

The Hybrid Women of the Arab Spring Revolutions: Islamization of Feminism, Feminization of Islam

Mira Tzoreff

Tel Aviv University

mirat@post.tau.ac.il

Many scholars who deal with social- and gender-oriented issues in Arab and Islamic societies tend to adopt the rigid, binary categories of secular and religious. Religious women are usually identified with a conservative worldview, a traditional education, and a medium-to-low socioeconomic status. The norms of honor and modesty governing these women are assumed to oblige them to confine themselves exclusively to their roles as wives and mothers and limit their presence in the public sphere. This binary approach stigmatizes those who wrap their heads in the hijab and cover their faces with the niqab as women who willingly or under compulsion accept traditional norms and behave accordingly.

Secular women, according to this binary division, are portrayed as those who have liberated themselves from the shackles of religion and tradition. They are assumed to be highly educated, liberal in their worldview, socially and politically engaged, and aspiring to build a career as competent professionals with the goal of becoming economically independent. To achieve this, they are prepared to struggle for their rightful place as equals in both family and society.

The history of women's movements in the Middle East and North Africa, however, indicates that women who led social- and gender-oriented struggles, from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day, were not necessarily secular. They neither issued challenges to their religion and tradition nor tried to undermine them. Rather, they sought to use them to construct more egalitarian gender relations by means of alternate readings and creative interpretations of the

holy Islamic writings relevant to the spirit of the times and changing circumstances (that is, according to the principle of *ijtihad*). Women social activists who renounced or shook off religion and tradition, on the other hand, failed to attract supporters, and their agendas were rejected.

Most of the women active in the Arab Spring revolutions are deeply rooted in and guided by their religion and tradition. Remaining within the framework of these institutions, they navigate their way to personal and gender empowerment. The hijab these women activists wear does not constitute an obstacle to living according to their credo or to taking a leading role in political and social activities. These women view their outward appearance as a sign and symbol of the cultural authenticity they seek to accentuate.

By their behavior, their dedication to their faith, and their worldview they unravel the binary approach imposed upon them by “outsiders” and construct a model that amalgamates a faith-motivated religiosity and a liberal, pluralistic worldview. At first glance it might seem that this amalgamation joins traditionally opposing categories. History, however, proves that these categories are not necessarily disparate nor do they contradict one another: they are more than just “complementary opposites.”

In order to put this phenomenon in a theoretical framework, I have borrowed Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, which clearly highlights the fact that for these women Islamic religious belief and a liberal worldview are intertwined. Bhabha, who developed his concept from literary and cultural theory to describe the construction of culture and identity within conditions of colonial antagonism and inequity, contends that a new hybrid identity emerges from the interweaving of elements of both the colonizer and colonized, and he objects to the notion of a pure, essential culture or identity adopted by postcolonial discourse. Bhabha’s new mutation, a mutual and mutable representation of cultural difference positioned between the colonizer and the colonized, creates a form of liminal space that he terms “the third space.” This space is an interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative space that blurs the limitations of existing boundaries and questions established categorizations of culture and identity.¹

The spheres in which Arab and Muslim women have been and still are active do not necessarily fit into the binary model of private and public. By their very activity these women molded a third sphere, which Homi Bhabha termed “in-betweenness,” made up of threshold or liminal spheres—hovering between the private, home-based and the public, communal spheres—that can also be labeled “hybrid.” This paper focuses on these women who, by their activism before the

Arab Spring revolutions, during the heydays of the revolutions, and especially after them, represent the above-mentioned hybrid prototype.

Did Women Experience an Arab Spring?

In a series of articles published in *Foreign Policy* in May and June 2012 under the heading, “Why Do They Hate Us?,” the Egyptian journalist and commentator Mona Eltahawy claimed that the revolutionary vision of an end to the era of autocracy in the Middle East and North Africa will not materialize unless an Arab and Islamic Spring takes place that encompasses society, gender, and culture, in addition to politics.

Until the rage shifts from the oppressors in our presidential palaces to the oppressors on our streets and in our homes, our revolution has not even begun.

Our political revolutions will not succeed unless they are accompanied by revolutions of thought—social, sexual, and cultural revolutions that topple the Mubaraks in our minds as well as our bedrooms.²

Even before this series of articles, in April 2012, Nifin Massad of the American University of Cairo published a no less provocative piece entitled “Let Not the Revolution against Mubarak Be a Revolution against Women.” In this article Massad presented a string of gender-oriented comments made by the new leaders of various Middle Eastern and North African states alluding to the revival of polygamy and the lowering of the legal age at which both men and women could marry. In Libya, for example, there was talk about revoking the law limiting the number of wives a man was permitted, based on the claim that shari’a permits polygamy. Massad called upon every Egyptian woman to raise her voice in the name of freedom and human dignity in order to draw society’s attention to the injustices being perpetrated against women even after the revolutions, “otherwise the Lotus Revolution does not deserve to be written into the annals of history.”³ Massad urged the women’s movements to consolidate their efforts and to expand their ranks with men and women conscious of the need for gender justice. Egyptian women, she argued, were duty bound to formulate a revolutionary gender model that would be acceptable to all Arab women in all countries in which Arab Spring revolutions took place. This model should enable them to lead the gender revolution in their own countries.

In the above-mentioned articles, Mona Eltahawy based her assertions on phenomena that occurred mainly in Egypt, but also in postrevolutionary Yemen and Tunisia, when women traversing the public spheres were sexually harassed by

men. This occurred in theaters, cafés, buses, and even in the long lines people were compelled to stand in at various government offices. In prerevolution Egypt this phenomenon was common, as evidenced by statistics that indicated that 80 percent of Egyptian women had experienced sexual harassment, and about 60 percent of Egyptian men admitted to engaging in sexual harassment.⁴

The Lotus Revolution fostered a widespread aspiration to abolish this phenomenon. The reality proved to be quite different. Serving as a stark example of this are the virginity tests conducted on women apprehended as they engaged in various revolutionary activities aimed at improving the square as a safe public space. These incidents reflect a sense of utter disrespect for women by Egyptian men in general and military men in particular. This can be seen in remarks made by General 'Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi, then a senior member of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, in an April 2011 press release in which he claimed that "the virginity test procedure was done to protect the girls from rape as well as to protect the soldiers and officers from rape accusations."⁵ Such actions against women aim to mark the border between the legitimate female arena and the public arena. In crossing the borders women are putting themselves at risk.

The results of the parliamentary elections in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen also failed to portend any miraculous political change for women. For example, of the 376 candidates elected to the Egyptian parliament after two rounds of elections, only eight were women; another twenty-one were appointed on the basis of affirmative action. That is, only 2 percent of all seats in the postrevolutionary Egyptian parliament were filled by women, even though the first round of elections included 212 women running on various party tickets and another 164 who ran on an individual, non-partisan basis. The second round of elections, however, included 328 female candidates, with 221 on party tickets and 107 participating on an individual basis.⁶

The postrevolutionary Egyptian government headed by Hisham Qandeel also failed to achieve any semblance of gender equality, as only two of thirty-five ministers were women, and the ministries assigned to them were not considered significant. Nagwa Khalil, a member of the National Center for Social and Criminal Research, was appointed minister of social affairs, and Nadia Zakhary, a professor of biochemistry and oncological biology at Egypt's National Cancer Institute, was appointed minister of scientific research. Both had served as ministers in the Ganzuri government toward the end of the Mubarak era. The situation is similar in Tunisia, where the 217 members of the Legislative Assembly include only forty-nine women, comprising 24 percent.⁷ These statistics indicate that although the

revolutions benefited significantly from women's contributions, women did not benefit from the revolutions, and their situation actually deteriorated. Indeed, not only did women respond to the calls of revolutionary men to take to the streets and demonstrate in the public squares, in Egypt and Yemen they even initiated and led the revolutions and served as media spokespersons. Yet after the dictatorships fell and the autocratic leaders were toppled, once the revolutionary fervor dissipated and the political process—including the formulation of a social contract—began to take shape, women were excluded, as if they had done their bit and could now go home.

A Historical Perspective of Women in Revolutions: From High Expectations
to Temporary Disillusion

The history of women throughout the region reveals that their accomplishments did not come to fruition immediately following the revolutions but rather as a result of the achievements of women during the prerevolutionary era and their determination to preserve and maximize these achievements.

The Arab Spring revolutionaries' main goal was to topple autocratic regimes and their leaders. The realization of women's human rights had not been their benchmark. Nevertheless, women also hoped that the courage they demonstrated in the public squares would translate automatically into concrete political dividends and that the new regimes would adopt a policy of gender equality as part of an overall policy of social justice (*'adālah ijtīmā'iyya*). Women active in demonstrations and protests also hoped that as the young revolutionaries entered the political arena, they would place the issue of women's rights squarely on their agenda for social change, even though the history of the region, especially of Egypt, is rife with examples of women's protests failing to result in progress on gender issues.

Consider the demonstration by Egyptian women on March 16, 1919, which took place at the height of Egypt's national revolution, the aims of which were independence, sovereignty, and the end of British occupation. A mythology has grown around this event, which gained the title "ladies demonstration." It achieved iconic stature and became part of the Egyptian collective memory.⁸ Huda Sha'arawi (1882–1947), then leader of Egypt's women's movement and organizer of the demonstration, did not hesitate to confront a British soldier who aimed his rifle at her, thus risking her own life for the sake of Egypt's independence. She documented these dramatic moments in her memoirs:

British troops surrounded us. They blocked the streets with machine guns, forcing us to stop along with the students who had formed columns on both sides of us. I was determined the demonstration should resume. When I advanced a British soldier

stepped toward me pointing his gun, but I made my way past him. As one of the women tried to pull me back, I shouted in a loud voice, "Let me die so Egypt shall have an Edith Cavell."⁹

Sha'arawi continued to lead the women's protest after the revolution. She turned her own home into a base of operations from which she and her comrades went to demonstrations calling for an end to both the military regime and the protectorate. They demonstrated in front of government ministries, urged men to absent themselves from their workplaces, declared a general boycott of British goods, and called for the exclusive purchase of Egyptian goods instead. As a symbolic act they publicly removed their jewelry and offered it to Egyptian civil servants employed by the British, in place of their salaries, calling out, "If you want money take this, but do not hinder our cause by going back to work under British threat. Long live the boycott! Long live unity! . . . Long live total independence! Long live the will of Egyptian women!"¹⁰

Egyptian national movement leaders who headed the country after it gained its independence in 1922 did not, however, see fit to repay the Egyptian women by making them citizens with rights and status equal to that of men. The women's efforts were acknowledged only verbally. The heads of the Wafd (delegation) Party wrote the following in a letter to its female members: "We shall never forget your great service when you quickly rose to action with the boycott. It was one of the most powerful weapons in our struggle."¹¹ Egypt's poet laureate, Hafez Ibrahim, also dedicated a poem to Egyptian women, who "strive for lofty goals" and from whom "the men learned . . . and became brave warriors."¹²

Sha'arawi and her comrades interpreted these gestures as no more than lip service.¹³ Moreover, Egyptian women suffered a slap in the face when they were prohibited from attending the opening ceremony of the Egyptian parliament, and more so when the 1923 constitution was drafted, explicitly stating (in clause number 3) that "all Egyptians are equal under the law . . . regardless of race, language, or religion."¹⁴ There was no mention of gender equality or voting rights for women. In 1923, as a result of these developments, women left the Wafd Party and formed their own organization, the feminist Union of Egyptian Women (al-Itihad al-nisa'i al-Misri), headed by Huda Sha'arawi. The union strove to improve the social status of Egyptian women by expanding the network of educational institutions serving them. It sought to improve their economic status by creating jobs and promoting equality of opportunity in the labor market. It also worked to improve their legal status through reforms in the sphere of personal status under the law, including

raising the age of marriage for both men and women and eliminating both polygamy and the practice of unilateral, instant divorce.

The shattered illusion of gender solidarity is clearly reflected in Sha'arawi's memoirs:

They [women] rise in times of trouble when the wills of men are tired. In moments of danger, when women emerge by their side, men utter no protest. Yet women's great acts and endless sacrifices do not change men's views of women. Through their arrogance, men refuse to see the capabilities of women. . . . Women rose up to demand their liberation, claiming their social, economic, and political rights.¹⁵

It should be noted that the organization headed by Sha'arawi was elitist in nature, refusing entry to women of the middle and lower classes. In protest, in 1944 Duria Shafiq (1908–1975), an intellectual and women's rights activist, founded the Daughters of the Nile (Banat al-Nil) society, which opened its doors to women of all social classes. Shafiq, who completed her doctorate on the status of women under Islam at the Sorbonne, led a protest in February 1951 in which about one thousand women participated, demanding their rights. These women demonstrated for three hours in front of the parliament building, disrupting the proceedings therein, yet their protest yielded no concrete results. Shafiq did not give in. In 1954 she led another demonstration, protesting the exclusion of women from the Egyptian parliament. She was joined by fourteen other women in a hunger strike. After this demonstration, and as a result of their determined protest, Egyptian women were granted the right to vote. However, despite this achievement, the political representation of women in government institutions did not change significantly.

Woman such as Sha'arawi and Shafiq would not have reached the impressive achievements attributed to them had they not been preceded by strong-minded, assertive women who strove, each in her own way, to improve the status of women within the family and society. These pioneers who led the struggle for women's rights in Egypt did not seek to adopt the Western model of gender relations but rather to formulate an authentic one based on a modernist Islamic interpretation of gender relations.

One of the foremost pioneers of this struggle was Malak Hifni Nasif, who was the principal of a girls' school and a journalist. She had her own column, "al-Nisa'iyyat" (On women's issues), in *al-Jarida* (The newspaper), the newsletter of Hizb al-umma (The nation's party). Nadia Wassef, a member of the Egyptian Mu'asat al-mara'a wa-l-thakirah (Women and Memory Forum),¹⁶ maintains that Nasif

was a woman of firsts: the first woman to get a degree from government schools (1900); the first to lecture publicly; the first to address the Egyptian parliament with a list of demands (1910); the first to lay the foundations for the feminist movement in Egypt; and the first to publish her poetry in a mainstream journal at the age of 13 (1899).¹⁷

Nasif relied on shari'a law in demanding that the status of Egyptian women be changed, adopting the worldview of modernist Islamic thinkers of the time, who had espoused modern ideas from the Western school of thought such as constitutionality, freedom of religion and worship, science and technology, updated educational models, and women's rights. She voiced strong objection to indiscriminate imitation of the Western belief system and opinions: "If we follow everything Western we will be destroying our own civilization, and a people without a civilization is weakened and will undoubtedly vanish."¹⁸

Accordingly, Nasif strongly opposed women removing their veils, which she saw as no more than an attempt to resemble European women. Rather than a means to isolate women or exclude them from the public sphere, the veil enabled women to participate in public life, make their presence felt in the patriarchal public spaces, breathe fresh air, go shopping, or pursue an education, without fear of any insult to their own or their family's honor. Nasif suggested that Egyptian women adopt the transparent Turkish veil as a compromise between the demands of conservatives, who thought women should wear the traditional, all-covering veil, and Egyptian intellectuals such as her uncle, Quasim Amin, who demanded in his 1899 book, *Tahrir al-mar'a* (Liberation of women), the immediate removal of the veil, claiming that it constituted a huge barrier between women and their empowerment and consequently between the nation and its progress.¹⁹ As Leila Ahmed argues, Amin represents—in a native voice of the upper-middle class, economically allied with the colonizers and already adopting their lifestyle as well as their way of thinking—the rearticulation of the colonial worldview of the inferiority of the native Muslim and the superiority of the European.²⁰ Nasif, however, clung to an indigenous discourse and way of life. Her choice of the middle road was based on her principled stance, according to which removal of the veil should be an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary process, thereby facilitating the education of men and their acceptance of the precept that unveiled women are not necessarily dishonorable or devoid of personal dignity. She wondered, "How can you men of letters . . . command us to unveil when any of us is subjected to foul language if she walks in the street, this one throwing adulterous glances at her and that one bespattering her with his

despicableness so that the sweat of shame pours from her brow.”²¹ Nasif was afraid of “man’s eyes and his tongue,” as she explained in a letter she wrote to her close friend May Ziadeh.²² Therefore, according to her opinion, women might suffer sexual harassment if they were unveiled in public. According to Nasif, by engaging in a process of preparation for the change in women’s appearance, their safety in the public arena would be ensured: “If we had been educated from our youth not to wear a veil, and if our men were ripe for this, then I would agree to the removal of the veil for those women interested in doing so. However, the nation is not yet ready for this.”²³

Nasif also supported quality education for women. She objected to the hypocrisy of those men in the Egyptian national movement who called for a rudimentary education for women, involving basic reading and writing and household skills such as cooking and laundering: “It is as if they are publicly insulting us by saying, ‘We only want you to be house servants, not respectable women.’ How can they deny us our natural rights and go petition for a constitution? Before demanding their rights from the patriarchal colonial power, the nationalistic men need to surmount their own patriarchal tendencies.”²⁴ Nasif’s worldview on gender issues was quite complex. She harshly opposed early marriages: in her view sixteen should have been the minimum age for girls to marry. She also expressed her disapproval of arranged marriages, claiming that a young couple should get to know each other before marriage. However, she clearly expressed her opposition to women singing and dancing in public, which she considered inappropriate for well-raised Egyptian girls. The complexity of the roles Nasif finds suitable for women indicates that she did not aspire to topple patriarchal authority but rather to challenge it and impel it to adjust to the spirit of the time without undermining Islamic values and morality.

Nasif embodied the integration of tradition and modernity and unraveled the dichotomy between modesty and feminism without subscribing to a Western feminist discourse. One may, therefore, define Nasif’s worldview as feminism through the veil: a model that was both authentically Islamic and feminist. In recent years this has also become the preferred model among Muslim women throughout the Middle East and Europe. These women not only prefer this model, they have even shown their readiness to fight for their right to wear the veil whenever it was denied them. The massive wave of protests against the “headscarf law” that came into force in France on April 11, 2011, and the veiled activists’ struggles to fight the ban on wearing the veil in public institutions in Turkey are stark examples. For these Muslim women, who identify themselves as believers, such restrictions are seen as an unethical and illegal enforcement of secularism upon them.

The Hybrid Women of Yemen: A Struggle for Women's Rights in the Framework
of the Islah Party

A majority of the women who participated in the revolution in Yemen belonged to or identified with the Islah Party (The Yemeni congregation for reform). This is an opposition movement affiliated with the Yemeni political party of the Muslim Brotherhood, *al-Huriyya wa-l-'adalah* (Freedom and justice). Foremost among these women was Tawakkul Karman, recipient of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize. Karman was born in 1979 to a family of rural origin. She is the daughter of 'Abd al-Salam Khaled Karman, a lawyer and politician as well as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. She is married and the mother of three sons. Karman completed her undergraduate studies in commerce at the University of Science and Technology in Sana'a in 1999, earned a master's degree in political science and education from the same university, and received a certificate in journalism in the United States. In addition to being an active member of professional associations and human rights organizations within and outside Yemen, Karman is a member of parliament for the Islah Party, a member of the Youth Revolution Council, and chair of the Yemeni-based Women Journalists without Chains. In 2009 and 2010 she led more than eighty nonviolent demonstrations calling for freedom of the press, the elimination of censorship, women's rights, the release of political prisoners, and respect for human rights, about which she also produced a documentary film. In January 2011 Karman was arrested for organizing gatherings and marches without a permit. She was charged with incitement and disturbing public order after she had called for an end to government corruption and dared to accuse Yemen's president, 'Ali Abdullah Saleh, of being responsible for the country's social and legal injustices. Saleh, for his part, responded to these charges by attacking the modesty of the revolutionary women as well as their personal sense of honor in light of what he termed "the intermingling of women and men in the public spheres of Sana'a," Yemen's capital city, which, he claimed, "defied the precepts of Islam."²⁵ Refusing to tolerate their president's verbal assault, the women embarked on demonstrations to express their unwillingness to accept claims that cast doubt on their modesty.

In her stances and activities, Karman embodies the complex, multi-faceted hybrid pattern typical of the revolutionary women of the Arab Spring: religiously observant, yet liberal in their political, social, and gender worldview. Furthermore, the Islamic Islah Party granted Karman space for feminist political activism by establishing institutions for women, enabling them to integrate into leadership positions of the party more effectively than did political parties identifying themselves as secular and liberal. Indeed, in 2007 Karman was one of thirteen women appointed to the

Shura Council, and as full-fledged members of this body, they left their mark on the party's gender agenda.

Karman also demonstrated her independence on gender issues when in October 2010 she unhesitatingly challenged the conservative faction of her own party for its opposition to proposed legislation forbidding girls below the age of seventeen to marry. Karman's determined, uncompromising struggle to enact legislation establishing a minimum marriageable age for girls emanated from the growing phenomenon of "brides of death": the death of girls who were married at the age of twelve or thirteen and soon died as a result of sexual relations forced upon them by husbands, who were often decades older than they, or as a result of complications during pregnancy or childbirth. This phenomenon reached a peak when ten-year-old Nujud 'Ali, who had been forced into marriage with a man more than twenty years her senior, filed and won a petition for divorce with the local court in Sana'a in April 2008.²⁶ The public uproar that surrounded the case was not necessarily the result of the bride's young age or the age discrepancy between her and her husband. Rather, it was related to this being the first time such a young girl had dared appear before a judge and, through her female attorney, file an appeal against her father's decision to force her into marriage and against her husband's right to do with her as he pleased.

Karman took advantage of the differences of opinion that surfaced within her party between conservative members who opposed amendment of the law, such as 'Aref al-Sabri, supporters of the proposed legislation, such as Shawqi al-Qassi, and those with a more complex position, such as Shaykh Mohammad ibn Nasser al-Hamzi, who objected to the marriage of young girls but simultaneously opposed legislation on the matter. In explaining his position al-Hamzi argued that such legislation would relieve both parents and the education system of responsibility regarding the marriage of minor girls. In his view this would be wrong, since it was a matter of concern to both the family and society. Therefore, the first step should be to raise awareness of the problem among parents and to place full responsibility for eradicating the phenomenon on their shoulders. These differences of opinion within the Islah Party enabled Karman to attack its conservative members. As a result, while demonstrating in front of the parliament gates (alongside Yemeni and international human rights and women's rights organizations), she suffered a counterattack from conservative members of her own party who opposed her unconditional demand to amend the law. The conservatives also criticized her for the demonstration itself, interpreting her joint activities with these organizations as cooperation with the West. Karman, however, dismissed this criticism, arguing that

"I do have close strategic ties with American organizations involved in protecting human rights. . . . [I also have ties with activists in] most of the EU and Arab countries. But they are ties among equals; [I am not] their subordinate."²⁷

Karman had in the past worn a niqab, as do many women in Yemen, but when she became an activist several years ago, she chose to remove it and wear a hijab instead. She explained that "it is inappropriate for a public activist [to wear a niqab], since people want to see you."²⁸ According to Karman, Islam did not mandate that women cover their faces; in her view this practice was a social tradition, no more than *urf* (a customary law), and her act therefore did not violate Islamic law. By distinguishing between shari'a and *urf*, Karman demonstrated not only her solid understanding of Islamic law but also her courage and willingness to fight for her right to choose how to conduct herself in the public sphere without compromising her devotion to her faith.

In her public activism against President 'Ali 'Abdallah Saleh in the context of Yemen's Arab Spring revolution, Karman did not portray herself as representing a political party. On the contrary, as she explicitly declared, "In this revolution, I have forgotten my partisan and geographic affiliations."²⁹ In her Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, Karman also stated that she viewed the prize as "an honor to me personally, to my country, Yemen, to the Arab women, to all women of the world, and to all people aspiring to freedom and dignity."³⁰ Among those to whom Karman dedicated the prize were Wael Ghoneim and Usra 'Abd al-Fatah, a young Egyptian woman who has come to be known as the "Facebook Queen" because she used Facebook to urge Egyptian internet surfers to join the general strike declared by all opposition movements on April 6, 2008, which came to be known as the "Pita Riots." She praised Tahrir Square, thereby demonstrating solidarity with the Egyptian revolutionaries, both men and women, with the aim of emphasizing what was common to all the Arab Spring revolutions in the social and gender spheres.

Karman does not seem to be representative of the women of either Yemen or the Islah Party to which she belongs; she comes across as the exception that proves the rule. Another exceptional woman is Dr. Fatima Qahtan, who heads the Directorate for Maternal and Child Health and Family Planning of the Ministry of Health in Yemen. While completing her medical studies in Germany, Qahtan maintained a thoroughly secular lifestyle. Yet before returning to Yemen, she experienced a personal epiphany that galvanized her identity as a Muslim woman and caused her to realize, in her own words, that as a woman she had a significant role to play within society. Upon returning to her homeland, she joined the Islah Party because, she claimed, the Islamic public sphere provides enhanced opportunities

for a woman to be socially active and serve as an agent of change. Qahtan also claimed that a Muslim woman who has mastered the inner essence and subtext of the religion can put her mastery of Islam's inner workings to great use as a means of fostering gender-related change within society, in effect transposing the mechanisms that men use to control women. Indeed, the body of Islamic knowledge, including the Qur'an, hadith (oral law), and shari'a, had been the exclusive purview of men until the previous decade. Therefore, women's mastery of this body of knowledge could help foment change, since it enables women to base their demand for change on Islam's holy scriptures while invoking their own interpretations in the spirit of *ijtihad*, thus making it difficult for the religious establishment to oppose them.

Tahani al-Gebali, appointed Egypt's first female judge in 2003, astutely conveyed this point of view:

Once I started studying *shari'a*, I came to the firm view that Merciful God has never legislated for injustice. In all honesty, injustice has always been man-made. It serves worldly interests and objectives, and sustains "backward and unjust" political and social situations.³¹

On March 14, 2007, the Egyptian Supreme Judicial Council approved the appointment of thirty-one female judges following the declaration of the previous grand imam of al-Azhar, Shaykh Tantawi, that there is nothing in the Qur'an that bans women from becoming judges. By doing that it turned the court of justice from a purely male space to a shared arena of both male and female judges.

Qahtan likewise used her considerable knowledge of religious law together with her status as head of the Family Planning Directorate to devise a strategy that would help lower the birthrate in her country. She grounded her claims in Islam's emphasis on the quality rather than quantity of human life. Qahtan clearly views Islam as a framework for a modern religious piety, one that would ensure the equal rights that had been denied to women in the name of traditional practices while scrupulously protecting their honor. The distinction she draws between the customary law, *'urf*, which reinforces patriarchy, and Islam, which has room for progress and a modern approach to relational and gender matters, enabled her to integrate into the Islah Party and make it her political home: "In Islah I had the feeling that I could be what I am. I could express what I think even if some people didn't like it. . . . They understood that I have a role in the community. It is a responsibility I will be asked about in front of God."³² Qahtan aspires to ensure the rights of Yemeni women within the framework of Islam, and her conduct is characterized by a combination of religious observance, authenticity, and modernism.

Another Yemeni social activist is Dr. Intilaq Mutawakil, who in 1999 founded a global communications center for women in the form of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) whose mandate was to teach young women computer skills and English and to instill in them a commitment to social activism. This NGO has contributed to the education of thousands of young Yemeni women annually, and for this educational enterprise Mutawakil earned the moral support of Islah Party members of parliament, as well as financial support from the party's charitable foundations. It is not surprising that the NGO conducted its activities in the private homes of foreign diplomats or wealthy local public activists. This space had the advantage of constituting a segmented public sphere, existing in the margin between the private and the public.³³ On the one hand, it was a **private** residence whose owner was well known; on the other hand, it hosted a teaching staff and young women who became a teaching and learning **public**, without venturing forth into the public space. This space was occupied only by women, and complete separation of the sexes was maintained therein. This segmented public sphere turned into a force that made it possible to give women a contemporary, updated education. Mutawakil's choice of an initiative was not random, as she herself had previously participated in similar initiatives when the University of Sana'a invited her to develop an educational curriculum for women. At that time she was completing her doctoral studies at Leiden University and preparing her thesis on characteristics of the writings of Yemeni women authors. She accepted the invitation, but because of objections by conservatives, the program was not implemented. Under her leadership, however, a women's center was established in which intellectual brainstorming sessions on the burning social and political issues of the day were conducted. The center provided scholarships, which Mutawakil termed "sandwich scholarships," for women seeking to pursue an academic education abroad. The grants were conditional on the recipients' residing abroad only briefly and completing their research in Yemen. This condition was intended to preserve the "sacred balance" between a woman's academic career and her marrying and raising a family. Here too, while struggling for the rights of women in Yemen, Mutawakil adopted an approach that combined scrupulous adherence to the norms of honor and modesty with the need to grant women their basic rights, such as the right to an education, the right to participate in the workforce and become economically independent, and the right to become involved in social issues.

The struggle of Yemeni female activists received backing from female intellectuals occupied with the status of women in Yemeni society. One of these was Dr. Elham Manea, a liberal journalist and poet known for having published articles perceived

as provocative. One of these called on Muslim women to remove their veils. In a poem titled “Mara’a hura wa-mutaharira” (A free and liberated woman) Manea deconstructed the accepted binary categories, religious versus secular, faith-based versus rational, and Islamic versus Western immorality, and proposed an alternative approach to the issue:

We have attached negativity to freedom and liberty
 And we have reached a stage where, when we say that a woman is calling for women’s
 freedom and liberty, it means that she is calling for women’s prostitution and
 immorality . . .
 Yes, she is secular and liberated. So she is a heretic who does not believe in Allah . . .
 But the problem is that in fact I believe in Allah, praise and blessings upon him
 And my faith in him is based on a rational and analytical view of this vast universe,
 which is so dazzling in its variety and complexity of creations that I stand before
 it enchanted.
 Therefore I say: I am secular, liberated, and a believer in Allah, praise him!
 Words such as secular, liberated, free, and liberal are said to deprive a person of the
 title, “believer,”
 Yet I continue to insist that a person can be all of these,
 While sustaining a spiritual bond with his Creator.³⁴

Manea draws a direct link between the use of one’s intellect, “which the Creator, praise be upon him, gave us so that we might use it,” and the need to interpret religious texts in accordance with the spirit of the time and changing circumstances and in line with the principle of *ijtihad*. A modernist interpretation of the holy writings, in her view, allows religion to remain relevant in a changing reality:

For life as it was one thousand four hundred years ago differed in essence and detail
 From our lives in the twenty-first century.
 And the opinions of commentators who lived in the Middle Ages,
 Although they embody rich thought and a vast array of views,
 Are nonetheless grounded in the historical reality and circumstances of their time.³⁵

Egyptian Hybrid Women: Struggling against Patriarchy in a Revolutionary Public Sphere
 The visible manifestations of gender dynamics that took place in Tahrir Square during the January 25, 2011, revolution also fostered hope, in Egypt’s liberal circles and the West, that a gender revolution would follow the political revolution that toppled President Mubarak’s regime so quickly. The protest demonstrations in Tahrir Square were led by women, some of whom covered their faces with a niqab,

some of whom covered their heads with a hijab, and some of whom left both uncovered. The phenomenon of niqab-covered women occupying the square daily and nightly astonished those who viewed veiled women as persons whose honor was defined by their household duties. As it turned out, these young women were educated, socially and politically engaged, liberal in their gender worldview, and devout. Their faith was an integral part of their belief system. Not all, it should be noted, strictly observed the commandments of Islam, but most of them deeply believe in Allah, who had a central role in guiding their conduct and behavior. The approach they adopted was that a woman wearing a veil out of choice rather than coercion was not denying her individuality, nor was she violating the revolutionary spirit within her.

Women spread the message of the revolution far and wide using the electronic media, thus creating a virtual space. Asmaa Mahfouz, for example, disseminated a video clip calling on people to join the demonstrators in Tahrir Square. Thousands of women marched from the 'Omar Makram Mosque through the square toward the streets that branched off from the square, calling for their revolutionary demands to be met. The marchers included women ranging in age from their twenties to their late sixties. Some were dressed in black, and some even wore black headbands with the inscription "mourners," in memory of the Egyptian *shuhādā*, men and women who lost their lives during the revolution. "I have not lost any of my family members, yet I am here because every Egyptian is family," said fifty-six-year-old Nariman Ra'fat.³⁶ Young women even strode at the head of the protest march, leading the protesters chanting against the regime and its leader, as exemplified by the young veiled woman who was seen in the square leading a group of youths and loudly chanting, "Fall, fall, Husni Mubarak, fall all the Mubaraks. . . . May God allow the winds to carry you and your associates far away, along with Jimi [nickname of the president's son, Gamal Mubarak] and the rest of the gang. . . . The day you fall will soon become a holiday. Raise your voice against the oppressive government."³⁷ This young woman did not relinquish her Islamic dress, but she demonstrated the determination and adherence to the goal of toppling the regime that the young revolutionaries had set for themselves. As a result she earned the title, "the bravest," a quality that belonged to the Arab noble attributes ascribed to men in the *murū'a* (the ideal prototype of virility).

Young women could be seen carrying antiestablishment banners in Arabic and English, reading, "Yes, we [the Egyptians] can too," echoing the election slogan used by United States President Barack Obama. Young women engaged in many responsible activities during the revolution, including the supervision of daily life



"Be afraid of us, Oh government!"

in the square, defense of the Egyptian Museum against vandals, maintaining order on the roads of the square to help prevent traffic jams, and fully participating in cooperative efforts to maintain sanitation around the square.

Other young women served as spokespersons for the revolution, conveying its messages to local and international media. One prominent spokeswoman was Nawara Negm, who wore a hijab and had a weblog of her own. A criminal investigation was launched against her, and she was charged with aiding and abetting the uprising in Tahrir, committing arson against public buildings, and inciting protesters to confront the army. Not only did the revolutionaries cross the “barrier of fear” with regard to the regime but they also fractured the traditional familial and patriarchal structures. For example, female demonstrators defied parental rules forbidding them to spend time in the square. Gigi Ibrahim, who was considered a well-raised girl from an upper-middle-class family, participated in the demonstrations in Shubra despite her parents’ objections. She served as a public relations media representative for the revolution, appearing on foreign television programs such as Jon Stewart’s *The Daily Show*. There she explained that she had learned the tactics that eventually led to Mubarak’s fall in a course offered at the American University of Cairo and that she had served as coordinator among the various revolutionary groups, whose activists she came to know while participating in joint working groups. Ibrahim summarized her personal revolutionary experience as follows: “Of course we didn’t achieve anything other than toppling Mubarak. But what we were able to achieve [is] to break that fear barrier, to put Mubarak in a cage.”³⁸

Women who identified as full-fledged members of the Muslim Brotherhood also participated in the revolution. One of these was twenty-eight-year-old Asmaa Shehata, a communications studies graduate, who stated that “the fact that I could sleep on the street and take part in a revolution against an unjust ruler was an amazing experience.”³⁹ Another young woman, wearing a brown robe and yellow hijab that covered her shoulders and chest, who also identified as a member of the Brotherhood, expressed hope that women who had taken an active part in the revolution would be rewarded by the movement’s leaders: “We, the girls, spoke to the media, arranged protests, slept in Tahrir Square, and some of us got detained. So we went through everything our brothers had gone through.”⁴⁰

This shared experience raised hopes that the time had come for women to be included among the senior ranks of the movement—the Shura Council and the Bureau of the General Guide—not only because they represented 25 percent of all movement membership but also because they had proved themselves by their active involvement in its social and political activities.

The exclusion of women from decision-making positions is often perceived, among both the movement's female members and Egyptian liberals, as a blanket policy of the movement's leadership, which sought to send women back to their homes and their traditional roles as wives and mothers. However, the situation is more complex, since women do play a role within the movement.

Another of these women is twenty-four-year-old Sondos 'Asem. She speaks fluent English and manages the movement's English-language Twitter account. 'Asem, who wears a hijab, rejects the prevalent view in the West that the Muslim Brotherhood oppresses and excludes women. She pointed out that her mother was among the movement's candidates in the parliamentary elections. She also emphasized that the Muslim Brotherhood opposed the cruel ceremony of *khitān* (female circumcision).⁴¹ 'Asem, as an informal spokeswoman of the movement, could certainly rely on Egypt's state-appointed Grand Mufti 'Ali Gum'aa, who in June 2007 stated in a fatwa that "the harmful tradition of female circumcision that is practiced in Egypt in our era is forbidden [by Islam]."⁴² Furthermore, he stated that the Qur'an forbids the faithful from committing physical or mental violence against their fellow man. Hence, the practice of genital mutilation must be considered a *gurm* (sin) for every Muslim.⁴³ Moreover, in a conference of high ranking Muslim theologians that took place in Cairo even earlier in 2006, the participants unanimously concluded that in Islam men and women are meant to experience sexual fulfillment and that it is the husband's matrimonial duty to satisfy his wife—an impossible task when a woman is circumcised.⁴⁴ 'Asem noted that the Brotherhood's agenda regarding gender and society indicated that it intended to solve the real problems facing Egyptian women, including illiteracy, poor education in general, and poverty. She took pains to emphasize that the Muslim Brotherhood had adopted a moderate, modernist version of Islam, and any attempt to ascribe extremist conservative positions to it was fundamentally flawed. Here 'Asem was alluding to the Salafi political party, al-Nur (The light).

'Asem is one in a line of women who have been active within the Muslim Brotherhood since its beginning. One of the most prominent figures in its history was Zainab al-Ghazali (1917–2005), whose efforts were even more groundbreaking than those of her predecessors. Initially she joined the Egyptian Women's Union led by Huda Sha'arawi. She soon reached the conclusion that Western feminism could not be imported indiscriminately, as Sha'arawi had believed. Rather, a feminist version of Islam needed to be developed, since Islam did grant women rights in the framework of the family. At the age of eighteen, al-Ghazali founded the Gama'at al-sayyidat al-Muslimat (Union of Muslim women) in the late 1930s, which led to

Hassan al-Banna inviting her to affiliate with the Muslim Brotherhood under his leadership. While she declined his offer, in order to maintain the independence of her organization, she nonetheless swore loyalty to al-Banna. Al-Ghazali's various activities included weekly lectures for women at Ibn Tulun Mosque, where she functioned as the first prominent female *dā'iya* (preacher) in Egypt who trained women in the art of preaching so that they could instruct women in religious issues either in their homes (that is, in the private sphere) or at mosques (in the public sphere). By venturing into such a distinctly male religious space, she became a pioneer. She also established women's study groups, provided maintenance for an orphanage and assistance to needy families, and even served as a mediator for couples in crisis. She was strongly opposed to the instant divorce whereby a man could divorce his wife by declaring three times, "I divorce thee." She had divorced her husband because he disapproved of her political career. Al-Ghazali paid a heavy personal price for her association with the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1965, during the period of President Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser's "iron fist" policy, she was arrested and sentenced to prison and hard labor for twenty-five years. President Anwar al-Sadat granted her a pardon in the framework of his policy of appeasement toward the Muslim Brotherhood and as part of the de-Nasserization process he initiated. Immediately upon her release, al-Ghazali began editing a column for women and children in the Brotherhood's newsletter, "al-Da'awa" (The preaching), through which she encouraged women to pursue an education. But the gender role proposed by al-Ghazali treads a fine line between her acceptance of the traditional view of gender roles—that women, first and foremost, fulfill their divinely ordained obligations to their immediate kin⁴⁵—and her recognition of the need to empower women by enabling them to acquire both religious knowledge and a formal education.

Saba Mahmood clearly shows in her ethnographic research that al-Ghazali's modernist religious worldview and activism as well as her insistence on entering a purely male arena—the mosque—as a *dā'iya* illustrate how the histories of Islamism and secular liberalism are intertwined. Al-Ghazali's genealogy as a *dā'iya*, Mahmood claims, was a product of the sociopolitical ethos of her times and the new opportunities that were opening up for women at the turn of the twentieth century, the heyday of the nationalist struggle for independence in Egypt. The women's press, which during the 1920s nurtured a vivid discourse on women's rights and their visibility in public life, is one example of this. At the same time there emerged a broad urban culture of women delivering speeches to other women, which were published afterward in women's organizations journals.⁴⁶ Therefore, to a large extent al-Ghazali's Islamic activism was shaped by the Egyptian nationalist discourse

in which “women’s issues” were a key signifier of the new nation. Nevertheless, al-Ghazali aspired to implement *qadīyyat al-mar’a* (woman’s issue) in an Islamic context rather than referring to it as a Western invention.

Al-Ghazali paved the way for other Muslim women in Egypt who were attached to both their religion and tradition. In the mid-1970s they established the “Women’s Mosque Movement” in order to adjust the Islamic belief system to modern life.⁴⁷ The leaders and activists of the Women’s Mosque Movement “conquered” the territory of the mosque, offering women weekly lessons aimed at inculcating values that were previously part of the social and familial ethos in Egypt. Among these women are housewives, working women, and young students. The *dā’iya* of the mosque, who exemplifies the ethos of the contemporary Islamic revival by studying and navigating the male scholarly tradition, gains the same degree of authority previously reserved exclusively for religious male scholars. One illustration of this is Hajja Fa’iza, the *dā’iya* of three upper-class mosques in Cairo. Fa’iza’s style of argumentation is considered unique because she strictly adheres to the scholarly sources she uses to structure her lessons. When asked during one of her lessons about *khitān* (female circumcision), she neither condoned nor condemned it, instead reasoning that the hadith on which it is based is actually *da’if* (weak), and she therefore concludes that it is neither *wājib* (obligatory) nor *mustahabb* (recommended), nor *sunna* (a custom of the Prophet). To those who still support female circumcision, Fa’iza recommends that they “consult a doctor before doing it.”⁴⁸ By adopting this kind of argumentation, she simultaneously demonstrates her exceptional scholarly religious knowledge, her adherence to it, and her acceptance of authoritative medical opinion.

The pantheon of women who served as inspirations for Muslim feminists such as al-Ghazali includes, among others, the Prophet’s wife, Khadijah, a savvy, economically independent businesswoman whose assertiveness was demonstrated when, upon their marriage, she posed the condition that he not marry another woman without her consent.⁴⁹ ‘A’isha, the Prophet’s beloved wife, who earned the title “Mother of Believers,” also served as a model for many Muslim women because she was considered an authority on religious law, having transmitted hadith texts, and because she, alongside Mua’awiya ibn abu Sufian, led the army in the Battle of the Camel in 656 CE against the forces of ‘Ali bin Abi Taleb, the fourth caliph. Umm Salama was habitually consulted by the Prophet, and ‘A’isha bint Talha, the daughter of one of the *ṣaḥāba* (companions of the Prophet), is also considered a cultural icon because she conducted a *majlis* (literary salon)—as is Sukaina bint Hussein, another literary salon proprietor. This gallery of women provides solid

evidence that Islam does not exclude women from social, cultural, and political engagement. Rather, it is the religious establishment that has consistently and systematically excluded women from the entire public sphere.

The Egyptian Mu'asasat al-marah wa-l-thakirah (Women and Memory Forum), established in 1995 by female researchers and activists, aimed at restoring the balance to the Egyptian collective memory that had been distorted by the process of marginalizing and excluding women, by rereading both Arab and Islamic cultural history from a gender perspective. Inspired by Michel Foucault, they aimed to reclaim power by disseminating knowledge about pioneer Egyptian women who participated in public life at the beginning of the twentieth century. Most of the female pioneers who were documented by the Women and Memory Forum are hybrid women.

In addition to the biography of Malak Hifni Nasif, the forum published the biography of Egyptian writer and poetess 'A'isha Taymur (1840–1902). As explained in the introduction to her life story, she “presents her reading of Qur'anic principles in the light of the contemporaneous social and cultural scene.”⁵⁰ By adopting the principle of *ijtihād*, Taymur showed that there is an authentic prototype of Islamic feminism in which women's rights are an inherent part of the Islamic holy scriptures: the Qur'an, hadith, and sunna (the biography of the Prophet Muhammad). Therefore, she claims, there is no need to adopt the Western model of feminism. Another woman whose life story was published by the forum is Nabawiya Musa (1886–1951), who established the Banat al-Ashraf (Daughters of the descendants of the Prophet) schools for girls in Alexandria. Her 1920 masterpiece, *al-Maraah wa-l-aamal* (Woman and labor), was the first declaration of Egyptian women's rights to education and employment; Musa also participated in the 1919 revolution and, together with Huda Sha'arawi and Seza Nabarawi, she took part in the International Women's Convention held in Rome in May 1923. When she returned, she did not throw away her Islamic dress and step on it the way Sha'arawi and Nabarawi did; she clung to her veil to the last moment of her life.⁵¹ Musa preferred the authentic Islamic feminist prototype to the Western prototype.

Most of the texts published by the forum focus on the link between Islam and feminism. Among these texts are Qadriyya Husayn's *Shahirat al-nisaa fi al-'alam al-Islami* (Famous women of the Islamic world), which focuses on Muslim feminine role models such as Sayyida Khadija, 'A'isha (“Mother of Believers”), and al-Khansa; *al-Mara'a wa-l-haya al-diniyya fi al-'ausur al-wusti bin al-Islam wa-l-gharb* (Women and religious life in the Middle Ages between Islam and the West), by Omais Abu-Bakr and Hoda El-Sadda, which sheds light on the neglected history of women as

theologians and religious scholars in Islamic societies; and *al-Nisa'a wamahnah al-tab fi al-mujtama'at al-Islamiyya* (Women and the medical profession in Muslim societies), also by Abu-Bakr and El-Sadda, a historical survey of the women who practiced medicine, which was considered a male profession in early Muslim societies.

Furthermore, members of the forum initiated discussions to link theoretical knowledge of feminism with its practical aspects. For example, one of the conferences the forum initiated ended with a roundtable discussion titled "Feminism and the Islamic Perspective: Between Views of the Past and the Present." A three-day workshop that took place in Istanbul on September 11–13, 1996, dealt with "Women in Islamist Politics: Between Public Visibility and Communitarian Perspective," and another workshop, held on May 16–17, 2005, focused on "Arab Women between Religious Belief and Social Justice." One of the topics discussed there was "The Concept of Gender and Social Justice in Religion." These activities reflect the growing interest women had in raising a feminist religious discourse suitable for those wishing to adopt a hybrid identity that is both Islamic and feminist. Furthermore, women's participation in Islamic politics legitimized a new realm of social roles and opportunities, political and religious alike. It enabled them to construct for themselves a unique belief system that both incorporates their newly acquired roles and falls within the Islamic frame of reference that can support and empower them.

Women who identified with the Islamic political movements were not the only ones actively participating in Egypt's Arab Spring revolution. Women who were fashionably dressed but insisting on covering their heads with a hijab were also among the prominent leaders of the revolution.

One of the most outstanding events illustrating the courage of revolutionary hybrid women was the march that took place on December 20, 2011, which Egyptian historians declared "the largest women's demonstration in Egyptian history since 1919." This was undoubtedly a turning point in the history of women's demonstrations: this time the demonstrators had an agenda whose aim was to condemn the violence perpetrated against them by the army as well as the insult to the sanctity of the female body on the part of military men. The demonstration's organizers were motivated by the vision of the young, defenseless woman who came to be known as "the woman in the blue bra," who had been stripped of her clothes and viciously dragged nude through Tahrir Square. The demonstrators marched while chanting at the army, "Drag me, strip me, my brothers' blood will cover me! Where is the field marshal [Mohamed Hussein Tantawi]? The girls of Egypt are here!"⁵²

This demonstration, like the others, was not visibly dominated by liberal, secular women. The demonstrators included housewives, mothers, young women carrying

their babies, and women wearing hijabs on their heads, as well as women covering their faces with niqabs. The demonstration's outcome was also unusual in that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces chose to apologize to the demonstrators, stressing "its great appreciation for the women of Egypt."⁵³

An outstanding example of Egyptian women demonstrating courage, a revolutionary act in and of itself, is the lawsuit brought by twenty-three-year-old Samira Ibrahim against the army for the virginity tests it conducted on her and six other women in March 2011. A senior Egyptian military source explained that these tests were necessary as an act of defense against women accusing the army of rape. "The girls who were detained were not like your daughter or mine," asserted an Egyptian general in an interview with CNN. "These were girls who had camped out in tents with male protesters in Tahrir Square, and we found in the tents Molotov cocktails and drugs."⁵⁴ According to these senior military men, the military authorities conducted the virginity tests to deflect from themselves accusations by demonstrators whom they considered to be no more than promiscuous girls lacking a sense of honor and modesty.

Samira Ibrahim, who testified that "the military tortured me, labeled me a prostitute and humiliated me by forcing on me a virginity test conducted by a male doctor where my body was fully exposed while military soldiers watched,"⁵⁵ was a pioneer because following her lawsuit against the security forces, she succeeded in securing a court ruling that the virginity tests were expressly illegal. Moreover, through her legal initiative she coerced the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to recognize the right of women to protect their own bodies, and even compelled it to apologize for the suffering and humiliation it had inflicted.

The practice of virginity testing had begun with the establishment, in the Cairene district of Uzbekia, of a school for midwives in 1832 by the Ottoman wali Muhammad 'Ali as part of an overall project of modernization he initiated. Graduates, or *hakimāt*, were assigned to police stations and charged with conducting virginity tests on young women whose male relatives wanted to confirm their chastity. These *hakimāt* soon became an integral part of the state apparatus, which began to police female decency and honor. In return they were given a high salary and a military rank and were offered free education, economic power, and elevated social status. Police documents from that period, located in the Egyptian state archives, reveal hundreds of cases with notations along the following lines: "found not a virgin," "her hymen has been removed completely," or "she has been used before."⁵⁶ These documents also give clear testimony to the fact that the modern

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"Salute, solidarity, and support for Samira Ibrahim, the girl from Upper Egypt."

educational institutions established in nineteenth-century Egypt were not intended to empower women or provide them with professional training for a career of their own; rather, the intent was to reinforce the state's supervision and control over the bodies of its male and female citizens.⁵⁷

Samira Ibrahim's historical breakthrough lawsuit proved that Egyptian women could overcome the country's systematic violence, which had been prevalent not only during Mubarak's time but even as far back as the nineteenth century, when Egypt's modern state institutions were founded. Khaled Fahmi stated that Samira Ibrahim's

lawsuit represents courage and perseverance as well as her conviction that the army should be held accountable for violating the sanctity of her person. She was striving to achieve the highest aims of the revolution, namely the right of Egyptian men and women to bodily integrity and their entitlement to live in their country with dignity and freedom.⁵⁸

Within the context of the 2011 revolution, the Egyptian women's protest against virginity tests was regarded by some as a window of opportunity to take the gender issue out of the revolutionary closet, or in the words of Fatima Imam, one of the young women who demonstrated in Tahrir, "The revolution is not only taking place in Tahrir, it is taking place in every Egyptian house. It is the revolution of fighting the patriarchy."⁵⁹

Samira Ibrahim and the other Egyptian women, who actively participated in the revolution and witnessed the humiliation suffered by fellow women in the squares and streets, used every opportunity to emphasize that they would not tolerate the gender injustice inflicted upon them and that they intended to fight for their freedom. One of these women, Rania Shaheen, who lost her husband during the revolution, used a eulogy to express her protest and determination to struggle:

To my husband, friend, and companion . . .

Do you see what is happening to girls who have taken to the streets to demand your rights and the rights of others unjustly killed? Is that what you saw when the angel of death came to take your life—an ugly tomorrow that you would reject living in? If you had stayed alive, would you have remained silent? . . .

Be sure that if they kill all of the men in this country, its women will continue to take to the streets to demand your rights, and I will be one of them.

So wait until I take revenge for you or die as a martyr [*shahida*].⁶⁰

Other women opted to underscore the unity demonstrated by men and women during the revolution: "Together they chanted the most beautiful three words ever: 'Bread, freedom, and social justice.'" This was in contrast to the atmosphere after the revolution and the desire to see change: "I don't want to believe that many of those who chanted for the ouster of Mubarak would also chant for abolishing women's right to divorce through *khul'* laws⁶¹ . . . and call for preventing men and women from mixing at workplaces."⁶²

The Gendered Scent of the Tunisian Jasmine Revolution

The Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia brought the Nahda Islamic movement, led by Rashid al-Ghannushi, into the political arena. Tunisian women were a key force in the Jasmine revolutions, as Lina Ben Mhenni described in her blog titled "A Tunisian Girl":

They are the doctors and nurses who rushed to the aid of those injured during the uprising. They are the lawyers who have stood against Ben 'Ali. . . . They are the women who took to the streets, cooked food and brought it to la Kasbah to feed the people taking part in the sit-in. . . . They are the women who died when the police fired live ammunition.⁶³

Ben Mhenni also voiced the concerns of these women, who were afraid that a Nahda-led government might roll back the rights of women and compel them to adhere to traditional practices. "I don't want anyone to force me to do anything," stated Salma, a young translator. "If I decide someday to wear a headscarf, or even a burqa, no one has the right to tell me yes or no." She added that the same applied to drinking alcohol or having a boyfriend.⁶⁴ Rafiq, a young married woman who wears a hijab, expressed her own concerns as to the process of Islamization Tunisia is going through: "Tomorrow there'll be separate busses for men and women and the day after that, separate universities. We want to keep moving forward and not make a U-turn."⁶⁵ However, female members of the party told media interviewers that they had joined it after experiencing discrimination in the labor market. Some said that they had even been arrested for choosing to wear a veil. A forty-three-year-old woman named Nesrine attested, "I have a master's degree in physics but I wasn't allowed to teach for years because of this [the veil]," the wearing of which was prohibited under President Ben 'Ali.⁶⁶ This ban applied to Tunisia's public places, government offices in particular. Other women joined the movement after their husbands, brothers, sons, or fathers had been arrested and penalized simply for participating in Friday mass prayers. The salient characteristic of Nahda's 130

female members was that they were educated, patriotic Tunisians who supported a moderate form of Islam. For them the main challenge facing the movement, which eventually became a political party, was to find a middle way between the French and the Islamic understandings of human rights.

The victory of the Nahda Party in Tunisia's October 23, 2011, elections generated concern among Tunisian feminists and led them to organize an emergency conference at the University of Tunis to discuss their options after the rise of political Islam. According to one participant: "Our conviction now is that we have to fight for the preservation of the women's rights that were included in the previous constitution," that is, in the 1957 Code of Personal Status promulgated by Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia's first president.⁶⁷ This Code was indeed considered liberal and progressive because it abolished polygamy and unilateral instant divorce, permitted women to initiate divorce proceedings, set a minimum marriageable age for women (seventeen) as well as men (twenty), prohibited fathers from forcing their daughters into marriage, and established "the best interests of the child" as the guiding principle in child custody cases after a divorce. Furthermore, abortion was allowed, and even prostitution was permitted and regulated on the assumption that doing so was the only effective way to protect both the women who engaged in this profession and the men who used their services.⁶⁸

Subsequently, the Nahda leaders issued announcements intended to mollify critics and to make it clear that Islam and feminism did not contradict one another. The movement's leader, al-Ghannushi, stressed that "we would prefer to see non-veiled women and discuss and argue with them than veiled women who were forced to wear the veil." He added that how one chose to dress was a "personal matter."⁶⁹ The only female candidate from the Nahda Party who did not wear a veil, Suad 'Abd al-Rahim, asserted that not only would there be no setback in any aspect of women's rights, but the women of Nahda would act to improve the status of Tunisia's women. 'Abd el-Rahim further made it clear that Nahda supported "a civil state, not a religious state [that is, a theocracy], like Iran." She added that "at the same time we don't believe in a civil state that is at war with religion, a secular state or a laic state like in France."⁷⁰

The new Tunisian constitution, endorsed by the Constitutional Assembly after two years of exhaustive and often acrimonious debate, is the first in the Arab world to give women and men alike the right to be presidential candidates. Article 46 guarantees parity between men and women in all elected assemblies, and it ensures gender equality in the workplace. This article includes the right to divorce, the right to marry by mutual consent, and a ban on polygamy. The Tunisian constitution

clearly refers to the issue of violence against women, stating that “the state is obliged to act through public authorities to eliminate all forms of violence against women.”⁷¹ This remarkable constitution is a byproduct of the cooperation between female activists of the liberal, secular *al-Takattul al-demoqrati min ajl al-‘amal wa-l-ḥurriyyat* (The democratic forum for labor and liberties) and female members of parliament of Nahda. One example of this is the constructive cooperation between Lobna Jeribi, a scientist from *al-Takattul*, and her key ally Meherzia Labidi, vice president of the constituent assembly from Nahda and a senior female politician. Labidi had been campaigning for the adoption of a clause in the constitution that guarantees full gender equality after realizing that the exact wording of Article 28 of the constitution changed the language from equality between men and women to “women being complementary to men as their partners.”⁷² The campaign took place despite resistance within her own political party. “It’s one of the articles in the constitution that I am most proud of,” declared Labidi.⁷³ Comfortable with the language of both piety and politics, Tunisian women of Nahda represent a model of hybrid Islamic feminism: vocal, active, and often veiled.

From a Revolutionary Euphoria to a Sisyphean Gender Struggle

The developments that unfolded in the Middle East and North Africa after the waning of the Arab Spring revolutions, which were perceived as revolutions against women’s rights, generated a wave of collective nostalgia for the previous era, when both Tunisia and Egypt had grounded women’s rights in law. Yet those had been “top-down” initiatives, a form of state feminism, in which the state categorically excluded its female members from the process. Despite the harsh events described above, however, it appears that the young men and women who drove the revolutions developed an awareness of human rights in general and of women’s rights and freedoms in particular, which found expression at both the discursive and practical levels. This consciousness-raising process could lead to a gender-equitable interpretation of shari‘a law that is based on a feminist theological chronology; it could even lead to a demand for equal space within Muslim religious institutions and equal rights to religious leadership. This process started with the establishment, in 1984, of “Women Living under Muslim Laws,” a network aimed at strengthening women’s individual and collective struggles for equality and their rights in Muslim contexts. The group focuses on those laws, customs, and diverse practices that are classified as “Muslim” and that have resulted in different interpretations of religious texts or, to be more precise, in the political—and manipulative—use of religion.

A more recent example is the campaign entitled *Intifadat al-nisā'a fi al-'alam al-'Arabi* (The uprising of women in the Arab world), which was launched on October 1, 2012, by four women: two Lebanese, a Palestinian, and an Egyptian.⁷⁴ This initiative promotes gender equality throughout the Arab world as defined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Operating as a Facebook and Twitter campaign, it calls explicitly for numerous rights for women, such as freedom of speech for women (*hurriyyat al-ta'abir*), freedom of thought (*hurriyyat al-fikr*), freedom of movement (*hurriyyat al-tanaqqul*), freedom to dress as they see fit (*hurriyyat al-libās*), freedom to make decisions (*hurriyyat al-qarār*), freedom of marriage (*hurriyyat al-ziwāj*), freedom to divorce (*hurriyyat al-talāq*), the right to education (*haqq al-ta'alim*), the right to work (*haqq al-'amal*), the [political] right to vote (*haqq al-taṣwīt*), the right to own property (*haqq al-tamālūk*), equality in establishing child custody rights (*al-musāwā fi ḥasana al-awlād*), and the right of protection from violence in all its forms (*al-muawa al-hamaya didd al-'unf*). The primary reason for launching the campaign at that time was the need to complete the Arab Spring revolutions “by implementing women’s rights.” In the statement published on Facebook, the campaign’s initiators claimed that “after women took part in the revolutions, and after the regimes in their countries changed, they were once again banished from the political arena, and the attack on their rights began.”⁷⁵ By mid-November 2012 the campaign had attracted more than 55,000 supporters throughout the Arab world, both women and men. Among its supporters were Tawakkul Karman and the Egyptian physician and writer Nawal al-Sa’adawi. In an article copied to the campaign’s Internet site, al-Sa’adawi emphasized that “the freedom, justice, and honor [of the Egyptian people in general, and Egyptian women in particular] will only be achieved by inculcating these values from childhood . . . so that Egyptians respect them automatically, not out of desire to win a reward, or out of fear.” Samira Ibrahim also pledged her support to the campaign and appeared on the Facebook page holding a banner stating: “I support The Uprising of Women in the Arab World, because [they] are the womb of the revolutions.” Many men can also be found among the supporters, including the renowned Egyptian film director ‘Omar Salameh, who complained, “How can we pretend that we’re fighting dictatorship, when each of us behaves like a dictator toward his mother or sister or wife or daughter?” Scholars at al-Azhar University also joined the debate over rights via a document prepared by four senior clerics representing the four schools of law, together with educators, media figures, and social science experts, headed by the shaykh of al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayeb. The document they composed dealt in detail with the rights of women and was intended to serve as a

basis for legislation. Pointing out the contradiction between the rights of women as embodied in the shari'a and the limitations imposed on women in practice, the document unequivocally asserted the rights of women, among them the right to obtain an education, to enter the job market, to be provided with childcare for both male and female children up to the age of 15, and to initiate a divorce. The document also asserted that the state authorities had a responsibility to ensure that women received their fair share of their inheritance. The authors of the document stated explicitly that women had the right to choose their spouse for themselves and to get married, provided the groom belonged to the same socioeconomic class as they. This statement was meant as a criticism of the pattern of marriage prevailing in Egypt, called "salon marriages" (*ziwāj ṣalōnāt*), in the framework of which parents dictate whom their children will marry and when. The document also addressed the phenomenon of sexual harassment that had spread in Egypt, and declared that women had the right to full security in both the public and the private space and that it was the responsibility of the state to protect them from sexual harassment and verbal abuse. Nor did the writers of the document ignore the political rights of women; they stated that women have the full right to vote and to be elected to both houses of the parliament. The document ended with the assertion that women had already enjoyed all these rights in the period of the Prophet.⁷⁶

The sexual harassment taking place in Egypt prompted a Facebook campaign calling on volunteers to join patrols against the phenomenon. This campaign received the blessing of the Egyptian metropolitan police and the cooperation of the railway authority, serving as clear evidence that the human rights discourse had infused the consciousness of revolutionary young women and men. In August 2012, even before the Facebook initiative took shape, the National Council for Women (al-Majlis al-qawmi li al-mar'ah) had launched its own campaign, in an uncompromising effort to combat sexual harassment. As a result the Ministry of the Interior installed cameras on Cairo's streets and squares in order to apprehend and punish harassers. The National Council for Women further approached the Ministry of Religious Endowments and the Coptic Church to request that the topic of sexual harassment be addressed during Friday sermons in mosques and Sunday prayers in churches, in order to give the issue a religious dimension. Representatives of the interior, justice, and religious endowments ministries, as well as clergymen from the Coptic Church, participated in a workshop organized by the council to combat sexual harassment. Public pressure increased as the holiday of 'Eid el-Adha approached, when harassment in urban public spaces would become a mass phenomenon. Hoping to have a preventive effect in advance of the holiday, on

October 24, 2012, members of the “Shoft taharoush” (Catch a harasser) movement and the Egyptian National Democratic Institute (al-Ma’ahed al-demoqrati al-watani) held a silent demonstration in Damanhour. Here women and men carried signs declaring “No to harassment!” and “Catch a harasser for a harassment-free Eid [holiday]!”⁷⁷ During the hour-long demonstration, protesters also distributed leaflets that aimed at addressing harassers directly as follows: “I’m your sister, your mother, your wife, your daughter. Do you stand for my humiliation and the loss of my dignity? . . . If you dislike my clothes or my walk, is that an excuse to molest me? . . . I would like to walk freely and safely. I want your respect. No to sexual harassment! No excuse for harassment! Harassment is a disease.”⁷⁸ Another campaign, organized to struggle against the increasing sexual-harassment phenomenon, aimed at encouraging women to rely upon themselves. Not only did the campaigners adopt the slogan “self-defense is a right,” but they also organized free classes for women, whom they trained to defy sexual harassment.⁷⁹ An extravagant campaign, “Tomorrow,” initiated by a group of young women and men, organized a bicycle demonstration against sexual harassment in the city of Suez in which tens of girls and a number of men who joined them biked on the corniche.

The cultural aspect of the struggle against sexual harassment is also expressed by committed filmmakers, writers, poets, rappers, hip-hop singers, and graffiti artists who contributed their own efforts to the struggle. In 2010 Egyptian director Mohamed Diab produced the film *678*, which succeeded in bringing the issue to the public’s attention while raising a vivid public debate that focused on whether women have the right to physically harm men who sexually harass them.⁸⁰ Through her appearances on *Arabs Got Talent*, eighteen-year-old Mayam Mahmoud, a hijab-wearing rapper whose songs tackle sexual harassment and condemn Egyptian society for accepting it and blaming women for it, challenged Egyptians’ expectations of how women, especially hijab wearers, should behave. She is convinced that sexual harassment cannot be tackled unless women unmask harassers in the street. “Maybe the reason harassment is worse here is because we choose to shut up,” declared Mahmoud, and she expressed her hope that her rapping will encourage others to follow her.⁸¹ In one of her songs, titled “Femininity,” she strongly criticizes Egyptian young men:

How can you govern me about my hair or my scarf?
 You look at me; I’m not going to be ashamed
 You flirt and you harass, yet think that you’re not wrong . . .
 I see you causing injuries, that is not your right
 You need to be ashamed of yourself and get struck in the face
 Being a woman is about thinking, the mind, education and religion.⁸²

While sexual harassment was common long before the Arab Spring revolution broke out, it had not aroused widespread public discourse or practices aimed at reducing its extent. One exception was the “Ikhtiram nafsak” (Respect yourself) campaign that took place in 2008 after a woman in her thirties was molested by sixteen men in the middle of a street where passersby did not dare to intervene until a taxi driver stopped, got out of his car, took off his belt, and whipped the harassers, who had left their prey half naked. A journalist who witnessed the scene initiated a campaign under the slogan “Respect Yourself: Egypt Still Has Real Men,” which tried to dissuade men from committing sexual harassment and pushed them to chase harassers wherever and whenever they came across them. Ahmed Salah, the campaign’s moderator, stated that “the campaign is directed to a passive society and to each man who thinks that nobody would stop him if he harasses a woman on the street. We want to tell the harasser to respect himself, and if he chooses not to do so he will find a man to stand up to him on the street.”⁸³ The campaigners, sponsored by the youth magazine *Kelmetna* (Our word), formed groups of volunteers between the ages of fourteen and twenty-four to map areas considered “harassment zones,” catch harassers, and hand them over to the police. On July 18, 2008, they established a group on Facebook that attracted around 19,000 members in a couple of months; by March 9, 2010, that number had risen to more than 53,000.⁸⁴ As part of the campaign, *Kelmetna* magazine initiated weekly seminars and street concerts to raise awareness of the issue.

Both pre-and post-Arab Spring campaigns, in which young men were not only participants but initiators, replaced the old virility (*murūʿa*)—which emphasized the more belligerent characteristics of strength, vigor, bravery, and courage—with



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From the left: "Be a man and defend her," and "Say no to sexual harassment."

a new model of masculinity (*rujūla*) that highlights softer characteristics such as compassion, sympathy, and solidarity with women.

The determined, persistent efforts of organizations and associations working cooperatively with public agencies, together with the accusing finger pointed at president-elect Mohamed Mursi for neglecting to address this issue and not defending the honor of Egypt's daughters as he would protect his own daughter's honor, had an impact even among the government's senior decision-making echelons. This became evident on October 21, 2012, when Prime Minister Hisham Qandil posted a statement on his Facebook page announcing that his government was working in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior and the National Council for Women to identify more effective ways of uprooting sexual harassment in the streets. Qandil disclosed that a law was being drafted to combat this "disastrous phenomenon" by imposing harsh penalties on harassers. He added that one of the planned solutions was to employ the media to raise public awareness of the dangers and consequences of this phenomenon; another was to reach the younger generation through the curriculum of the Ministry of Education.⁸⁵

Three articles in the Egyptian code of criminal law addressed harassment. The first dealt with "insulting" (Article 306), which applied to verbal harassment on the street, the punishment for which ranged from a fine of one hundred Egyptian lira (roughly seventeen US dollars) to one month in prison. The second dealt with "indecent behavior" (Article 278), which applied to instances of indecent exposure, following, or stalking, the punishment for which ranged from a fine to three years in prison. The third dealt with "sexual assault" (Article 268), which applied to physical contact and other physical harassment, with the punishment ranging from three to fifteen years in prison.

Following this legal procedure, feminist critics admitted that these initiatives are not enough to put an end to such practices. Only a legal procedure that criminalizes both verbal and physical sexual harassment—that is, stating that it is a *tajrīm* (crime)—might significantly reduce the scope of the phenomenon. Indeed, various steps were taken to combat this epidemic since the revolutionary *coup d'état* of June 30, 2013. The law against sexual harassment that was passed in June 2014 by former interim president 'Adly Mansour criminalized sexual harassment for the first time by imposing stiff punishments on sexual harassers, including a minimum of six months in prison or a minimum fine of LE 3000.⁸⁶ The law was already implemented when on June 19, 2014, an Egyptian court sentenced thirty-nine-year-old 'Abd al-Latif 'Abd al-Fattah, who was accused of photographing a woman while she was sleeping on a public bus, to one year in jail.⁸⁷ The president's office formed a committee of

government officials as well as Muslim and Christian spiritual leaders to come up with a strategy to combat this growing social epidemic, while the minister of health, 'Abd al-'Awadi, established medical teams for both the physical and the psychological treatment of women who suffered sexual harassment. The newly-elected President 'Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi not only paid a personal visit to one of the victims who had been sexually harassed during the celebrations of his inauguration in Tahrir Square, but he also initiated an appearance on national television in which he apologized to the Egyptian women who had suffered sexual abuse, and he declared that violence against women is recognized as an issue of national concern. The fingerprints of the five women chosen in September 2013 to sit on the committee of fifty that revised the 2012 constitution were evident when referring to political equality: the constitution explicitly states in Article 11 that "the state shall endeavor to take measures ensuring the adequate representation of women in parliament . . . and to ensure women's right to hold public offices and senior management positions in the state and to be recruited by judicial institutions without discrimination."⁸⁸ The constitution also declares that "the state is committed to the protection of women against all forms of violence."⁸⁹ Furthermore, to enable women to take part in the workforce, the state will provide "care and protection to mothers, women-headed households, elderly and the neediest women, breadwinners, divorced women and widows." Article 10 of the 2012 constitution expresses the Gordian knot between women's honor and the nation's honor by declaring that "there is no dignity for a country in which women are not honored. Women are the sisters of men and hold the fort of motherhood; they are half of society and partners in all national gains and responsibilities."⁹⁰

Female activists, however, knew that to realize these legal achievements they needed to win the support of the religious establishment. Therefore, Mervat al-Telawi, head of the National Council for Women and a member of the committee of fifty, urged al-Azhar to play a greater role in changing social attitudes and help women reinforce their Islamic identity. She also came up with practical proposals, one of which was to publish booklets on women and their role in Islam, for both Muslim and Western women, "to help them understand that Islam gives women their rights."⁹¹ Iman Bibars, cofounder of the Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women, clearly expressed this when stating that "currently, women are struggling to continue gaining the rights that God gave them. . . . Women in Islam used to enjoy all their rights, but today they have to resort to the courts to get them."⁹² 'Azza Suleiman, head of the Egyptian Center for Women's Legal Assistance, added that religious scholars should also support a revolution in education for both girls and boys and should help in reinforcing perceptions on the valuable roles of

women in society. Female activists have no intention of either bypassing or ignoring Islam; on the contrary, they aspire to instill a process of change in Islam.

The concerns voiced by many people regarding the reactionary and radical tendencies of the political Islamic regimes that gained power following the Arab Spring revolutions are not unfounded. Nonetheless, there is reason to assume that the achievements secured by women during the era preceding the revolutions cannot be eradicated by the political extremists. The struggle of Middle Eastern and North African women is destined to continue, and the solutions demanded of Islamic regimes regarding the status of women in the family and society will undoubtedly engender an old/new hybrid model of Islamic feminism, one that does not circumvent or contradict shari'a but rather is grounded in it. A woman who personifies this "schizophrenic" model through her conduct, worldview, and appearance is twenty-nine-year-old Heba Ra'uf Ezzat. She is a native Egyptian and a teaching assistant in the political science department of Cairo University. Her field of research is the political role of women through an Islamic perspective. She was also engaged in a youth dialogue between Islamists and secularists organized by the Muslim Brotherhood in April 1994. Her complex religious yet liberal outlook and opinions on gender issues are reflected in the women's column she edits for the weekly *al-Sha'ab* (The people), an opposition newspaper published with the support of the Muslim Brotherhood. Ra'uf Ezzat strongly opposes Egyptian secular feminists who "regard religion as an obstacle to women's rights." She believes, however, that "women's liberation in our society should rely on Islam."⁹³ Ra'uf Ezzat, who declares herself an Islamist, is aware of the necessity to revive Islamic thought and renew Islamic jurisprudence. By sticking to that principle, she does not aim to deconstruct Islamic law and thought but rather to reconstruct it and change the paradigm from within. According to her worldview,

being a true Muslim doesn't mean that I accept the dominant discourse about women inside the Islamist movement. My studies focus on the need for a new interpretation of Qur'an and *sunna*. . . . We should benefit from . . . the contributions of previous generations of Islamic scholars. This doesn't mean that we have to stick to their interpretations of Islamic sources while we ignore the sociology of knowledge.⁹⁴

Ra'uf Ezzat has clearly adopted the concept of *ijtihad*, articulated as long ago as the nineteenth century by the fathers of Islamic modernism, which holds that religious legal precepts should be read so as to accommodate changing circumstances and times. By adopting this concept, Ezzat asserts, she defends Islam from stagnation

and bias. Ezzat also strongly objects to the dichotomy between the private and the public. In her opinion Islam does not embody such a polarized perception. For example, social movements cannot be understood in an Islamic social system without referring to the extended family as a political and economic unit. Breaking this dichotomy will, in her opinion, generate social respect for housewives and encourage working women to realize their identities as mothers and wives, on the one hand, and enable them to fulfill their political, social, and economic duties, on the other. Moreover, blurring the distinction between the private and the public will, she believes, facilitate implementation within both the family and the state of the principle of *shūrā* (consultation), which is equivalent to the Western concept of democracy. Ezzat is convinced that the family unit must conduct itself in accordance with this principle and treat the institution of marriage as comparable to voting for one ruler or another. That is, the head of a family who does not properly fulfill his role is akin to a *caliph* who abuses his office, and just as a head of state may be deposed from his position, the head of a household who does not treat his family as he should may be stripped of his title. Under such circumstances, according to Ezzat, women are entitled to exercise their rights and divorce their husbands. As a religiously observant woman who maintains that women's emancipation should be grounded in Islam, she strongly believes that it is time to launch a new women's liberation movement—an Islamic one.

The hybrid women, who are persistently unraveling the rigid seams separating the secular and the religious, the liberal and the conservative, are a new female model that serves to represent the women of the Arab Spring. Ironically, it was (and still is) the Western discourse that determined the new meanings of the veil and gave rise to its emergence as a symbol of resistance. The veil, therefore, symbolizes not the inferiority of Islamic culture and the need to cast aside its customs in favor of those of the West, but rather the dignity and validity of native customs, particularly those relating to women. Moreover, Western discourse adopts the binary secular/religious approach, which distinguishes between secular Muslims—men who neither pray five times a day nor attend a mosque regularly and women who do not wear a hijab, but both of whom embrace Islamic rites of passage in matters of birth, marriage, and death—and religious Muslims, men and women alike, who fully practice the precepts of their religion. Muslims in general, however, grow up thinking they are believers for whom Islam is more than just a religion; it constitutes both a spiritual and an ethical resource.⁹⁵ The female believers among them, in their quest for equality, have done their utmost to unravel the dichotomous approach by rereading, reinterpreting, and rewriting Islamic scriptural and historical texts.

By highlighting Muslim women's participation in the fields of theology, law, and religious scholarship as *muftiyāt* (religious adjudicators), *faqīhāt* (religious judges), and *muḥāddithāt* (transmitters of hadith) between the ninth and fifteenth centuries, and by telling the life stories of women—such as al-Shefaa' bint 'Abdallah, minister of finance during Omar ibn al-Khattab's period, and 'Amat al-Muhamili, who excelled in the *fiqh* of the Shafi'i school and was an expert on inheritance laws and mathematics—who were active in the social and intellectual life of their time, they have established an indigenous, organic form of Islamic feminism. Due to their allegiance to religion, tradition, and culture—that is, authenticity—these women have the potential to be the harbingers of a social and gender Arab Islamic Spring.

Notes

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- 5 Zeinab el-Gundy, "Meet General el-Sisi, Egypt's New Defence Minister," *Abramonline*, August 13, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/50305/Egypt/Politics-/Meet-General-ElSisi,-Egypt-s-new-defence-minister.aspx>.
- 6 Yomna Mokhtar, "Rights Group: Fewer Female Candidates in Second Phase of Elections," *Egypt Independent*, December 12, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/rights-group-fewer-female-candidates-second-phase-elections>.
- 7 Hania Sholkamy, "Egypt's Women Missing from Formal Politics," *Abramonline*, January 22, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/32349.aspx>.
- 8 Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Cairo: The American University of Cairo Press, 2005), 107.
- 9 Huda Sha'arawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (London: Virago, 1986), 113. Edith Cavell was a British nurse who provided shelter to British soldiers during World War I and aided their escape from occupied Belgium to the neutral Netherlands. A court-martial found her guilty of assisting the escape of British soldiers, and she was subsequently executed.
- 10 Ibid., 120. Also see Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 110.
- 11 Ibid., 126.
- 12 Hafez Ibrahim, *Diwan Hafiz Ibrahim* (Cairo: Dar al-kutub al-Misriyya, 1937), 1:132, my translation.

- 13 Sha'arawi, *Harem Years*, 115.
- 14 Haggai Erlich, *Hamizrah Ha-tichon bein milhamot ha-olam* [The Middle East between the world wars], vol. 1, unit 2, 196.
- 15 Sha'arawi, *Harem Years*, 131.
- 16 More on "Women and Memory Forum" can be found at <http://www.wmf.org.eg>.
- 17 Nadia Wassef, "Malak Hifni Nassef: The Woman, the Nation, and the Silent History," Women and Memory Forum, <http://www.wmf.org.eg/ar/node/332>.
- 18 Malak Hifni Nasif, quoted in Hoda Yousef, "Malak Hifni Nasif: Negotiations of a Feminist Agenda between the European and the Colonial," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 7, no. 1 (2011): 75.
- 19 Quasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women: A Document in the History of Egyptian Feminism* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 1992), 39.
- 20 Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 160, 162.
- 21 Malak Hifni Nasif, quoted in *ibid.*, 180.
- 22 Malak Hifni Nasif, *al-Nisā'iyyat* [On women's issues], (Cairo: Women and Memory Forum, 1997), 202.
- 23 Malak Hifni Nasif, quoted in Margot Badran and Mariam Cooke, eds., *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 233–234.
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- 25 "Thousands Denounce Saleh's Remarks on Women," *Khaleej Times*, April 17, 2011, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2011-04-16-yemen-protests.htm>.
- 26 *Report on the Status of Women in Yemen for 2008* (OWAM Development and Cultural Foundation, 2008), 55. The report was jointly prepared by the Yemeni organization OWAM and the German foundation Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung.
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- 28 Tawakkul Karman, quoted in *ibid.*, parenthetical additions in the original.
- 29 Tawakkul Karman, quoted in *ibid.*
- 30 Tawakkul Karman, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2011/karman-lecture_en.pdf.
- 31 Tahani al-Gebali, "The Law of Khol between Text and Application," in *The Harvest: Two Years after Khol*, ed. Azza Soliman, Azza Salah, Huda Zakareya, and Mariz Tadrous, trans. Seham Abdel Salam (Cairo: Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance, 2003), 37.
- 32 Quoted in Stacey Yadav, "Segmented Publics," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6, no. 2 (2010): 11.

- 33 The public segmented spheres in Yemen have yielded a variety of outcomes. For example, Aamat al-Salam, a doctor of Islamic law (*fiqh wa'usul al-din*) from the University of Sana'a, established study groups for women (*nadwa*) aimed at empowering women and raising their consciousness regarding their rights. The starting point for transmitting knowledge to these women was that Islam is not the source of their subjugation, which should rather be attributed to customary law (*'urf al-nās*).
- 34 Elham Manea, "Mara'a hura wa-mutaharira," http://www.metransparent.com/old/texts/elham_manea/elham_manea_free_woman.htm, translated from Arabic to Hebrew by Yitzhak Schneiboim and from Hebrew to English by M.T.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Quoted in Ekram Ibrahim, "Women's March Calls for End to Military Rule," *Abramonline*, January 21, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/32230/Egypt/Politics-/Womens-march-calls-for-end-to-military-rule.aspx>.
- 37 "The Bravest Girl in Egypt," YouTube, posted by Iyad El-Baghdadi, January 30, 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwIY6ivf70A, my translation from Arabic.
- 38 Quoted in Sarah A. Topol, "What Happened to My Revolution," *Foreign Policy*, January 24, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/01/24/what_happened_to_my_revolution, parenthetical addition in the original.
- 39 Quoted in Noha el-Hennawy, "Sisters Aspire to Equality within Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," *Egypt Independent*, March 15, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/sisters-aspire-equality-within-egypts-muslim-brotherhood>.
- 40 Quoted in *ibid*.
- 41 It should be noted that the campaign to prohibit female circumcision began in 2005, when the National Council for the Mother and Child publicly expressed its opposition to the practice of *khitān*. Two years later, in a special decree (271), the Egyptian Ministry of Health prohibited doctors and nurses from carrying out *khitān* in government-run hospitals as well as in private clinics. The penalty set by law for violating this prohibition was the closure of the clinic and an inquiry by the Egyptian Medical Association, which could lead to a five-year suspension or revocation of the violator's right to practice medicine in any way.
- 42 Quoted in "Egypt Mufti Says Female Circumcision Forbidden," *Reuters*, June 24, 2007, accessed at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/06/24/idUSL24694871>.
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- 45 Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 67.
- 46 Ibid., 68.
- 47 Ibid., 45.
- 48 Ibid., 85–86.
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- 50 “*Mira’at al-ta’amul fil omnou*” [Reflections on issues], Women and Memory Forum, 2001, <http://www.wmf.org.eg/en/node/190>. ‘A’isha Taymur’s biography was published by Women and Memory Forum in 2001.
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- 52 David Kirkpatrick, “Mass March by Cairo Women in Protest over Soldiers’ Abuse,” *New York Times*, December 20, 2011, <http://www.sott.net/article/239130-Egypt-Mass-March-by-Cairo-Women-in-Protest-Over-Soldiers-Abuse>.
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- 54 Shahira Amin, “Egyptian General Admits: ‘Virginity Checks’ Conducted on Protesters,” *CNN*, May 31, 2011, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/05/30/egypt.virginity.tests/>.
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