Mar-2011

The Other Extremists: Marxist Feminism in Egypt, 1980-2000

Hanan Hammad

The Other Extremists: Marxist Feminism in Egypt, 1980-2000

By Hanan Hammad[1]

Abstract

This article focuses on independent Marxist feminists in Egypt during the last two decades of the twentieth century.[*] I show that despite the Islamist discourses that called for women's withdrawal from public places simultaneously with the demise of state feminism, the public sphere was far from monolithic. Independent Marxist Feminists attempted to challenge the strictures of gender, and to participate with alternate discourses and activism in and through alternate media and public spaces. My goal is to shift the attention from Cairo-based politics and movements and to shed light on feminist activism in the relatively closed communities in small provincial towns.

Keywords: Marxist feminism in Egypt, Bint al-Ard, Sana' al-Misri

Introduction

Inspired by postcolonial theories on gender and alternative modernity, scholars of gender in the Middle East have focused on the limitation and demise of state feminism on the one hand and the engagement of Islamic traditions to formulate *authentic* feminism on the other hand.[2] The development of an international agenda concerning women after the World Conference on Women in Nairobi at the closure of the UN decade of women

---

[1] Hanan Hammad is an assistant professor of Middle East history at Texas Christian University. She is spending the 2010-2011 academic year as the EUME Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin fellow at Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin. She is currently writing a book tentatively entitled "*Mechanizing People: Industrialization, Sexuality and Gender in Modern Egypt*".

[*] I would like to thank Intsar Salih and Ibrahim al-Baz for providing me with a copy of Sana' al-Misri's unpublished manuscript, *Ruwwad al-tanwir wa taqadumiyya hasab al-talab* [The pioneers of enlightenment and progressiveness on demand] and to thank Iman Mersal for providing me with the early editions of the Bint al-Ard journal. I also thank Professor Mervat Hatem, all participants in the Alternative Publics in the Middle East and North Africa Workshop in the 11th Mediterranean Research Meeting of the European University Institute, Florence, in March 2010 and the participants of the PV meeting of the Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin, on January 13, 2011 for their useful comments on early drafts of this article. Of course any shortcoming is my sole responsibility.

[2] On the state, see Mervat Hatem, *The demise of Egyptian state feminism and the politics of transition, 1980-1991* (Los Angeles: Gustave.E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies, University of California, 1991) and "Political Liberalization, Gender, and the State" in *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World: Theoretical Perspectives,* ed. Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Noble (Boulder: Lynne Runnier Publishers Inc. 1995). For the Islamists, see Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) and Lara Deeb, *An enchanted modern: gender and public piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) and "'Doing Good, Like Sayyida Zaynab': Lebanese Shi'i Women's Participation in the Public Sphere," in *Religion, Social Practice, and Contested Hegemonies: Reconstructing the Public Sphere Muslim Majority Societies*, ed. Armando Salvatore and Mark Le Vine (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). An important exception dealing with secular feminism is Nadje al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender, and the State in the Middle East: the Egyptian women's movement* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

in 1985 contributed to shifting the focus onto transnational discourses and activism on women's issues.[3] Despite the important contributions of these recent trends in gender studies, the image of women's activism in the Middle East that has emerged through this scholarship is overshadowed by the state, Islamists, and transnational activism. Although the dominance of these three players is undeniable, it is misleading to assume that independent Marxist activism, which enjoyed strongholds in parts of the Middle East in the middle of the twentieth century, has become non-existent. To fill the gap in the current scholarship, this study deals with Marxist feminists in Egypt who acted independently from the state, formal political organizations, and Western funded societies in the last decades of the 20th century. These critical decades witnessed the transition from state-contained public life to the relatively open public sphere and active civil society and the flourishing of Western-funded NGOs. I show that despite the Islamist discourses that called for women's withdrawal from public places simultaneously with the demise of state feminism, the public sphere was far from monolithic.[4] Marxist Feminists were able to challenge the strictures of gender, and to participate with alternate discourses and activism in and through alternate media and public spaces.[5] My goal is also to shift the attention from Cairo-based politics and movements and to shed light on feminist activism in the relatively closed communities in small provincial towns.

This article focuses on the author and activist Sana'al-Misri (1958- 2000) and the women's group Bint al-Ard, "Daughter of the Land", during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Al-Misri's activism was in Cairo, but the Bint al-Ard Group started in the city of al-Mansura and branched off in different towns in Lower Egypt. These Marxist women patiently carved their space in a public sphere that seemed almost exclusively reserved for patriarchal anti-women and anti-secular discourses. They were totally independent from the state, foreign associations, and formal opposition groups. This position put them not only in confrontation with an authoritarian regime and its Islamists competitors, but also with leftist comrades in the opposition parties and in Western-funded organizations. I argue that the conservative discourses against women's rights since the late 1970s by both the state and the Islamists provoked extremist secular feminists to break away from the legacy of the Egyptian enlightenment of the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries. Instead of advocating women's rights of education and work in order to fulfill practical familial and societal needs within an Islamic

---

[3] See Valentine Moghadam, *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) and Valentine Moghadam and Fatima Sadiqi, *"Women's Activism and the Public Sphere: Introduction and Overview", Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* - Volume 2, Number 2, spring 2006, 1-7.

[4] Examples of this Islamist discourse during 1970s and 1980s include: Muhammad Fahmi 'Abd al-Wahab, *al-Harakat al-nisa'iyya fi al-sharq wa silatiha bil-ist'mar wa al-suhyuniyya al-alamiyya* [Feminist movements in the East and its connections with imperialism and International Zionism] (Cairo: Dar al-'Itisam, 1979), Muhammad bin Lutfi al-Sabbagh, *Tahrim al-khilwah bil-mar'ah al-ajnabiyyah wa al-ikhtilat al-mustahtir* [Banning privacy with non-relative women and irresponsible mingling] (Cairo: Dar al-'Itisam, 1980), and Nadhmi Khalil Abu al-'Ata, *Risalah ila al-ukht al-muslimah fi al-jam'ia* [A message to Muslim sisters in the university] (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nur, 1987). These books, along with other publications produced by Islamist publishing houses, were distributed for free among female students cross campuses since late 1970s.

[5] Mary P. Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in 19th Century America," and Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Boston: MIT Press, 1992), 259-288 and 109-142.

framework, those feminists based women's rights on the wider human principles of absolute gender and class equality.

The experiences of Sana' al-Misri and the group of Bint al-Ard provide excellent examples of what Salvatore and Le Vine describe as certain categories of people who, when excluded from the dominant public sphere, create alternative parallel public spheres that must be uncovered and investigated.[6] In their tireless attempts to create opportunities to penetrate the public sphere and to challenge the hegemonic anti-women discourses, Bint al-Ard worked around the irony of a public sphere based on limited accessibility and rationality and they endeavored to deploy a strategy to confront distinction and exclusion.[7] In doing so, they radicalized public places under government control, blurred the line between public and private space, and through social networks they pooled financial and artistic sources to serve their alternate media. Because this paper deals with independent Marxist feminism, it does not deal with Marxist women who were active in political parties or in Western funded organizations, such as the Progressive Women's Union that is affiliated with the Tagamu' Progressive Party.[8]

Sana' al-Misri… The Radical Individual

Sana' al-Misri started her activism as a student in Cairo University and spent a month in jail for protesting the authoritarian student bylaws and the demise of state welfare policies in the late 1970s. By that time she was already known as a radical Marxist, a distinction which directly challenged laws criminalizing communism in Egypt, though she was not known to be a member of any underground communist groups. In October 1985 she was badly injured by police forces while she was leading a protest close to the Israeli embassy in Giza in the wake of Israel's attack on the headquarters of the Palestinian Liberation Organization in Tunis. Due to her anti-state activism she was fired from her work as a journalist in the official *al-Ahram al-Iqtisadi* magazine. After winning a court case to be reinstated she nonetheless declined to return to the magazine to keep her independence from the state. She also kept herself independent from all opposition political parties, including al-Tagamu' Progressive Party, and refused to work for its newspaper, *al-Ahali*. Although she came from an upper middle class Alexandrian family, she pursued an ascetic life and lived most of her life in inexpensive female dorms in downtown Cairo. This frugality gave her independence from any establishment or institution and an ability to remain faithful to her uncompromising views. What was unique about al-Misri's experience was not only her commitment and what could be termed her individualist activism, but also the variety of ways she chose to create an alternate public sphere for her alternative discourse. She debated Islamists in their own forums, led demonstrations in the streets and public places, wrote for non-periodical magazines, published books at her own expense, and participated in theater performances. Through all these minority media, she advocated egalitarianism between men and women, the rich and the poor, Muslims and Christians. She was vocal in

---

[6] Armando Salvatore and Mark Le Vine *Religion, Social Practice, and Contested Hegemonies: Reconstructing the Public Sphere Muslim Majority Societies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 5.
[7] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere", 115.
[8] For the PWU and other secular organizations within political parties and secular activists who accepted Western fund, see Nadje al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender, and the State in the Middle East: the Egyptian women's movement* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

rejection of any "normalization" of relations between Egypt and Israel just as much as she raised doubts about Arab nationalism and rejected a theocratic state. She neither formed nor joined any sort of "formal" political or intellectual platform. She was "the extreme" on many levels. Among leftists she was a Trotskyite, among feminists she accepted only secular non-Islamic feminism, and among activists she refused any compromise with the establishment.

In a wide array of interests and activism, al-Misri published her first book, *Khalfa al-hijab*, behind the veil, in 1987 as a strong critique of the Islamist vision of women's issues. This book stemmed from a confrontation between her and the Islamists during a debate on Islam and secularism held in *Dar al-Hikma*, the stronghold of the Muslim Brotherhood, in 1986. Her blatant critiques of the lack of equal rights for women, Copts and non-Muslim minorities in political Islamist thought angered zealous Islamists so much that she had to leave the debate under the protection of several men. In her second book on the Muslim Brotherhood and the working class, she broadened the discussion to include the subjugation of working class rights.[9] In both books she argued that political Islamist forces, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, have historically been hostile to the rights of women, the working class, and non-Muslim minorities. In a chapter on "a woman, a Christian, a laborer, and a poor person," she warned the reader about what she saw as the racism and exclusivity inherent in the Islamist project.[10] She argued that only secular democracy and socialism would allow equal rights for all citizens.

Her last research project was on the Muslim conquest of Egypt in the seventh century. The work was never finished though a second volume did appear posthumously, having been prepared for publication by her widower Ibrahim al-Baz. It is difficult to accept the second volume as a complete project. Relying heavily on rarely used Coptic sources, and providing a new interpretation of medieval Islamic sources, she argued that Arab Muslims were not the benevolent conquerors and that Coptic Egyptians did not submissively welcome the invaders as described in the customary Muslim account. Providing a new reading for Islamic history is not a new project for Egyptian secularists. Taha Husayn and Husayn Haykal, among others, launched that project during the liberal experiment of the interwar period. Employing European and orientalist approaches these secularists provided a critical reading of Islamic sources. Yet, none of them went as far as al-Misri did when she depicted life in Mecca as primitive compared to civilized Egypt. Reflecting ultra-Egyptian nationalism, she described the journey of the Egyptian concubine of the Prophet Muhammad as a move from the Egyptian paradise to the Arab hell, and questioned whether Arab racism against the Coptic Marie was responsible for her premature death.[11] Along with her work on the Christian female laborers and her critique and class analysis of the Muslim Brotherhood's of Muslim capitalism, al-Misri emerges as a strong advocate of gender and social egalitarianism in the face of exclusive Muslim male dominance.[12] This work on the Muslim invasion of Egypt angered a wide range of intellectuals, namely Islamists and Arab nationalists for whom it was an attempt

---

[9] Sana' al-Misri, *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun wa al-tabaqah al-'amilah al-Misriyyah*, [The Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian Working Class] (Cairo: without a publisher, 1992).

[10] Sana' al-Misri, *Khalfa al-hijab: Mawqif al-jama'at al-Islamiyya min qadiyyat al-mar'a* [Behind the veil: The position of the Islamist groups towards women's issues] (Cairo: Sina lil-Nashr, 1987).

[11] Sana' al-Misri, *Hawamish al-fath al-'Arabi: Hikayat la-dukhul* [Footnotes of the Arab Conquest: tales of penetration] (Cairo: Sina lil-Nashr, 1996), 17- 51.

[12] See *Khalfa al-Hijab*, 67-72 and *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun wa al-tabaqah al-'amilah al-Misriyyah*, 119-149.

to undermine the Arab-Muslim roots of contemporary Egypt.[13] Meanwhile, it pleased the Copts and she was invited to give talks in churches and other Christian gatherings. Christians still celebrate this work as a rare case when a Muslim historian gives credibility to the Coptic voice.[14] She declined to accept any offers to fund her research, particularly from Egyptian Coptic émigrés abroad. Before moving the discussion to the Bint al-Ard Group, it is important to note that although the journal of the group published some of al-Misri's articles, al-Misri never joined the group and until her premature death in June 2000, she acted solely as an individual activist and intellectual.

Daughters of the Land, the Provincial Feminists

Located away from Cairo-centered politics and within the more closed provincial communities, the group of Bint al-Ard was active in the towns of al-Mansura, al-Mahalla al-Kubra and Bani Suef and some other villages in the Delta between 1982 and the late 1990s. The group is most unique in that it started in the town of al-Mansura and, although it branched off in several locations in Lower and Upper Egypt, it never tried to have a base in Cairo. This experience suggests that there is much room to explore feminist activism in Arab provincial towns. The dynamics might be different from those who act in the major capital cities. The group stemmed out of a dissenting student movement that was itself a coalition of Nasserist, Marxist, and other leftist-leaning students. The student movement focused on opposing Anwar Sadat and Husni Mubarak's policies towards the Arab-Israeli conflict, the elimination of the state's commitment to social welfare, and the socioeconomic shift towards Western capitalism that had been taking place since the 1970s. After participating in the Egyptian Committees to Support the Lebanese and the Palestinian Peoples that was formed in the wake of the Israeli invasion of Beirut and the massacres of Palestinians in the refugee camps in 1982, female student activists in al-Mansura University transformed their association into a feminist group. They developed their seasonal activities around the Arab cause into a permanent association focusing on emancipation and empowering women in Egyptian society. The name of the group *Bint al-Ard*, Daughter of the Land, was generated from the pioneering Egyptian feminist Doria Shafik's magazine *Bint al-Nil*, Daughter of the Nile.[15] It also reflects their association with their provincial, and even rural, origins and setting. Their focus on local activism governed their work and emphasized their choice to reach out to local communities and not be lured to Cairo. Although they never called their group a Marxist communist group, the founders and the core members of the group adopted Marxism. It's important to note that Egyptian law has criminalized communist activities since 1924, which might explain why the group was never open about their ideological choice. The group also aimed at establishing itself as a platform for all supporters of equal gender rights irregardless of any political ideology.

---

[13] For such critique see Fahmi Huwaidi, "Qadaruna ann na'ish"[It's our fate to live], *al-Ahram*, December 1, 1998, Op-ed section.

[14] For examples of these celebratory Coptic writings, see 'Izzat Andarawis, "al-Mu'arikhun al-Muslimun" [Muslim Historians], Encyclopedia Coptic History, http://www.coptichistory.org/p1.htm. See also Free Christian Voice Net, "'Ghzawat Rasuluallah' hall kanat fi sabil allah?" ['The Conquests of God's Messengers' was it for God's sake?], http://www.coptichistory.org/p1.htm

[15] For a comprehensive study on Doria Shafik's life and work, see Cynthia Nelson, *Doria Shafik, Egyptian Feminist: A woman apart* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1996).

The purpose of the group, as its founders laid it out, was "to develop a fresh perspective for real and comprehensive women's emancipation, to positively participate in (solving) questions of their societies (…) to bring women's questions to the forefront of the debate, to engage in a vigorous intellectual struggle against the backward values of the society that ascribe to women inferiority, limitation, inability, inactive failure, masochism, and narcissism. Consequently men are superior and should dominate and turn them (women) into a commodity that is sold and bought, into a reproduction tool, into a hand to cook and clean, and reduce her to a limited value and role."[16] The activists of Bint al-Ard pooled their financial sources and artistic, professional, and intellectual expertise to publish journals. They contributed to the mainstream and alternate media, and activated social networks to secure access to public places such as local cultural centers and the Cairo Book Fair.

The State-Islamist Alliance against Women

It is not difficult to understand why members of Bint al-Ard chose to focus their activism on women's rights and to prioritize it above the other many causes in whose essential importance they believed such as social justice, democracy, human rights, and Palestinian rights. They were middle class women with high educational levels with aspirations for promising professional careers. Although they came of age under Sadat, they experienced the free educational system as it was set up under Nasser's regime. Nasser's regime emphasized, at least theoretically, women's equal rights for education and work. They grew up in urban families in which their mothers never witnessed discursive pressure to wear the head covering, the hijab, and aside from socially expected modesty they never had to conform to any Islamic dress code. Intellectually, secularism formed their world views, socialism and egalitarianism between men and women across social classes informed their political activism in the student and nationalist movements. While they were finishing their education, they realized that the social and professional life they had expected and aspired to was vanishing under the continuing and blunt anti-women discourses of the late 1970s and 1980s. They witnessed the elimination of state feminism under Sadat's and Mubarak's regimes. With the retreat of the state as a social and economic agent of change, many official commitments to gender equality were either ignored or abandoned both inside and outside the state sector. The ideological and economic vacuum was filled by local entrepreneurs and international capitalist enterprises that were hostile to the quest for economic and social equality for women.[17]

One of the issues that the state and the Islamists had agreed on since the mid 1970s was the call for women's withdrawal from the workplace. They considered women devoting themselves only to domestic chores essential to solve many social problems, unemployment in particular.[18] In 1960, men's unemployment rate was 1.9 percent and women's unemployment rate was 5.8 percent. In 1976, two years after Sadat introduced his economic liberalization policies, *infitah*, total unemployment shot up to 7.7 percent, 5.5 percent for men and 29.8 percent for women. By 1986, the unemployment rates

---

[16] *Bint al-Ard*, 1, June 1984, 4.

[17] Mervat F. Hatem "Economic and political liberation in Egypt and the demise of state feminism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24 (1992), 231-251.

[18] The phrase "the return of women to the home" has been used as a synonym for women's withdrawal from the workplace in this discourse.

doubled to 14.7 percent with 10 percent for men and 40.7 percent for women.[19] The government's programs of economic restructuring and readjustment since the early 1990s worsened women's opportunities for jobs. The Islamists' call for women's withdrawal from work and public space was an ideological stand, and the state discerned that endorsing that call was a way to blame women for the high rate of unemployment. It was easy for the state and the Islamists to accuse working women of taking work opportunities from men, overloading the transportation system and causing a moral decline. Secular and religious opponents of women's employment stressed the adverse effects that it had on the family and children. There was a wave of movies and TV shows and press articles carrying the message that working mothers were behind children's drug addiction and other vices. Blaming women was a way to silence calls for the state and major private employers to fulfill their legal commitments to provide social services such as daycare and quality education and transportation systems.

In the legal sphere, Egyptian women were losing the little protection they had gained toward the end of Sadat's presidency. The presidential decrees of 1979 that guaranteed women a quota of 30-parliamentary-seats, granted the wife the right to a divorce if her husband took another wife, and assured the divorced mother who had custody of the children the right to stay in the family house were abolished by the mid 1980s. The biggest success of the anti-women discourses was in changing the public culture in favor of the Islamic hijab. That dress code met the needs of women coming from conservative and rural areas for the privacy that they lost when they left their familiar social setting in the family home or in the village. Due to its thriftiness, Islamic dress released women with limited financial sources from the expenses of continually changing "non-Islamic" fashion and cosmetic expenses. It also implied the religious devotion of the woman who was wearing it and hopes of protection from the phenomenal sexual harassment of women in the workplaces, streets and in public transportation.

Despite the discourse against women's work and its relative popularity among men and women, giving up work proved to be impractical and contradicted the needs of working women and their families for an income. The liberalization of the Egyptian economy caused high inflation and prices skyrocketed making it too difficult for middle and working class families to live on one income. Islamist parliament members proposed compensating women who gave up work with half of her salary. This proposal was concerned with women working for the government and public companies and excluded women working for private companies. Poor women working in marketplaces and as domestic servants were totally irrelevant to this discourse. These poor women were not competing with men nor expected anything from the state, consequently it was easy for Islamists and the state to ignore them. Although none of these proposals fully materialized, the state encouraged state-employees to use early retirement and made it possible for mothers to have multi-year unpaid leaves. The biggest achievement of these proposals was actually the devaluation of women's work in the eyes of men and women and the society as whole. It was demoralizing for educated middle class women who pursued work just to fulfill a pressing need for income not as a means for self-fulfillment or creativity.

These discourses launched by politicians affiliated with the state and political Islamists in parliament, the media, and schools went on for several years with very little

---

[19] Widad Murqus, *Sukkan misr* [Egypt's Population] (Cairo: Markaz al-Buhuith al-'Arabiyya, 1988), 45.

challenge due to the suppression of the secular opposition. While Sadat's authoritarian regime with the democratic décor initially encouraged and co-operated with Islamists, it suppressed secular liberals and leftists for more than a decade. It harassed the Tagamu' party until the party suspended its newspaper al-Ahali.[20] The secular Wafd party was denied a return to politics until 1984, three years after Sadat's assassination. The intensive anti-women discourses by conservative Islamists and the state brought women's right into the forefront for secular female activists and engendered its countering discourse and activism. The veteran feminist Nawal al-Sa'dawi established the Association of Arab Women's Solidarity (AAWS) in 1985, and the Tagamu' Party established the Progressive Women's Union in 1982 among other women's associations that were affiliated with either professional syndicates or political parties. The Wafd, al-Ahrar (Liberal) and the 'Amal al-Ishtiraki (Socialist Labor) parties formed committees for women's affairs. The effectiveness of these organizations was limited due to the marginalized positions they enjoyed in their parties, in addition to the continuing official policies to marginalize the opposition parties as a whole. Meanwhile, the secular opposition faced losing momentum through getting in alliances with the regime or with Islamists themselves.[21] All these circumstances put the Islamist discourses in a stronger position in convincing middle classes that they had a solution for their socio-economic problems. With the state's withdrawal from the social welfare commitment and with the spread of Islamism, more women articulated their feminisms within the discourse of religion. There was an increasing use of religious argumentation by secular feminism in addition to a new feminism employing Islamic discourse as its paramount discourse, often referred to as Islamic feminism.[22] But with their Marxist social and economic perspective, Sana al-Misri and Bint al-Ard analyzed women issues as socio-cultural issue connected to the dynamic of gender as a social/sexual relation of domination in a patriarchal society and materialist conditions related to their roles in production and social reproduction and social class. Their analysis conforms to what Margot Badran calls holistic cultural feminism.[23]

Independent Women Activists

Bint al-Ard was unique, not only because it carried out its activities outside Cairo in 1982, but also because it was absolutely independent from any political affiliation and it rejected the international funding that supported Nawal al-Sa'dawi's AAWS and many

---

[20] For a detail account on how Sadat's regime treated the Tagamu' Party and its newspaper, see Husayn 'Abd al-Raziq, *al-Ahali sahifa tahta al-hisar* [al-Ahali is a newspaper under siege] (Cairo, Dar al-'Alam al-Thalith, 1992).

[21] I'm referring here to the alliance between al-Wafd, al-Ahrar and al-'Amal parties with the Muslim Brotherhood Group during the parliamentary election in 1984, then between al-Ahrar and al-'Amal parties and the MB in the parliamentary election and the eventual mergence of al-'Amal party in the MB. I'm also referring to the agreement between the al-Tajamu' Progressive Party and the regime concerning the treatment of Islamists which has undermined the position of the party among its followers. For the recent cooperation between some leftists with Islamists, see Maha Abdelrahman, "'With the Islamists?—Sometimes. With the State?—Never!' Cooperation between the Left and Islamists in Egypt", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, April 2009, 36(1), 37–54.

[22] See Zakia Salime, "Mobilizing Muslim Women: Multiple Voices, the Sharia, and the State", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2008, pp, 200-211.

[23] Margot Badran, "Locating Feminisms: The Collapse of Secular and Religious Discourses in the Mashriq," *Agenda*, No. 50, 41-57.

others. Although the group appreciated the need of Egyptian women to organize themselves and to collectively defend their rights, they declined to join any political party, including the secular al-Tagamu' Progressive Party. The group rejected the democratic façade of political parties and accused these parties of not being genuinely supportive of women's rights. As the group put it "parties, including the progressive one, ignore the specificity of women's issues. Women and their problems come at the bottom of parties' programs as a general protocol when these programs deal with problems of transportation, sewage, women and children!! It is only to fill space with vague meaningless words".[24]   The group also feared that the tight police restrictions and regulations imposed on the parties could handicap the women's movement from attracting the masses of working women, housewives, and female students should the women's organization affiliate with any of these political parties.[25] The group put forth their vision for an association that should be capable of organizing the vast majority of women around their rights and interests as "democratic, multiple, and independent organizations for women only (…) efficient under women's leadership and completely independent from the government that has long experience in aborting any organization."[26] Their insistence on building an independent democratic women's movement did not stop them from supporting Farida al-Naqqash, the female candidate of the Progressive Party who ran in the parliamentary election in 1987 for the Mansura area. They campaigned for her and gave her a platform. Several members of the group were also engaged in broader coalitions of activism concerned with the environment, the labor movement, and human rights issues and emphasized the link between women's rights and comprehensive socio-political reform.[27]

The core members of the group were leftist middle class women. They were highly educated with degrees from scientific and technical colleges, in the fields of engineering and agriculture in particular. The group defined their audience as educated college and secondary school women and also solicited the support of enlightened men in their community and families. To reach that audience they had to face two major obstacles. The first was the authoritarian state that employed the emergency law to curtail the citizens' rights of assembly and expression. Second, they had to contend with the Islamists, who enjoyed more appeal among a wide range of audiences under the banner of reviving religion and authentic traditions. Bint al-Ard maneuvered to create and enlarge any possible opportunity to make their voice heard and publicize their ideas. Despite their commitment to independence, they shrewdly used public spaces and sources under state control to meet, organize, network and to publish their annual journal Bint al-Ard. They used local branches of the secular parties in Mansura to hold forums and host speakers with dissenting social views. They hosted a public debate whose key speaker was the controversial feminist Nawal al-Sa'dawi in March 1983. That forum attracted a crowd of men and women and youth and parents to discuss the position of women and their rights in Islam. In that early phase, the group tried to argue that Islam is an egalitarian religion that endorses equality between men and women. They quickly gave

---

[24] "Tariq al-Khalas" [The Salivation path,] *Bint al-Ard* 2, September 1985.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] This "normativety" might explain why a scholar categorized the group as Muslim feminists rather than class feminist. See Salime, "Mobilizing Muslim Women".

up that line of argumentation and called for absolute emancipation for women and men so that they both can carry on their social responsibilities.

Though Bint al-Ard profited by using the facilities of political parties, these parties attracted only a limited audience who were already politicized, willing to challenge the state's effort to contain opposition parties, and more importantly already shared the group's progressive views and attitude towards women's rights in general. To avoid the pitfalls of many Egyptian leftist activists that made them a scattering of small closed intellectual groups, they mobilized their social network to give them access to public facilities such as local culture centers. In their quest to attract wider audiences, particularly young females who were deterred from the type of open political participation as perceived by attendance at political parties' facilities, the group utilized their social network to gain permission to organize weekly meetings in the Mansura Cultural Center. Although it was under government control, the group was able to have a weekly meeting there for several years. During these meetings they discussed dissenting books and articles related to women's issues. More importantly these meetings were open to the public, which helped to recruit new members and attract wider audiences.

The group succeeded in recruiting activists who took their ideas outside al-Mansura to the town of al-Mahalla al-Kubra, Kafr 'Antar, Dikirnis and other surrounding villages. By enrolling an activist from Upper Egypt, the group established a branch in Bani Suef. The local branches acted along the same model of al-Mansura. Each branch built its own collection of feminist writings and printed materials on women's issues. Periodic meetings were held in a local cultural center or in a private home and a core member of the Mansura group attended. The local groups were much smaller and most of their meetings were held in a private home rather than in a public place. Wherever Bint al-Ard acted they radicalized public places, including those controlled by the state, and blurred the line between private and public spaces. In these maneuvers they went as far as proposing to devote one room in the family apartment of one of the members to house the group should the government grant them a license as a registered social society.

The group also networked with feminist writers in the state controlled press, like Sana' al-Bisi who was then the editor of the *Nisf al-Dunya* magazine, and Iqbal Baraka, the editor of the *Hawwa'* magazine. Both editors welcomed the group and wrote in favor of their annual journal. The group and its annual journal enjoyed similar support from the Progressive oppositional newspaper *al-Ahali*. The group members funded, edited, and distributed the journal. They targeted their readership at female high school and college students. They also solicited donations to sustain the publication. The Cairo Book Fair was a good occasion for them to distribute their journal and to meet many intellectuals and activists whom they did not ordinarily get to meet outside Cairo. In many cases, readers asked to buy the old editions upon reading the latest edition. The group needed help with the process of production. Until the group recruited a member with expertise in design and publication layout, the group resorted to male professionals who volunteered to help. For several years 'Abd al-'Aziz Gamal al-Din of the state publishing house Dar al-Ma'arif took care of the artistic aspect of the production. Gamal al-Din had long experience in the production of non-periodical journals or what was known in Cairo throughout the 1980s as the *al-mastirs* magazine. To overcome laws that made it impossible for individuals and independent groups to issue periodicals and restricted that right to parties and companies with large amounts of capital, young leftist intellectuals

issued these publications. Although they were journals, each edition was legally treated as an individual book in terms of registration procedures. These publications developed their distinctive aesthetic features in covers, designs and colorful papers. Almost all these magazines were Cairo-based and concerned with literary genres such as poetry, novellas, and short stories. Bint al-Arad was the only publication concerned with feminist issues and it survived longer. Although its members lived and acted outside Cairo, their seriousness and commitment made Bint al-Ard unique in the intellectual scene in Cairo. Consequently, renowned artists such as the painter 'Adli Rizqallah, the cartoonists Higazi and 'Izz al-'Arab, and the calligrapher Hamid al-'Uwaydi published their art in Bint al-Ard. The group also republished the classic works of the Egyptian artists Mahmud Sa'id and Inji Aflatun. The later was considered one of the pioneering Egyptian feminists.

For a deeper understanding for the social reality, values, needs, aspirations and problems faced by different sectors of Egyptian women, the group conducted a series of surveys on the conditions of working women, women's opinions about withdrawing from the workplace, political culture and awareness among the youth, and the religious views of female university students. [28] They also interviewed women from the lower classes such as industrial and construction workers.[29] Professors of sociology helped the group to analyze the data, which made these surveys and interviews helpful in understanding the realities of Egyptian women at the local level. This systematic empirical knowledge was a serious response to the lack of information on provincial women in the secular discourse of the Cairo-based public sphere. The journal also boldly dealt with sensitive issues that had been overlooked such as women's sexuality and female genital mutilation[30], the emotional pain of Egyptian women in the Arab Persian Gulf states,[31] and tensions between Muslims and Christians.[32] Noticeably, the Palestinian cause was always a recurring subject in every edition of the journal.

When the West Came!
In their search for an indigenous Arab and Egyptian project of women's emancipation, Bint al-Ard rejected the European model "that treats women's issues away from the social and class struggles, it limits (women) to an adversary of men and encourages women to rebel against men to the extent of refusing marriage and reproduction". That statement shows that the group was not well aware of different Western feminism(s), which could have been a result of their inability to read foreign languages. Yet, the group warmly received the African-American activist Angela Davis in al-Mansura in April 1986 and endorsed her research on Egyptian women's sexuality.[33] Their stand was remarkable considering the rejection that visit and the sensitive purpose

---

[28] Jihan al-Sayyid, Fatin Muhammad and Hala Isma'il, "Dhahira wa ra'i: Istiqsa' hawla mawdu' 'awdit al-mar'a lil-manzil" [A phenomena and an opinion: A survey on the returning women to the houses,] *Bint al-Ard* 1, June 1984, 6-19, and Thuraya 'Abd al-Radi, "La talumu al-shabab," [Don't blame the youth,] *Bint al-Ard*, 6, 1990, 27-34.

[29] "Wujuh kadiha" [Toiling faces], *Bint al-Ard*, 6 and 7, 27- 30 and 22-25.

[30] "Angela Davis wa ziyaratiha li-Misr" [Angela Davis and her visit to Egypt], *Bint al-Ard* 2, December 1985, 22-24.

[31] "Al-Dumu' fi al-manazil" [Tears at homes], *Bint al-Ard* 6, 22-26.

[32] Magda Siyyduhum, "Laqatat" [shots,] *Bint al-Ard* 6, 19-20 and Mary Georg, "Amina wa Maryam" [Amina and Maryam,] *Bint al-Ard*, 8, 18-19.

[33] "Angela Davis".

provoked in the official media. The group rejected Western funds that started to support civil society organizations after the World Conference on Women in Nairobi. A conference organized by Nawal al-Sa'dawi's AAWS in 1987 and funded by the Ford Foundation was the first event to open the heated debate over this type of funding among Egyptian activists. A leak of information about the sources of funding was a huge blow to the conference and Bint al-Ard along with other participants, withdrew. This was a landmark in the group's relations with the charismatic feminist al-Sa'adawi. At its inception, the group was close to al-Sa'dawi whom they admired for her contributions to women's issues. They invited her in a public forum in al-Mansura and endorsed her talk in which she connected exploitative capitalism and women's inferior position. The group's first publication included one article and one short story by al-Sa'dawi's daughter Muna Hilmi. Al-Sa'dawi also provided the group with a great deal of encouragement. Ambitious to build a movement beyond intellectual circles and in an attempt to incorporate working class women in a movement that aimed at improving their life and working conditions, Bint al-Ard started a project to train poor women in surrounding villages in a weaving workshop. Financial support for that project was supposed to be provided by al-Sa'dawi's AAWS. Upon realizing that al-Sa'dawi's organization was funded by the Ford Foundation and other international donors, the group chose to suspend the project. Ambivalence about funds coming from the West and questions about the hidden agendas of international donors made the group refuse the funds, while no other source was available. The project never materialized for lack of money.

The ideological rift between the group and al-Sa'dawi was widened when the latter started publishing her magazine Nun in the late 1980s propagating ideas closer to the type of Western feminism that Bint al-Ard had rejected earlier. Nun carried views that the group thought to be irrelevant to Egyptian women, such as free love versus the institution of marriage, reproducing children outside marriage, and equating marriage to slavery.[34] These ideas echoed what Bint al-Ard deemed as "encouraged by the Western capitalist government to distract mass women from confronting capitalist exploitation".[35] In a comparison between Bint al-Ard and al-Sa'dawi's organization, an Egyptian-American scholar wrote that "initiative and feminist awareness of women outside of Cairo, and the popular perspectives and diverse activities carried out by Bint al-Ard (…) made them more representative of Egyptian feminism at the present stage".[36] Although the group disagreed with al-Sa'adawi and suspended any cooperation with her organization, they kept friendly relations with her and declined to join those who wrote in the conservative press against her. They kept appreciating al-Sa'dawi's courage and sacrifices for what she believed, in addition to the moral encouragement she provided the group at its inception.

Confronting the Comrades

---

[34] "Limadha tas'ad al-mar'ah bi-al-hubb wa tashqa bil-zawaj?" [Why women are happy in love and miserable in marriage?" and " Urid al-amuma wa la urid al-rajul," [I want motherhood, I don't want the man] *Nun* 1 (May, 1989), 6-8 and 9. See also Muna Hilmi, "Mas'ibi al-thalath," [My three difficulties,] *Nun* 3 (November, 1989), 54-55.

[35] "Tariq al-Khalas".

[36] Hatem "Economic and political liberation in Egypt".

It is fair to say that Sana' al-Misri was more vocally extremist than the members of Bint al-Ard in her rejection for Western funding of the Egyptian NGOs. Beyond Bint al-Ard's quiet withdrawal from any Western-funded activity, al-Misri wrote two books denouncing what she thought to be the political and moral fall of the Egyptian left.[37] Since the early 1990s, a human rights perspective in Egypt became a widely accepted framework for women's activism and to many political activists of the 1970s the notion of human rights presented an alternative to earlier forms of socialist struggle.[38] The mushrooming of centers working on human rights is probably one of the most obvious outcomes of the influence of international agendas and donor organizations.[39] Al-Misri wrote that leftist activists who accepted international funds compromised their anti-Western capitalist views and traded their national agenda with imperialist agendas.[40] She insisted on equating Western funds with *tatbi'*, or normalizing relations with Israel. Since the Camp David Accords dictated normalizing relations between the peoples of Egypt and Israel, many Egyptian organizations including political parties, Labor Unions, the Egyptian Writers' Union and the professional syndicates have been committed not to be involved in relations with their Israeli counterparts. Committing *tatbi'*, or participating in common activities with Israelis has become taboo among Egyptian intellectuals and activists. With the launching of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians in Madrid in 1991 and the concluding of the Oslo Accords in early 1993, the fear of breaking the taboo of normalization, *tatbi'*, rose high. The declaration of the International Coalition for Peace in Copenhagen between Israeli and Egyptian intellectuals and the establishment of the Cairo Society for Peace in 1997 increased anxiety among leftists about the normalization of relations under Camp David.

In two books al-Misri suggested that Western agencies have provided Egyptian activists with generous funds to facilitate their acceptance of Israel and its aggressive policies against the Palestinians, a goal that the peace agreements between Egypt and Israel have failed to achieve.[41] The second book was hastily published when the conference of the Copenhagen Coalition for Peace was held in Cairo and attended by the former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres in 1999. The revenue of that book was donated to the Arab Committee for Resisting Normalization. Al-Misri led a few dozen activists in demonstration outside the hotel where the conference was held. She had led similar protests when the Israeli ambassador in Cairo attended the Cairo Book Fair in the previous year. Despite the validity of some of al-Misri's critiques of the Western funded organizations, she did not provide tangible evidence that all Western funds were conditioned on normalizing relations with Israel. Meanwhile, these organizations helped to restore the dynamic of civil society and attracted international attention to some aspects of the government abuse of human rights. They succeeded in what a scholar on the public sphere called engendering an international sphere beyond the domestic

---

[37] Sana' al-Misri, *Tatbi' wa tamwil: Qissat al-jam'iyyat ghayr al-hukumiyya* [Normalization and funding: The story of the non-government organizations] 2 volumes (Cairo: Sina lil-Nashr, 1998) and (Cairo: Markaz al-Nadim lil-Abhath wa al-Ma'lumat, 1999).
[38] al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender, and the State in the Middle East*,112.
[39] Ibid.
[40] al-Misri, *Tatbi' wa tamwil*, Vol. 1, Chapter 1 in particular.
[41] Sana' al-Misri, *Tatbi' wa tamwil,* Vol. 1, 56- 61 and the entire Vol. 2.

sphere.[42] Due to this achievement, the Egyptian government launched legal and media campaigns to bring these organizations under its control. It's noteworthy to emphasize that al-Misri refused all government attempts to engage her in these campaigns.

Despite operating in discrete areas, many agreements brought al-Misri and Bint al-Ard together in the early 1990s. Although Al-Misri never became a group member in a full sense, she actively contributed to their publications. She published a critique of the religious media celebrity Sheikh Muhammad Mutawali al-Sha'rawi and participated in the group's interview with the secularist author Husayn Ahmad Amin.[43] Al-Misri and Bint al-Arad wanted to build on the achievement of the Egyptian enlightenment at the turn of the 20 century but were very critical of the neo-secularist who used the old discourse to give legitimacy to women's right to work and participate in the public sphere. They exposed the limitation of the 19th and early 20th century enlightenment project as articulated by Rifa'a Tahtawi, Qasim Amin, Muhammad Abdu and Rashid Rida.[44] They adopted the "holistic approach" that positioned women's inferiority in the Egyptian society in both social class and gender oppression. They saw that working class men and women were oppressed because of the capital dependant system and poor women were oppressed in their family by the male members of the household because of the unfair gender relations.[45] They not only advocated women's right to work, but also women's right to enjoy and be creative at work. These rights would not be fulfilled if working women were oppressed in their family, overloaded with all the housework with no help from males or the state, and their work is not appreciated or trusted at the workplace or in the society.[46] The call for change was not only to improve working conditions for women by better transportation, daycare services etc, but also the call of cultural change to appreciate women's contribution to the society and endorsement for women to enjoy life and work.[47] They situated the anti-women discourses in the crisis of capitalism in Egypt and the vulnerability of the bourgeois project of enlightenment. They called for emancipation for both men and women in a socialist system where everybody enjoys a just and happy life. They cited women's oppression in a wider social context and considered it part and result of the lack of political democracy and social justice. In other words, emancipating women and promoting their status in the society is not divorced from the struggle for public liberties, political democracy, and comprehensive social reforms that benefit men and women of all classes. The capitalist state which had been facing continuing crises embodied in its withdrawal from social welfare and the increase in unemployment had found in the conservatives anti-women discourse a partial solution that shifted attention away from its failures.

Neither Bint al-Ard nor Sana' al-Masri tried to tap religious arguments to support their views over gender equality. Although secularist speakers in the forums of Bint al-

---

[42] Valentine Moghadam, *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 4.

[43] Sana' al-Misri, "al-Shaykh al-Sha'rawi wa al-rijal al-masakin" [Sheikh al-Sha'rawi and the poor men], *Bint al-Ard* 7, July 1992, 45-49 and "Hiwar ma'a rajul mutasha'im lakinahu mazala uqatil", [A conversation with a pessimistic, but is still fighting, man] *Bint al-Ard* 6, January 1993, 6-13.

[44] Sana' al-Misri, *Ruwwad al-Tanwir wa taqadumiyya hsab al-Talab*, a book manuscript submitted for publication to Dar Mirit in Cairo.

[45] "Tariq al-Khalas".

[46] al-Sayyid, Muhammad and Isma'il, "Dhahira wa Ra'i".

[47] Ibid.

Ard, such as al-Sa'dawi and al-Naqqash, tried to emphasize the egalitarian principles of Islam and to show no contradiction between religion and women's emancipation, the group itself declined to take up that argument.[48] They believed that generating religious legitimacy for a political ideology and social program would put them in a weaker position in comparison with their Islamist foes where the audience would give more credit to the Islamists who enjoy higher credibility concerning religious arguments. Meanwhile, members of the group deliberately followed the social norm to defeat the stereotype that depicted feminists and female leftists as sexually loose and social deviants with no respect for the society or its values. They meant to have all the focus on their ideas and to gain credibility for their rational. The group members always dressed modestly and wore little or no makeup. Members were not allowed to smoke in public since Egyptian society imposes a stigma on women who smoke. They publicly profiled themselves as family women and mothers with respect for social norms. They were even happy when some mocked their social conservativeness by calling them *al-shabbat al-shuy'iyat*, the young communist women, which echoed the Muslim Brotherhood's women's organization, *al-Shabbat al-Muslimat*, the Young Muslim Women.

The success of the Bint al-Ard group might have been a major cause in its own end. Their publicity in Cairo and al-Mansura attracted more attention from the state's agencies. The State Security Police exerted pressure to contain the group. First the Mansura Culture Center suspended the group's weekly meetings. Then the police arrested three of the core members and detained them for one night while they were picking up their newly published journal from the press. The police charged them with the possession of illegal publications. The accusation proved to be false because their journal held a legal registration number in the official Dar al-Kutub. Although the Cairo-based opposition press rushed to defend them, the group chose the practical path. They refused to publicize news of their detention lest the parents of the younger members not allow them to continue with the group. However the incident was a harsh message that the state was aggressively after them, particularly when the State Security Police refused to release the confiscated journal.[49] Preventing the group from access to public spaces was critical particularly with the authoritarian laws that curtailed the rights of association and public meetings. To overcome their possible isolation, the group decided to register themselves as an organization subject to the Social Affairs Ministry. They were required to have a meeting place. Due to the limited financial resources one of the members devoted a room in her apartment to host the potential organization. It was not too difficult for the authorities to deny the group a license with on the pretext that their place lacked a private bathroom or exit door, and consequently was not qualified.[50] To rent such a place was almost impossible considering the lack of financial resources and the acute housing problem the entire country was experiencing. The group, remaining faithful to its

---

[48] Thuraya 'Abd al-Radi, "Al-liqa' al-fikri ma'a al-dukturah Nawal al-Sa'dawi hawla qadiyyat al-mar'a wa iltihamaha bi-qadiyat al-mujtama'" [The intellectual meeting with Dr. Nawal al-Sa'dawi on women's issue and its integration with societal issues,] *Bint al-Ard* 1, June 1984, 36- 53 and Saniyya al-Bahhat, "Malaf al-ahwal al-shakhsiyya: lamm yantahi al-sira'" [The personal status file: the struggle has not been resolved,] *Bint al-Ard* 2, December 1985, 28- 38.

[49] "Musadarat Bint al-Ard" [The confiscation of Bint al-Ard,] *al-Ahali*, December 1990.

[50] "Qanun qatl al-jami'yyat al-ahliyya: Shaqqa bi-hmmam shart ishhar jam'yya nisa'yya" [The law of killing civil societies: an apartment with a bathroom is a condition to register a women society,] *al-Ahali*, September 1990.

nationalist agenda based on a socialist vision and anti-Western imperialism, rejected the international donors as a solution. They were very skeptical about any hidden agenda that might come with such funds and they preferred to be consistent with their principles. Members of the group were not flawless. Local fame, immaturity, and the inconsistency of some of them made the continuation of the group challenging. Although Bint al-Ard was still small in membership with a very loosely defined leadership, the hierarchy reflected the financial privileges and the social hierarchy of their male households. Those who inherited this leadership grew hungry for notoriety, while other members were perhaps not mature enough to treat this course with patience and they withdrew rather than attempting to reform. Others shifted their attention to their own professional life and career.

Although the group disintegrated by the end of the 1990s, its legacy is still tangible in the lives and activism of its ex-members. Some of them moved to Cairo where they employed their skills in building organizations, editing publications, working as professional journalists or took up positions in feminist organizations. Two members acquired doctoral degrees and pursued careers in American academia. The legacy of Sana' al-Misri has been always celebrated in secular Arab circles beyond Egypt.[51] Although her uncompromising views angered many fellow activists, her sudden premature death came as a huge loss for the secular and leftist movements as revealed in their writings on her.[52]

Conclusion

While the spread of Islamism against the backdrop of the crises of the postcolonial nation-state, which made more women with different perspectives articulate their feminisms within the discourse of religion, Marxist feminists such as al-Misri and the Bint al-Ard group avoided the pitfall of the increasing use of religious argumentation by secular feminism. Unlike their contemporary secularists, they criticized the *limitations* of the founders of Islamic enlightenment traditions such as Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, Muhammad Abdu and Qasim Amin.[53] They analyzed women's inferiority in Egyptian society as a product of both the unjust social class system and patriarchal culture. Despite a minority discourse, they shifted the debate from whether women's work conforms with Islamic traditions to women's right to work as a way to enjoy self-fulfillment, be creative, and contribute to her personal and social evolution. They also shifted the basis of women's right to work from being a practical need to help her family and society to the society's responsibility to help women to enjoy work and to be creative. They also broke from the standard Marxist views that connected oppression of women only to class and the sexual division of labor. Meanwhile, they rejected what they considered the European model of feminism and Western funding and support. Independent from local political

---

[51] Several Arab secularist sites have posted entire of some of Sana' al-Misri's books on line. For example see the site of **Center For Women's Equality** http://www.c-we.org/ar/show.art.asp?aid=4034 and the site of al-'Ilmaniyya [Secularism] http://3ilmaniya.jeeran.com/archive/2007/3/171719.html

[52] Among enormous examples see the special section on Sana' al-Misri in *Akhbar al-Adab* on June 18, 2000 and Faruq 'Abd al-Qadir "Sana' al-Misri: al-intifa' qabla al-awan" [Sana' al-Misri: premature depatrue], *al-Musawwar*, June 21, 2000, 52- 54.

[53] For critique of traditional Marxist and culturalist analysis of Middle Eastern/ Egyptian women, see Mervat Hatem, "Class and Patriarchy as Competing Paradigms for the Study of Middle Eastern Women" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Oct., 1987), 811-818.

and professional organizations and from international funding they challenged both the hegemonic Islamist discourse and state authoritarianism to create an alternate public sphere and managed to operate both inside and outside the establishment.