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EGYPTIAN DISCOURSES ON GENDER AND POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION: DO SECULARIST AND ISLAMIST VIEWS REALLY DIFFER?

Mervat F. Hatem

VERY few studies have examined the impact that the post-1976 neo-liberal system has had on Egyptian women. Those who have evaluated the changes in women's status generally conclude that the changes have been positive.[1] Their views offer a marked contrast to what most analysts describe as the limited/restrictive scope and content[2] of Egypt's second liberal experiment.[3] Controlled liberalization has been a response to serious economic and political crises. It has been used by the Egyptian state to continue its dominance of the political process, through the National Democratic Party (NDP), and to deny legitimate political participation to the government's leftist and Islamist opponents.[4] Despite these restrictive political credentials, most analysts do not question the gendered accomplishments of the state, because of the belief that secular-liberal regimes, regardless of how modest, are generally favorable to women. While these analysts concede that the political exclusion of the Islamists is anti-democratic, they argue that this exclusion has enhanced the ability of secular-liberal

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[1] Kathleen Howard-Merriam, "Egypt's Other Political Elite," *Western Political Quarterly* 34 (March 1981), pp. 174–87; Earl L. Sullivan, *Women in Egyptian Public Life* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), pp. 24, 36; Howard-Merriam, "Guaranteed Seats for Political Representation of Women: The Egyptian Example," *Women in Politics* 10, no. 1 (1990), pp. 17–42.

[2] Bahgat Korany, "Arab Democratization: No Longer a Poor Cousin?" (Paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, September 2–5, 1993), p. 5.

[3] Egypt's first liberal experiment followed the 1919 revolution in 1923 and ended with the 1952 military coup.

[4] Mustapha Kemal al-Sayyid, "A Civil Society in Egypt?," *The Middle East Journal* 47, no. 2 (Spring 1993), pp. 235–9; Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Crises, Elites, and Democratization in the Arab World," *The Middle East Journal* 47, no. 2 (Spring 1993), p. 296, 301.

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regimes to expand the rights of women. This article endeavors to evaluate arguments of this discourse on the connection between political liberalization and expanded rights of women.

It is useful to begin the analysis by examining feminist perspectives on liberalism and gender. The decision to examine the Western feminist critique of liberalism in the assessment of the gendered perspectives associated with political liberalization in Egypt is not motivated by a desire to derive a model that can serve as a universal standard by which the liberal experiment and its impact on women can be judged. As an imported ideology and political system, liberalism effectively has been nationalized by the different Egyptian regimes, which developed distinct institutional features and discourses. Secularists make numerous public and academic references to other liberal experiments, especially to those in the West. Given the intrusion of this international dimension into the debate, the selection of the feminist literature on liberalism is designed explicitly to offer a perspective that is critical of the romantic and idealized definitions that Western liberalism has of itself and its relationship to women, and which are shared by its secular supporters in Egypt. The discussion presented below is doubly comparative. It seeks to develop an appreciation of the Western liberal ideal and its practice as well as the Egyptian transformation of both into something that reflects Egypt's cultural background and political challenges. This article does not assume the superiority of the Western model, the inferiority of the Egyptian one, or vice versa. Examining both the external and internal critiques of liberalism is important for understanding the global, gendered discourse.

Western feminist literature offers multiple vantage points from which to evaluate liberalism. It suggests that the liberal extension of universal civil rights of men has a different history from that of women. The latter's incorporation into civil society and/or the political arena, where the formal rights of liberty and equality are declared, coexists with the social acceptance of continuing gender inequality in the family. In this way, liberal societies offer modern forms of patriarchal relations and control.[5] More recently, feminist theorists have moved one step further to question the assumed universality of women's familial roles, which serve as the basis of their liberal citizenship rights.[6] These roles are shaped by the interplay of culture, class, and ethnicity and explain their different forms of political engagement (or lack thereof).[7]

In terms of Egypt, feminist views of the relationship between liberalism and gender make important contributions. For example, they challenge the most cherished assumption of the Orientalist literature on Middle Eastern cultures, that is, its belief in the existence of an "essential difference" between modern/Western and traditional/Islamic cultures in their attitudes toward women and the position women occupy in society. While Islamic societies are presumed to be particularly oppressive to women in terms of rights, Western societies are portrayed as supportive of women's public rights to equality and liberty.[8] Feminist discussion of the liberal emphasis on gender inequality in the family as the basis for women's unequal incorporation into the political arena bears a striking resemblance to some of the assumptions and definitions offered by the Islamist discourse. This is not to say that these discourses are the same or that there are no differences in their definitions of masculinity, femininity, and the family. The differences are very important in any comparative discussion. They do not establish, however, the separate status of Islamic societies and/or their women.

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[5] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 1–18; Adriana Cavarero, "Equality and Sexual Difference: Amnesia in Political Thought," in Gisela Bock and Susan James, eds., *Beyond Equality and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 32–47.

[6] Jane Flax, "Race and Gender as Barriers to and Possibilities for Communities" (Paper presented at the 1994 annual meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Albuquerque, NM, March 10–12, 1994).

[7] Ibid.

The feminist discourse demystifies liberalism in yet another way. It cautions against a universalizing effort that generalizes the discussion of the system of gendered relations in liberal society. These relations must be differentiated by culture, class, and ethnicity. While liberal discourses rely on common concepts and assumptions that shape the discussion in some ways, they are transformed by the cultural, political, economic class, and ethnic relations that each case contributes to the understanding of the global phenomenon.

Given this dialectic between the general and the specific, how relevant is the feminist critique of liberalism to the discussion of the gendered strategies offered by the Egyptian secularist and the Islamist discourses in the post-1976 system? Feminist critics suggest that liberal societies disadvantage women in two ways: by denying women "the full complements of rights and privileges accorded to men and. . . [by taking] for granted a conception of citizenship which excludes all that is traditionally female";[9] or, if granting women virtual equality in formal rights, by retaining a different meaning of citizenship for men and women.[10] With regard to this second point, feminist writer Carole Pateman contends that "motherhood" in liberal societies is a political status and a means of political incorporation.[11] Motherhood distinguishes the "political tasks, service, and contribution of women that can be compared to the contribution of men as workers and soldiers."[12] In other words, while most discussions view motherhood as "quintessentially private" and opposed to citizenship,[13] it is a service that women render to the state and is, therefore, a central component of their citizenship. Pateman is silent on the diverse motherhood experiences of women of different class, ethnic, and cultural groups and which one of these the liberal state favors.

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[8] Nikki Keddie and Lois Beck, "Introduction," in Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie, eds., *Women in the Muslim World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 16, 18, 27.

[9] Susan James, "The Good-Enough Citizen: Female Citizenship and Independence," in Bock and James, *Beyond Equality and Difference*, p. 48.

[10] See further, Carole Pateman, "Political Obligation, Freedom, and Feminism," *The American Political Science Review* 86, no. 1 (March 1992), p. 181.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

Pateman's view of motherhood as a political status is echoed strongly in the secularist and Islamist discussion of women's "special"—not equal—status in the liberal/political arena. Both embrace domesticity as a middle-class ideal and an indirect means of political participation. Working-class women are not included in this discussion. It is assumed that they must work to supplement the economic needs of their families and simultaneously perform their household obligations. Theirs is a devalued femininity that denies them even indirect political participation.

THE SECULARIST NEO-LIBERAL DISCOURSE OF THE STATE

Secularist views of citizenship rights of men and women under limited neo-liberal rules identified "gender difference" with hierarchal relations of power between women and the state. In the 1970s, the regime of Anwar Sadat (1970–81) emphasized "women's gendered difference" in arguing for the need for the paternal and/or protective arm of the state to secure women adequate political representation as individuals and as a group. Since 1981, the regime of Husni Mubarak has abandoned this strategy in favor of another that upholds a definition of equality as "sameness." It has ignored the social and political disadvantages of gender difference and has defined equality for women as having the same formal rights as men. As part of this strategy, the state, through the NDP, gave women a marginal role to play in the political arena that reestablished its maleness.

Secularism was not just a label used by the state, but described policies and practices that, since the 1950s, marginalized the role of religion in politics. Nowhere was this clearer than in the definition of women's rights and the role that women were to play in the postcolonial society. Many of the rights given to Egyptian women by the regime of Gamal Abdul Nasser (1952–70), like the right to vote and to run for public office (1956 constitution), the provision of supporting social services for working women, including maternity leave and childcare (Law 91, 1959), and the right to work (Law 14, 1964), were not couched in religious terms. The state presented them as citizenship rights to which women were entitled in the new secular/national society.

Of course, Arab secularism had a different history and mode of operation that set it apart from its Western counterpart. Abd ElBaki Hermassi summarized these differences in the important distinction between de facto and de jure secularism.[14] Whereas in the West de jure secularism called for the formal separation of church and state, the Arab state recognized Islam as the religion of society and in this way demobilized its political use. In practice, these states marginalized the role of the mosque in politics and practiced de facto secularism.

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[14] Abd ElBaki Hermassi, "Islam and Politics in North African Contemporary History" (Paper presented at the 18th Annual Symposium on Islamism and Secularism in North Africa, the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, April 1–2, 1993).

The rise of independent Islamist groups as political opponents of the Sadat and Mubarak regimes challenged the legitimacy of this formula of formally recognizing Islam as a component of national identity but practicing de facto secularism. The neo-liberal discourse of the 1970s and 1980s reflected a retreat by the secularists in the area of women's rights: first, to cement their alliance with the Islamists, and then to face the Islamist political challenge. In Egypt, the state's switch to political liberalization in 1976 completed its announced commitment to economic liberalization (*infitah*) a year earlier. Political liberalization began with the dissolution of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), then Egypt's only political party, into three parties representing the left, center, and right. The state, through Egypt's Arab and Socialist party, and then the National Democratic Party, continued to dominate the new liberal system as a representative of the political center.[15]

The new parties were free to manage their administrative and political affairs within the framework set by the 1971 constitution. However, the former ASU bureaucracy, now part of the state apparatus, continued its control of the so-called "auxiliary mass organizations" (like the women's and youth organizations), daily newspapers, and the councils of professional associations, chambers of commerce, and agricultural cooperatives.[16]

The early transition to political pluralism was clearly modest. The state retained control of many key political groups and institutions. It divided these diverse groups and institutions into separate organizational categories, classifying women's and youth organizations as "auxiliary mass" institutions, as distinct from "mass" organizations, including professional associations, chambers of commerce, labor unions, and cooperatives. Whereas the latter had functionally-defined goals and were organized independently, the women's and youth organizations lacked these features. They were created by the state, which defined their agendas and expected them to act as its auxiliaries. Even within that subordinate political status, the women's organization was politically inferior to that of the youth because, for the members of the youth organization, which included boys and girls under the age of 18, state guidance of their activities did not extend beyond the age of 18, when they were free to join the political party of their choice. In the case of the women's organization, membership was for adults, but the state controlled women and their organization, indefinitely denying them the freedom of direction and representation it accorded adult men and women in other institutions. The state's control of that organization was open-ended. The organizational efforts on the part of publicly-active women outside that organization to form independent associations for themselves were turned down by the state until 1987.[17]

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[15] In 1976, the Nationalist, Progressive and Unionist Party (Hizb al-Tajamu'a al-Watani, al-Taqadumi al-Wahdawi) was to represent the left and the Liberal Socialist Party (*Hizb al-Ahrar al-Ishtiraki*) was to represent the political right. The state has since then recognized a total of 13 parties, some of which are politically active and some of which are not. See "Bitakat ta'ruf ma' ahzabna al-siyasiya" (Introductory notes to our political parties), *Al-Ahram*, June 11, 1993.

[16] Ahmed Yussef and Kamal al-Munufi, "Al-Itihad al-Ishtiraki al-'Arabi" (The Arab Socialist Union), in *Al-Bina' al-Siyasi* (The Political System) (Cairo: Al-Markaz al-Qawmi lil Buhuth al-Ijtima'ya wa al-Jin'ya, 1985), p. 86.

This suggests that the political parameters set for the only women's organization were more illiberal than those for any other group. While the different mass organizations and their adult members were free to determine their programs and representatives after May 1982, members of the women's organization were denied these choices and singled out for the special status of "permanent wards of the state." The special relationship of the women's organization to the state did not change. Thus, the measures taken to further pluralism did not signal a greater margin of political liberty for women's organizing efforts. Interestingly, the politically-active members of the women's organization did not challenge this arrangement, but accepted it as giving them the status of junior partners of the state.

The laws that governed the formation of political parties and their activities also placed more restrictions on women's political organizing efforts and some of their citizenship rights. For instance, Rule no. 4 of the Political Parties' Law, passed in February 1977, listed among the conditions to which political parties needed to adhere the principles of the 1952 Revolution and Sadat's 1971 corrective measures, as well as Islamic *sharia* (religious law) as one of the leading sources of legislation.[18] They also needed to abide by the rules of Law no. 2 of 1977 that protected "national unity and social peace."[19] The latter outlawed political parties that formed on the bases of religion, geography, or class, or those that discriminated on the bases of gender, origin, religion, or doctrine—*'aqida*—a special reference to Marxism. Finally, parties that attempted to resurrect old ones, especially those dissolved in 1953, also were rejected.

The above restrictions confirm the argument that Egyptian liberalization was limited. Two of these restrictions had significant implications for women. First, there was the demand by the secular state that the programs and goals of political parties adhere to the principles of Islamic sharia. This was a significant concession by the state to the Islamists, whom it needed to defeat the Nasserist elements in important institutions like the universities and the professional associations. As a means of cementing this new political alliance, the Sadat regime developed its own brand of nationalist ideology to distinguish itself from the Nasser regime. In contrast to the socialist/secularist rhetoric of the Nasser regime, Sadat's government declared itself simultaneously committed to science and religion. This was an important political development, not because it dealt a serious blow to secularism, but because it politicized the role of sharia in the new secular order.[20]

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[17] Iqbal Baraka, "Ba'd 'ashr sanawat matha qadamat al-mar'at lil mar'at?" (After ten years: What did women offer one another?), *Sabah al-Khayr* (March 8, 1984), pp. 20–1. In 1987, the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (*Tadhamun al-Mar'at al-'Arabiya*), headed by Dr. Nawal El-Saadawi, was recognized after a widely-publicized lobbying campaign.

[18] Mustapha Kamel al-Sayyid, "Ta'dud al-'ahzab" (The multi-party system), *al-Bina' al-Siyasi, p. 89.*

[19] Hasan Naf'ah, "Al-Idarah al-siyassiya li azmat al-tahwul min nizam al-hizb al-wahid 'ila nizam ta'dud al-'ahzab" (The political management of the transition from the one-party to multi-party system), in Ali Eddin Hilal, ed., *Al-Nizam al-Siyassi al-Misri: al-Taghiur wa al-Istimrar* (The Egyptian Political System: Change and Continuity) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriya, 1988), p. 41.

Like other religious legal systems, sharia gives full rights to its male believers. The rights of women and members of other religions are subordinated to those of Muslim men. While conservative and liberal readings of sharia differ in their definition of the rights of subordinate groups, both usually accept the political centrality of male believers in the public domain. Liberals are open, however, to the discussion of equalizing strategies that could be adopted to expand the rights of subordinate groups. The Nasser regime used the liberal strategy to extend to women rights to education, public work, and political participation.

During the more conservative ideological climate of the Sadat regime, however, a restrictive reading prevailed that imposed new limits on the rights of women. This new conservative, secularist interpretation argued that changes in the status of women must be in line with the views of sharia. More serious was the state's denial of legitimacy to political parties based on gender, class, religion, or geography, a denial that undermined the ability of subordinate groups—women, Copts, southern Egyptians, and the working class—to mobilize and organize themselves. In this way, the privileged position of Muslim men was doubly reinforced. Not only did the state continue to define the status of all other groups through a conservative reading of sharia, but it also prevented them from organizing politically to reverse their subordination.

In the honeymoon period between the secularist state and its Islamist allies (1971–76), the government argued that Islam offered a good definition of the types of jobs suited to women's nature, provided that they dressed modestly, in accordance with sharia, and that work did not interfere with their family obligations.[21] When the state parted ways with the Islamists in 1977, following the assassination of the minister of religious affairs, the state adopted a different interpretation of sharia and used gender to rehabilitate its liberal credentials. In 1979, two presidential decrees underlined the political disadvantages associated with gender difference in the social and political arenas. The first decree earmarked 30 additional seats for women in the Egyptian parliament and specified that 20 percent of the seats in the 26 local governorate councils be for women.[22] The second decree introduced some reforms in the personal status laws by stipulating that the first wife of a man who takes a second wife may file for a divorce on grounds that his action is a source of harm to her. It also guaranteed divorced mothers the right to the family home until their children grew up.

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[20] Fouad Zakaria, *Al-Sahwa al-Islamiya fi Mizan al-'Aql* (Islamic Revival in Rational Balance) (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr lil Dirasat wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'a, 1989), pp. 50–1.

[21] Wizarat al-Ta'lim al-'Ali, *Al-Mar'at fi Misr* (Women in Egypt) (Cairo: Al-Matba'a al-'Alamiya, 1975), p. 41.

[22] Jehan Sadat, *A Woman of Egypt* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989) p. 364.

While both decrees recognized that "gender differences" contributed to political and legal inequality, the state's strategy to correct these asymmetries was to give women new electoral and legal rights that did not diminish or impinge on existing male privilege. For instance, the seats earmarked for women were added to the original number of parliamentary seats. In this way, the new seats did not disadvantage male candidates. In contrast, the stipulation that 20 percent of all local council positions be given to women disadvantaged male candidates. While the 30 parliamentary seats, as well as the 20 percent of the local council seats, increased fivefold the number of women in the political arena, the above measures were clearly not designed to deliver absolute equality. At most, they were committed to relatively better political representation for women.

As for the personal status law, the decree did not give women an equal, unconditional right to divorce. It merely added polygyny to the list of conditions under which women could sue for a divorce. The change implied that there were some problem areas in the application of sharia to women. Considering that the incidence of polygynous marriages in contemporary Egyptian society was minuscule, this was not a major legal advance, even though it attempted to challenge, for the first time, a symbol of male privilege. A real benefit was giving divorced mothers the right to the family home. Because motherhood was a politically valuable service, the state was willing to ensure for women the living conditions that would facilitate raising children.

The High Constitutional Court reversed both of these decrees on procedural grounds. In the case of the personal status decree, the court argued in 1985 that there was no national emergency that justified the use of a presidential decree to enact this measure while the parliament was in session. In 1987, the court struck down reserved seating for women on the grounds that special political treatment for women contradicted the constitutional commitment to equality. The Constitutional Court held that women had the same legal and political rights as men. Gender bias against women in the political arena was not considered a great concern by the state.

The political consequences of the court's decisions were demonstrated in the 1987 and 1990 elections to the Peoples' and Consultative Assemblies. The change reflected the NDP's lack of interest in the support of its own women. In the 1987 election, held immediately after the elimination of reserved seats for women, 14 women were elected to the Peoples' Assembly: 13 were members of the NDP. The only non-NDP woman was a member of the New Wafd party. President Mubarak also appointed four additional women to the assembly, bringing the total to 18. This was half of the 36 women who had been elected to the assembly in 1984.[23] In the 1990 election, the number of women elected to the assembly declined even further to seven. Four belonged to the NDP and three were independent candidates. The president's appointment of three more women brought the total to ten women, out of 444 members. All the NDP members elected or appointed to the assembly, with the exception of one, were middle-class women representing different sections of the capital city. The three independents represented the governorates of Alexandria, Sinai, and Ismailiyya, and two represented working-class women.[24] This suggests that the NDP had become identified with the token representation of the Cairene professional, middle-class woman. By deciding to run as independents, working-class women recognized the class makeup of the NDP.

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[23] Howard-Merriam, "Guaranteed Seats for Political Representation of Women," p. 32.

In the 1987 and 1992 elections of the Consultative Assembly, the NDP did not nominate a single woman to its lists. The party told its female members that they could not possibly succeed in these difficult electoral battles. Out of both pity for its female members and the belief that female candidates would lose in the competition with men, the NDP promised to represent them among the 30 percent of the membership appointed to the assembly.[25] This logic ignored the fact that there were women candidates in the elections to the Peoples' Assembly who ran against men and won. By not nominating women, the NDP was casting a vote of no confidence in its female members and also denying them valuable electoral experience. It made women politically dependent on the largesse of the party and implied that they were not suitable for the political arena.

Politically, the NDP's female members in the Peoples' Assembly became identified with a variety of legislative initiatives that were designed to provide working women with incentives to return to the home. In 1987, Imtethal al-Dib proposed a draft law that would have increased by ten percent the retirement benefits of working women who retired early. She stated that this was the demand of working-class women in the textile and spinning industries.[26] Adly al-Baghdadi, a member of the National Commission for Women, contradicted this claim by stating that the call for women's return to the home had no impact on working-class women.[27]

In 1990, Soraya Labna, an NDP member newly elected to the Peoples' Assembly, pointed to a similar proposal that was listed among the priorities of the party's program. It stated that the NDP was committed to facilitating women's desire for early retirement at the age of 50 instead of 60. This, Labna argued, would give women their full rights and provide employment opportunities for the young (men).[28]

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[24] "Qira' fi intikhabat 90" (A reading of the elections of 1990), *Akhr Sa'a*, December 12, 1990.

[25] Helmi al-Nimnim, "Intikhabat majlis al-Shura lil rijal faqat," (The elections of the Shura Council: Only men can run), *Hawa'*, May 30, 1992.

[26] Fatma al-'Attar, "Ya kul zawj lan 'aud lilbayt shaghala binisf 'ajr" (To all husbands: I am not returning home as a maid with half pay), *Sabah al-Khayr*, December 3, 1987.

[27] Ibid., p. 31.

The above discussion suggests that there was a secularist ideal of domesticity that has coexisted since 1959 with the legal acquisition of the right to work. It was a middle-class ideal that dealt with work as a choice or a "modern" need that did not diminish the importance of women's domestic roles. It added a professional identity to the basic domestic identity of women. When it became imperative that women work to maintain middle-class status, work was discussed as an inconvenience, something that women had to do even though they preferred to be at home. For working-class women, work inside and outside the household was an economic necessity; the element of choice was missing. As a result, work was part of their definition of themselves, even when national statistics did not classify their labor outside the home as vendors, domestics, or service personnel as work.

ISLAMIST DISCOURSE ON LIBERALIZATION

The Islamist views of political liberalization were not homogeneous. While the Muslim Brotherhood was interested in participating in neo-liberal politics, the more politicized groups, like the three *al-Jihad* (holy war) organizations active in the early 1980s, rejected politics as a legitimate means of change. They viewed political participation as misguided, a means of trivializing the difficult struggle against the secular state that also signified consent to an infidel government's rules.[29] Force was the only tool to be used against a state that refused to adhere to sharia. Because their struggle against the state was to be a violent one, their political manifestos targeted young men, not women. At most, they discussed women's flashy clothes along with corruption, embezzlement, and bribery as the consequences of the lack of public adherence to sharia. They also declared women as a group that needed protection in the prolonged violent struggle against the state. This effectively excluded women from active participation in their cause.[30]

The same approach to politics was not true of the many social and religious al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamist groups) that, like the Brotherhood, used persuasion as a means of attracting and encouraging both young men and women to become practicing and devout Muslims.[31] In their gender discourse, women members of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as unaffiliated Islamist writers, have discussed the need to use the existing system to mobilize for the creation of an Islamic society and/or state. For these Islamist activists and intellectuals, representing different generations of women, the political process provided, for the first time, real choices and alternatives. They could reject the old secularist alternative that had contributed to the present economic and political crises and choose the new Islamist one, which presented new approaches and solutions. While the Islamist political discourse generally emphasized "women's sexual and gendered difference," which it sought to incorporate in its definition of women's issues and their manner of political participation, Islamists did not agree on how to deal with either. The individualist and voluntarist character of their suggested solutions highlighted the simultaneously limited and active role they assigned to women in the existing political order.

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[28] "Qira' fi intikhabat 90," *Akhr Sa'a*, December 12, 1990.

[29] Adil Hamouda, *Qanabil wa Masahif* (Bombs and Holy Books of Islam) (Cairo: Dar Sina lil Nashr, 1989), pp. 36–7; Mohammed Abdel Salam Farag, "Al-faridah al-gha'iba" (The missing obligatory ritual), in Nimat Ginena, *Tanzim al-Jihad: Hal Huwa al-Badeel al-Islami* (The Jihad Organization: Is this the Islamic Alternative) (Cairo: Dar al-Huriya, 1988), pp. 239–40.

[30] Farag, *ibid.*, pp. 264–65; Hamouda, *ibid.*, p. 36.

[31] Hamouda, *ibid.*, pp. 22–43.

During the honeymoon years between the Sadat regime and the Muslim Brotherhood, Zeinab al-Ghazali, president of the Muslim Women's Association, came out in support of the regime following the 1974 discovery of an *al-Takfir wa al-Hijra* (repentance and holy flight)[32] plot, organized at the Technical Military Academy, and the confession by al-Takfir's leader, Saleh Sirriya, that he had met with al-Ghazali and leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Al-Ghazali distanced herself and the Brotherhood from Sirriya and pledged to work with the Sadat regime to create a Muslim Egypt.[33] Furthermore, she rejected the claims of al-Takfir wa al-Hijra that the state's persecution of Muslims earned government officials the description of infidels. She urged the defection of Islamists from al-Takfir wa al-Hijra and denounced its use of force.[34]

Even after the parting of ways between the regime and the Brotherhood following the Camp David Accords (1978–79), the Brotherhood continued to preach peaceful conversion and/or persuasion as a means of reaching the Egyptian public and working toward the goal of an Islamic state. It used its weekly journal, *al-Da'wa*, and the publishing and distributing house, *Dar al-'Atisam*, to disseminate its Islamist views. Through its electoral alliances, first with the New Wafd party (1984), and then with al-Sha'ab party (1987), the Brotherhood sought to present the political slogan: "Islam is the solution."

Some of the basic assumptions of the Islamist discourse produced by the Muslim Brotherhood on the rights of citizenship of men and women were developed in the 1930s as part of the *aqidat al-Jama'a* (doctrine of the group), adopted in its Third Congress in 1935. This doctrine has served as the constitution of the Brotherhood. It targeted the family and existing economic and political institutions. As a model of action, it adhered to moderation, gradualism, and the status quo. While some of the changes in the roles of men and women in the home and in the marketplace were small in scope, they became a measure of the Brotherhood's ability to leave its cultural mark on secular society. The doctrine also showed the exclusionary and patriarchal nature of the early Islamist discourse. It held that Islam offered a comprehensive law that did not tolerate other legal competitors. Because the Brotherhood claimed that it represented the party of the Quran, it denied an equally moral claim to the interpretations held by other groups. This early discourse, thus, not only excluded non-Islamic laws, but also narrowed the definition of legitimate Islamic interpretations. Its tolerance for ideological "difference" within its definition of Islam was quite limited.[35]

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[32] I have borrowed this translation of the group's name from Saad Eddin Ibrahim's, *The New Arab Social Order* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), p. 21.

[33] Adil Hamouda, *Al-Hijra 'ila al-'Anf* (Migration to Violence) (Cairo: Dar Sina lil Nashr, 1987), p. 33.

[34] Ginena, *The Jihad Organization*, p. 86.

The Brotherhood's doctrine held similar exclusionary definitions of masculinity and femininity. Muslim men were required to work and to earn a living. In fact, their economic productivity lay at the heart of the economic system: they saved, gave to charity, supported economic projects, provided a market for locally-produced goods, and avoided conspicuous consumption. The only Islamic features of their economic contribution were giving alms and refusing to deal in usury.

In contrast, Muslim women were simply the dependents of men economically and morally. Men provided for them, took care of their well-being, and protected their beliefs and ethics. In this particular definition, Muslim men even usurped women's care-taking functions in the family, which were used by Egyptian feminists in the 1930s to claim their special contribution to the state and their right of citizenship.[36] If, as Hasan al-Banna argued, men monopolized all the public and care-taking functions in the family, then citizenship rights in Egypt of the 1930s belonged solely to men, and women had no claim to equal citizenship based on their role within the family.

This passive definition of femininity offered by al-Banna was reflected in the way the Muslim Brotherhood related to the Muslim Sisters as a parallel organization. In the Muslim Sisters, founded in 1937, men, not women, were given the task of educating and organizing women.[37] The men reportedly were unhappy with the task of having to work among women. Membership in the Muslim Sisters numbered 5,000 in 1948, a very high figure judging by the membership figures for other women's organizations at the time.[38] It is reasonable to assume that, given the Brotherhood's paternalist ideal of masculinity that presumed to run their women's lives, the Muslim Sisters did not choose, but were instructed, to join the organization.

When al-Banna approached al-Ghazali, the president of the smaller, but more activist, high-profile Muslim Women's Association, and asked her to merge and run the two organizations, he acknowledged the difficulties the Brotherhood had in organizing women. Al-Ghazali refused al-Banna's proposal, however, because she felt that her organization would lose its autonomy.[39]

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[35] Rifa'at al-Sai'd, *Hasan al-Banna: Mata? Kayf? Wa Laih?* (Hasan al-Banna: When? How? and Why?) (Cairo: Madbuli Bookstore, 1977), pp. 67–8.

[36] Cathlyn Mariscotti, "Consent and Resistance: The History of Upper- and Middle-Class Egyptian Women Reflected through their Published Journals (1925–39)" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1994), pp. 79–80.

[37] Rifa'at al-Sai'd, *Hasan al-Banna*, pp. 72–3.

[38] Ibid.

The large-scale internment of members of the Muslim Brotherhood, following the political assassination of Prime Minister Mahmud al-Nuqrashi in 1948, constituted a powerful test both of the Brotherhood's notion of "passive femininity" and of the Muslim Sisters as an organization. Instead of falling apart without their male kin and/or leaders, the Muslim Sisters emerged as organizational actors in their own right. They took care of the families of the interned Brothers. They also played an important communication role among the Brothers interned in different prisons, carrying messages between those interned and those on the outside, and between al-Banna and other important political figures.[40] The 1948 ordeal, along with the internment of Muslim women in the 1960s, laid to rest the early discourse on passive femininity and paved the way for a different discourse in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Brotherhood's definitions of masculinity and femininity changed to address the new role of Egyptian women in the 1970s and 1980s. The published works of al-Ghazali show elements of continuity and change. As the only prominent woman in a leadership position within the organization, al-Ghazali's imprisonment and torture in the 1960s, along with other Muslim Sisters, gave her a wide readership. Although al-Ghazali continued to adhere to the dichotomous definitions of masculinity and femininity, she also developed a more dynamic definition of femininity. She argued that men and women have "different temperaments," which explained their engagement in different occupations. This naturally assisted the "family unit to perform its message and to emerge as an active and important institution in society."[41] Like men, women had the right to receive education and to express opinions on the affairs of their society. Yet, men were obligated by sharia to assume financial and other responsibilities within the family. Male neglect of these tasks exposed them to divine punishment. By encouraging women to take public roles outside of the home, the state created serious problems in the home, work place, public transportation, and production. Thus, al-Ghazali concurred with the prevalent male secular view that blamed working women for most of the ills of society. She used these claims to argue in favor of the return to the Islamic ideal of womanhood that stressed the home as the proper place for women.

In 1989, al-Ghazali took the position that "Muslim women should play a role outside of the home if the well-being of the Islamic state required it"[42] and "if the woman was able to juggle both her private and public task.''[43] Given her basic view of men as providers and of women as economic dependents, al-Ghazali was unwilling to allow women the right to work. If the state no longer needed women workers, they were expected to return to their ''natural'' domain and role. In other words, while this new view addressed new situations and conditions encouraging Muslim women to work outside of the home, these contingencies did not change the rigid dichotomous definitions of femininity and masculinity. Furthermore, the ideal of Islamic femininity was based implicitly on class. It assumed middle-class families as a frame of reference, where the loss of a woman's income would make some but not considerable difference. The concerns of working-class women for their need for permanent work and legally-defined work conditions were largely unaddressed; in fact, their work was devalued for departing from the ideal of Islamic femininity.

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[39] Zeinab al-Ghazali, *'Ayam min Hayati* (Days From My Life) (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1986), p. 23.

[40] Sa'id, *Hasan al-Banna*, p. 73; al-Ghazali, *'Ayam min Hayati*, p. 24–5.

[41] Zeinab al-Ghazali, "Hathihi al-Tanzimat al-Nisa'iya Tahdim wala Tabni" (These feminist organizations destroy instead of building), in Ibn al-Hashimi, ed., *Al-Da'iya Zeinab al-Ghazali* (Zeinab al-Ghazali: The Preacher) (Cairo: Dar al-'Atisam, 1991), p. 55.

[42] Zeinab al-Ghazali, "Al-Mar'at al-Muslima ila 'Ayn" (Where are Muslim women going), in Ibn al-Hashimi, ed., *Humum al-Mar'at al-Muslima wa al-Da'ya Zeinab al-Ghazali* (The Heavy

The views of Safi Naz Kazim, a drama critic at Dar al-Hillal, offered a different generational perspective on women's citizenship. Born in 1937, Kazim argued that her generation, like Egypt, faced a gap between its strong religious convictions and a daily reality that negated religion. Until 1972, when she performed a pilgrimage to Mecca, adopted Islamic dress, and integrated her Islamist views in her writings, she had been an enthusiastic supporter of Arab nationalism and socialism as liberating formulas with Islamic roots. She eventually realized that regimes like those of Nasser and Iraq's Saddam Hussein used Islam when it was convenient, but remained very antagonistic toward it and brutal in their treatment of Muslims.[44] She was imprisoned by the Nasser and Sadat regimes three times for her active political involvement in the struggle against the secular state.

In describing this political struggle, Kazim disagreed with those who interpreted Egyptian society as that of infidels. Egypt was stolen from Islam and Egyptians were attempting to find their way back to Islam.[45] The conspiracy against Islamic society and its sharia began in the nineteenth century with attacks leveled by the Baha'i community, whose religion preached submission to secularist principles and advocated the unveiling of women.[46] Imperialism and Zionism represented another attack on Islamic society. Because Huda Sha'rawi and Ceza Nabarawi, the leading Egyptian feminists, called for the unveiling of women, they were unwitting allies in this conspiracy.[47]

Preoccupations of the Muslim Woman and the Preacher Zeinab al-Ghazali) (Cairo: Dar al-'Atisam, 1990), p. 64.

[43] Ibid., p. 65.

[44] Safi Naz Kazim, *'An al-Sign wa al-Hurriya* (About Prison and Liberty) (Cairo: Al-Zahra' lil 'Alam al-Arabi, 1986), pp. 33–6.

[45] Ibid., p. 36.

[46] Safi Naz Kazim, *Fi Mas'alt al-Sufur wa al-Hijab* (On the Issue of Veiling and Unveiling) (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1982), pp. 11–12, 14.

[47] Ibid., p. 11.

Women's return to Islam and the veil showed unveiling to be an exception in an historical pattern. To be sure, there were different modes of Islamic dress that reflected a woman's level of faith: the veil with long dress and bonnet; *al-farida* (the obligatory ritual), revealing only the face and hands; and the *niqab*, which went beyond the ritual in revealing only the eyes. Over and above the rituals, one could characterize a Muslim woman as being modest without being submissive. She was assertive and sharp enough to distinguish between politeness and weakness. She was learned in the affairs of her religion and those of her government. If the rulers were unjust, she was obligated, as a member of the community, to correct, advise, and struggle against them. In this, she was an equal partner of the Muslim man.[48]

Kazim's ideal of Muslim femininity incorporates the citizenship rights won by her generation. She calls upon Muslim women to participate actively in the affairs of Muslim society. Domestic and mothering roles are quietly assumed while openly accepting secularist definitions of citizenship rights.

Finally, Iman Mohammed Mustafa represents the distinct views of a third generation of Islamist women in the discussion of women's work. A reporter since 1979, she published a series of very critical articles entitled "The Empire of Working Women," in *al-Ahram al-Iqtisadi* in 1989. The articles argued that the present economic crisis reopened the question of the desirability of women's work. While rejecting the views of Qasim Amin, an Egyptian judge who wrote two books at the end of the nineteenth century calling for the liberation of women, Mustafa pointed out that the judge was interested only in the way education would make the home a place where future successful men were trained.[49]

During the twentieth century, women's education and work had progressed beyond the original goals. Since the 1970s, women faced rapidly-deteriorating work conditions, the effects of which were damaging to them and their children. In numerous vignettes, Mustafa sought to show that the children of working mothers suffered and that working mothers became unproductive. To correct these problems, she supported a state proposal that had been debated widely during the last 15 years to offer working mothers a three-year leave of absence at half pay to care for their young children. Women could use this right a maximum of only two times during their professional career. This option should be made available to, not forced upon, all working women. Mustafa said the state should compensate women monetarily for their socially-valuable work as family care-takers. In fact, Islam described this role in noble terms.[50]

What was curious regarding the above view was its eclectic nature. Mustafa used the Islamist view to critique the secularist definitions of femininity, which did not help women to juggle successfully their private and public roles. Unlike many of the Islamist writers who advocated the permanent return of women to the home, Mustafa only supported a tactical return to the home for the care of children if that return were supported financially by the state. In other words, she supported a very modern (state) solution to the difficult problems facing women and society.

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[48] Ibid., p. 22.

[49] Iman Mohammed Mustafa, *Imbraturiyat al-Nisa' al-'Amilat* (The Empire of Working Women) (Cairo: al-Zahra' lil 'Alam al-'Arabi, 1991), p. 9.

[50] Ibid., pp. 14–15.

The writings by Islamist women on the roles and rights women should have in the contemporary society bring together different generational definitions and views. While they assume the desirability of middle-class domesticity (full-time mothering), they add numerous other roles that historically had become part of the secularist definitions of femininity.

CONCLUSION

The convergence of the secularist and Islamist discourses highlights the centrality of domesticity as part of their definitions of femininity. The secular state accepted qualified political and legal rights of women but subordinated them to the state's larger social and economic concerns. The Islamists similarly accepted qualified rights of women in the public arena when the interests of the state and the family required it. Because of the economic crisis, both the secularist and Islamist discourses shared the demand that women return to the home.

The options offered by the secular state and the Islamists are similar. The differences between the two are incremental and not as radical as apologists of each side maintain. While Islamists are not at all committed to the liberal process, secularists are only committed to it if liberalization does not dislodge them from their positions of power. They present Egyptian women with equally difficult choices. The emphasis on equality as "sameness" or "difference," in the discussion of the means of incorporating women in the political order, present distinct sets of problems. The secularist state's interpretation of equality as sameness required women to fit within a political arena that was dominated and defined by men. In contrast, the Islamist stress on "gender difference" was used to justify acceptance of an unequal status in the work place and the male political order. Both were unable to represent women's responsibility for children, the sign of their sexual difference, in politically-affirming, not diminishing, and unequal ways.