholars are the ones interpreting the religion for their sisters in society. Dr. Saleh is one who consciously writes for the advancement of women and while being an observing Muslim does not shy away from criticizing Islamic norms that impede the progress of women.

In addition to individual women acting in their capacity as politicians and academics, Suzanne Mubarak, the wife of the incumbent President Hosni Mubarak, is also using her political stature to headway changes for women's rights. The National Council for Women (NCW) was established in 2001 under a presidential decree. The Council serves as a center for organization and production of plans of actions and studies on women in different realms of activity. The significant role that Suzanne Mubarak plays as its Chairman provides the council with a degree of political leverage that many other organizations that are actively pursuing to educate women and promote their social and political participation may not have at their disposal. In her capacity as Chairperson, Mrs. Mubarak has taken the role of being a vocal voice and familiar face in the Arab world in heralding the need to improve the socio-economic position of women. As she

¹⁷² Gamal Nkrumah, "Zeinab Radwan A Woman's World"

¹⁷³ Ghada Osman, "Back to the Basics: The Discourse of Contemporary Feminism in Egypt", *Women and Language*, Volume. 26, Issue 1 (Spring 2003), 73.

travels to neighboring countries in her capacity as Chairperson of the NCW, she seems to not only want to use her advantaged political position to pursue a cause, but, in addition she serves as a vehicle where many issues can be brought to the foray of public debate through her elaboration on it. The Council appears to be a very lively organization where women in Egypt and from the Arab world come to discuss gender and development; the right of women to travel in the Shari'a; strategies for integrating women in the labor market and more. Mrs. Mubarak has taken the issue of advancing women's cause as a personal mission seeking to open a development center for women in the field of small projects which gives assistance to develop economic abilities of women and establishing a women's complaint office.¹⁷⁴

What is significant about the case of Egyptian women is that from the early periods of their movement until now, they have established well structured organizations headed by capable women who seek change through the frameworks of well managed organizations. Hoda Badran heads the Alliance for Arab Women, Farkhonda Hassan is Secretary-General of the National Council on Women, and Aziza Hussein heads the National Commission on Population and Development (NCPD). These women are all seeking to work within a socio-political framework which they have come to know its ups and downs. Aziza Hussein points that: "we always work within culturally accepted frameworks, like the family, which many feminists have identified to be a domain in which women are oppressed by men. I do not want to intimidate men. It is very important for us to be part of the social fabric, and that is why the NCPD has been able to win the support of women of different views."¹⁷⁵ Similar to Iranian women, Egyptian women

¹⁷⁴ The National Council on Women, (www.ncwegypt.com).

¹⁷⁵ Mariz Tadoz, "A Movement for All Seasons", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Issue No. 419 (March 1999).

have also opted for a non-confrontational approach so as to be able to work through the system and by so doing exert the most durable impact on the views that society holds on women. Hoda Badran also believes that the demands of women have evolved. "We are now asking to participate in governance and decision-making, we want to be judges and governors, so in many ways, while our demands are essentially the same, they are more crystallized and more focused."¹⁷⁶ Like Hoda Badran, Marie Assaad, head of the Female Genital Mutilation Taskforce, believes that "there are now many movements centering around different women's issues: for example, one movement advocating women's right to become judges, another focusing on raising poor women's legal awareness, yet another dealing with how to stop FGM."¹⁷⁷ In fact, Egypt appointed its first female judge, Tehany El-Gebali, in 2003.

Debates over FGM and the bodily integrity of women is a site of political and religious battle, where neither the state nor religious authorities have publicly denounced its practice. The Egyptian government has officially announced that this practice is harmful, but not illegal. Hence, it is by bringing issues such as FGM and women's right to become judges into the foray of public discussion that today women in Egypt are taking a lead in breaking certain social taboos and making issues that were deemed personal and private as political and public.

One such figure in Egypt is Nawal El-Saadawi Egypt's premier feminist, who has become a household name. She first published *Women and Sex* in 1972, which dealt with the taboo of women's sexuality, leading to her dismissal as Egypt's director of Public

¹⁷⁶Mariz Tadoz, "A Movement for All Seasons", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Issue No. 419 (March 1999).

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Health.¹⁷⁸ A psychiatrist by profession, today Saadawi heads the Arab Solidarity Association, and is going to nominate herself as a candidate in the upcoming presidential election. Rafat Bayat who is a Member of Parliament in Iran, is also considering nominating herself for president, mainly to challenge the clause in the Iranian Constitution that uses the Arabic word *rijal*, meaning men as a requirement for presidency. But there is caution to be noted. “Women now may have the choice to go out and march, but do you think all of their male counterparts would let them go out?” asks El-Tabei, an Egyptian and mother of two. “Hosni Mubarak may let them go out, but it’s their husbands and brothers and fathers that won’t. The government gives more power to women than the culture.”¹⁷⁹ However, the fact that they do make the effort is important. So it seems that today more than ever before women in all walks of life are seeking ways to connect the issues that affect their personal lives to bigger and more inclusive discourses, that of patriarchy and misinterpreted religious discourse. Through their conscious criticisms and activisms modern Muslim women in Iran and Egypt are literally carving new spheres of presence and influence in society. Although their presence is sometimes unwelcome, they will just have to be tolerated because women are now consciously stepping out of their secluded cocoons that they contend to stay out! This chapter briefly looked at some of the activities and initiatives that the new generation of Muslim women selves in Iran and Egypt has undertaken. This nuanced way of looking at the emergence of women who are self-conscious and, have become vocal and confident in expressing their individuality, upholding their autonomy and maintaining authentic to the religious and cultural traditions attests to the emergence of a new generation of women selves. It

¹⁷⁸ Ahmed Nassef, “Egypt’s Leading Feminist Unveils Her Thoughts” WeNews Correspondent, (February 25, 2004), (www.womensews.org)

¹⁷⁹ Yasmine Rashidi, “The Flipside of Feminism”, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Issue No. 629 (March 2003).

can be stated that women in Iran and Egypt are experimenting with the new phenomenon of creating their own identities and self-hoods based on their own independent, rational thought. Although, this chapter looked at women in the higher echelons of society, nevertheless, it can be argued that these women are also part of the masses, and they are not hero's indeed. rather, they are individuals who are inspired by a sense of vision and thirst for freedom and equality for all citizens of their nations.

Conclusion

O Me! O life!... of the questions of these recurring:
Of the endless trains of the faithless—of cities fill'd with the foolish:
Of myself forever reproaching myself. (for who more foolish than I,
and who more faithless?)
Of eyes that vainly crave the light—of the objects mean—of the
struggle ever renew'd:
Of the empty and used years of the rest—with the rest me intertwined:
The question. O me! So sad, recurring—What good amid these. O me,
O life?

Answer

That you are here—that life exists, and identity:

That the powerful play goes on, and you will contribute a verse.

Walt Whitman. *Leaves of Grass*

Some women! Having looked at the colorful cast of women that have been forcefully yet rightfully demanding an audience to hear them, one must say that they have persevered with optimism and confidence. These women have faced numerous obstacles, in the hope of claiming their humanity in a world which has for long overlooked and neglected the price that they have paid with their bodies and souls as women of society. The woman that this thesis claims to be in the making is the result of the numerous events, discourses and activities that have shaped the lives of women in Iran and Egypt in the past decades. The modern Muslim woman who is in the making is the individual who upholds her humanity to be supreme to any other characteristic of her being. It is under the flag of individual self worth that she takes the initiative to make a claim about her place in society, as an individual, a woman, a citizen and a Muslim. Living in the modern world today not only requires self-knowledge and self-consciousness but also a degree of awareness about the events and discourses that take place in the world at large. Women in Iran and Egypt have become conscious that they are part of a larger milieu which directly or indirectly influences their mode of thought and life, and as a result, they have decided to become actors in forging their own destinies.

Using notions and debates in modernity, feminism and revivalist Islam it can be seen how women in Iran and Egypt at different historical periods have tackled the secular and religious manifestations of patriarchy in order to make a space for themselves in the public and private sphere. Throughout their movements Iranian and Egyptian women have participated in their capacities as mothers, wives, citizens, feminists and social activities in the pursuit of goals aimed at changing women's social, economic and political standing. As participants in nationalist movements Iranian and Egyptian women used the rhetoric of citizenship and their ascribed role of "mothers of the nation" to legitimize their presence within movements. Although citizenship is a discourse that is still invoked around the world to justify their political participation, nevertheless, today, Iranian and Egyptian women are creating their own discourse and identity which garners to their needs and interests.

It's important to realize that the goal that women in all women's movements were and are pursuing is to be able to enter society simply as individual members. In other words, the goal is to become part of the mainstream tide of society where no banner or discourse is needed to justify, even legitimize entrance into that sphere. From efforts to become educated mothers and wives for the "good" of society to the push for inclusion in the political decision making process, women, have all along tried to shed the "otherness" that has been attributed to their sex for long, and simply become individuals, persons, and members of society. However, it has been battling with the institution of patriarchy in its visible and invisible, secular and religious manifestations that women have sought to retrieve the dignity and honor due to their womanhood and femininity under the banner of feminism. In other words feminism has become the discourse that provides reasons

and methodologies for women's activities in the pursuit of gender equality and women's emancipation. In Muslim countries, women have had to face and challenge laws and traditions that had been fabricated by men but deemed "divine" and untouchable. The knowledge of interpreting religious texts and establishing religious laws has for long been seen as the exclusive right or realm of men. But, Muslim women today have entered the realm of deciphering and understanding the religious basis of certain laws that discriminate based on sex. So, revivalist Islamic discourse has become another tool that women have been using in order to justify their presence in society. All these efforts are pursued and devised by women with the goal of carving a space in society where their humanity and potentials as individual persons is recognized and respected.

As a result, when talking about the modern Muslim woman, the idea is that we are talking about the making of a self that is conscious and aware of her capabilities and potentials as an individual person, who is woman and Muslim at the same time. So, womanhood and Muslimness are attributes that carry the same weight, and are differently emphasized due to the structure and discourse of the situation that they are located in. Having followed the activities of women in Iran and Egypt through their movements, it can at once be realized that women acted or pursued a certain discourse and methodology in attaining recognition simply because that was the flag that would win them entrance and acceptance into society. Whether it was calling for educating the future wives and mothers of society or participating in nationalist and anti-colonial movements, or emphasizing on religious authenticity, Iranian and Egyptian women have sought different means to formulate an identity and plan of action that was at all times complimentary to the mores of society.

This thesis focused on prominent Egyptian and Iranian women activists who were able to take an initiative either because they were educated and had the knowledge of how to articulate their concerns, or because they were well connected to the religious and political institutions of their societies. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that even if individual women have taken charge of the movement, there have been other women who have followed their lead. Today, women make up sixty percent of university students in Iran. In 2003 Egypt appointed its first female judge in addition to changing its citizenship laws which also allow children born to Egyptian mothers and non-Egyptian fathers to acquire Egyptian citizenship for their children. In essence, these official actions are recognizing the individual self worth of women as persons who like men have rights and interests that are to be provided for. As all women are sooner or later influenced by changes that take place in laws and official state policies, the participation of women in the creation of laws and policies either as lawmakers or protesters in demonstrations is necessary.

The modern Muslim woman is one individual who permeates throughout the different strata of society conscious and unconscious of the many different discourses and modes of political and religious life that have influenced her character. As a homemaker or a vice-president, the fact that this woman has self-love, self-respect and self-knowledge makes her capable of being an active agent in the home and in the office. The modern Muslim woman is an individual who sees herself with respect and dignity and wants all those around her to treat her as such. As an agent in the making she is ready to greet all those respect her personhood, womanhood and Muslimness with respect and dignity with confidence and authenticity.

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