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# THE EFFECT OF FEMINISM ON EGYPTIAN LITERATURE

Mohammed Salim Abdulameer

Engineering Technical College / Najaf, Al-Furat Al-Awsat Technical University, Najaf, Iraq

## Abstract

This study examines the contemporary Egyptian female subculture movements that have brought life to the nation's media landscape. According to the study, women have created unique strategies for encouraging a shared discussion on the significance of social change. Their emphasis on lifestyle issues often reserved for closed-door private discussions enables them to question social norms without upsetting the government or security services and entering the polarised political environment. This article examines the objectives and internal workings of three distinct online feminist initiatives using case studies. Through semi-structured interviews with important participants, we were able to understand the evolution of these groups from networks to movements and ultimately into the organizations we are familiar with today.

**Keywords** Feminism, Egyptian Literature, contemporary, social change.

## INTRODUCTION

During the early 1900s, women expressed their strong disagreement with colonial policy. Throughout the 1919 Egyptian revolt, the protesters advocated for gender equality by demanding freedom for women and men. Nevertheless, women remained devoid of political representation even after men like them were granted political authority in 1922. (Sorbera, 2014.) Consequently, women organized prominent associations such as the Egyptian Feminist Union (founded by Huda Sha'rawi in 1923), group of Muslim women's organizations (founded by Zaynab al-Ghazali in 1936), and the Sisters of the Nile Union (Bint al-Nil) (founded by Doria Shafiq in 1948). During Gamal Abdel Nasser's government, laws were enacted to place all civil society organizations under state oversight, a period known as "State-feminism."

This situation persisted during President Sadat's tenure despite his liberal economic policies. Many of these communities were assimilated during this period. (Al-Ali, 2000)

Abdel Nasser's most notable accomplishment was the enactment of women's suffrage in 1956, while the Sadat administration mainly acquiesced to women's demands for economic rights. However, the fundamental patriarchal principles and women's conventional household responsibilities persisted throughout both regimes. Consequently, women's groups became associated with the authoritative structure of the state, which ensured that women's rights were integrated into a broader developmental objective headed by the state's authoritarian regime. The reference is from Sika and Khodary's work in 2012. During Mubarak's presidency, an advantageous development was the

proliferation about groups that advocate for the rights of women. The "empowerment" of women and the protection of their economic rights were prioritized on a development-focused agenda, despite the fact that the organizations had strong contacts with individuals in positions of authority within the government.

Furthermore, Abu-Lughod mentioned establishing In the year 2000, the National Council for Women (NCW) was established with the purpose of granting woman's rights. Suzanne Mubarak was appointed as the head of this council. The creation of the NCW has been praised as a step forward in providing women greater liberties in their personal lives, especially considering the changes made to the Personal Status Laws. Regrettably, this legislation acquired the label of the "Suzanne Mubarak laws," carrying a negative connotation. Therefore, instead of relying on widespread public approval, the NCW's strong connections with the government and religious establishments facilitated the enactment of this legislation. The NCW, claiming to represent Egyptian women as a whole, took control of women's advocacy and efforts. However, there was a shift from the conventional focus on women's economic empowerment through development, Political groups like the kifaya meanwhile (Enough) Movement gained significant recognition. Furthermore, it is widely recognized that women played a prominent role in the increasing number of labor strikes between 2006 and 2007. Women who chose to use their freedom to vote and circulate freely in the city were subjected to discrimination and harassment during this period. Undercover male individuals engaged in sexual assault against female protesters in May 2005, as law enforcement officers observed the incident. According to one of the female demonstrators, an officer informed her that the assault had been orchestrated with the intention of "hindering your future participation in demonstrations." The

events were primarily political, as they were coordinated by activist organizations who dedicated their time, particularly on demonstration days, to provide inclusive public spaces for women interested in engaging in political activities. (Karam,1998)

The contemporary women's rights movement in Egypt is perceived as a challenge to patriarchal ideologies and an attempt to infuse Western values into the nation. Women's rights groups are currently faced with the task of untangling the association of women's rights with politics, mainly as represented by the NCW, while also addressing this mistake. An enduring conflict has persisted between the "deep state" and dissident factions. The "deep state" frequently employs counterrevolutionary tactics that specifically aim to undermine women and disrupt gender dynamics. There have been explicit attempts to suppress female demonstrators. The connection between feminist and revolutionary movements is evident through adopting politically charged vocabulary. It is hardly unexpected that activists and advocates for women's rights get singled out in Egypt following a recent counter-revolution that effectively strengthened the "deep state."

### **Feminist in Egyptian's history**

Among Egypt's history Badran said most notable historical figures are the women who played essential parts in Egyptian politics, society, and the sciences. Many Egyptian women have long advocated for gender parity in politics and the workplace. To begin with, Hatshepsut ruled Egypt for an unprecedented 21 years during the Paranoid era, a period commonly seen as a period of peace and prosperity for the nation. Hatshepsut, the daughter of Thutmose I, sought to gain recognition as the legitimate successor to the Egyptian monarchy by assuming the appearance of a man. The Egyptian people enjoyed a time of unparalleled prosperity under Hatshepsut's rule, even though

she first led the army into conflict. However, she quickly changed her focus to cultivating trade links with neighboring countries( Badran, 1995)

Second, Egypt's economy benefited from Cleopatra VII's promotion of trade with eastern nations. When Egypt's internal strife finally subsided, the country's once-proud reputation took a significant boost. My primary objective was Shajar al-Durr, and the third one was eradicating all Crusaders from the land. His people named King Louis IX or Saint Louis, and his senior captives from Mansoura were in danger, so I spoke with him, and we devised a scheme wherein I would give up Damietta in return for a ransom that would free them. The first 50,000 dinars are due before he leaves, and the second 50,000 are due when he reaches ( Badran, 1995).

While feminist strategies around the turn of the century did seek to abolish female exclusion and gender segregation, they did not demand the immediate deposal of the existing system. Malak HifnT Nasif advocated for a slow end to women donning veils because she preferred the thin, altered veil used by Turkish women to the bulky fabric covering preferred by older Egyptian ladies. The gradualist method was approved by Huda Sha'rawi, who saw that the timing needed to be better for the unveiling. While applauding the middle class for their more covert habit, she scolded the higher-class Egyptian ladies for being too eager to expose themselves. After realizing that now was not the time to reveal anything, Huda Sha'rawi came to concur with the gradualist strategy. The more vocal upper-class women in Egypt were scolded for rushing headlong into uncovering, while she praised the covert middle-class habit of veiling. After spending her formative years in Paris, Egyptian girl Siza Nabariwi returned to her homeland around 1910. Understandably wary of jeopardizing the long-term advancement of women's liberation, feminists in the early 20th

century hesitated to take risks. They highly valued the sexual moral code, and it was decreed that all sexual relations between men and women must occur within the context of matrimony( Baron, 2005)

Feminists did not talk about the issue of masculine sexual morals or the double standard, even though this was the case for both men and women (except for men who had the right to concubinage with enslaved women). The most important thing for feminists to do was to protect upper- and middle-income women from sexual abuse and charges of losing their honor. Feminist leaders knew this would have significant effects because women's honor is tied to their families' image. Feminists thought that girls and women should go to school because it would help these individuals run their homes better and provide them with the skills they needed to get valuable jobs if they wanted to or had to. They also thought schooling would make things equal between men and women and help eliminate sex discrimination in the long run. Feminists have long pushed women to have the same educational opportunities as men. Huda Sha'rawi helped start the Mabarrat Muhammad 'Ali, the first Egyptian female social welfare group, in 1909. There, she pushed for classes to educate working-class women about wellness and family care. 20 She was going to push for classes where young women could learn skills to help them make money.(Bowe,2001)

Feminists pushed for women to go to school by using moral and nationalist reasons. People who were against it said that girls and women who were allowed to learn how to read and write would quickly lose their morals. Feminists, on the other hand, said that women could be safer from men taking advantage of them if they went to school. 25 Feminists made the nationalist case that educated Egyptian women were going to be better able to care for Egyptian youngsters in the future, so wealthy Egyptian families would not need to hire

foreign nurses and maids. Some of the most critical issues around the turn of the century had to do with women working. As the need for Egyptian goods exported dropped and Egypt turned into a market for cheap European goods, men had to find other ways to make money. Because not enough jobs paid well, men were often sent away from home, leaving women to care for the home. Even more, basic wants have become less critical. The countryside had it especially hard with the economy and farming. Many people moved to cities, where finding work might be more challenging for newbies. The kind of education and training that feminists wanted to offer showed how much they cared about the suffering of low-income women and their households. What purpose do they serve? Many women have to stop working because of things like being left alone, getting divorced, or being put in charge of their own homes. Because feminism is becoming more popular, women have developed their ideas. To get closer to the final feminist goal of complete freedom, they devised a plan to reach their short-term, practical goal. The main idea behind the policy and the policy itself was to eliminate the stereotypes about gender differences and everything they meant. When feminism said that men and women are of equal worth and sort, they offered a new way of thinking that questioned biological determinism. Planned system restructuring Immediate practical goals included making it easier for women to attend school and work. (Hashem,1986)

### **The Islamic Modernist Foundations of the Egyptian Feminist Movement**

During the latter most of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, Egypt experienced several intellectual currents that played a significant role in the rise of Egyptian feminism. Several ideological groupings, including Islamism and secularism, Egyptian nationalism and pan-

Arabism, Islamic modernism and traditionalism, and others, came into conflict. The foundations of feminist philosophy can be traced back to the principles of Islamic modernism. Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), who served as the Grand Mufti of Egypt was a devoted disciple of Jamal adine Afghani, was a stalwart supporter of Islamic reform. McLarney mention that the foundations of feminist philosophy can be traced back to the principles of Islamic modernism.. "Abduh advocated for a comprehensive overhaul of the educational program at Al-Azhar, one of the world's oldest educational institutions. He did this by reintroducing the practice of *ijtihad*, which is defined as independent inquiry and the free exercise of reason in inquiries concerning matters of personal belief." The historian Indira Falk Gesink has described his creation as "a hybridized framework for a genuinely Islamic revolution of thinking." He accomplished this by combining religion and reasoning, European ideals with Islamic principles, and therefore created what she has referred to." Instances of *taqlid* include but are not limited to, conformity to established norms of conduct, obedience to existing precedents in law, and acceptance of traditional teachings. It was never his intention for ordinary people to incorporate *ijtihad* into court proceedings or other topics unrelated to matters of faith. He called for a complete reform of Islam from the top down, just like al-Afghani did, but he was able to do this without inciting societal unrest during the process. (McLarney2005).

Over time, feminist writing emerged within this progressive Islamist discourse. Through the use of modernist ideals, Qasim Amin, who had been highly influenced by 'Abduh, advocated for the abolition of customs such as polygamy, facial veiling, seclusion, and abusive divorce practices. Both "The New Woman" ( *al-Mar'ah al-Jadidah*) and "The Liberation of Women" (*Tahrir al-Mar'ah*) were published by Amin for the first time in the year

1899 and the year 1900, respectively. In order to emphasize the superiority of Western ways of doing things, both 'Abduh and Amin advocated for the education of Egyptian women to the same level as that of their European counterparts. Even though many people regard Amin to be the "father of Egyptian feminism," other famous Islamic modernists, such as Ali Mubark and Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, who took up "the woman problem" in their writings, have been referred to as being equally as influential.

Women who were wealthy and of the middle class were the first to publicly announce their support for the feminist concept. A'ishah al-Taymuriyah (1840-1902) A'ishah al-Taymuriyah (1840-1902) and Zahra al-Fawwaz (1860- 1914) were two of the pioneers who fought against the practice of women being isolated in the inside of their homes. In 1892, Hind Nawfal established al-Fatah, the first journal solely devoted to women's issues and authored by women (The Young Girl). Many authors, like Malak Hifni Nassif (1886-1918) (who wrote under a fictitious name Bahithat al-Badiya),

**Egyptian Feminism: Current Debates Egyptian Feminism**

Understanding the distinctions between secular and Islamic feminism remains a struggle for Egyptian women. Marwa Sharafeldin, the co-founder of the Federation of Woman rights Organisations in Egypt and a board member of Musawah, an international campaign to change Muslim family law, points out that various feminist groups in Egypt have distinct guiding principles. For mainstream Egyptian feminists, the question is, whose principles—Islam, non-religious humanism, or human rights—should they follow in their fight to amend the Personal Status Law? Parties frequently negotiate on human rights and Sharafeldin's "enlightened" religious views. The term "enlightened" is not defined, although NGOs

have used it to mean "gender-sensitive Islamic views."

Some have contended that rereading the Qu'ran allows women to use religious text to protect their rights and gives them authority and power. Within the Islamic faith, Egyptian feminists like Omaima Abu-Bakr encourage looking for opportunities within Islam. Feminists of the Islamic faith who support modernist Islam and its offshoot, "Islamic feminism," think on that as a formidable challenge to secular feminist theory, the latter of which is the most popular in Egypt. Secular Egyptian women's groups are adamant that practicing Islam will "either consciously or unwittingly denigrate religious and social forces." Women like these say that religious beliefs shouldn't be the basis of government and social organizations. If religiously motivated feminists stick to theological arguments and ignore socioeconomic and political concerns, and if they use the Qur'an as their compass instead of human rights norms, secular feminists say, their influence will be limited, and the Islamic system will be strengthened. Some secularists believe that Islamic feminism will ultimately fail to end patriarchal power and enhance women's lives. (McLarney, 1905)

In 2011, the Cooperative of Egyptian Feminist Organisations gave female-led feminist organizations a stage to debate these competing viewpoints. Despite the apparent consensus, arguments from millennia are still up for discussion. Alliances between feminist groups are frequently held to impossible standards. The key to understanding them is being aware of their limitations. Even though it has been more than a century, Egyptian feminists are still debating the same persistent problems. Just as it was when Egyptian women initially spoke out for change, so too is the question of whether or not either religious or secular values should form the basis of feminism, and the degree to which to which



Egyptian woman confront particular difficulties or share their experiences with women in the Arab world and globally.

The Most Effectuated Woman by Feminist in Egypt

1-ENAYAT AL-ZAYYAT (1936 – 1963)

The third of three sisters—Aida and Azeema—Enayat Al-Zayyat came into this world in 1936 to a wealthy family. Actress Nadia Lotfy, her best friend since childhood, was her classmate at the German school. However, instead of finishing her degree, she wed in 1956 at the youngest age of 20. The marriage between AL-Zyaat and Kamaal Saheen did not endure despite having a son together. Al-Zayyat finally got a divorce in the late 1950s. From a dark corner of his mind, Al-Zayyat penned his works. A collection of her short stories, diaries, and other writings was released as a later novel titled Love and Silence. Two months prior to her 27th birthday in 1963, Al-Zayyat committed suicide after receiving a firm rejection from a publishing house following the submission of her book. The novel Passion and Silence was published after her passing and quickly became a blockbuster. Many critics and writers hailed it as a masterwork, while others thought it was only adequate. For instance, Love and Silence is troublesome because Al-Zayyat addresses subjects and difficulties that were and are relevant to all women; it is also descriptive and emotive, and it is about Al-freedom, Zayaat's freedom to love beyond all else. (<https://egyptianstreets.com/2022/02/16/5-revolutionary-egyptian-women-authors-to-learn-about/>)

RADWA ASHOUR (1946 – 2014)

In 1946, Radwa Ashour was born in a house located in El-Manial. Her parents, Mustafa Ashour, a lawyer and literary admirer, and Mai Azzam, a poet and artist, were her parents. Radwa was born during a period of upheaval between World War II's conclusion and the Nakba's end. In addition,

she was a child during the Free Forces' insurrection in Egypt in 1952, which was a rebellion against British domination. Consequently, I was impacted by the political economy of the period, which drew me toward investigating political life, history, and literature in the English Writing department at Cairo University. If a person in the region is interested in Arabic literary works, politics, or history, they are probably familiar with the name Radwa Ashour. No one in the region is unaware of her. In addition to being the wife of Palestinian poet Mourid AL-Barghouti and the mother of the well-known poet Tammim AL-Barghouti, Radwa Ashour is appreciated for her numerous achievements as a writer, scholar, critic, school professor, revolutionary, and also as the mother of his son. Several of her works have achieved widespread recognition, including. Every single one of Radwa Ashour's novels includes female protagonists who are radicalized in some fashion, and all of these ladies are women. The protagonists of her stories are artists, poets, and activists who go through struggles comparable to those that Radwa has experienced in her own life. These struggles include incarceration, exile, revolution, disease, and other harsh realities.

(<https://egyptianstreets.com/2022/02/16/5-revolutionary-egyptian-women-authors-to-learn-about/>)

ARWA SALIH (1951 – 1997)

Arwa Salih is a journalist, social imprisoned individual and creator of the contentious book Al-Mubtasarun. She is also known for her involvement in communist and feminist movements and her leadership role in the Egyptian Student Revolution of the 1970s (The Stillborn, 1996). Arwa Salih, born in 1951, has a degree in English literature from Cairo University. Following her graduation, she embarked on her professional journey as an educator. However, she ultimately decided to abandon the teaching profession due to her

dissatisfaction. She quickly secured a position as a translator for the Saudi Arabia-funded business monthly Al-'Alam Al-Yawm and the state-owned Middle Eastern News Agency (MENA).

Additionally, Salih translated numerous Marxist texts and disseminated them through clandestine leaflets and newsletters of The Egyptian Communist Worker Party. Shortly after that, Salih became a member of the party's central leadership. The PLO originated from the student movement in 1972 and was crucial in initiating the 1977 Bread Intifada. Under Sadat's autocratic rule, she clandestinely authored a range of sociopolitical articles under pseudonyms, which were then published in underground newspapers and magazines affiliated with various communist groups to avoid the risk of prosecution and imprisonment. Arwa Salih and Siham Sabri organized sit-in protests at Cairo University, during which they and their followers engaged in activities such as reading poetry, reciting revolutionary slogans, and performing plays. Arwa's incarceration, coupled with her fervent fascination and active participation in these movements and protest, served as the foundation for her anthology of essays, Al-Mubtasarun. This collection was composed after her arrest following the assault by police forces on the on December 29, 1972. The book Al-Mubtasarun focuses on the age of radical revolutionary groups, activists, artists, and leaders, which has sparked controversy due to Salih's appraisal of them.

Furthermore, Salih discloses the instances where men within the same intellectual circles, groups, and campaigns took advantage of and sexually victimized women employed by communist parties and organizations. The book is challenging to read because of the immense anguish that Arwa experienced while it. Following Arwa Salih's death in 1997, her second compilation of writings, titled Disease of the Soul (Saratan Al-Rawh), was

released. (Laura, 2011)

AHDAF SOUEIF (1950 – )

In addition to being a veteran of the Egyptian Student Revolution of the 1970s, Ahdaf Soueif is a novelist, a political and cultural analyst, a university lecturer, and a member of the Egyptian Student Movement. In addition to being the aunt of notable activists Alaa Abdel - Fattah , Mona Seif, and Sanna Seif, she is also the sister of Laila Soueif, a math professor and a well-known activist. At the beginning of the 1970s, Arwa Salih and Ahdaf Soueif were both students in the English Literature department at Cairo University. The year 1983 marked the publication of Soueif's first book, a short story collection titled Aisha. The publication of her first novel, titled "In the Eye of the Sun," occurred ten years later, in 1993. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist, Asya, a young Egyptian woman who is captivated by art, is followed as she develops in both Egypt and the UK. It is to pay tribute to her friend and fellow innovative, Arwa Salih, that Soueif wrote this book. In 1999, The Map of Love was published, and since then, it has been translated into over twenty other languages and has sold more than one million copies. Due to the introduction written by the well-known professor and novelist Edward Said, the novel I Saw Ramallah by Mourid Barghouti, which she translated, is considered one of her most well-known works. The fact that Ahdaf Soueif was the Founding Chair of the first-ever Palestinian Festival of Literature, which took place in 2008, makes it quite evident that he is interested in the history and politics of both Egypt and Palestine. The cultural and political columnist Ahdaf Soueif, who writes for the Guardian newspaper, greatly impacted the news coverage of the Egyptian revolution in 2011. Her first-person narrative of the first year of the revolution was published in January 2012 under the title Cairo: My City, Our Revolution. In 2011, Soueif was named to the Board of Trustees of the British Museum, and

she continued to serve in that role until her resignation in 2019.

In the same way that she has been doing on social media, Soueif has not slowed down her attempts to free her nephew Alaa Abdel-Fattah from prison. Writing produced by Egyptian women is exceptional not only because of the brilliance and creativity of the authors but also because it bears witness to the situation of women and continues to fight for their rights. By introducing students to the writings of these women, namely Naguib Mahfouz and Ihsan Abdel-Koddous, they become aware of the presence of an alternative narrative at that period. This discussion is not only exceptional in its progressive ideas in the MENA region, but it is also unrivaled in its global advancement. (Mahmood, 2011)

## **CONCLUSION**

The feminist movement in Egypt has experienced a decline in activity due to the various challenges posed by the political and economic crises that the country has faced and continues to face. Despite the disappointment of many women involved in the freedom movement, a new cohort of young feminists in Egypt is undeterred by the country's significant political challenges. They are determined to bring about substantial improvements in women's issues. Although feminism initially had a limited effect on Egyptian literature, its importance gradually increased, primarily due to the widespread availability of journals and newspapers. Eventually, Egyptian women started to participate on an equal footing with men in all areas of activity. Consequently, the written arts and other fields of intellectual endeavor experienced a revival in writing and other sciences. The Islamic anti -women's rights group in Egypt has injected its influence into the country as a direct result of the pressure that the United States has put on the Mubark government to implement The objective is to implement political

reform and enhance civil liberties..

each and Each prominent media outlet, Both domestically and internationally, the organization integrates representation into its programming. According to these those speaking, the demands made by feminists are considered unacceptable if Egyptians want to uphold their cultural and religious heritage. They accomplish this by referencing hadith 19, which lacks substantial evidence, and selectively employing texts from the Qur'an. An inhospitable atmosphere has emerged for any political or social movement that lacks strong Islamic endorsement and intention, due to the significant rise in the number of women donning niqabs (face-covering veils) and the widespread presence of bumper stickers that coerce women into sporting hijabs. These stickers, unlawfully displayed in various transportation hubs and vehicles, have contributed to the creation of an unwelcoming surroundings.

The latest generation of feminists has skillfully modified their discourse to incorporate more Islamic authority into their arguments. To identify voices that expressed women's rights within the context of Islam, researchers have examined Egypt's colonial past and criticized the manner in which Western forces exert control over the nation. Despite the continued presence of secular voices such as Saadawi in social discussions, it is evident that a significant phenomenon is occurring today: the division of the Egyptian feminist movement. This can be attributed to the emergence of a fresh batch that has a greater inclined towards convictions related to religion.

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