

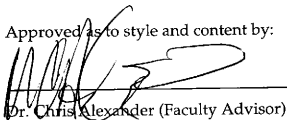
The Role of Women in the Fight for Egyptian Independence

By
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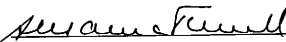
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Abstract

The Role of Women in the Fight for Egyptian Independence

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Egypt achieved independence from Britain as a result of the Egyptian Revolution (1919-1923). During this revolution, the Egyptian nationalist movement was formally established by the Wafd party, a congress type of political organization that traditionally has received the credit for the success of the Egyptian nationalistic cause. However, at the end of 1921 the leaders of the male leaders of the Wafd were exiled by the British government, leaving the Wafdist Women's Central Committee (WWCC) headed by Huda Sharawi in command of the battle for Independence. This organization became a powerful, organized group involved in economic boycotts, public demonstrations, and the supplying of information to Wafd exiles. These women also kept up morale, passed political resolutions, served as liaisons between the British officials and the exiles, and maintained a stream of political protests until March 1923. This study argues that by using the very spaces to which they were confined, the harem and religious places of worship, the women of the WWCC greatly contributed to the success of Egyptian nationalist activity. Using archival data and interviews, my paper uncovers the accomplishments of these seldom recognized, revolutionary women who mobilized the Egyptian nationalist cause against Western domination in the absence of the established male leadership and who then were forgotten quickly by the very government they helped to found. I conclude that the traditional view that the Wafd was responsible for the success of nationalist activity during the fight for Egyptian independence is inadequate for it overlooks the tremendous contributions of the WWCC and Egyptian women.

The Role of Women in the Fight for Egyptian Independence

Egypt achieved independence from Britain as a result of the Egyptian Revolution (1919-1923). For some Egyptians, independence encompassed ideas of modernization, liberalization, and secularization. For others, independence offered the opportunity to resolidify traditional Egyptian and Islamic values and practices in the absence of Western interference. As a product of the alliance between these two visions, Egypt's nationalist movement emerged.

One of the most important but most overlooked constituencies in the nationalist alliance was Egypt's feminist movement. Traditionally, scholars argue that "women's revolutionary activism arises mostly out of their roles as wives, mothers, and providers of food and services."¹ Also, "women are rarely among the leaders of revolutionary movements, but are often the wives, sisters, mothers, and lovers of the male leaders."² This paper, however, challenges this tradition and argues that Egyptian women greatly contributed to the nationalist cause not only through their established roles in the home but through political and economic spheres as well. Through the examination of these roles, one is able to bridge the gap between the national and social movements of the time as well as call attention to the accomplishments of revolutionary, seldom

¹ Berkin, C. R. and C. M. Lovett, eds., Women, War, and Revolution. (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1979). As quoted in Soha Abdel Kader, Egyptian Women in a Changing Society, 1899-1987. (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1987) 76.

recognized women during the fight for Egyptian independence.

² Soha Abdel Kader, Egyptian Women in a Changing Society, 1899-1987. (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1987) 76.

Chapter 1

British Colonialism and the Advent of Egyptian Nationalism

In order to fully understand the extent of women's participation in nationalist activities from 1919 to 1924, it is necessary to first discuss the nature of European colonialism and the origins of nationalism in Egyptian society.

The nineteenth century was a time of great transformation and modernization in the "non-Western" world under European colonial rule.³ During this period, Europe was becoming increasingly expansionistic. The non-Western countries attempted to adopt Western institutions of government and economics with the hopes of maintaining their independence. These countries were not viewed by Europeans as simply different, but in some ways barbaric, making it a duty of Europeans to civilize these areas. However, most countries were unsuccessful in rapidly implementing new systems and subsequently came under European control as a result of European imperialism.⁴ It was under this colonial rule that many countries were introduced to and then molded by the ways of the West.

³ Robert L. Tignor, *Modernization and British Colonial Rule in Egypt, 1882-1914*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1966) 3.

⁴ Tignor 3.

As an example of this type of colonialism, "The British occupation of Egypt in 1882 came about through the danger to foreigners and minorities as a result of the 1882 revolution, and because of the disastrous state to which Egypt was reduced by the intrigues of European adventurers and the disasters of the Arabi period."⁵ It was essentially an easy target offering imperialistic opportunities for whomever was up to the challenge, and Britain seized this opportunity. However, Egypt was not technically a colony of Britain until the First World War. Instead, the British administrators at the time "wished to create in Egypt conditions which would enable them to withdraw without jeopardizing British strategic interests."⁶ Therefore, the British personnel stationed in Egypt were under the direction of the British Foreign Office instead of the British Colonial Office and were under strict orders to leave intact the Egyptian administrative infrastructure, though it was monitored through their roles as advisors and inspectors.

In the early years of the occupation, the British desire for an informal empire was quite evident. In fact, once the British gained full control over what was shared with the French prior to 1882, they did not choose to extend their power at all. Specifically, the British strategic interests were focused on the Nile and Egypt's geographic location with proximity to the Middle East, access to valuable waterways, and boundaries to the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the British wished to establish their presence in the region and assert claims over

⁵ Jean and Simone Lacouture, Egypt in Transition. (New York: Criterion Books Inc., 1958) 78.

their strategic interests without the energy and responsibility of fully co-opting an entire nation. Concentration was focused on the Ministries of Finance and Public Works, allowing the other Egyptian ministries to carry on without any interference. The British government appointed Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer, as Consul-General to this process. Lord Cromer essentially ruled Egypt from 1882 to 1907. According to Tignor, "the governmental mechanism in Egypt rested upon a delicate balance of powers – the willingness of the Egyptians to permit the British to exercise predominant influence in important branches in the administration, in return for Egyptian control over other branches."⁷

The policy of establishing Egypt as an informal empire, however, was short lived. Growing more and more disillusioned with the strength of the Ottoman Empire and fearing a European scramble for power in the event of its dissolution, the British began to see Egypt of an even greater strategic importance.⁸ In 1892, the British expanded its influence in the Ministries of Justice and Interior, and in 1894 established tight controls over the Ministry of War. Between 1892 and 1914, Britain steadily expanded their influence over the entirety of the Egyptian administrative system, and British personnel grew dramatically. It was this expansion of British control that sparked the initial signs of nationalist activity.

⁶ Tignor 391.

⁷ Tignor 147.

⁸ Tignor 392.

Nationalism of this period originated with the Egyptian bureaucrats who were desperately trying to keep hold of their positions which were quickly being usurped by growing British control. Confrontations between these Egyptians and British officials caused the British to implement autocratic methods more frequently in order to maintain their position and resulted in the overall growth of British control, now more open and pervasive in nature.⁹

Nationalism, in its early stages, was not a mass movement. Tignor describes it as "largely an emotional effusion, confined to a small, educated, or semi-educated, urban class."¹⁰ Nationalistic support drew primarily from the professionals, politicians and lawyers, and university students all of whom had some knowledge of Western institutions and culture and an interest in enhancing governmental and administrative opportunities for Egyptians. Nationalistic sentiment also grew among traditional intellectual and religious leaders who saw a need for reform in the existing Egyptian government. In order to offset the influence of these urban elites, the British administration showed great concern for the rural poor, who received better treatment under Cromer and Kitchner than by any rulers before or after them.¹¹ Overall, the nationalists were among the wealthiest in Egyptian society, many of whom had land interests and all with a commitment to the preservation of features of the existing class system.¹²

⁹ Tignor 147.

¹⁰ Tignor 149.

¹¹ Lacouture 79.

¹² Tignor 150.

The early nationalist program emphasized reform. They supported programs which would make education available to a larger portion of the population and open the bureaucracy and army more thoroughly to Egyptians. In addition, nationalists sought to limit the economic and political power of the old aristocracy yet preserve the existing class structure, for they were by no means socialists. Their social attitudes were far more conservative than their political agendas.¹³ However, there was no consensus on what type of government would best facilitate these reforms. In the secular camp, there were supporters of a constitutional monarchy, a parliamentary system, and of a republic.¹⁴ The religious leaders also disputed over recreating Egypt along Islamic lines or going beyond and creating closer ties with the Ottoman Empire, fulfilling the Pan-Islamic dream.¹⁵ There was also widespread disagreement among nationalists over mechanisms of achieving independence. Moderate nationalists believed England would grant independence if Egyptians cooperated with British authorities and verified their ability to govern themselves.¹⁶ Others sought the support of British anti-imperialists by denouncing British colonialism in Egypt. Still more looked to foreign powers such as France and Turkey for assistance.¹⁷ Though disagreement existed among nationalist leaders as to how to achieve independence and what type of new government to establish, for the moment, if only in their opposition to British

¹³ Tignor 150.

¹⁴ Tignor 151.

¹⁵ Tom Little, *Modern Egypt*. (New York: Praeger Inc., 1967) 60.

¹⁶ Little 62.

rule, they were united. As far as the Egyptians were concerned, Lord Cromer had successfully restored their country in a material sense and there was nothing more he could do for them but to now restore the country to the people.¹⁸ The nationalist demands included: the removal of the capitulatory privileges; the evacuation of the British; the possession of the Sudan; the possession of the Suez Canal Company.¹⁹

The nationalist movement appealed to Egyptian society on two different levels. First, it was built on the secular, nationalist slogan "*Misr lil-Misriyin*" or "Egypt for the Egyptians."²⁰ Second, religious leaders called on the Muslim people to combat the Christian aggressors and cried out against the decline of religious institutions and faith due to increasing European influence.²¹ By creating a dualistic approach, the nationalists were able to converge into one united movement and appeal to the general population through both avenues. Though nationalists did not call for demonstrations and violence at this point in time, these appeals were circulated through the press which attacked the British, criticized Egyptians who were thought to be cooperating with the British, and praised the loyal citizens who stood up to British officials.²² Arabic newspapers and journals continued to gain prominence in Egyptian society through the turn of the century by expressing nationalistic ideas and also serving an outlet of

¹⁷ Tignor 150.

¹⁸ Little 62.

¹⁹ Little 62.

²⁰ Tignor 149.

²¹ Tignor 149.

²² Tignor 149.

familiarization with Western sentiments to educated Egyptians.²³ Lord Cromer did not curb the Egyptian press because he saw it as "a useful safety valve for nationalist feelings."²⁴

The British were successful in controlling the first stirrings of nationalistic activity during the political crises of the late nineteenth century. According to Tignor, "the British did not associate with them, did not listen to them, and for a long period of time did not take nationalism seriously, regarding it with a mixture of tolerance and contempt."²⁵ Consul-General Cromer did not even mention nationalism in his annual reports until after the turn of the century.²⁶ This disregard for the nationalist movement is possibly a result of the British being misinformed. Their direct contacts with the population were very limited, and their understanding of its workings had not been fully developed.²⁷ Essentially, Cromer was removed from Egyptian society and relied on only a few advisers for information regarding the attitudes of the people.

Things began to change shortly after the turn of the century. In the early 1900's, Cromer began to show some concern for the movement, and these concerns proved to be warranted with the nationalist disturbances in 1906.

The first disturbance in 1906 became known as the Akaba crisis. The Egyptian government and the Ottoman Empire engaged in a dispute over the

²³ Tignor 249.

²⁴ J. C. B. Richmond, Egypt 1798-1952: Her Advance Towards a Modern Identity. (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1977) 162.

²⁵ Tignor 271.

²⁶ Tignor 271.

²⁷ Tignor 271.

Egyptian boundary in the Sinai peninsula. The Turks asserted a claim to part of this territory because it was needed to complete a railway from Hijaz to Medina while the British upheld the Egyptian claim to the territory because they wanted to keep Ottoman influence as far as possible from the Suez canal. Though the British felt as if they were also acting in Egypt's best interest, nationalist papers and politicians supported the Turks and launched scathing attacks on the British. They described British actions as "undermining the prestige of Islam by humiliating the Sultan," a view which the British did not see as nationalism, but Pan-Islamism in disguise.²⁸ The nationalists clearly sided with the Turks in an effort to further annoy the British administration, even if it meant giving up their boundary claims.

The second disturbance of 1906, which proved to be even more controversial, came to be known as the Dinshawai incident. While a regiment of the British army was marching through lower Egypt to Alexandria, the soldiers made camp near the village of Dinshawai and set off to shoot pigeons, a popular sport among the British in Egypt. The soldiers were under the impression that the villagers, who thought of pigeons as their own domesticated animals, had been notified by the village leader of their intentions. The village leader, however, failed to notify the villagers who became alarmed and approached the soldiers. In the ensuing of this commotion, a peasant woman was shot and wounded accidentally by a soldier. The villagers began to attack and beat the

²⁸ Tignor 278.

soldiers who disarmed themselves. One of the soldiers managed to break away and run for help but died before reaching the camp. Upon hearing the news of this incident, Lord Cromer formed a military tribunal to try the case. The court sentenced four men to death by hanging, two men to life in prison, and fourteen men to varying prison terms. The trial made it clear that the British were not only cracking down on crime, but also against opposition to British rule. The harshness of the punishments shocked educated Egyptians and created doubt in the minds of those who had once been supporters of the British occupation. Nationalist leader Mustafa Kamil dubbed the Dinshawai incident as one of the most decisive occurrences in the nationalist movement, and within a year of the sentencing the first Egyptian political parties were founded.²⁹

The formation of Egyptian political parties signaled a new level of nationalist organization. The most notable parties included the *Ummah* party (a moderate party consisting of wealthy landowners), the National party of Mustafa Kamil (a party strong in the professional and student classes and the most influential in terms of public opinion), and the Constitutional Reform party of Ali Yusuf (a court party representing the *Abbas*). Now through formally organized political structures, nationalist leaders appealed to larger audiences, refined their oratory skills, became familiar with the uses of propaganda, promoted scholarship which discussed nation-state relations, and attempted to

²⁹ Tignor 286.

provide a mechanism of unity to Egyptian society.³⁰ The political parties, however, were not without weakness. Internal divisions over personal issues and poor goal attaining techniques continued to plague the nationalist movement.

With rising international tensions in Europe and the subsequent increase of demands on the British government in response to a possible world war, it became necessary to create a less consuming British administration in Egypt. The Organic Law of 1913 created the Legislative Assembly composed of 91 members: 8 ministers, 17 members nominated by the government, and 66 elected members. The Assembly served as an advisory body to the British advisers and had the power to delay, but not reject, decisions of the British. This new “legislative” body allowed Britain to focus on the bleak European environment with the advent of World War I and yet still fulfill the Egyptian agenda. This agenda was now limited in scope with primary considerations being the maintenance of law and order in Egypt, the prevention of other foreign influence, and the protection of the Suez canal.³¹

Egypt was declared a British protectorate in 1914 with the arrival of World War I. Prior to the war, Britain had continuously asserted its intention to remain in Egypt only until the Egyptians were capable of governing themselves. However, with the Ottoman Empire’s declaration of war against the Allies, Egypt and the Suez Canal became of greater strategic importance. Britain now

³⁰ Tignor 287.

had to maintain firm control over the land, people, and resources of Egypt which was manifested in increased numbers of British army and personnel. Because of this increase of military rule and the events of the war itself, the nationalist movement was temporarily subdued by decision of the Egyptian elites. Rather, Anglo-Egyptian relations were refocused to the growing domestic problems.

Many great accomplishments in Egypt occurred through the British occupation from 1882 until World War I. Britain succeeded in creating an efficient Egyptian administration which led to the emergence of a sound fiscal policy for Egypt. This stability, along with the almost doubling of cotton production, brought economic prosperity to the country. Egyptian financiers and entrepreneurs, among them secular reformists Amad Lutifi al-Sayyid and Saad Zaghlul, began to emerge from this prosperity with both economic and political ambitions.³² Furthermore, great advances in communication and transportation mobilized the population.

Despite prosperity and technological advances achieved under British rule, the years of World War I were characterized by growing discontent among Egyptians. As a protectorate, Egypt was required to meet British military demands. These demands included men, materials, and money. As a result, peasants suffered from forced enlistment in the Labour Corps and from a forced confiscation of goods. In addition, the tax burden was increased and inflation hit the lower classes. The Legislative Assembly was adjourned throughout the

³¹ Terry 8.

War and martial law was declared. All classes of Egyptian society were effected. It is through the frustration of the entirety of the Egyptian populace caused by the demands of war that the revolution of 1919 was able to take place.

The surviving membership of the Assembly of 1914 met in late 1918 and selected seven of its members to "take all necessary steps to achieve the complete independence of Egypt by peaceful and legal means and in accordance with the principals of justice on behalf of which Great Britain and her Allies raised the banner of right and liberty in support of the liberation of peoples."³³ Lead by Saad Zaghlul, this delegation became the Wafd.

From the beginning the Wafd was able to inspire all segments of the Egyptian populace with its calls for independence. The aristocracy and the bourgeoisie were the first to rally behind the Wafd, but students, peasants, workers, religious minorities, and women were not far behind.³⁴ Egypt now possessed a somewhat sophisticated financial infrastructure including banking, foreign exchange, and the cotton market. The exclusion of educated Egyptians from these important economic areas created resentment, and the Wafdist leadership was quick in co-opting the economically frustrated.³⁵ This broad base of support was the source of its power.

In November 1918, the leadership of the Wafd was received by the High Commissioner, Sir Reginald Wingate, and at the interview called for an

³² P. J. Vatikiotis, *The Modern History of Egypt*. (New York: Praeger Inc., 1969) 239.

³³ Richmond 177.

³⁴ Terry 72.

³⁵ Terry 72.

immediate end to martial law and to the censorship of the press, both of which were a result wartime policy. They also asserted the Egyptian desire for complete independence from Britain, regarding Egypt as just as capable of independence as Serbia and Bulgaria and more capable than any Arab state likely to be created by post war peace treaties.³⁶ Wingate responded by assuring them that Britain had no intention of abandoning her responsibilities to Egypt.³⁷

Zaghlul then attempted to take the Egyptian nationalist cause abroad by forming an official delegation to travel to London or Paris. The British authorities, however, restricted any official delegation from traveling outside of Egypt. In response, the Wafd increased public agitation through organized rallies and appeals to foreign powers to present their case at the Peace Conference. By 1919, the British authorities considered the activities of the Wafd to be a threat to public security. The Wafdist pressure was creating a climate from which widespread disturbances could arise. This threat to British order made the Wafd now impossible to ignore. Under British law, martial law was still in effect and the military remained responsible for the maintenance of order. On March 8, 1919, determined to stop any further Wafdist action, military authorities arrested Zaghlul, Ismail Sidqi, Mohamed Mahmud, and Hamad Basil and exiled them to Malta.³⁸ The following day massive demonstrations and strikes in protest, encompassing all classes of society, broke out in Cairo,

³⁶ Richmond 178.

³⁷ Richmond 178.

³⁸ Vatikiotis 258.

Alexandria, and in other towns and villages throughout the country. The 1919 revolution had begun.

The violent period of the revolt was short but bloody. By the end of March about 1,000 Egyptians and 40 British had perished.³⁹ April 7 marked the end of the violent revolt. Zaghlul and his followers were freed and allowed to attend the Paris Conference, and the military suppression of the rebellion seemed to be complete. However, The Wafd experienced great frustration in Paris when the Allied Powers, most importantly the United States, gave the British Protectorate of Egypt formal recognition. Meanwhile, the British had decided that the Egyptian resistance constituted a threat to their authority and appointed General Allenby, a "strong man," to replace Wingate as High Commissioner.⁴⁰

Allenby announced on November 10, 1919 that the British government had decided to send a mission under Lord Milner in order to work out the details of a constitution, making it quite clear that the intention was to "preserve autonomy under British protection."⁴¹ When the Commission arrived in December 1919, Zaghlul ordered a boycott of the mission, believing it to be a British attempt to incorporate Egypt into the British Empire. This boycott was effective in that the High Commissioner received protests from every section of society.⁴² Riots continued, and many were killed. After three weeks, Milner

³⁹ Richmond 181.

⁴⁰ Richmond 181.

⁴¹ Little 75.

⁴² Little 75.

realized that the people were united behind the Wafd and that the best way to quell the uprising was to discard the "Protectorate" label with the hopes that Egyptians would agree on the actual substance of British demands.⁴³ On December 19, the Commission issued a declaration stating that its purpose was to reconcile "the aspirations of the Egyptian people with the special interests which Great Britain has in Egypt and with the maintenance of the legitimate rights of all foreign residents in the country."⁴⁴ The Wafd response was that "complete independence" was not negotiable but that British special interests would be acceptable to debate.⁴⁵

The commission, which became known as the Milner Mission, left Egypt in March of 1920. Negotiations, however, continued in London between Adly Yeken Pasha, the new Egyptian Prime Minister, and British officials, with the British well aware that an agreement would not be successful without the support of the Wafd. In June 1920, Zaghul entered into negotiations with the Milner Mission in London, and a memorandum was drafted outlining the essential points necessary for a treaty between Britain and an independent Egypt. Britain was now willing to consider a treaty arrangement with an independent Egypt so long as Britain continued to oversee basic defense, administration insofar as it affected foreigners, a measure of control over the Egyptian legislature, and advisers to the Ministries of Justice and Finance.

⁴³ Richmond 183.

⁴⁴ Richmond 183.

⁴⁵ Richmond 183.

Zaghlul, fearing a negotiated treaty between Britain and Egyptian Government Ministries lead by Adly, rejected the Memorandum.⁴⁶ This memorandum split the Egyptian delegation. Adly and the “moderates” felt nothing better could be achieved while Zaghlul and the “extremists” viewed the memorandum as a continuance the Protectorate in disguise.⁴⁷

The Report of the Mission was published in February, 1921. It recommended that the Protectorate status was no longer satisfactory and included instructions from Allenby for the Egyptian government to send a delegation to London in order to come up with a substitute relationship. Upon this news, the nationalist struggle in Egypt again became a political power fight between Zaghlul and the Wafd and the established Egyptian Government lead by Adly Yeken over who would participate in the negotiations.⁴⁸ With the approval of Zaghlul, Adly formed a new government in March 1921, and then in May announced the formation of an official delegation that would negotiate a treaty in London. The support of Zaghlul, the obvious popular leader, was needed in order for any agreement to be successful, and Zaghlul refused to compromise even if Adly’s delegation felt that it was necessary. When the delegation left for London in July 1921, Zaghlul remained behind and continued his political activity with the hopes of undermining Adly’s delegation and creating more support for himself and the Wafd. Allenby, aware of the situation

⁴⁶ Vatikiotis 262.

⁴⁷ Richmond 184.

⁴⁸ Vatikiotis 262.

and in an attempt to strengthen the chances of the delegation, exiled Zaghlul to Aden and then to the Seychelles in December 1921.⁴⁹ When Wafd leaders Sinut Hanna, Fath Allah, and 'Atif Barakat, Nahhas, and Makram 'Ubayd still refused to halt their political activity, they too were deported. A sudden widespread wave of Wafd arrests and exiles followed, leaving the nationalist movement without its male leadership and creating the opportunity for women to take center stage.

⁴⁹ Vatikiotis 263.

Chapter 2

The Emergence of Feminist Nationalism

The consequences of British colonialism and the events during the first years of the Revolution certainly impacted the lives and roles of Egyptian women and therefore shaped the emergence of the women's movement in Egypt and the subsequent contributions of women to the nationalist cause. In order to fully understand the extent of this impact, it is first necessary to explore the evolution of Egyptian women in the context of Egyptian society during this period.

Perhaps the most visible group of women in nineteenth century Egypt were the hareem, or harem, women. The word *hareem* is derived from the Arabic word *harem*, meaning "sanctuary" or "holy place," in addition to "the forbidden."⁵⁰ This twofold definition gave rise to the harem, which "primarily means the separate quarters for women within the household, or the women themselves and their children."⁵¹ Though traditionally associated with the concubinage and polygamy in the royal harem of the Ottoman Empire, the Egyptian harem, whether in the Mohammad Ali royal Turkish family, among wealthy Turks living in Egypt, or among wealthy Egyptians, was only a mere

⁵⁰ Kader 18.

⁵¹ Kader 18.

“miniature imitation” of its Ottoman inspiration.⁵² However, with the advent of the British and the abolition of the slave trade, which supplied concubines and flourished in the marketplace throughout the nineteenth century, the Egyptian harem lost most of its Turkish character.⁵³ Yet, most Egyptian upper-class women continued to lead a veiled and isolated lifestyle.

Beginning with the British occupation in 1882, the number of Europeans in Egypt dramatically increased, specifically in concentrated, urban areas. This increase of European influence was manifested in dramatic increases in secular education, now rising in status compared to the previously esteemed religious education. With the expansion of the British agenda and the growing demand for government jobs, the men of Egypt embraced secular education as an opportunity for employment. Awareness regarding the necessity of secular education for women increased, but opportunities for women remained quite limited.

Qasim Amin, dubbed the “Liberator of Egyptian Women,” exemplified through his works the change in social thought and ideas of secularization of this time period. Amin sharply criticized the harem lifestyle in his controversial book, The Emancipation of Women, published in 1899. With a Western education and experiences with European women, Amin recognized the effects of the harem. In the words of Amin:

⁵² Kader 18.

⁵³ Kader 21.

Women have been almost totally effaced by men. They have no place in the universe except the hidden corners of homes...where men use them for their sexual pleasures at will and then discard them in the streets, if they so desire. Freedom for men is countered by enslavement for women; education for men is countered by ignorance for women. Men develop their rationality and mental faculties, leaving for women only idiocy and retardation.

It is a sign of the contempt in which men hold women that they fill their homes with concubines...and several wives from which they choose to satisfy their lust.

It is a sign of the contempt in which men hold women that they divorce them for no reason.

It is a sign of the contempt in which men hold women that they eat alone, while their wives, sisters, daughters eat only their remains.

It is a sign of the contempt in which men hold women that they pride themselves that their women never leave their homes except for their graves!

It is a sign of the contempt in which men hold women that they exclude them from public affairs and from work related to this sphere. Women do not have a say even in their own affairs; they have no intellect, no taste for the arts, no role in public life, no role in religious life; no feelings of patriotism; no feelings.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Qasim Amin, The Emancipation of Women. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1970) 38-39, as quoted in Kader p. 37.

Amin also insisted that “the real reason for the corruption and backwardness of the whole of the Egyptian society is really the abysmal ignorance of its women.”⁵⁵ In addition, regarding the health conditions of women, Amin comments:

We are all aware that many women have lost their health in this degraded existence and in this life imprisonment, and that they live weak in body and soul. Most of our women are obese and anemic. They are born and immediately afterwards their bodies shrink and shrivel, appearing old in the prime of life. All this is because men fear for their honor.⁵⁶

Though Amin’s ideas and assertions were certainly bold, he never suggested doing away with Sharia as a source for personal status and family law in Egypt. This code defined “marriage as a contract that allows a man to own a woman or several women despite any objection the wife might make,” provided the husband with the right of obedience which implied the right of the husband to keep his wife in the marital abode, and declared the husband’s unilateral right to divorce whenever he wished.⁵⁷ In this area Amin preferred a more cautious approach of reinterpretation. It is important to note that Amin saw the emancipation of women not as an end itself, but as a means to the independence of his country. If Egypt was to progress, it could only do so by removing the educational, health, and economic constraints imposed on its female population.

⁵⁵ Kader 37.

⁵⁶ Amin 57.

His ideas garnered opposition from every conservative quarter, and at the end of the 19th century the lives of Egyptian women essentially remained prescribed by religion.

Historians have offered several explanations for the emergence of feminist movements: changes in family structure due to industrialization, variations in demographic patterns, changes in class structure, and contradictions between the ideology of women's roles and their actual positions in society.⁵⁸ However, the emergence of Egyptian feminism was not a result of categorical catalysts but rather due to political factors, specifically British colonialism.⁵⁹ The introduction of Western society to the larger cities troubled the established social balance and disturbed the traditional social strata by "culturally alienating" some of the native upper class from the rest of society.⁶⁰ Before the arrival of the British, extreme economic inequalities existed throughout the classes creating great differences between rich and poor. However, the Europeans introduced a new prestige to the native upper class who then began to imitate the West not only by adopting new technology but also through the acceptance of specific Western attitudes and morality.⁶¹ The upper class came to view the lower classes as primitive and backward, increasing the already huge class gap. In addition, the upper class adopted attitudes fostering the relaxation of religious traditions and the redistribution of roles within the nuclear family, including a more egalitarian

⁵⁷ Kader 44.

⁵⁸ Kader 50.

⁵⁹ Kader 50.

⁶⁰ Kader 69.

role between husband and wife within a tightly knit family system.⁶² Though the upper class women remained confined to their homes in a harem lifestyle, they began to experience progress within their tiny realm. These changes fostered the first ideas of Egyptian feminism which were felt strongly among the upper class and substantially among the middle class, but virtually not at all among the peasant class. Therefore, the first Egyptian feminists were educated, urban, upper class women effected by the Westernization of society introduced by the British.

In addition to representing changing attitudes among the upper class as influenced by the British, Egyptian feminism was viewed by most Egyptians as a response to the British occupation. In its earliest phases, Egyptian feminism was linked closely to the Islamic Reform Movement, both considered expressions of Egyptian nationalism in the midst of Western domination. Islamic reformer Shaikh Abdu made tremendous efforts to reinterpret Islam and Islamic tradition in a manner more compatible with modern times, especially in the area of women. He asserted a growing necessity for the training and education of girls to be equal to that of boys and for reform in the existing customs and social conditions affecting the lives of Muslim women in order for them to be raised to "the level originally contemplated in the spirit and the religion of Islam."⁶³

⁶¹ Kader 70.

⁶² Kader 70.

⁶³ Kader 53-54.

The increasing awareness of Egyptian feminism in the early twentieth century was aided through women's expression of feminism in books and articles published by the mainstream press which was relatively unregulated by the British. This literature reached large audiences of both men and women as opposed to the limited circulation of women's journals. Nabawiyah Musa in *The Woman and Work*, and Bahithat al-Badiyah in *Feminist Pieces*, were adamant advocates for education and work for women. They argued that gender and sexuality were both socially defined. Their assertions paved the way for the final breakdown of the female domestic seclusion argument and opened the door for the assertion of gender equality and equal treatment.⁶⁴ Through speeches and published articles and books, Egyptian feminists made their cause known.

It is unclear why Huda and other feminists wholeheartedly believed that women's liberation lied within Egyptian nationalism and more specifically with the Wafd when their actual progress began under European colonial rule. Nationalism, however, did provide the women a vehicle to expand their social roles out of the home and into the street. Behavior which would not have been tolerated absent of nationalism was encouraged and praised. Though the Wafd made no concrete guarantees regarding the status of women, Wafd leaders did encourage the formation and activities of the WWCC. Zaghluul even reported in

⁶⁴ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1995) 66.

his diary discussions with Wafd leaders concerning the improvement of the status of women.⁶⁵

The first public vocalization of feminist demands occurred in 1911 at a nationalist forum, the meeting of Muslim nationalist men at the Egyptian National Congress in Heliopolis. Prevented by tradition from attending male gatherings, Bahithat al-Badiyah sent a set of demands from half of the nation. According to Badran, "In the voice of a nationalist feminist she confronted British colonialists and at the same time addressed the Egyptian patriarchal system."⁶⁶ The demands included: women must have access to all educational opportunities; women must be able to take up new occupations and enter the professional realm; women must regain their right to congregational worship in mosques; changes must occur in the personal status code, especially relating to marriage and divorce, in order to achieve needed family reform.⁶⁷ Though the demands produced little if no tangible results, Egyptian feminism in the form of nationalism grew.

In 1918 Bahithat al-Badiyah died suddenly at the age of thirty-two. Though her premature death was certainly a tragedy, it clearly inspired her companions. In an attempt to carry on al-Badiyah's mission, Huda Sha'rawi, at the age of forty, unleashed her public voice and began her nationalist-feminist crusade.

⁶⁵ Shaarawi 126.

⁶⁶ Badran 69.

⁶⁷ Badran 69.

Upon the outbreak of the Revolution in 1919, gender roles in Egypt were suspended.⁶⁸ Historians report that Egyptian women of the lower and middle classes had participated in previous demonstrations dating back to the French conquests, but for the first time in Egyptian history harem women flooded the streets of Cairo to protest the British.⁶⁹ Social constraints were put on hold, and women were able to emerge from their quarters in the name of nationalism. Women worked for the nation in any way possible and from this point on, feminists and other women became engaged in highly visible and organized political activism.

On March 16, 1919 upper class women left their homes and assembled on the streets of Cairo in order to protest the violence and oppression against the Egyptian people by the British and the arrest of the nationalist leaders. Huda, along with three hundred veiled women, began the march on foot in front of Mrs. Ahmad Abu's house in Garden City carrying banners and flags of protest. The demonstration then proceeded down Qasr-al-Aini Street toward the home of Saad Zaghlul. Huda described the events of the day in her memoirs:

No sooner were we approaching Zaghlul's house when the 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 that the demonstration should resume. When I advanced, a British soldier stepped toward me pointing his gun, but I

⁶⁸ Badran 74.

⁶⁹ Kader 73.

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" (an English nurse shot and killed by the Germans during the first World War, who became an instant martyr). I called upon the women to follow...but at the thought of Egyptian losses sure to follow, I came to my senses and stopped still. We stood still for three hours while the sun blazed down on us...⁷⁰

Lower class women protested in a more spontaneous fashion. These women were usually found in street protests alongside their men, and it was within this context that women were sometimes fired upon and killed.⁷¹ Many were wounded and some killed while either marching in the streets or cheering on men in balconies and windows. The revolution had also spread to the countryside and provinces where women were also active. Examples include Hidayah Barakat traveling to Upper Egypt to distribute revolutionary pamphlets to teachers and Zaynab Talat, with the help of women servants, giving assistance to militants attempting to sabotage the rail line.⁷²

Women continued demonstrations throughout 1919, but the arrival of the Milner Mission fueled a fresh stream of protests. On December 9, 1919 women again flooded the streets and after circling Cairo arrived at St. Mark's Coptic Cathedral for a mass meeting. At this meeting, Egyptian women made their first

⁷⁰ Huda Shaarawi, *The Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*. (New York: The Feminist Press 1987) 113 (translated and introduced by Margot Badran).

⁷¹ Badran 76.

⁷² Badran 77.

direct protest to British authority by condemning the Milner Mission.⁷³ This was the first of many written protests and was drafted "in the name of the women of Egypt."⁷⁴ On January 20, 1920, the women met at the Cathedral once again and for the first time formed a political organization which they named Lajant al-Wafd al-Markaziyah lil-Sayyidat or the Wafdist Women's Central Committee (WWCC) with Huda Sha'rawi elected president.

The Wafdist women were mainly from large landowning families, but middle class women were represented as well. Most had participated in the 1919 protests and several were married to Wafd leaders which made the relationship between the Wafd and the WWCC very tight. Wafd secretary Fahimi commented upon the creation of the WWCC, "The renaissance of the woman in the nationalist movement is occurring in a way that augurs well for the future."⁷⁵ He also wished that the women's efforts would be long lived and expressed the Wafdist men's belief that women could play a positive role in the formation of an independent Egypt.⁷⁶ Zaghul himself noted in his diary that during a meeting among Wafdist men in London (1920), it was agreed upon to work for the integration of women into society once independence was achieved.⁷⁷

The end of 1920 was a period of tension between the Wafd and the WWCC. In October, the male Wafd leaders, who had been invited to attend

⁷³ Badran 77.

⁷⁴ Shaarawi 120.

⁷⁵ Badran 80.

⁷⁶ Badran 80.

negotiations in London, returned to Egypt with proposed terms of independence to present to the people. The proposal was read to various male groups and organizations but not to the WWCC whose members felt that they had worked together with the Wafd for Egyptian independence. The WWCC finally obtained a copy of the proposal which they found inadequate and then published their response in the press.⁷⁸ The WWCC was angered because not only had they not been contacted by the Wafd, but feminist issues were not included in the proposal. Huda explains, "We criticized the delegates from the Wafd for disregarding our rights and our very existence by neglecting to solicit our views."⁷⁹ Huda sent a letter to Zaghul expressing the disappointment of the WWCC which read:

We are surprised and shocked by the way we have been treated recently, in contrast to your previous treatment and certainly contrary to what we expect from you. You supported us when we created our Committee... What makes us all the more indignant is that by disregarding us the Wafd has caused foreigners to disparage the renaissance of women. They claim that our participation in the nationalist movement was merely a ploy to dupe civilized nations into believing in the advancement of Egypt and its ability to govern itself... At this moment when the future of Egypt is about to be decided, it is unjust that the

⁷⁷ Badran 86.

⁷⁸ Shaarawi 122.

⁷⁹ Shaarawi 122.

Wafd, which stands for the rights of Egypt and struggles for its liberation, should deny half the nation its role in that liberation.

The WWCC received a formal apology from Zaghlul. This incident marked the first significant dispute between the WWCC and the Wafd.

The WWCC was aware of Zaghlul's disagreement with Adly Yeken, the Egyptian Prime Minister at the time. Upon receiving the news that Zaghlul had planned demonstrations against Adli's delegation, Huda as well as other WWCC leaders went to his house in an attempt to dissuade him, feeling that such behavior would display national disunity. Though the WWCC would have most likely agreed with Zaghlul in finding Adly's proposal compromising to nationalist goals, the WWCC stressed the importance of nationalistic unity. Zaghlul, backed by Wafd membership, refused the request of the WWCC and continued with numerous planned demonstrations, ultimately resulting in his exile. Widespread arrests of nationalist leaders followed, resulting in the exile of the Wafd leadership. In their absence, nationalist women and the WWCC lead by Sha'rawi took control of the nationalist agenda and with it, center stage of the fight for Egyptian independence.

Chapter 3

Women In Command of the Battle for Independence

At the end of 1921 with the Wafd leadership deported to the Seychelles, the WWCC lead by Huda Sha'rawi seized control of the nationalist movement, uncontested by other nationalist factions, and entered a period of intense activity. Though differences had emerged between the Zaghlul, leader of the Wafd, and the WWCC, the Wafdist women quickly responded to his exile. Huda, representing the WWCC, sent a letter to British High Commissioner Allenby stating:

You cannot stifle the voice of a nation by stifling the voice of the person who speaks for the nation. There are millions who will speak out for the right to liberty and will protest injustice. We shall always protest vehemently the arbitrary and tyrannical measures which you take against us exciting the wrath of the people.⁸⁰

This letter marked the first display of WWCC initiative in the absence of the Wafd leadership.

⁸⁰ Huda Shaarawi to Allenby, high commissioner, Dec. 25, 1921, "Political Views and Activities of Egyptian Women," Consular and Embassy Archives File 14083, FO 141, Box 511, as quoted in Badran p. 83.

The women of the WWCC now began an agenda of new militant tactics. In a mass meeting held at Sha'rawi's home on January 20, 1922, the women signed a petition calling for an end to martial law, the abolition of the Protectorate, and opposing the formation of an Egyptian cabinet while the Wafd leadership was in exile.⁸¹ In addition, they also called for a sweeping economic boycott against the British. This petition, which was to be sent to the British government and circulated to the British press, was sealed with a "religious" oath:

We swear by God, the merciful and omnipotent, and all of his bountiful messengers and the souls of our holy martyrs and the will of our devout heroes, to boycott the British aggressor, to deny to ourselves and to the people close to us everything that those usurpers have manufactured. By God, their shops are forbidden to us. By God, all that is connected to them is forbidden to us. God is our witness, and we steadfastly swear by him. May his curse be upon those who betray their oath. We implore you, God, to bring back to us our honest Sa'd, safely and in good health, for his sake and the sake of his devoted compatriots, and to bring victory to Egypt and defeat to her deceitful enemies.⁸²

The economic boycott organized by the WWCC was to be implemented by several means, the first target being British banks. The women would withdraw all of their money from the British banks and then transfer their business to Bank Misr, the new Egyptian bank. To further the extent of their

⁸¹ Shaarawi 125.

attack on the British bank, the WWCC formed a special committee which sold shares for the national bank and set a national example by being among the first Egyptians to purchase such shares.⁸³ The national bank campaign initiated by the WWCC proved to be effective among both wealthy men and women which therefore greatly impacted the statuses of the respective banks.

The economic boycott also targeted British goods and services. The WWCC refused to purchase British goods and to patronize British doctors, dentists, and pharmacists and encouraged other women to do so as well. According to Islamic law, women inherit money and property in their own name and in principle may spend it as they wish.⁸⁴ This ability of women added to the boycott campaign in targeting the general population, for women, responsible for running households and families, contributed greatly to Egyptian consumption. The WWCC formed the women's boycott committee which was able to reach middle-class women in Cairo and provincial towns through links with newly formed women's associations. The Wafd commended the women's economic boycott in a letter saying, "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."⁸⁵

In addition to the implementation of the economic boycott, the WWCC worked with newly formed women's associations, though not explicitly

⁸² Oath published in *Majmu'at al-Khutah*, p. 10, as quoted in Badran p. 83.

⁸³ Badran 83.

⁸⁴ Shaarawi 125.

⁸⁵ Shaarawi 126.

nationalist, and established female communication networks in an effort to spread their cause beyond the urban upper-class and broaden the base of support for the Wafd. Members of the WWCC including Huda Sha'rawi, Regina Khayyat, Ester Fahmi Wissa, and Fikriyah Husni were active in the New Women Society (al-Jam'iyat al-Mar'ah al-Jadidah) which set up a workshop to give poor girls in the Munirah district of Cairo a means to earn money.⁸⁶ The WWCC also aligned themselves with the Society of the Renaissance of the Egyptian Woman (Jam'iyat Nahdat al-Sayyidat al-Misriyat) and the Society of Mothers of the Future (Jam'iyat Ummuhat al-Mustaqbal), both of which were founded by middle-class women solidifying the upper-class to middle-class relationship.⁸⁷ The WWCC was also able to establish a relationship with women's societies in provincial towns. Through encouraging the local wives and daughters, WWCC member Fikriyah Husni helped in the formation of the Women's Union of Minyah in Upper Egypt.⁸⁸ In addition, Hayat Thabit aided in the establishment of the Women's Union of Asyut, and Khadijah 'Abd al-Salam lead the Society of Union and Progress in Tanta and the Delta regions.⁸⁹

The WWCC called a meeting on February 3, 1922 in response to the British announcement of the Curzon Plan which declared a modified Egyptian independence. Considering this plan to be unacceptable to the nationalist agenda, the WWCC demanded that the Egyptian political leaders, now lead by

⁸⁶ Badran 81.

⁸⁷ Badran 81.

⁸⁸ Letter from Fikriyah Husni to Huda Shaarawi, April 26, 1922, as reported by Badran p. 81.

⁸⁹ Badran 81.

politician 'Abd al-Khaliq Tharwat, reject the proposal. The WWCC again opposed the formation of any cabinet while the Wafd leaders remained in exile, called for an end to press censorship and martial law, and demanded the release of all political prisoners.⁹⁰ According to Badran, "the minutes of this meeting found their way to the British, who diligently began to monitor women's nationalist activities."⁹¹ Women continued to use their private space, the harem and places of religious worship, to organize their nationalist agendas, for official meetings were banned. However, even if just to a small extent, British intelligence somehow penetrated this realm.⁹²

On February 28, 1922 the British issued a unilateral proposal of Egyptian independence. This proposal was conditional upon the Four Reserve Points which allowed for a continued presence of British troops in Egypt, protected British foreign interests in Egypt, authorized the British to maintain security in imperial communications, and removed the Sudan from Egyptian sovereignty. Despite objections from the Wafd and the WWCC, the government led by Tharwat accepted the offer and formed a government on March 1, 1922.

Outraged at "the mere verbal independence of Egypt," Huda responded: We women consider it merely a move to paralyze our national movement and mute our passions. The burden of proof is not upon us. The leader of our national renaissance, Saad Zaghlul Pasha, and other members of the Wafd, are suffering the pain of exile in the Seychelles.

⁹⁰ Badran 84.

⁹¹ Badran 84.

Their only guilt was to have demanded independence... Censorship of the press gags our mouths. The prisons are filled with our best men. Special laws are enacted to prevent us from congregating. All this persists despite the conditions Tharwat Pasha laid down for forming a new government, which included the abolition of martial law and of the restrictions upon the freedom of the press and freedom of speech, the return of those in exile, and the freeing of those detained at home...

Let us aim it (the economic boycott) again at the face of our enemy and swear not to let it drop until Saad returns and we achieve all of our demands. Long live the boycott! Long live unity! Long live Saad and his companions! Long live total independence! Long live the will of Egyptian women!⁹³

For the next year, the WWCC not only maintained but expanded its economic boycott through their previously established means in protest of Tharwat's quasi-independent government.

"It is hard to exaggerate the courage women displayed under conditions of martial law on behalf of the imprisoned nationalists."⁹⁴ Following the formation of the new Egyptian government with Tharwat as prime minister, martial law was still in effect, meetings were banned, the press and mail were censored, and arrests continued.⁹⁵ This hostile environment resulted in real dangers associated with nationalist activity. In addition to the threat of the

⁹² Shaarawi 125.

⁹³ Shaarawi 127.

⁹⁴ Badran 85.

⁹⁵ Badran 85.

British, Wafdist women were now under even closer surveillance by the newly established Egyptian government.

Despite the growing dangers of nationalistic activity, the WWCC assumed responsibility for the preservation of communication between the Wafd members abroad and the homeland throughout 1922. They maintained communication between the Wafd exiles and the Egyptian populace by promoting Wafd demands and encouraging the morale of both Wafd and the general population. The women also served as a link between the males and the British and assumed diplomatic roles in the negotiation of their timely release. Huda herself sent telegrams to the British prime minister and to British papers demanding the release of Zaghlul and the others. Furthermore, the women assumed responsibility for Wafd finances and carefully monitored the health of the Wafd leadership. Louise Majorelle Ghali, wife of Wasif Ghali who was one of many Wafd members arrested in July 1922, maintained frequent contact with Wafdist leaders detained abroad, receiving word and reporting on the prisoners conditions.⁹⁶ She maintained contact with Zaghlul and others until their release.

Zaghlul was freed on March 24, 1923, and with his return Wafdist women were optimistic about their own future. Encouraged by continued independence negotiations and by the Wafdist men themselves, their expectations for a new egalitarian Egypt grew. This agenda, however, was never addressed when the male Wafd finally came to power in 1924, and the

⁹⁶ Badran 85.

years following Egyptian independence marked a period of great disappointment and disillusionment for Egyptian women.

Aftermath

In April, 1923 a new Egyptian constitution under the government lead by Tharwat declared: "All Egyptians are equal before the law. They enjoy equally civil and political rights and are equally charged with public duties and responsibilities without distinction of race, language, or religion."⁹⁷ Though this constitution was the product of the government despised by both Wafdist male and females, it gave confidence to Egyptian women because it seemed to benefit their status. However, this confidence was destroyed three weeks later when the new government passed an electoral law which granted suffrage to men only. Again, since this law was the product of Tharwat's regime, nationalist women continued to support Wafdist demands.

After gaining an overwhelming majority in the Chamber of Deputies, the Wafd came to power in January 1924. Zaghlul then formed a new government and celebrated the victory by a grand inauguration of the Egyptian Parliament, a landmark of national achievement.⁹⁸ Women were not only left out of the new legislature but also prohibited from attending the opening ceremony except as wives of ministers or high officials.

Outraged by their exclusion in the Wafd government, the WWCC along with the Egyptian Feminist Union picketed outside the Parliament building on

⁹⁷ Shaarawi 129.

the day of its opening. The women carried banners in French and Arabic proclaiming feminist and nationalist demands. In addition, they also distributed the *Les Revendications des Dames Egyptiennes* (The Demands of Egyptian Women), a pamphlet listing 32 nationalist and feminist demands to the members of Parliament and other government officials. These demands were entirely ignored by the Wafd, causing a further separation between the Wafd and the WWCC.

An independent Egypt did not mean liberation for women. Disenchanted with the new Wafdist government, Huda Sha'rawi resigned as president of the WWCC and focused her feminist activity within the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU). A final excerpt in her memoirs reveals her disappointment:

Exceptional women appear at certain moments in history and are moved by special forces. Men view these women as supernatural beings and their deeds as miracles. They 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... Men have singled out women of outstanding merit and put them on a pedestal to avoid recognizing the capabilities of all women... Women reflected on how they might elevate their status and worth in the eyes of men. They decided that the path lay in participating with men in public affairs. When they saw the way

⁹⁸ Shaarawi 130.

blocked, women rose up to demand their liberation, claiming their social, economic, and political rights. Their leap forward was greeted with ridicule and blame, but that did not weaken their will. Their resolve led to a struggle that would have ended in war, if men had not come to acknowledge the rights of women.⁹⁹

The split with the Wafd marked the coming of age for the EFU. By 1929, it had over 250 members comprised mostly of women like Sharawi, upper-class women with immense wealth and western education. Their goal was to overcome women's "disadvantaged status" by achieving equality with men in the public and private sector. Like Qasim Amin, these women believed such advances would benefit the whole of the society, and therefore legitimized their demands.¹⁰⁰ They considered it their duty to win back the lost rights of women which included educational opportunities, changes in the personal status law, and suffrage. In the area of education, the EFU urged the government, with some success, to provide free public education to girls, and in part secured women's entry into universities.¹⁰¹ The EFU also campaigned for reforms in the personal status law while also emphasizing their commitment to Islam. This action rendered little to no success. The EFU also made numerous arguments for women's suffrage also without any success. With the death of Huda Sharawi in 1947, the EFU lost its momentum. It continued to run schools and training centers, but its activities were purely welfare in nature. For the duration of its

⁹⁹ Shaarawi 131.

¹⁰⁰ Kader 92.

existence, the EFU encountered little opposition. Centuries of customs and traditions made the need to articulate anti-feminist sentiment unnecessary.

Though women were forgotten quickly once independence was achieved, their contributions to the nationalist struggle during Egypt's fight for independence certainly should not be. Solely attributing Egyptian independence to male nationalist and Wafd leaders is inadequate, for Egyptian women greatly contributed to the political and economic agendas of the nationalist cause. During the period of the Wafd exile, Egyptian women left their roles as supporters and emerged as effective leaders of the nationalist movement. Their actions during this period challenge the traditional thought as to women's roles in revolutionary activism and offer a bridge to the gap between the national and social movements of the time.

¹⁰¹ Kader 93.

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