**Dressing the Feminine Body in Modern Egypt: Fashion, Faith and Class**

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Amany Abdelrazek

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Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Phil. Cordula Lemke

Second examiner: Prof. Dr. Phil. Andrew James Johnston

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# Abstract

There is an intimate relationship between clothes and identity. Clothes express our ideas, values and social norms to others. Therefore, dresses can be utilized to explore and explain the identity transformation from an older to a newer socio-cultural context. This dissertation reads the shifts in Egyptian Muslim women's attitude towards modern dress and clothing style and their entanglement with gender, nationalism, faith, and socio-economic contexts starting from the 19th century from a post-colonial perspective. I rely on fashion and post-colonial theories to address three sets of questions: (i) to what extent do the shifts in socio-economic and political discourses construct gender norms and redefine the feminist quest concerning clothing choice in modern / post-colonial Egypt? (ii) Can we read fashion as a resistance strategy to Egyptian patriarchal forces and hegemonic Western secular modernity in contemporary post-colonial Egypt? (iii) How does fashion disrupt the claimed monolithic Muslim women's identity? Finally, I discuss how Leila Aboulela's literary texts deconstruct the claimed fixed relationship between modernity and its assumed emancipating values and Western dress in her texts *Lyrics Alley* (2010) and *Bird Summons* (2019). The term "clothes" is used mainly to refer to the process of *veiling* and *unveiling* as an expression of a feminist quest of Egyptian women in the public sphere.

# Zusammenfassung

Es besteht eine enge Beziehung zwischen Kleidung und Identität. Unsere Kleidung bringt unsere Ideen, Werte und sozialen Normen zum Ausdruck für unseren Umfeld.Daher kann Kleidung verwendet werden um die Identität Transformation von einem älteren zu einem neuen soziokulturellen Kontext zu erklären und zu erkunden.Diese Dissertationen formuliert die veränderte Einstellung von ägyptischen Muslimischen Frauen zu moderner Kleidung und Kleidungsstil und ihre Verwicklung mit dem Geschlecht, Nationalismus, den Glauben und sozioökonomischen Kontexte, beginnend mit dem 19 Jahrhundert von einer Postkoloniale Perspektive.Ich berufe mich in dieser Dissertation auf die Mode und die Postkoloniale Theorie um drei Sätze von fragen zu adressieren.Meine erste Frage richtet sich der Verlegung in den soziökonomischen und politischen Diskurs dass die Geschlechter Normen gestaltet und die feministische Suche bezüglich der Kleidungswahl in modernen Postkolonialen Ägypten neu definiert.Zweitens bespreche ich wie die Mode, als modernes und Postmodernes Phänomen, die angeblich Monolithe Identität von Muslimischen Frauen spaltet. Mode kann als Wiederstandsstrategie gegen die ägyptische patriachale Macht und die hemogänische westliche säkulare Modernität im zeitgenössischen Postkolonialen Ägypten betrachtet werden. Schlussendlich bespreche ich in dieser Dissertation wie die literarischen texte der Schriftstellerin Leila Aboulela's den Konstanten Verhältniss zwischen Modernität und dessen emanzipierenden Werte und westlicher Kleidung in ihren werken"*lyrics Alley*"(2010) und"*Bird Summons*"(2019) analysiert.Der Begriff "Kleidung" wird hauptsächlich verwendet um sich auf den Prozess der Verschleierung und Enthüllung als Ausdruck der feministischen Strebe von Ägyptischen Frauen im öffentlichen Bereich zu beziehen.

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# Contents

**Introduction**

The 2011 Arab uprisings created a revolutionary atmosphere aspiring for social, political and economic changes. In Egypt, the revolution ignited public discourse and debates on many social and religious practices. In these debates, wearing the veil[1] resurfaced as a divisive issue among feminists, conservatives, intellectuals and politicians. The opponents of wearing the veil claim that unveiling or taking off the hijab stands as a symbol of a post-revolution era that should support Egyptian woman's emancipation and gender equality in the public sphere vis-à-vis the oppressive out-moded veil forced on women by chauvinist backward male relatives or the politically affiliated Islamists. Indeed after the revolution, many Egyptian women were encouraged by the discourse of free expression and democratic civil society to take off their hijab despite pressure from their families or conservative social milieu.

Other Egyptian women who clung to their hijab as a marker of their faith, social, or cultural identity were also not entirely free from social pressure in some wealthy neighborhoods. In these affluent districts, many restaurants, bars, and swimming pools banned headscarf wearers. Those headscarf wearers are mainly considered low-class women who could be politically affiliated to conservative Islamist ideology. Those assumed low-class "backward"

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[1] The Islamic practice of head-covering is generally called "veiling" in Western writing. Veil, however, comprises various types. Some Muslim women wear a veil covering a woman's body from head to toe, and others wear a veil covering a woman's head, neck, and shoulders. The first type is popular in the Gulf region and is called "niqab", while the second type, which is deemed by a wide range of scholars and academics as a modern design of the traditional veil, is the most common among Muslim women in the East as well as in the West nowadays. The second type, for which I use both the word "hijab" and "headscarf" interchangeably, is my focus in this study.

headscarf wearers could not modernise themselves to suit these rich, glamorous buildings in these wealthy modern districts (Conrad 2015; Morsi 2020).However, religion itself and wearing the hijab became a fashion attracting females from diverse social classes and educational backgrounds in urban and rural areas in contemporary Egypt. Wearing the headscarf has become more than a statement of piety, modesty, ignorance, or subordination to Muslim male's authority.

The prevailing Western assumption is that unveiled women who dress up in miniskirts or expose their bodies have much more freedom or are socially emancipated than lower classes Egyptian headscarf wearers who do not have direct access to Western values and products. However, this assumption proves to be not particularly true when it comes to a modern fashionable look in Egypt. Although the upper-class Egyptian women started to embrace Western culture, mainly dress, beginning from the 1920s and distanced themselves from the lower-class Egyptians and their traditional national dress (galabyya)2 they have also been physically distant, living in their wealthy neighborhoods. They wear their revealing Western clothes at their workplaces in super- rich private companies or in summer resorts far from the rest of the country, where most Egyptians with different social values live and where sexual harassment is still widespread ("BBC" 2017).

In contrast, a headscarf wearer moves freer in the public sphere than the assumed "liberated" unveiled Westernized Egyptian women by claiming moral and religious authority, even while wearing Western tight-fitting clothes and makeup. This atmosphere pushed some affluent and even non-religious women to wear the headscarf to move freely on the

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2. Galabyya is a long, loose-fitting garment usually considered a modest and Islamic form of dress. Peasants and lower classes wore it until the twentieth century. Today, women still wear modified changing models of this loose galabyya mainly in rural areas.

streets. For example, in an article in "Rose el-Youssef", a 20-year-old student maintains that although she liked to dress in revealing Western clothing style because it makes her feel like an accomplished businesswoman she sees in foreign films, she has stopped dressing in such a style after experiencing harassment on the streets (Mabro, *Through a veil darkly*, 83).

Furthermore, many Egyptian headscarf wearers maintain that observing hijab is a prerequisite to conforming to the faith's modesty concept based on an established interpretation of the statement in the Quran. The Quran tells women to observe modesty, mainly through covering their bosom and hiding their charm in the public sphere, as the following verses tell:

> The believing men are enjoined to lower their gaze and conceal their genitals [30], and the believing women are enjoined to lower their gaze and conceal their genitals, draw their khimar to cover their cleavage [breasts], and not display their beauty, except that which has to be revealed, except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers or their brother's sons" (Quran, *Surah an-Nur*).

According to the interpretation of these verses, Muslim women have to avoid wearing makeup, and the standard dress has to consist of a loose garment that does not reveal a woman's body shape.

Nonetheless, modesty strict rules varied throughout history in Egypt, mainly in line with political and economic circumstances. In contemporary urban Cairo, most Muslim women do not observe strict modesty rules concerning dress and appearance. Although some women and girls wear loose garments and niqab, namely, the veil covering the head and face leaving only two openings for the eyes, most Egyptian women wear a headscarf covering the head and shoulders and sometimes covers the head and leaves the neck uncovered. Their garments are a combination of "Islamic" and Western clothing items.

Women, in particular, working- class women and university students, combine headscarves with Western-style colorful jackets, skirts and blouses or long-sleeved shirts and tight-fitting trousers or jeans. Most of them also augment their look by wearing accessories and makeup. Simultaneously, wealthy women who opt for wearing the hijab usually differentiate themselves from other headscarf wearers who belong to the lower class through the expensive material of their dress, headscarf, accessories and heavy makeup.

Therefore, although headscarf wearers are still widely stigmatized as low-class women by the upper-class Westernized elite, this wave of stylish headscarf wearers is also met by fierce criticism from religious scholars, traditionalists, and a wide range of Muslims. Those Muslim objectors argue that the ornamented body of a headscarf wearer exposes her beauty, empties Islam from modesty as its central value, and affirms the hegemony of Western consumerism and values over Muslim societies.

In her book *Changing Consumer Cultures of Modern Egypt* (2006), Mona Abaza maintains that even though consuming Western goods was introduced to Egyptian Muslim society long before the colonial time, consumerism, in particular regarding women's dress and appearance, started to be read as a Western "cultural invasion" after the 19th-century colonial encounter. In the colonies, consumerism supported the secular perception of daily life and the imposition of the European colonizer's values on the indigenous values. The colonizer sought to compel the Eastern societies' local population to abandon the religiosity and modest life that religion required. According to the modern Western colonizers, religion as a belief and values belonged to traditional times and has no place in the modern era that frees the individuals from out-moded oppressive religious (puritan) values. Indeed, those stylish practising Muslim women subvert the claimed "pure" modest Islamic culture vis-a-vis a Western secular, consumerist culture by integrating into the prevailing consumer culture

while not entirely abandoning their Islamic practices.Their attitude can be read in light of the classical consumption theories, which relied on the work of Karl Marx, Adam Smith, and Max Weber. These theories made a connection between the term "consumption" and the word "consume," meaning "to destroy, to use up, to waste, and to exhaust." Thus, "consuming" was widely rejected because of its negative connotations until the middle of the twentieth century (Williams 78-9).

Consumption, however, does not always end at the stage of destroying and deconstructing, but it can also extend to building something new in fields like music, fashion and design (Abaza, *Changing Consumer Cultures*, 45). Many studies assert that the relationship between fashion and consumers is an intricate relationship that exceeds that of simply buyers and goods.Fashion builds and rebuilds our social identities and expresses our convictions. Embracing fashion is not about an external fabric covering the body, but it can also influence individuals' convictions, values and behaviour (Nystrom 1928; Wilson 2003; Reilly 2020).  Indeed, fashion affects women's convictions concerning adhering to a modest appearance called for by the prevailing Islamic traditions. Those stylish practising Muslim women are also under the domination of Western concepts of beauty and novelty. In this respect, the choice of embracing an elegant attractive look without renouncing the belief in Islam, despite being fraught with tension and confusion, could be a model of an emergent hybrid identity that tends to reconcile post-colonial Muslim Egyptian cultural identity with modern secular Western values.

Nonetheless, the practising Muslim women´s choice to integrate into the prevailing consumer culture in their globalised societies is ignored by fashion theorists, particularly veiling, even if their contemporary veils vary in their innovative designs, colours and ideologies. Balasescu (2003) highlights the problematic relationship between the veil and

fashion writing, "since veiling is a practice that does not belong to the 'Western' space, and since fashion . . . historically belongs to the West; the veil cannot be fashion" (Balasescu 7). Consequently, Muslim women, particularly veiled Muslim women, are still widely read as subordinate traditional veiled women in the Western discourse on Muslim women. Therefore, those stylish headscarf wearers are marginalized and silenced by the Westernized elite and conservative men at home and by the stereotypical Western representation of veiled Muslim women as passive, ignorant and traditional women.

In this vein, Gayatri Spivak's work on the subaltern status in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is relevant. In her text, Spivak investigates the exploitative relationship between gender, knowledge and power in a post-colonial society. She maintains that "third world" women are caught in the dichotomy between tradition and modernisation. This dichotomy seizes women between "patriarchy and imperialism" where "the figure of the woman disappears" (Spivak 306). Furthermore, Spivak argues, a group from within the "dominated" "subaltern" category can turn into "dominant" of another group that belongs to the same "element" because of the discrepancy in their economic situation. She wrote:

> thanks to the uneven character of regional economic and social developments, differed from area to area. The same class or element which was dominant in one
>
> area ... could be among the dominated in another. This could and did create many ambiguities and contradictions in attitudes and alliances (Spivak 284).

Egyptian Muslim women are not unified based on their gender and thus all marginalized by the post-colonial Muslim male elite. Instead, women are also divided according to social class. In their struggle to fight patriarchy, privileged women represent their class values while assuming that they represent all women. Those privileged women are themselves against the assumed traditional backward lower-class women and their values. The result is that the disempowered lower-class women cannot speak; even if they attempt to speak, they are silenced and marginalized by patriarchy, class and imperialism.

Following Spivak's argument, I discuss how the shifts in socio-economic and political discourses construct gender norms and redefine the feminist quest concerning clothing choice in modern / post-colonial Egypt. I argue that discussing the status of stylish practising Muslim women can be useful since their attitude towards Western secular modernity is where the overlapping of class, gender, faith and nationalism occurs. Their attitude that Muslim and Western theorists reject and read as a problem can also be considered an emerging negotiating model between secular modernity and Islamic cultural values. Situating this research within postcolonial and fashion theories, I discuss how fashion played a remarkable role in dividing Egyptian society by putting the fashionable modern Western dress vis-a-vis the perceived by the colonizers as an ugly traditional non-Western (Egyptian) dress during the early post-colonial era turned into a feminist empowering instrument in contemporary Egyptian society. Egyptian headscarf wearers' contemporary stylish clothing style challenges the fixed gendered, class and cultural borders. I argue that these claimed fixed borders between the "authentic" traditional Islamic identity and modern secular Western identity are in a continuous state of redefining and negotiation by a sector of Muslim women.

1. **An overview of Egyptian Women, Dress and Feminism**

The first generation of Egyptian feminists belonged to the urban upper-class and upper-middle-class who were educated in Western institutions. They were greatly influenced by the 19th century's Western discourse on gender, Islam, and modernity. The Enlightened Europeans relied on the "evolutionary" thinking of the 19th century, assuming that human history is a linear and progressive process. As a result, all different non-Western rituals, customs and cultural practices are read as signs of the incomplete process of modernity (Stocking 185). Following this argument, Western modernity differentiates between two

categories of women: the fashionable unveiled modern woman and the traditional veiled woman (Eisenstein 4). These Euro-centric views on modernity were also reflected in the upper-class prominent feminists' texts such as the lawyer and feminist Qasim Amin's texts *The Liberation of Women* (1899) and *The New Woman* (1900), the founder of the women's movement in Egypt Huda Shaarawi's text *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1986) and the feminist, poet, publisher, and political activist, Doria Shafik's autobiography *Egyptian Feminist: A Woman Apart* (1996).Those elite feminists encouraged Egyptian Muslim women to adopt the emancipating and refined Western women's dress and renounce the backward national dress, mainly the oppressive practice of veiling, despite not necessarily rejecting their firm belief in Islam or supporting Western political colonialism.

This first feminist wave in modern Egypt was supported by these feminists' social class and its connection to the government. This closeness helped spread their ideas and world views on women's modernization; unveiling and adopting the fashionable Western dress had become a visual symbol of the new modern Egyptian woman in the public sphere. Although there were other feminist voices from diverse social classes and backgrounds, these feminist views and demands remained within the permitted limits prescribed and encouraged by the state. Simultaneously, other feminist voices that challenged the authority of the mainstream political discourse or the rigid class system were silenced or forgotten, such as Malak Hifni Nassef (1886-1918) and Doria Shafik (1908-1975). Furthermore, the spread of shopping stores, advertisements, and television promoted Westernized dress over the claimed backward out-moded traditional Egyptian female´s appearance, as I discuss in chapter III.

The attitude toward Muslim Egyptian women's veil as an oppressive backward remained untouched in the later post-colonial feminist texts despite the resurgence of Islamic dress in

new styles and ideologies under the concept of "Islamic fashion ". These texts include, for instance, the literary works of prominent Egyptian feminist Nawal Elsaadawi (1931- 2021), such as *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (1980), *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* (1988), and *Diary of a Child Called Souad* (2016). The depiction of oppressed traditional veiled Egyptian woman vis-à-vis the assumed fashionable emancipated unveiled woman is also present in the Egyptian novelist Miral al-Tahawy's recent texts such as *Blue Aubergine* (2002) *and Brooklyn Heights* (2013).These feminist texts, however, underestimate the socio-economic and political pressures that push for constant processes of feminist negotiations concerning women's dress and its diverse meanings. Egyptian women's dress and attitudes towards women's place in the public sphere have been going through dynamic shifts since the 1970s. These attitude shifts represented different forms of religiosity, political and economic phases. Young students started to wear modest long loose robes, long skirts, and long-sleeved blouses combined with colourful head-gears during the 1970s and 1980s to assume a place in a conservative public sphere, particularly among students from rural backgrounds and lower-class female students. The educated and urban working-class females joined the assumed lower class headscarf wearers as wearing the headscarf became the norm supported by the state's political-religious attitude. Those urban women started wearing bright tight-fitting blouses, tight jeans and sexy dresses from the 1990s until the end of Hosni Mubarak's regime. The wave of fashionable headscarf wearers was supported by modern elegant television preachers, middle-class and upper-middle-class urban educated women, and even famous movie stars. Those headscarf wearers did not denounce their elegance and femininity or their active participation in the public sphere.

In addition, these post-colonial texts on veiled Egyptian Muslim women focus on veiling and ignored the whole clothing style.These Egyptian literary texts align with the mainstream post-colonial Muslim women writers' fictional texts, memoirs, and life narratives published

in Western languages. These post-colonial texts are usually supported by veiled Muslim women's gloomy images on their covers that assume veiled Muslim women's oppressive and miserable lives versus the elegant happy, unveiled Western woman. For instance, Azhar Nafisi's novel *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) depicts the suffering of the Iranian woman and forcing her to be "enveloped in voluminous fabric" (Nafisi 51) of the "ugly" black veil after the "Islamic Revolution" (1979).On the novel´s cover, we see two young headscarf wearers in their black headscarves. They look down as an expression of their submission and miserable lives compared to the emancipated beautiful, fashionable, unveiled woman. Also, Fadia Fakir's novel *My name is Salma* (2010) tells the story of a Jordanian girl (Salma). The novel's cover depicts a girl wears a loose traditional dress and a black headscarf. Salma's tragedy started when her family found out that she had a sexual relationship outside marriage. As a result, Salma was jailed and threatened with killing by her brothers. Salma's salvation was achieved through leaving Muslim culture to Britain, where she first learnt good manners from her landlady and then got married to a good Englishman, renouncing her Islamic practices and values.

These literary texts are written by Muslim female writers and are received as an authentic representation of all veiled Muslim women worldwide. Within this vein, many post-colonial scholars argue that although post-colonial Muslim women writers were supposed to depict and represent all Muslim women, they could not give voice to diverse sectors of veiled Muslim women or challenge the Western representation of the Islamic rituals such as the traditional dress and veiling. Instead, their literary texts extend the writer's goal of empowering Muslim women to legitimize imperial interference in Muslim societies, especially when those "native informers" are given a wide platform to speak out against their Muslim societies and Islamic values (Dabashi 79-80).

In this context, I do not argue that these life narratives do not depict and reflect real miseries of many Muslim women, but I argue that these works cannot be read as a general depiction of all Muslim women in all Muslim and non-Muslim societies. Moreover, it is essential to pay attention to the political and historical moments in which these texts are received and celebrated in the West. One can argue that these texts on Muslim women cannot always be read as a neutral text, particularly with such fierce renewed imperialist converge with Orientalist representation of Muslim cultures and societies after 9/11 (Dabashi 79-80).

Indeed in *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (2003), Bernard Lewis argues that the attacks of 9/11 pushed the Western audience to understand the reasons behind these attacks in light of an ideological difference between Islam and the West, backward values and modernity. In this respect, a vast celebration of the clash of civilizations thesis that influenced how texts from and about the Middle East- its inhabitant, its values and traditions are read, also reduces the whole diverse histories and cultural practices into a monolithic static representation of a homogeneous Muslim East versus the secular / Christian West. Therefore, reading one text on the attitude towards the veiling practice, based on a woman's personal experiences, appears to be enough to define all Muslim women, their miseries and desires. Overall, this made the hybrid identity model of a modern Muslim woman no longer attainable for those Muslims in Western discourse. Those Muslim women were all put under the name of "dangerous, backwards Muslims" (Young 18). Furthermore, this mainstream representation that ignores the area in which hybridity and complexity continually disrupt the certainties of imperial /colonial logic also strengthens the dichotomy of " they" Westerners vis-à-vis "us" Muslims This narrative undermines coexistence in a multicultural society where diversity and dialogue between diverse cultures are celebrated.

In contrast to the binarism above, one can refer to different represenatition and narrative on the relationship between Muslim and Western values in contemporary societies. This narrative is urging for rethinking the incompatibility between the assumed pre-modern Muslim East and modern secular West and the claimed fixed borders between Muslim culture and secular Western culture (Tarlo 2010). This argument is reflected in the shifts mentioned earlier towards the claim of authentic "Islamic" dress, women's emancipation and the claimed contradictory world views that create a wave of public debates in the academic arena and recently echoed in literature in texts by Muslim female writers.  This wave of literary texts published mainly in the West introduces Muslims who combine their Islamic values with their interest in fashion and feminist ideals. These texts include, for instance, Leila Aboulela's work *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret* (2005), *Lyrics Alley* (2010), *Bird Summons* (2019), Mohja Kahf's novel The *Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006), Randa Abdel-Fattah's novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?,* and Ayisha Malik's novel *Sofia Khan is Not Obliged* (2016) among others.

On the cover of these literary works, the headscarf also appears as an essential feature of those Muslim women/ girls. They wear headscarves in different styles and colours while wearing fashionable, colourful dresses, blouses and jeans. Those girls / women look at the reader with confidence and smiles on their faces. These literary works highlight the significance of both the literary and the visual as a material expression of the debate on the relationship between Empire and its modernizing "secular" values and colonized Muslim cultures and their claimed monolithic static Islamic values. These texts do not simply stand opposite to the Orientalist representation of Muslim women that is still followed in mainstream post- colonial literature. Instead, these texts engage with Orientalist images of Muslim women and attempt to reread Muslim Egyptian women's agencies within their specific socio- economic, historical and political contexts. Moreover, they attempt to

deconstruct Muslim women's monolithic representation by affirming that the Muslim women's subject is, above all, a heterogeneous subject. Furthermore, they depict contemporary Muslim women's dialogic relationship to Western fashion and values beyond the past ideological conflict between the West and Islam.

Follwing this line of thought, I discuss Muslim Egyptian women's dress as the social, political and ideological signifier of changing attitudes towards Western modernity in the literature to integrate my research in the current growing literary-critical interest in fashion. This recent interest came as a response to the lack of clothing studies in the literature that could be explained by considering fashion is a trivial issue to be discussed by academics, or that fashion stands against Marxist feminists and their struggle to empower women, liberating them from commodifying the body. This discouraged scholars for a long time from taking their interest in such a topic (Hollander 450).To contribute to the lack of studying fashion in literature, I discuss the impact of women's interest in fashion on changing meanings of Egyptian women's dress and practising faith in Leila Aboulela's texts *Lyrics Alley* (2010) and *Bird Summons* (2019) using a socio-cultural approach to these post-colonial texts.

I divided the dissertation into five chapters. The first chapter contains the theoretical context of modernity, feminism, fashion and faith from a post-colonial perspective. In this chapter, I contest the claim of a universal rational, autonomous agency in light of the poststructuralists´ view of agency to create a room for Muslim women believer's agency in contemporary modern societies. Moreover, I look at the impact of fashion in blurring the rigid borders between gender, class and secular Western individual and modest Muslim individual.

The second chapter looks at Muslim women's visibility and dress code in the public sphere in Islam between practice and theory in light of Fatima Mernissi's feminist reading of Quranic verses on veiling and gendered borders in Muslim societies. I start by looking at Muslim

women position in Islamic theory. Then, I look at the Muslim women's clothing style and their changing attitude towards observing modesty in the public sphere in medieval Muslim societies, mainly Egyptian Muslim women. The final section an overview of Muslim women and their Islamic values in the Medieval Western literary text.

The third chapter examines the debates on Egyptian women's position in society that started with the nineteenth-century colonial encounter. It discusses the intersection between politics, gender identity, nationalism and the state's economic policies, as they shape the world of post-colonial modern Muslim women in Egypt. In this chapter, I attempt to weave feminist personal collections with historical data, newspaper and literature to reconstruct a narrative of the meaning of fashion and Egyptian women's dress during the first half of the twentieth century concerning three prominent feminist figures: Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947), Malak Hifni Nassef (1886- 1918), and Doria Shafik (1908-1975).

Chapter IV discusses how the socio-economic and political context triggered a resurgence of the practice of veiling and new attitudes towards Muslim Egyptian women's dress, practicing faith and women's role in the public sphere from the 1970s. I focus on a single item of dress which is the headscarf. I will deal with its symbolic meanings and the aesthetic practices involved in wearing it to draw attention to women's struggles with social norms, faith, and politics regarding clothing style in the Egyptian post-colonial public sphere.

Chapter V looks at Egyptian women and fashion in post-colonial literary texts in Aboulela texts *Lyrics alley* and *Bird Summons*. I argue that Aboulela's works deconstruct the claimed monolithic Muslim women's identity. Her post-colonial female characters occupy neither the discourse of secular modernity nor indigenous traditional authentic Muslim culture. Instead, her characters vary from subordinate fashionable secularized Egyptian women to educated,

stylish headscarf wearers whose aim is to negotiate a third hybrid space in the modern age. The study is an attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How do political events, cultural and social customs impinge upon practicing Muslim women's, in particular, headscarf wearers' lives in post-colonial Egypt?

2. Can we still speak of a universal binary model that puts an assumed oppressed modest traditional veiled Muslim woman vis-à-vis an emancipated fashionable modern Western woman in a global contemporary consumerist culture?

3. How do we explain Egyptian Muslim women and their relation to fashion in the fictional text from a post-colonial context?

**Chapter I**

**Modernity, Muslim Women, Fashion and Agency**

This chapter discusses the perception of religion, fashion, female's agency, and their position on Muslim women's dress in the modern age from a theoretical perspective. I start with an overview of Western modern secular thinking and the concept of autonomous choice regarding dress code and fashion. Then, I will look at constructing non-Western Muslim women's traditional dress, particularly veiling, as a symbol of Muslim women subordination in the public sphere. I challenge the aforementioned (Orientalist) discourse, which depicts non-Western Muslim women as a monolithic oppressed "Other". This argument posits that the universal theories of modernity, which regard non-Western religious practices and rituals as inherently oppressive pre-modern practices in relation to the European modernity model, are hegemonic theories that exclude non-Western historical and cultural experiences.

**Fashion, Emancipated Individuals and Muslim Women in the Modern Public Space**

The term "modern individual" has been used to describe north-European individuals whose societies went through a social and cultural transformation as an outcome of a new attitude towards individuals and society starting with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. In these modern societies, individuals are described as autonomous modern subjects compared to pre-modern subordinate individuals who could not liberate themselves from "pre-modern" religious and cultural beliefs' oppressive irrational norms. Sociologists and historians use the term "modernity" to denote a

historical period and a cultural spirit that entailed a resolution with the traditional pre-modern era and its old values. Furthermore, it is a progressive linear procedure that requires a new "secular" worldview.

A wide range of scholars maintain that fashion and dressing the individual's body hasbeen seen as an essential feature to the concept of modern Western life – because the new clothing style represents the onset of a whole new era with its values and thoughts. Consumer historians maintain that clothing styles are passed from one generation to another without radical changes during stable political and social periods. This explains why ancient civilizations such as the ancient Egyptians adopted the sameclothing style without significant changes for centuries. Braudel sums up the state above, writing, "If a society remained more or less stable, fashion was less likely to change – and this could be true at all levels, even the highest established hierarchies" (Braudel 312).

Modernity, with its new ideas, however, came to challenge the whole idea of old fixed norms, reflecting the modern secular, rational culture and renouncing the mediaeval pious consumer. The French poet Charles Baudelaire in his essay, "The Painter of Modern Life", defined modernity as "the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; the half ofart of which the other half is eternal and immovable" (Baudelaire 214). He considered fashion a fundamental way of expressing modernity and the dismissal nature of past values. Baudelaire criticized the artists of his age for dressing their figures in Renaissance-era instead of the present contemporary modern fashion. According to Baudelaire, these painters could not "represent the present" and its new values (Baudelaire 203) because the dress was not only "an attribute of class recognition and aspiration, but also a pervasive and persistent statement of temporality" (Rocamora andSmelik 16).

Indeed, costume historians maintain that it is widely agreed that the concept of fashion, meaning a broad sector of people embraces a prevailing clothing style for a relatively short period, started during the Middle Ages but became widespread during later centuries. The popularity of fashion came as a response to many cultural, political and economic forces. Historians connected the emergence of modern fashion particularly with the emergence of the wealthy bourgeois culture in Europe. The wealthy merchant middle-class desired to compete with the aristocratic royal class that was the only class to dress fashionably. The middle classes wore fashionable clothes that emulated the structure's royal classes but were less luxurious (Rocamora and Smelik 21). It was mainly the Industrial Revolution that brought about technological and economic changes, resulting in social change and new attitudes towards dress and costume; the rapid mass production of textile enabled broad sectors of the society to participate in high fashion that was reserved to the court and aristocracy. During the times of the Medieval Europe, women wore simple two-layer loose-fitting tunics underneath a cape or mantle made of linen, silk or wool. The fabrics and ornaments of the costumes defined the borders between social classes and society status rigidly.

During the medieval period, married women would further cover their hair with a veil. From the end of the sixteenth century to the first half of the eighteenth century, the dominant fine art was baroque, and it was also reflected in the clothing style that was extensively ornamented and was worn only by those who could afford them. Nevertheless, during the 17th century, the upper-class women's costumes, in line with the baroque and rococo arts, changed gradually from the famous full sacque gowns to the tight bodices into loose flowing dresses.

Starting from the 19th century, European women started to call into question their roles in modern society. During the Victorian era, women wore constricting corsets and large

skirts. Women were idealized as wives and mothers of a large family who takes care of the household. Women's dress emphasized the social norms that separated women from men's busy life in the public sphere. The call for freeing slaves into free individuals during the American Civil War encouraged some European women to revolt against their suffering from another kind of enslavement and oppression, and it was their dress. The prominent American reformist Amelia Bloomer (1818-1894) who wrote on women's rights, led a wave of active women to change women's dress that restricted women's movement. Bloomer attempted to change women's sophisticated unhealthy dress to a comfortable rational modern dress. The new dress was in line with a feminist attitude that demanded women's participation in the public sphere challenging gender norms in Western societies. Bloomer's dress was a shorter model consists of a shorter skirt worn above a pair of trousers. Although Bloomer's wave did not gather momentum initially, photographs affirm that some women in the American society embraced it for the rapid busy modern life, and diverse forms of the bloomer style were also adopted by young women interested in sport and healthy lifestyle. This popularity was achieved thanks to the spread of information about contemporary styles in magazines for women, engraved fashion plates and the invention of photography in the 1840s. Furthermore, this shift was encouraged by the emergence of the modern consumer society during this period.  Both printing and advertisements helped in the department stores' popularity and organized markets, which saw their birth first in cosmopolitan cities in Europe (Wilson 2003, Reilly 2020).

 The call for women´s right to actively participate in the public sphere in the West coincided with the 19th-century colonial mission in the East. In the colonies, the colonizers urged non-Western women to liberate themselves from the pre-modern oppressive dress that relegated them to the domestic sphere. The Western colonizers denounced non-Western clothing styles as backward oppressive in relation to European modern emancipating

dress. In this vein, one can refer to the colonial discourse on Muslim women´s dress, particularly the practice of veiling forced on upper-class women in Egypt. Lord Cromer attacked the veiling practice as the symbol of a backward misogynist irrational Islamic religion forced by cruel Muslim men on their Muslim women. Thus, he called for "saving" Egyptian women by encouraging them to abandon their traditional Egyptian dress and embracing the modern Western dress to usher in their modern age and its emancipating values. Consequently, fashionable dress that tended to be the instrument of visible demarcation between social classes in the pre-modern age in Europe came to draw the lines between the emancipated rational modern Western women and oppressed "pre-modern" veiled Muslim woman by the European colonizers. In the following part, I discuss Muslim women's agency concerning the "choice" of non-Western modern dress code, particularly the practice of veiling in modern secular thinking.

## 2. Faith, Postcolonial Muslim's Identity and Agency

According to Enlightenment thinking, secularization is the central pillar of modern society where the gradual waning of religion is the normal and progressive outcome of being modern and enlightened. Although this prediction was supported by the process of a gradual decrease in religious practices and rituals in North European societies, starting from 1950 (Cf. Casanova 8), the Enlightenment's narrative on religion's demise has been problematized by a new way of thinking called Postmodernism. In this context, Grace Davie, in her essay "New Approaches in the Sociology of Religion: A Western Perspective", argues that the certainties inherited in modern thinking were substituted with a different current mode of thinking that established the ground for ongoing debates in sociological literature and laid a fundamental philosophical shift from the former known as

Enlightenment thinking. Those contemporary sociologists argue that, in our postmodern era, it is no longer assumed that a "secular discourse" will gradually substitute the claimed pre-modern religious narrative. However, both religious and secular will exist side by side as different individuals choose for themselves different ways of life in our contemporary modern liberal society (Davie 77-78). Religion is present in Western liberal societies today. An outstanding example is the case of the United States where the individual not only participates in religious rituals and traditions (Cf. Keddie 39), but their past religious traditions are deep-rooted in their subconscious. This led Kosmin to argue that "The contemporary United States exhibits both high modernity and substantial religiosity among the populace and so shows that secularization has not been sweeping, thorough and total"(Kosmin 8).

Indeed, A wide range of social and anthropological researchers affirm that "viewed from a global perspective at least, the presumption of secularisation as an inevitable or uniform process is no longer tenable" (Reilly, 2011, 5). Nonetheless, most of the attention (rejection) of liberal feminists and politicians has been devoted to the persistence or even the "voluntary" comeback of religiosity among Muslims, particularly the practice of veiling in contemporary modern societies.

Mahmood (2005) argues that according to secular feminist thinking, those veiled Muslim women pose a challenge to feminist ideals; since they tend to embrace values and practices that have historically ascribed women to "subordinate status" and associate them with terms like "the subjugation of women, social conservatism, reactionary atavism, cultural backwardness...". Hence, according to the liberal feminists' view, these women are "passive actors"; they cannot decide for themselves since no free woman can choose "against her interests", that is, the freedom chosen by the secular feminists (Mahmood 4-11).Thus, to these secular feminists, those Muslim women's autonomous choice depends

on what they "choose" to wear and not how their decisions are made. Within this vein, one has to go back to the history of feminism in the West. *Feminism* can be defined as "the ideology of a modern social movement for the advancement of women, taking shape (in its Western European and US forms) in the eighteenth century and based on principles of equality and emancipation in secular societies […]" (Dinshaw in Plain &Sellers 11). Thus, the historical grounds of feminism as a European project derived from the Enlightenment critique of suppressive religious doctrines and clerical injustice. In her article "Despite the Times: The Post-secular Turn in Feminism" (2008)*,* Rosi Braidotti argues that in the "philosophies and political practices, the feminist struggle for women's rights in Europe has historically produced an agnostic, if not downright atheist position". Having been influenced by existentialist feminism and Marxist or Socialist feminism, feminists in their struggle for women's rights relied solely on "rational argumentation". Their belief system is thus "civic, not theistic, and is viscerally opposed to authoritarianism and orthodoxy." Moreover, their politics were also rooted in the idea of separating the secular public sphere from the sacred private sphere and its values. Therefore, the "social practice of agency or political subjectivity is clearly situated in the secular public sphere" (Braidotti 4). Thus, the choice of Islamic head-covering that contradicts what is assumed as the "positive freedom" could only be read "in terms of a false consciousness or the internalization of patriarchal norms through socialization" (Mahmood 6).

Although the narrative above on the inherently passive oppressed religious Muslim women has not lost its momentum in modernistic / post-colonial discourse, even after more than two centuries, another dimension that vilifies practicing Muslim women as affiliated to an extremist ideology was added to the discourse after the terrorist attacks in the West perpetrated in the name of Islam (Zine, *Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism*, 1). As a result, veiled women are rejected and face discrimination because of their headscarf

that symbolizes a political affiliation with an extremist religious ideology that contradicts the values of a liberal democratic public sphere. This narrative on the veil as a political statement also emerged in Eastern societies such as Egypt and Tunisia, where there are religious, political parties. Overall, according to the mainstream Western discourse on modernity, any deviation from the anticipated future secular choices of women in the modern age reflects a" false consciousness" of their practitioners, as Bullock puts it:

> If you have chosen to cover, well, you have been socialized to believe covering is a good thing. However, if you really knew your interest as a woman, you would know that it is not good to cover, so your decision to cover is a sad indication of your being brainwashed in the modern secular state" (Bullock, *RethinkingMuslim Women and the Veil*, 22).

All in all, this secular feminist narrative negates any possible choices outside the Western dress code in line with non-Western faith, social norms, and socio-economic circumstances without any political inclination. This secular feminist narrative traps Muslim women between their clothing styles that constitute an aspect of their historical and socio-economic circumstances and the ideals of the "Western" perception of freedom in the modern age on the one hand, and negate the continuous change in the form and meaning of Islamic clothing style among Muslim women throughout their history. In this line of thought, poststructuralists argue that our decisions are the outcome of our social norms and traditions that form our preferences (CF. Bilge 12-13). According to poststructuralists, "human subjectivity is constructed by ideology (Althusser), language (Lacan) or discourse (Foucault), [therefore] any action performed by that subject must also be to some extent a consequence of those things" (Ashcroft et.al 8).

The French philosopher Michel Foucault's works on power and knowledge offer nuanced understandings of the impact of discourse on the human's agency. Foucault argues that knowledge is produced by discourse and is not free from power relations. According to

Foucault, knowledge supported by power can rule its recipient's behaviour and choices since it is considered "truth", and this "truth" is historicized. This means that "truth" differs according to what a given society thinks the acceptable discourse during a specific period.

The discourse affects individuals' consciousness through the state's institutions such as the schools and media. Through these state's institutions, discourses are constituted by excluding what cannot be said and including what can be repeated. These inclusion and exclusion processes resist and prevent other opposing discourses (knowledge) from flowing into society. Here, discourse plays a vital role in constructing one's subjectivity since, through language, the individuals' desires and choices are regulated. Therefore, Foucault argues that our autonomous self is not orchestrated by our rationality. Instead, our human subjectivity is constructed by a discourse that affected those represented in the discourse and those who produce it. Foucault wrote:

> Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, how each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 131)

In line with the poststructuralist understanding of the individual´s agency, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor analyses our practices in a specific community in the light of what he calls the "community's good". Taylor argues that no identity can imagine itself without considering itself in a specific social community. Taylor calls this stance a desire to be "embedding socially" where the social norms and conventions determine one's choices. Therefore, Taylor argues that since religious life cannot be separated from social life where members embraced commonly adopted religious attitudes, their choice of

religious rituals and practices is taken regarding their social community and prescribed values (Taylor 147-150).

Following this line of thought, one can refer to Algerian women's choice to wear the veil to respond to the French colonizing discourse of women's emancipation by unveiling Algerian women. Franz Fanon claims that veiling's religious practice was deemed the border between the liberal French culture and Islamic culture. Those Muslim women saw that forsaking these religious practices and adopting secular French dress code precipitated "the French colonizer's victory"(CF. Fanon, *Algeria Unveiled*, 162- 168). During this period, Fanon argues, those Muslim women sought to affirm that "it is not true that women liberated themselves at the invitation of France and General de Gaulle" (Fanon, *Algeria Unveiled*, 61). The so-called backward, oppressive choice of head-covering was a conscious outcome of an autonomous choice of those Muslim women's desire to survive and not assimilate into the colonized culture. Nonetheless, although the discourse on political colonization has officially ended in Muslim societies, the logic behind the desire to cling to Islamic symbols in the face of Western cultural imperialism and assert Islamic identity has not entirely lost its momentum, in particular in countries where women were forced to renounce their Islamic traditions for the Western ideals.

Thus, for instance, a Tunisian college student describes her choice to wear the hijab, stating, it "is dictated by my conviction that I belong to a great and beautiful civilization with deep roots and a set of norms. It is this set of norms I have adopted" (Charred 67). Furthermore, non-Western Islamic dress can be an expression of modest cultural identity beyond body commodification. For instance, one can refer to Yasmin Mohsen, the first

Hijabi model in Egypt. Yasmin comments on her choice to combine faith and elegant look, saying, "We are saying that hijab is elegant and that being veiled is not equivalent to raggedness a ruggedness femininity" ("Hijab into a Fashion Hallmark").

In addition, choosing to wear a non-Western dress can be an outcome of consciously taken choice that reflects a feminist strategy to participate in a patriarchal society.Indeed, in contemporary Egypt, dressing in revealing short clothes, women risk sexual harassment on the streets and social rejection in conservative neighbourhoods; even though those "emancipated "unveiled, Westernized Egyptians usually do not transgress the traditional morality norms.

Moreover, the choice of different non- Western clothing styles can be an empowering instrument for impoverished Muslim women who opt to go out for work but cannot afford the money spent on hair styling. Their choice allows blurring the social distinctions among students and female employees in a rigid class society like Egypt. Dressing in an Islamic fashion by women belonging to different social classes did not necessarily prevent women from being emancipated or relegated to their claimed domestic roles. Those headscarf wearers are seen driving their cars or jogging on the street, or taking parts in sports in the public sphere while wearing a headscarf in its modern designs.

Overall, choosing to wear the headscarf can be a marker of women's commitment to their faith, women's empowering tool in a class patriarchal society or a marker of women's cultural identity. A woman can choose to wear it one motive or even have mixed motives to wear it. Ahmed wrote:

> The veil is economical; it solves difficulties over the lack of glamorous clothing. It is psychologically comforting, and it protects women from male harassment. It signals the wearer's adherence to Islamic moral and conservative mores. The veil extends female autonomy; wearing the veil does not define women's place at home but

legitimises their presence outside it. It is indigenous; in the context of rapid social, economic, educational and professional changes, it provides a viable strategy by which women negotiate the tensions between the old views and their new roles (Ahmed 225).

In this context, Mahmood (2005) refutes identifying the secular feminists' attitude towards Muslim women's choice to dress in non- Western clothing style in liberal society as inherently oppressive backward practice and see achieving their emancipation and the right to self-affirmation only through unveiling. Instead, Mahmood argues that social context defines the challenge, how and which women's action pushes for changes in a given society. Mahmood wrote:

> The ability to effect change in the world and oneself is historically culturally specific (both in terms of what constitutes 'change' and the means by which it is affected). In that case, the meaning and sense of agency cannot be fixed in advance but emerges through an analysis of the particular concepts that enable specific modes of being (Mahmood 14).

In this context, it is critically important to emphasize that my argument is not between 'tradition' and 'modernity, but between two different views / models of modernity. The non-Western model considers historical and cultural differences. This model can accommodate modern secular and traditional religious elements while endeavouring to achieve a modern feminist attitude towards women in a modern public sphere.

In this vein, one can refer to groups of contemporary fashionable headscarf wearers' choice as an instrument to challenge the patriarchal religious discourse and conservative social norms within Muslim societies that are rarely discussed in the post-colonial context. One can argue that with the absence of robust feminist activism outside the state's realm in Egyptian society, the unstoppable tide of consumerism, particularly fashion, plays a prominent role in disrupting the dominant patriarchal and oppressive forces in Muslim societies. Besides, this dress code challenges the stereotypical representation of Muslim women as modest, subservient unveiled "Other".

This strand of post-colonial feminism in Muslim societies, which does not necessarily follow the normative model of Western modernity or mainstream Islamic feminism, is still marginalized in post-colonial text. In "Displacements: Religion, Gender, and the Catachrestic Demands of Postcoloniality", Sîan Melvill Hawthorn argues that scholars deem postcoloniality as merely another "marginality ", rather than regarding it as a starting point towards "theorizing `our' reconfigurations of centre and periphery" that should be reconsidered or even redrawn. She posits that the "European construction of gendered difference" in which "'religion` and "female" were devalued" was the result of the new condition of modernity and its claimed civilizing mission. This marginality of post-colonialism could be partially embedded in the inability of postcolonial scholars to discern and deconstruct the "ethnocentrism of the field's history that is heavily influenced by the colonial history on women and religion. These colonial encounters with their past histories have shaped the past and still affect the present; even if we take a different position to those histories, they remain the starting point from which religion, feminism, and postcoloniality are investigated (Hawthorne 182-183).

## 3. Postcolonial Theory and the Muslim Practicing Subject as a "Subaltern" of Modernity

In post-colonial studies, Antonio Gramsci's concept of subaltern that refers to the marginalized and silenced social and political groups by a hegemonic discourse has been appropriated and used to investigate Western hegemony over non-Western cultures and histories. In his essay "Postcolonial Remains", Robert Young investigates the subaltern excluded non-Western histories in Western academia today. He argues that after the age of Enlightenment, `histories of "the world" became histories of European expansion within

academia, while histories of other cultures were counted as inferior to be considered. Therefore, the task of post-colonial scholars and historians is to make their histories recognized and acknowledged. Young wrote: "post-colonialism, in its original impulse, was concerned to make visible areas, nations, cultures of the world which were notionally acknowledged, technically there, but which in significant other senses were not there". Although the excluded histories of the non-Western cultures, mainly the anti-colonial indigenous struggle for liberation from Western cultural hegemony, started to occupy a space in contemporary post-colonial debates, some parts could not be accommodated in these debates for they do not fit in the post- colonial theories such as the concept of the sacred (Young 13-14). In this context, Waïl Hassan, in his article "Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application", highlights the fact that post-colonial theory is a Western product that affirms the Western secular modern thought vis- a-vis the pre- modern sacred. Hassan argues that main fours theories from which post-colonial theory has developed are grounded in anti- religion tradition. These theories are: "Marxism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and feminism"(Hassan 47).

This hegemonic Westernized secular thinking ignored most ordinary post-colonial Muslims who embrace different values and live in different harsh socio-economic and political contexts. Therefore, this resulted in a gap between the realities of ordinary Muslims and mainstream post-colonial discourse represented by secular post-colonial theorists and elite writers. Malak describes this situation stating," the result is a dissonance between post-colonial discourses and anticolonial praxes, between the polished halls of academe and the desolations of slums, refugee camps, torture chambers, and combat trenches."(Malak 17) Malak, thus, argues that post-colonial theory is prone to be influenced by Eurocentrism and its hegemonic values and expected to end up in a state of neo-colonialism. In this context, Malak argues that mainstream postcolonial literature

could not provide "insights about the activism of Islam" as a religion with its long history of struggling against the hegemonic colonial depiction of Islam and its adherent to challenge the biased depiction of Muslims and Islam which draws an oppositional model of oppressive backward Islamic ideals vis-a- vis liberating modern secular Western values.

Furthermore, postcolonial literature ignored the significant role of Islam as a cultural and historical aspect in the formation of its adherents' identity where "many Muslims regard their religion as a key component of their identity that could rival, if not supersede, their class, race, gender or ethnic affiliation" (Malak 3). Malak posits that although the question of faith and religious identity is present in post-colonial literature in discussing the issue of the "Oriental" cultural traditions and philosophy in contrast to the Western culture, the question of religious identity received little attention (Malak 16). Malak claims that post-colonial literature is accused of its "dearth of useful ´post-colonial´ theoretical material germane to the issue of religion or the sacred as a critical conceptual category, as compared to the valorised ones of race, class, gender, nation, migration, and hybridity" (Malak 16).

In this context, one can understand the absence of the diverse identities of practicing Egyptian Muslim women and their changing attitude towards fashion and practicing religion in post-colonial texts mainly produced by the secularized Egyptian elite. This absence of practicing Muslim women in the post-colonial text stresses the claimed fixed borders between Muslim and West cultures by negating Muslim women's changing experiences, needs and desires. Hasan (2015) states:

> Despite such hype accompanied by enormous curiosity involving Muslim women, practicing Muslim women were conspicuous by their absence in the literary scene for a very long time, which perhaps facilitated the proliferation of fantasy, static identity and cultural stereotypes about them. As a result, Muslim women were made

to fit the preconceived (neo-) Orientalist notions." (Hasan, *Seeking Freedom in the "Third Space" of Diaspora*, 93).

In this context, Malak urges post-colonial theorists, critics and writers to fill this gap by claiming a "middle terrain". This "middle terrain" can decolonize the hegemony of the euro-centric post-colonial discourse to offer a more representative theory on the reality of dispossessed, marginalized people (Malak *17- 18).*

In summary, following Malak´s argument on the need to fill a gap between the rigid binary model of religious pre-modern "other" and modern Western secular subject, I aim to bring to the forefront the diverse voices on politically unaffiliated practicing Egyptian women in modern Egypt.I attempt to deconstruct the Western monolithic stereotypical representation that assumed traditional subordinate religious woman vis-a-vis modern emancipated non-religious woman in the modern age. The research is not about the clash between traditional Muslim culture and modern secular Western culture instead, it follows Eisenstadt's theory of "Multiple Modernities" (Eisenstadt 2000). This theory predicates upon the "past" of a given culture with its different history that gives rise to a specific "identity" and, as a result, different paths to its mode of modernity without negating their present lived experience The present lived experiences are intertwined with the secular European modernity brought to non- Western Muslim culture in the context of colonialism and globalisation. Therefore, I suggest with Eisenstadt that the best way to understand the modern world with its diverse histories and cultural values is to grasp it as "a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs" (Eisenstadt 2).

**Chapter II**

**Islam, Dress and Gendered Borders between Theory and Practice**

This chapter follows Muslim women's visibility and clothing styles in the public sphere before the 19th-century encounter with Western secular modernity. In Muslim society, the claimed correlation between modesty and inner virtue and Muslim women's outer appearance justifies the need to adhere to a specific dress to ensure morality. Moreover, established interpretation of Qur'anic verses demands that a clear distinction between male and female spaces be made and that this distinction be enforced visually through clothing regulation. Nonetheless, Muslim women's position and visibility in the public sphere differ throughout history according to social-economic circumstances and the religio-political contexts. This argument challenges contemporary Islamists´ and secularists´ essentialist representation of Muslim women's dress and presence in the public sphere. These contemporary debates maintain that the 19th century's colonial encounter grounded Muslim women's consumer culture and the secularised feminist rebellious attitude against their traditional interpretation of religious / mores.

The nineteenth century's modern Western discourse on Muslim women is represented in two primary practices; the Islamic social system of the harem and veiling. These two practices have been considered the symbol of Muslim women's oppression, enslavement, and submission to their misogynist Muslimmen.Westerners imagined the Muslim harem as a vast space where females are lying down naked or wearing transparent dresses, exposing their alluring bodies at the service of their sexually obsessed men. Those women are also passive in the public sphere, where they

succumb to Muslim men's chauvinism by covering themselves in loose black robes and veils. This representation of Muslim women as inherently passive women hidden behind the high wall of the harem or their claimed ugly long tent-like robes compared to beautiful emancipating Western dress is still highly widespread in the Western public imagination and literary texts. Conversely, a wide range of Muslim feminist writers and sociologists argue that such an Orientalist representation overlooks the history of Muslim women's resistance to their oppression. This Orientalist discourse contradicts Muslim men's reading and representation of their women as willful women who need to be controlled and excluded from the public sphere in the name of their religion. In her book, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (2002), the Moroccan sociologist and feminist Fatima Mernissi describes the above-mentioned two contradicting representations of Muslim women writing:

> Muslim men represent women as active participants, while westerners such as Matisse, Inger, and Picasso show them as nude and passive. Muslim painters imagined women as riding fast horses, armed with bows and arrows, and dressed in heavy coats. Muslim men portray harem women as uncontrollable sexual partners. But westerners...see the harem as peaceful pleasure-garden where omnipotent men reign supreme over obedient women. While Muslim men describe themselves as insecure in their harems, real or imagined, Westerners describe themselves as self-assured hero with no fears of women, the tragic dimension so present in Muslim harems- fear of women and male self-doubt – is missing in the western harem(Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different,*16).

Furthermore, the Western discourse of subordinate veiled Muslim women negates the diversity of Muslim women´s clothing styles and women´s attitudes towards the modest appearance in the public sphere throughout history. Many post-colonial scholars argue that the 19th century's Western representation of Muslim women did not necessarily reflect Muslim women's situation and was highly influenced by the political/cultural conflict between Islam and the West during this period. Therefore, their representations

came to serve the colonial imperial interests in Muslim societies (Said 1978, Alloula 1986, Ahmed 1992, Mernissi 2002).

Those mentioned above contrasting views on Muslim women's position in Muslim societies encourage me to start the research by excavating Muslim women's status in Muslim societies and their attitudes towards clothing styles in Muslim societies before the 19th-century colonial encounter. Therefore, a review of this period is crucial to deconstruct contemporary Islamist / secularist debates on Muslim women's dress and presence in the public sphere. These contemporary debates maintain that the 19th century's colonial encounter grounded Muslim women's consumer culture and the secularised feminist rebellious attitude against the traditional interpretation of religious / mores. Thus, the Islamists and the secularists call for a renouncing of the fashionable Islamic dress and attractive look, which became popular among contemporary Muslim women. While the Islamists demand renouncing the fashionable dress and returning to an "authentic" Islamic dress, the secularists encourage Muslim women to stick to the fashionable dress and take off the veil, which is inherently connected with women's modesty and subordination.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section discusses Mernissi's critical re-reading of Quranic verses that deal with Muslim women´s seclusion and veiling. The Moroccan writer, sociologist and feminist Fatima Mernissi is one of the most well-known Muslim feminists and thinkers. Mernissi's texts are considered the most revolutionary reading that addresses the Islamic clothing style and questions women's position in the public sphere and Western attitude towards Muslim women. In her texts, Mernissi investigates the changing meanings of veiling and women's position in the public sphere before and after the colonial encounter. Her works reflect the changing attitude towards practising Islam, modernity, colonialism, and the present Western consumer culture.

The second part discusses Muslim women's position in the public sphere between the ideal Islamic model on women's visibility in the public sphere and women's changing daily needs and attitudes towards practicing their religion with special attention given to Egypt.

1. **Muslim Women's Visibility in the Public Sphere between Theory and Practice**

In her book *Women and Gender in Islam: The roots of A Modern Debate* (1992), the historian American Egyptian Leila Ahmed maintains that women's status and presence in the public sphere in Muslim societies in general, represented in Turkish, Syrian, and Egyptian society, from the tenth century until the beginning of the nineteenth century were governed by four main interrelated factors: laws and customs that govern marriage, the social system of the harem (or the seclusion of women in special quarters), the right of women to inherit, and finally the social class to which women belong. Ahmed argues that social class governed the other three factors.

According to Ahmed, Muslim women enjoyed the right to inheritance, and affluent women were allowed to invest their inherited properties and money in the markets and trade. Those wealthy women achieved their affairs, usually through male agents, because they were not allowed to work or interact with unrelated men. Their social class demanded women´s seclusion in the harem.

Women belonging to the lower classes, however, were present in the public sphere, and they worked in simple crafts such as cooking, cleaning houses, selling vegetables and fruits, assisting in washing the dead, or as brokers "Dallas" who brought the harem wealthy women their demands from the market. Nonetheless, the presence of lower-classes' women in the public space was not to be compared with men's presence throughout Muslim history. Instead, all Muslim women were under the dictate of their

political and religious rulers, who banned them several times from appearing on the streets or forced a specific dress code on women.

Muslim women were forced to wear the veil combined with a prescribed dress from time to time. The practice of veiling and relegating women to the domestic sphere was adopted by upper-class women, particularly in urban areas in Arabia, long before Islam's spread in countries influenced by the Assyrian culture like Syria and Palestine. The veiling practice dates back to the Assyrians, the rulers of Mesopotamia, from about 1380 to 612 B.C.E. The Assyrian law that obliged married women, widowed, daughters to wear the veil was the first law on women's clothing. Women were considered the property of their fathers and then passed to their husbands' ownership and thus were not available to other men to see their faces. The veil was intended to protect men's interests.

Also, the harem system and secluding upper-class women were still practiced during the Sassanian Empire's time, the last empire before Islam. Although the marriage was monogamous among ordinary people, the rulers and upper classes continued to enlarge their harems. For instance, the harem of the twelfth-century Assyrian ruler that consisted of forty women contained twelve thousand women during the Sassanian emperor Khusru1 (531-79 CE.) Shortly before the Muslim conquest of the empire (Ahmed 14).

In her book *The Veil And The Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation Of Women's Rights in Islam* (1991), Mernissi argued that neither the practice of veiling nor the harem system is explicitly prescribed in the Quran; the only verses dealing with women's clothing instructed women to keep their private parts and their  bosoms covered.  In her preface to the second edition of *her book The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights In Islam* (1991), Mernissi argued that despite the rights granted to women in Islam in the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad's teaching

and attitude towards women during his lifetime, Muslim women were deprived of their

rights by Muslim male elites through relegating women to the domestic sphere. Those

Muslim elites used their authority to enforce the most conservative interpretation of the

Quranic verses to achieve their interests, particularly with the absence of any female's

role in interpreting the sacred verses throughout Muslim / Arab societies' history so far.

Mernissi states:

> I had come to understand one thing: if women's rights are a problem for some modern Muslim men, it is neither because of the Koran nor the Prophet, nor the Islamic tradition, but simply because of those rights conflict with the interests of a male elite. The elite faction is trying to convince us that their egotistic, highly subjective, and mediocre view of culture and society has a sacred basis. But if there  is one thing that the women and men of the late twentieth century who have an awareness and enjoyment of history can be sure of, it is that Islam was not sent from heaven to foster egotism and mediocrity (Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite, xi).*

Therefore, Mernissi, who believed that the source of Muslim male elite´s claim of the

sacred basis of their authority over Muslim female and women's relegation to the

domestic sphere lies in the past texts, embarked on questioning the interpretation of

Quranic verses and traditional Islamic texts or "Ahadith"[3]  that validate their claim.

Mernissi endeavors to claim a feminist position of Muslim women in Islam as Meriam

Cooke affirms the following Lines:

> Mernissi decided that if she were to question the reliability of this misogynist tradition, she would have to study 'the religious texts that everybody knows but no one really probes with the exception of the authorities on the subject: the mullahs and Imams (Cooke 71).

According to Mernissi´s interpretation, the sacred verses referred to the division of

space in Islam were not intended to segregate genders or seclude women in the

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3 The term "Ahadith" means reports or narratives that describe the Prophet Mohammed's words or customs. The Ahadith literature, based on the spoken accounts, was in circulation in Muslim societies after Prophet Muhammad's death and was evaluated by Male Muslim scholars and gathered into collections during the 8th and 9th centuries.

domestic sphere as they were interpreted by conservative Muslim scholars later.

Mernissi refers to the Verses 33:53, which say:

> O you who have believed, do not enter the houses of the Prophet except when you are permitted for a meal, without awaiting its readiness. But when you are invited, then enter; and when you have eaten, disperse without seeking to remain for conversation. Indeed, that [behaviour] was troubling the Prophet, and he is shy of [dismissing] you. But Allah is not shy of the truth. And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts (Quran 33:53).

Mernissi posits that while these verses should be looked at as pedagogical verses that aim to teach all Muslim believers the ethics of entering someone's house which needs prior permission (Mernissi 1997, 92), the traditional patriarchal interpretation of these verses put a significant hindrance on women's position and presence the public sphere in Muslim society throughout Muslim history. She wrote:

> It is a passage so exceptional and determining for the Muslim religion that it introduced a breach in space that can be understood to be a separation of public from the private, or indeed the profane from the sacred, but which was to turn into segregation of the sexes. The veil was going to cover up women, separate them from men, from the Prophet, and so from God (Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, 101).

Mernissi argued that Muslim women's exclusion from the public sphere after Mohammed's death was mainly supported by political and economic circumstances. These circumstances hindered an objective interpretation of the sacred verses that deal with veiling and gender spaces and roles, in particular, since mainly "all power, from the seventh century on was only legitimized by religion, political forces and economic interests pushed for the fabrication of false traditions" ( Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, 101).

According to traditional Islamic law, the universe is divided into two spaces according to sexes. Domestic space is assigned to women, while public space is designated for men.

The public sphere symbolizes the male community whose members interact based on power, equality, love, and trust. However, the domestic sphere of sexuality is assigned to females representing family, inequality, seclusion, subordination, and mistrust (Mernissi, Beyond *the Veil,* 138). Mernissi wrote:

> Muslim sexuality is territorial: its regulatory mechanisms consist primarily in a strict   allocation of space to each sex …apart from the ritualised trespasses of women into   public spaces (which are, by definition, male spaces), there are no accepted patterns for interactions between unrelated men and women. Such interactions violate the special rules that are the pillars of the Muslim sexual order (Mernissi, Beyond *the Veil,* 137).

Therefore, in this respect, women must wear the hijab (hijab in Arabic means curtain) to hide their beauty and charm when they step into the public sphere. Mernissi claims that according to the traditional interpretation of the Quranic verses, hiding women's beauty and veiling them tend to protect Muslim men from violating their faithful relationship with God because trespassing of the "sacred" frontier by women results in the falling of men into the sin of "fitnah" or sexual temptation. In this context, Mernissi maintains that unlike in Christianity which regarded women as biologically inferior to men, Muslim women are considered more powerful than Muslim men. She argued that there are two contradicting theories on sexuality and women's status in traditional Islamic theory and the prevailing Muslim public imagination. Firstly, Islam considers female sexuality passive in its explicit approach to women and sexuality, calling for women's protection from men´s sexual assault by relegating women to the domestic sphere or veiling them in the public space. Implicitly, however, Islam regards women's sexuality as the cause of social immorality. This implies women´s evil nature and their body´s subversive potential of the social fabric, while men are passive and weak when faced with women's tempting body or "fitnah".

Mernissi wrote:

> The Muslim woman is endowed with a fatal attraction which erodes the male's will to resist her and reduces him to a passive acquiescent role. He has no choice; he can only give in to her attraction, whence her identification with fitnah, chaos, and with the anti-divine and anti-social forces of the universe (Mernissi, Beyond *the Veil,* 41).

In this context, mandating wearing the veil and embracing modest appearance is a tool to hide the dangerous women´s charming and destructive femininity in the public sphere.

In contrast, Mernissi's investigation led her to claim that gender equality and women's rights, particularly concerning their participation in the public sphere, are granted in Islam in its holy text and through the attitude of the Prophet Muhammad towards women during his life. Mernissi posits that the Prophet of Islam endeavoured to rid the Muslim community of the then-dominant "phobic attitude" towards women and is considered the first Muslim feminist, but his efforts failed to bear fruit because of political and social pressure (Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, 81). She maintains that during the first period of Islam in Medina, veiling was not required, and there was no division between private and public spheres. The Prophet's wives accompanied him in all his military and religious expeditions, and he even consulted them in all his military matters, particularly A'isha and Umm Salama, who were known for their strong characters and sharp minds. A'isha herself, familiar with the military techniques, led a battle against Ali called "Camel battle" after the Prophet's death. The attitude towards separating males´ and females' spaces and their roles in this period was criticized by the Prophet's conservative companions, particularly those who grew up in Mecca. For instance, Umar Ibn al-Khattab stood as "the spokesperson of male resistance to women's demands" to participate actively in the military arena like men and equal rights to inheritance (Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite,* 41).

Umar, the Prophet's companion and the second righteous caliph, was the military chief who fought for achieving the Prophet's Islamic political and social revolutionary egalitarian projects for changing society except concerning the pre-Islamic traditional role of sexes in Mecca- Umar states, "We men of Quraysh dominate our women" [4]Umar criticized Medina's social environment that allowed women's freedom in thinking and also movement and was compatible with the Prophet's attitude towards women in general, represented in his attitude towards his wives. Mernissi maintains that during these debates on Muslim women's position among the prophets and his Muslim community from both sexes: "munafiqun, "'the Hypocrites', those Medinese who saw in him a threat to their interests and the security of their city, attacked him and undermined his emotional ties" ( Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite, 143).*

His wife Aisha was accused of adultery by those Medinese. This incident which

Muslim Imams and religious scholars call (the lie) while is called by the Orientalists

"the affair of the necklace" (Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite, 177).* According to

Mernissi, Aisha's involvement in the political conflict between the Prophet and his

opponents can symbolise the male elites' desire to" humiliate" women and relegate

them to the private space. Mernissi wrote:

> A'isha, like any intelligent, beautiful woman loved by a powerful man, was not likely  to be lacking in egotism and insolence. As a result, she was bound to be the focus of envy, arouse hate, and provide an easy means to attack the one who held power. Combined with the lack of security that reigned in the streets, the slanders against A'isha were to shake the Prophet's faith in the project that was so dear to him -that of a private life open and mingled with public life, with the two of them existing side by side without conflict or barriers (Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite,* 178).

Besides, during this period, the Prophet and his first community of Islam were under

siege from their enemies and in conflict with the local opposition inside; in particular,

the Prophet's wives were exposed to harassment on the street by the unbelievers. As a response, free Muslim women believers were asked to veil themselves to protect themselves from this harassment in an unsafe society. Veiling was, thus, adopted as a community marker to distinguish themselves" the believers" from the others as the verse reveals; "O Prophet tell your wives, daughters and believing women to put on their jilbabs [long loose shirtdress] so they are recognized and thus not harmed" (Qur'an, 33:59). In this context, Mernissi, therefore, argued that veiling free Muslim female believers during this period symbolized not only the failure of an egalitarian society but the practice of veiling was also forced on Muslim women regardless of the degree of security the street. She wrote:

> The veil, which was intended to protect them from violence in the street, would accompany them for centuries, whatever the security situation of the city. For them, peace would never return. Muslim women were to display their hijab everywhere, the vestige of a civil war that would never come to an end. (Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite, 191).*

Nonetheless, Mernissi posits that there were Muslim women who rejected women´s relegation to the domestic sphere or wearing the veil in the public sphere. A famous example is Sukayna, one of the Prophet's granddaughters, who rejects everything that obstacles her personal "freedom - including hijab". Sukayna was born in circa. 671 AD and was known for her physical beauty, intelligence, wit and strong character. She was married five times (some say six) and stipulated in her marriage contracts that her husband was not allowed to practice polygamy and her right not to subordinate her desires and will to any husband. Contrary to what is followed by most Muslim women, Sukayna expressed her love feelings to a husband, rowed with others, and dared to sue one of them for breaching conditions stipulated in their marriage contract. Sukayna also continued actively participate in the public sphere´s activities like attending debates in "Qurashi tribal council, the equivalent of today's

democratic municipal councils" after her marriages (Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite,* 192).

The example of the strong feminist Sukaya, Mernissi maintained, is rarely present in the Arab Muslim historical or modern discourse on the position of Muslim women in Muslim societies or Western texts on Muslim women. Her presence disturbs the prevailing patriarchal Muslim culture and Western imagination of oppressed passive Muslim women. In addition, after the Prophet's death, there were many oppositional feminist debates from within the Muslim community over Quran´s interpretation upon which a Muslim society has to be established, such as the Shiite sects, the Kharijjites and Qarmatians. The Kharijites rejected having concubines, marrying girls at the age of nine and granted women's visibility in the public sphere. The Qarmatians also banned polygamy and the practice of veiling.

Also, Sufi thought promotes ethical pious Islam that focuses on the inner self and does not discriminate between the sexes. Sufists tend to „renounce worldly attractions" and lead modest spiritual lives. Through Sufist life, Muslim women control their lives without male guardianship by choosing not to get married. Unlike Christianity, celibacy goes against the Islamic "orthodox imperative to marry and live under male authority". Although Sufis observe a pious attitude and modest lifestyle in line with established Islam, their mysticism and practices are considered controversial and undesirable by the established Islam (Ahmed 90-101).

In summary, the hegemony of the established andro-centric interpretation of the Quran throughout extended periods of history led to the disappearance of the image of rebellious strong Muslim women like Umm Salama, A'isha and Sukayna or a feminist visions of Muslim women. In contrast, "the image of the woman of the 'Golden Age' - a`slave' who intrigues in the corridors of power when she loses hope of seducing- who

symbolizes the eternal Muslim female". As a result, veiling and women's seclusion remained the prevailing custom among Muslim women in most Muslim societies for centuries, in particular Arab Muslim societies (Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite,* 190-195). This, however, does not mean that Muslim men dominated Muslim women in all Muslim societies following a traditional conservative Quranic interpretation in Medieval Muslim societies. Mernissi argued that historical accounts and paintings from Turkey and central Asia show that men did not dominate their women. Women in these non-Arab Muslim societies were present in the public sphere and were not expected to be veiled or hidden behind their men, even in the highest ranks in society. Ibn Batouta, the infamous fourteenth-century Moroccan traveler, expressed his astonishment at witnessing the respectful position given to Turkish women by their men. He wrote:

> "I witnessed in these lands something remarkable...the highest consideration accorded by the Turks to their women. Women enjoy among the Turks a higher position than men...The first time I saw a princess, she was riding in a chariot adorned with a sumptuous blue drap...when she arrived in front of the prince's house, she stepped out of her chariot ...she walked with majesty towards the prince ...the prince stood and walked towards her, saluted her, and invited her to take a seat besides his own ". Also, Ibn Batouta affirms many times that, "Turks do not veil" (Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West*, 194-195).

Moreover, Muslim women did not cease to challenge the claimed universal authentic interpretation of the Quranic verses, which has to be followed in all Muslim societies. In the same vein and challenging Muslim and Western discourse of all Muslim women's subordination to their men throughout history, Mernissi´s text *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1993) uncovers the hidden history of powerful Muslim women in Muslim history. She takes a journey into the history of the Muslim world to show a different position of Muslim women than the established patriarchal version promoted by male authorities or what she calls "political Islam". Mernissi uncovers the lives of sixteen

Muslim women who were the head of the state between 1000 A.D. and 1800 A.D. Some of those Muslim women inherited the reign, and others won the power struggle. Some of those powerful women ruled with the help of male heirs, and others succeeded in ruling alone. Those Muslim powerful queens include for instance Sultana Radiyya who reigned in Delhi for four years from 1236 until her death and Shajar al-Durr in Egypt who was able to rule for eighty days after the death of her husband in 1249. Shajar al-Durr was the first female Mamluk (slave) girl to be the leader of Muslim Egypt. Although she was accepted by the Egyptian common people and civil service who were familiar with her ruling the state on behalf of her husbands during her absence for military campaigns, she was forced to leave the power by the caliph of Baghdad, the highest religious authority during this time. There were only two Arab women among these Muslim queens: Queen Asma and her daughter-in-law Queen Arwa. Queen Asma ruled with her husband Ali Ibn Mohammad al- Sulayhi and temporarily independently after death (1098), but the Caliph did not accept her rule independently and urged her to remarry. She ruled with her second husband. What is unique about Queen Asma is that the historians describe her as the powerful daring intelligent woman who appeared in the councils with her "face uncovered"(Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, 115). Mohammad al-Thawr, a modern Yemini Historian, describes Queen Asmaa writing:

> She was one of the most famous women of her time and one of the most powerful. She was munificent. She was a poetess who composed verses. Among the praises  given her husband Al-Sulayhi by the poets was the fact that he had her for a wife…When he ascertained the perfection of her character, her husband entrusted  the management of state business to her. He rarely made decisions that went against her advice (Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, 145).

Queen Arwa ruled Yemen for 47 years, from 1091 A.D. until her death in 1138 A.D. Nonetheless, the universal suffrage that affirms the will of the people and undermines the authorities of Muslim male elite in contemporary modern Muslim societies.

Overall, this led Mernissi to claim that according it is the universal sufferage and democratic election which can re-inscribes "Islam IIrisalh" or ethical Islam that the Prophet's teaching endeavoured to establish but failed due to the hegemony of male political elites, who used Islam to achieve their political interests. Thus, Mernissi urges all Muslim individuals to think for themselves and not rely on a specific calimed timeless interpretation of the Quran or Hadith. Mernissi wrote:

> The Islam of the politicians changes its colours according to the circumstances. The politicians who are caliphs and qadis [Islamic judges] can at will bend Islam risala, the Islam of the Prophet's message in the holy book, the Qur'an, to suit the precise interests they wish to defend (Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam,* 157).

Overall, Mernissi used religion "as an epistemological terrain upon which to construct alternative visions of womanhood have not been validated in most anti-racist feminist discourses"( Zine*, Creating a Critical Faith-Centered Space for Antiracist Feminism*, 173).

In summary, there have been two versions of Islamic attitudes towards Muslim women´s status in the public sphere and gender equality throughout history. The first version affirms ethical; spiritual Islam aspired and achieved by many Muslim groups and individuals. The other Islamic stance towards women is represented in the institutional Islam that is mainly andro-centric supported by Muslim male elites. The memory of an ethical Islam that affirms equality between all the believers throughout history makes Muslim feminists and of even ordinary Muslim women insist that gender equality and Muslim women´s active participation in the public sphere is granted to them in Islam even if these feminist stances are being rejected and hindered by Muslim

traditional male elites. Furthermore, although Muslim scholars affirm that the Quran tells women to observe modesty, mainly by covering their bosom and hiding their charm in the public sphere, many Muslim women groups and individuals resist covering their face and hair in most Muslim societies and have diverse beauty accessories rituals throughout their history. In the following part, I look at practicing Islam and Muslim women's resistance to their invisibility and exclusion from the public sphere in Medieval Egypt.

## 2. 1. Public Sphere and the Medieval Muslim Women

Ordinary Muslim women continued to appear in the public sphere and dressing in diverse attractive ways challenging their Arab / Muslim males who were responding by forcing women to withdraw from the public sphere in the name of religion from time to time, as the number of bans on women's appearance in the public sphere suggests. For instance, around 1000, the ruler of Egypt, al-Hakim, ordered that shoemakers should not make footwear for women and ordered that all women should not leave their homes, claiming that he intends to reinforce "proper" Islamic regulation (Gutherie 19). Nonetheless, accounts from two centuries after the royal edict suggest that such an edict could not be enforced forever or that women succumbed to their relegation to the private sphere. Ibn al-Hajj's (1250-1336), an Egyptian Moroccan scholar and theologian who described daily life in Cairo during the week in his book Kitāb al-Madkhal. According to Ibn al-Hajj, women's presence in the market exceeded men's presence and that women were able to intimately converse with men, in particular on Thursdays, since it was the weekend. According to Ibn Hajj, women's public time was divided into visiting the shrines and cemeteries, visiting the hammam, or shopping for jewellery and perfumes for wealthy women, even if women´s outings caused tension

with their men. Shirley Guthrie, in his book *Arab Women in the Middle Ages: Private and Public Roles* (2001), stated that:

> In the markets of old Cairo on Thursdays there were more women than men, and one could hardly move because of them. According to the authority, there were many material disputes between husbands and wives over such outings (Gutherie 150).

Besides, women's behaviour in the public sphere triggered conservative scholars' anger. Theologians rejected those women's attitude whose behaviour did not give much heed to the conservative laws as( Ahmed 120).Nevertheless, this tension among the women's resistance and the conservative group was settled against women when they were banned from leaving their houses by a royal decree after a plague struck Cairo markets in 1437.

This ruler manipulated Quranic verses that regard epidemics as a justification of the "Divine wrath" of women's presence in the public sphere. [5]Furthermore, even if the ban did not last forever and women were allowed to appear in the public sphere, women's presence was curbed by diverse restrictive regulations. For instance, in June 1522, it was decreed that "women were to refrain totally from going to the markets or from riding donkeys followed by its keeper-donkey drivers had still not overcome the error ways over three centuries (Guhthrie 19). Guthrie argues that the decrees' frequency that banned Egyptian Muslim women from appearing in the public sphere questions women's obedience and submission to the claimed timeless Islamic rule and laws forced on them by the rulers and conservative theologians. In these medieval Muslim societies, women's struggle was over their presence in the public sphere and how Muslim women transgressed the claimed eternal regulation of Islamic clothing. In the following part, I follow the Muslim women's interest in fashion and the tension that comes with it in a Medieval Egyptian Muslim society.

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## 2.2. Medieval Egyptian Women and Consumer Culture

Egyptian women wore different headgear in different styles and colours after the Muslim conquest of Egypt between 636 and 646 AD and after converting to Islam. For instance, some women wore the "qina", a meter-long cloth. A part of "qina "was worn under the scarf to cover the head, and the rest covered the face and chest. The veil and costume worn by peasants and Bedouin women were modified to suit their daily life requirements. They used available plants and animals for providing their fabric and dying their textiles. Poetesses, singing women, slaves, and prostitutes were exempt from wearing the veil and covering their faces. There were other kinds of headgear like the "Isaba", or a tight-fitting cap decorated with jewels or silver accessories sewn to its borders as a sign of wealth, was a popular fashion in Baghdad during the late eighth century and continued to be worn in Persia and by small girls in Mamluk Egypt for centuries later.

Also, Jews and Christians in Egypt wore some kind of veils. It was a sign of disrespect and humiliation for any woman to appear unveiled in the public sphere. There were also other kinds, such as the khimar, which covers women´s heads and shoulders.

Egyptian women also wore a kind of head covering called the niqab, which covered the whole face leaving only two holes for the eyes. Some scholars such as Guthrie (2001) argues that the niqab might be a reaction to fashion and a method to reinforce modesty among Muslim women during the fifteenth century. During this period, Egyptian Muslim women showed an extraordinary interest in extravagant clothing styles, particularly upper-class women, who were followed by women from lower social- classes.

Egyptian women's interest in fashion and the external appearance differs according to the economic situation, social conditions and the rulers' views on practising Islam.

Women would go through periods of exaggeration in ornamenting their appearance and other periods of voluntarily or compulsive giving up of glamour appearances. Indeed, women's fondness for fashion increased during the early Mamluk prosperous era, especially among the ruling class and the wealthy women, who created many fashions and were imitated by the lower classes women, even if women belonged to impoverished classes bought inexpensive materials according to their economic condition. Wealthy Egyptian females wore extravagant headdresses, which ignited the conservative religious class's anger and were subjected to violent punishment on the streets because they refused to give up their luxurious appearance. Guthrie describes this scene writing:

> In 1471 women in Cairo were forbidden on pain of beating by police to wear (tartor) or a distinctive, tall-head covering. Some women were afraid chose to go bareheaded. They were risking social disgrace, as their reputation was impugned and their menfolk shamed but demonstrated that they were not necessarily meekand submissive (Gutherie 126).

The upper-class women's behaviour in Egyptian society was not uncommon in other similar historical junctures. Historians' accounts show that upper classes stick less to the religious regulations throughout history in Muslim societies. Dressing in extravagant clothing by both men and women of the better-off classes and challenging the religious class had been justified through citing the Prophet's Hadith that says: "When Allah gives riches to man, he wants to be seen on him" (Gutherie 119).

Even though interest in fashion was a widespread phenomenon among royals and affluent classes in Egypt, lower strata took part in consumer culture even on a lesser scale. Merchants also endeavoured to promote such a culture among ordinary people since they could not rely only on the upper social classes to sell and profit from all their goods. Thus merchants strived to make their goods of various qualities and materials available to all social classes through exposure and selling in the markets. Silk, crepe

de chine and satin, furs, linen, brocade were popular among affluent urban women, while lower-quality materials of the same fabric were always available to women belonging to the lower classes. The fabric and ornamentation reflected the social status as mentioned above. Harem women's interest in luxurious appearance was satisfied by possessing expensive cosmetics and jewellery. They wore precious stones and gold accessories. Women did not neglect to beautify their bodies and skin, relying on natural ingredients at their disposal (Gutherie 141).

Little information is available about the Bedouin women and peasants and women belonging to the lower classes concerning beautifying the body. Edward lane (1801-1876), in his book *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1908), mentioned that peasants and lower-class women opted for tattoo designs instead of applying henna on their skin, which was a common practice among upper-class women to save money. Tattooing, however, was seen as implying an erotic nature and therefore was rejected by theologians. In Egypt, during the Mamluk era, the tattooists were not originally Egyptians but gipsies. The origins and religions of the gipsies are not mentioned either in historians' books or European travel books.

However, despite imagining their demanding rough lifestyle and, by extension, the little interest in possessing accessories or beautifying the body, it seems that lower-class women also kept the tradition of wearing some accessories according to their economic condition until the 19th century. Lane described the obsession of all Egyptian women with ornaments, but unlike wealthy who wore precious jewelry, women who belonged to lower classes wore cheap accessories such as rings and necklaces made of silver or glass. He wrote:

> I have before mentioned that the libbah and Sha´eer are worn by some women of lower orders, but their necklaces are most commonly composed of coloured glass beads, with one or more larger beads in the centre: or they are made in the form of network. The Egyptian women, being excessively fond of ornaments, often wear two or three necklaces of the value of a penny or less (Lane 576).

## 2.3. Islamic Dress and Fashion

According to established Islam, as mentioned before, Muslim women have to wear a loose chemise-like gown that has to reflect modesty in its pattern and colours and wear the veil of different variations. This clothing style is required for all girls from puberty and all women irrespective of their class when they leave their houses, whether they lived in the desert, rural or urban areas. Nonetheless, women´s dress had been dictated by fashion and fabric that differed according to the local customs, historical and social contexts.

Bedouins wore a loose-fitting wrap practical to their daily activities in the desert, such as firewood gathering. This loose wrap was also preferred by the breastfeeding women and those who were on the move. For women in the cities, tight-fitting clothes were the most popular. Nonetheless, modesty and respect required following the basic rules in society and historians such as Al-Muqaddisi's and Ibn Hawqal's accounts affirm that "as late as the ninth century, ordinary people in the Muslim world still followed a conservative lifestyle and dressed accordingly" ( Guthrie 116).

Due to the accumulation of wealth and the spread of the Muslim territories, Islamic dressing styles and fashion started to witness significant changes. Fashion was standard in the ruling class and among the upper classes. A large class of bourgeoisie came to resemble the hedonistic lifestyle adopted by the aristocracy. Women mainly showed particular interest in fashion and were open to embracing exotic materials and fashion in neighbouring societies, although local artists and craftspeople modified them to suit the local taste and social custom. For instance, the "Sarawil meaning underpants "was imported from the Persian dressing tradition because it has its origins in the Persian language. Contemporary illustrations showed sarawil as light, and

flowering and they were worn by women under their long robes whenever they step outside their domestic sphere" for the matter of respect" (Guthrie 120).

Furthermore, during the early period of Islam, many Arab Muslim rulers took foreign wives who brought their fashion into Muslim societies. Adding to this, merchants who brought gifts for their wives from other countries and pilgrims from different Muslim societies also introduced Muslims to diverse clothing styles. All these aspects helped in the exchanging and shifting taste and fashion around the Muslim world.

A study by Uthman Khan (2014) follows the changes in clothing styles of men and women from the 8th century Islamic Umayyad period until the 19th century relying on figures on coins, miniatures and paintings. These figures and drawings show that men wore a turban and long tunics in different colours while women wore very colourful long loose dresses with different patterns and designs. For instance, this is represented in a painting that depicted two women "from the early Abbasid period," about 836-839 from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul. Women covered their heads, but behind their head-coverings, one could see women's braids, as well as their necks. Also, the long garment worn by Muslim women during the Umayyad period was replaced by knee-length Tunic (Khan5-9). According to traditional Muslim theologians and scholars, this was not preferred for women, unlike men's garments which preferred to be shorter to reflect their pious attitude. Guthrie wrote:

> Shortness in the length of male clothing came to be associated with piety and the poverty of asceticism... It was totally unacceptable for women to do so. The earlier Umayyad practice of wearing clothes that covered the heels was officially overturned in the Abbasside period, for whatever reason. Did this signal a diminution in piety in general, or did footwear styles adapt to accommodate pious strictures, hence women's apparent predilection for boots in contemporary paintings?"(Guthrie 117).

Paintings from the twelfth century still show the long dresses and turbans worn by Muslim men and women. Khan used "a frontispiece from a manuscript of the sultan al-

Muta' of Ibn Zafar (565/1170)", in which three young hunters are depicted in colourful long robes. Another figure from the same period shows a woman in front of a judge wearing colourful loose "dresses with outer garments… The left half of her face and her neck is open. Her feet are covered in contrary to the man next to her, whose feet are open. The lady also has her head covered, but her hair is open in the front". Also, paintings from the Mamluk period (1250-1517) through the Ottoman era until the 19th century do not show significant changes in the clothing style adopted by both men and women. In all pictures studied, Khan maintains, both men and women covered their heads but "not necessarily the hair"( Khan 5-9).This clothing style was embraced by the masses, unlike the upper-middle classes, the upper class, and noblewomen who usually covered their faces and were restricted to their domestic sphere. The traditional dress remained the same until the 19th-century colonial encounter between the "modern civilized" European and traditional Islamic societies.

Overall, women belonging to the lower classes continued to appear in the public sphere for both shopping and working in the neighborhood shops, stores and factories during the following centuries, unlike upper-class women who became invisible due to the criticism by conservative religious clerks and rulers as Edward lane recounts from the 1880s period. He wrote: "The ladies of the higher orders never go to a shop" (Lane 1908, p. 191).

In summary, this led us to argue that Orientalists and Islamist's, claim that Muslim societies had followed "pure" and "authentic "Islamic traditions and laws of modesty and that all women were relegated only to the domestic sphere until the 19th-century encounter with the Western modernity and its secular values need to be reinvestigated. Muslim women's dress, fabric, fashion, and role in the public sphere varied from time to time according to social class, local customs, political and economic circumstances.

These factors played a pivotal role in applying the conservative, traditional Islamic rites and the form of religiosity.

## 3. An Overview of the Representation of Muslim Women in Medieval Western Literary Text

The contemporary dominant literary representation of Muslim women as passive, subordinate women to their misogynist irrational religion and its practices was not known in medieval literature; instead, Muslim women were introduced to the European audience as willful bold characters.These wanton Muslim women represented the difference between the sensual savagepagans who embrace a false creed and the rational, civilized European Christians whobelieved in the true religion (See Kahf 1999).

In mainstream Medieval English romance literature, the willful Muslim woman, after falling in love with a Christian hero, often a prisoner, fled her society and abandoned herheathen (Islamic) traditions through converting to Christianity. The theme of conversion of Muslim "heathen barbaric" woman to a good civilised religion manifested itself in the twelfth- century tales such as *Historica Ecclesiastica* (1130-35), in which a Turkish princess falls in love with a French Crusader. She betrayed her father and released him. The Turkish princess then converted to Christianity and abandoned her Islamic"Otherness" to become a good Christian woman.

The representation above of overbearing powerful Muslim women did not lose its momentum even after the passage of two centuries as it manifested itself in *Bevis of Hampton* (Ca.1324), one of the most famous romance novels. In *Bevis of Hampton,* theKing of Armenia's beautiful daughter, Josian, admires the courageous Braves. Josian reveals her emotions about Bevis to her father, saying: "Sire, ich wot wel in me thought, / That thine men ne slough he nought, / BeMahoun ne be Tervagaunt, /

Boute hit were himself, defendant!" (657-60).

Josian then confesses her love to Bevis and offers herself to him: "Bevis, lemman, thinore! Ichave loved thee ful yore, Sikerli can I no rede, Boute thow me love, icham dede,And boute thow with me do thee wille" (1093-97). However, Bevis refused to succumb to Josian´s desires until she converts to Christianity, she agrees to convert and forsake her false "religion. She says:"And ich wile right now to mede Min false godes al forsake And Christendom for thee love take!"(1196). Although the title is Bevis, it is clear that the religion of Islam, represented by powerful,knowledgeable Josian is the focus. Josian wins and lives with her chosen beloved Christian hero.

Another example of a bold, courageous Muslim woman whose religion permits her endless sexual indulges is present in Philip Massinger's play *The Renegado* (ca. 1624).The play follows the story of the Christian protagonist, Vitelli, who comes to Tunis to bring home his sister, Paulina, who has been taken captive by the converting to Islam (renegade) pirate Grimaldi who sold to a Turk. Vitelli meets a Turkish princess, Donusa,niece to the emperor Amurath (Murat IV), in a bazaar, and they fall in love with each other. They then met in the palace and have an erotic relationship. After their sexual relationship was exposed, they were to be punished according to Islamic law. Their onlyhope is to save themselves and their relationship that Vitelli converts to Islam and marry Donusa. Vitelli rejects to renounce his religion and instead succeeded in persuadingDonusa to convert to Christianity

When Donusa asks Vitelli to turn convert to Islam so that they both can be forgiven and get married. Vitelli replied angrily:

> Dare you bring Your juggling prophet in comparison with
> That   most inscrutable and infinite essence
> That made this all and comprehends

> I will not foul my mouth to speak the
> sorceries Of your seducer, his base birth,
> his whoredoms,His strange impostures; nor

deliver how
He taught a pidgeon and feed in his ear
In the framing of his Alcoran (UI.L 114-31).

In contrast to Vitelli' stance on his faith, Donusa, who was persuaded to convert to Christianity, says, "Then thus I spit at Mahomet" (IV.iii. 157). Donusa, thus, turns into a good woman after Vitelli throws water on her face "to purge those spots that cleave upon the mind, / If thankfully received" (V.iii. 115-16). This "holy" water" freed [her] from the cruellest of prisons, / Blind ignorance and misbelief. False Prophet! / Impostor Mahomet!" (V.iii. 131-33). At the end of the play, they were able to escape these Muslim(heathen) lands.

In addition to the theme of conversion to true good faith, the play highlights the difference between the supposedly sexually liberated bad Muslim women and sexuallyconservative good Christian females. Islam is depicted as the religion that allows females boundless sexual indulges, but Turkish customs put stains on women. When Donusa asked Carazie about the mores and traditions followed in England and by English females regarding sexual freedom, she states, "We enjoy no more / That is of the Ottoman race, though our religion / Allows all pleasure" (50).

Also, when Donusa reveals her emotions to the Christian Vitelli to Manto and Caraziethe eunuch. Carazie considers her feelings towards Vitalli and desires for him as natural. He says: "A smock employment, which has made more knights / (In a country Icould name) than twenty years / Of service in the field" (II.i. 71-73). In the play, Donusa succumbs to her sexual desires and loses her virginity to Vitelli, contrary to Vitelli's sister, Paulina, who kept her virginity intact, rejecting her Muslim captor´s temptations.

In this context, Elizabeth Archibald in her book *Women and Romance* (1990) maintains that female characters in medieval romance can be divided into two

categories; the female protagonist and the minor characters such as maids and servants. Four main features always characterize the female protagonist. She is beautiful, weak, powerless and waiting for the male hero's rescue or combing back. The second category refers to females characters who are introduced as "powerful in some way, knowledgeable, resourceful or enterprising" (158). According to Archibald's analysis, these Muslim women's "Otherness" is represented in their deference to the passive sexually conservative good Christian heroine.

European writers relied on scholarly books and travel narratives that were, according to Jones, "highly prejudiced and inaccurate" (164) and influenced the political and ideological conflict; Europe was threatened by Islamic expansion and even conversion to Islam was noticed in Europe. During this period, conversion to Islam „appeared in the rich and the poor, the common and the aristocratic, the young and the old" (Matar 490). Geraldine Heng, in his book *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy*(2003), maintains that the recurrent theme of conversion in medieval romance novels sought to prove the superiority of Christianity as the right belief and Christians as good people vis- a- vis an inferior pseudo-religion of Islam during this period (187).

This argument changed from the 18th century onward. The formula mentioned above of overbearing heathen Muslim woman versus a silent fragile Christian European woman has turned gradually into a passive veiled Muslim woman versus emancipated modern European women. Those powerless Muslim women needed rescue from their backward, oppressive religious values, mainly the harem system and the practice of veiling.

Typical representations of passive secluded Muslim women manifested themselves in the nineteenth century's painting such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique *Ingres´ La Grande Odalisque* (1814) and *Turkish bath* (1862), Eugène Delacroix´s *the Women*

*of Algiers in Their Apartment* (1834) and the Spanish painter Mary Fortuny's *Odalisque* (1861) among others. In these paintings, a Muslim woman in her harem is depicted partially or entirely nude and her eunuch female slave beside her. These works try to convey the plight of Muslim women in the harem and reflect the European sexual male gaze, which tends to penetrate the harem that is forbidden for them (Yegenoglu1998)

In line with the Enlightenment thinking, these paintings' primary purpose was, on the one hand, to produce the "other" of modernity through highlighting the difference between the modern Western and its practices and values and the backward East and its oppressive Islamic values. Furthermore, many of these works on Muslim women were not only influenced by the Eurocentric understanding of the Muslim backward "Other" but also they were intended to justify the colonial existence in Muslim societies;given that many of them were commissioned or supported by Western rulers at that time (See Alloula 1986; Yegenoglu 1998;al-Ani 2004).

Moreover, starting from the 19th-century, harem account gained popularity among European readers when many European females, who accompanied their husbands orbrothers to the Orient gained access to the imperial and middle-class harem and wrote about their own experience. These European female travelers were also the bearer of modern Western ideals to upper-class Muslim women, who would follow in modern Western men's footsteps. Diane M. Huddleston (2012) maintains that although Westernwomen, unlike the Western male, were permitted to the harem and their published observations and experience was able to "dispelled some of the mystery and false assumptions of harems" created by the male, nevertheless, Western women opinions on the harem system varies from "admiration to harsh criticism (Huddleston 1-3).

Moreover, the dominant view of Muslim women as oppressed and subordinate

veiled women was enhanced by the sheer amount of knowledge on the Oriental veiled Muslimwomen. Homa Hoodfar, a Canadian-Iranian socio-cultural and anthropologist known forher work on the Western perception of veiled Muslim women, claims that around 60,000books portrayed the veil as an oppressive backward tradition of the Islamic culture in the West between 1800 and 1950 (Hoodfar 8).

Overall, I attempted to illustrate that the traditional ideal model of Muslim women calls for modesty mentioned in the Quran followed by sharia law and the Hadith (Prophet's words), asks Muslim women to observe their modesty and not to wear flashy clothing ortight revealing attires in the public sphere. This does not necessarily convey the reality of Muslim societies throughout their histories. Covering the face and hair remained a choice for Muslim women in most Muslim societies, and women had their diverse beauty and accessory rituals throughout their history.

Furthermore, I argued that Muslim´s historical accounts depicted Muslim women as resistant and active participants in the public sphere and as consumer agents who paid great attention to their fashion and appearance in the public sphere and domestic sphere. However, this is still underrepresented, particularly since little attention is given to research and knowledge on women's history and "gender construction" in Muslim society before the 19th century. This under-representation, as Leila Ahmed puts it:

> exemplifies the status of research on women and gender inIslam, reflecting the absence of gender in any Islamic society before the nineteenth century and also the progress that has been made in conceptualising a framework of women's history with respect to more recenttimes (Ahmed 2).

In addition, I attempted to highlight that the Muslim women's image and their cultural practices in Western literary texts are beyond static. These images that started by depicting Muslim women as rebellious wanton women during the Middle Ages shifted

into a miserable passive "other" who cannot liberate themselves from the clutches of their oppressive religion and its values represented in women's seclusion practice of veiling from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward.

# Chapter III

# Modern Egyptian Women and Fashion between Westernization and Islamic Identity

"Adopting another culture as a general remedy for a heritage of misogyny within a particular culture is not only absurd, it is impossible. The complexity of enculturation and the depth of its encoding in the human psyche are such that even individuals deliberately fleeing to another culture, mentally or physically, carry forward and recreate their lives a considerable part of their previous enculturation"

(Leila Ahmed, *Gender and Islam*)

Throughout the last two centuries, the discourse on the claimed powerless, ignorant veiled Muslim women vis-a-vis the emancipated modern unveiled women dominated feminist debates on Muslim women in many eastern and Western societies. However, Muslim women´s clothing styles have been going through series of shifting articulations in line with socio-economic circumstances and political relations between Muslim societies (Islam) and the West throughout the last two centuries.In this chapter, I discuss establishing a modern Egyptian state and its repercussions on Egyptian women's appearance in the colonial/postcolonial nationalist and feminist writing and women's attitude in the public sphere. Therefore, the period studied here extends from nineteenth-century colonized Egypt until the postcolonial Nasserist era.I aim to describe the intersection between the politics, religion and class that define Egyptian women's appearance and choice of dressing styles. I argue that the intersection between these forces fosters and strengthens the hierarchical structures that allowed female oppression and subjugation to men.

The first section deals with the encounter between modern Western culture and Egyptian traditional Muslim society. It looks at Mohamed Ali Pasha's, the founder of modern Egypt, and his ancestors' project of modernising Egyptian society and women's position during this early modernising period. Then, I will look at the debates on modernising Egyptian women during the second half of the 19thcentury. These debates took place among Western colonisers, the conservative, the nationalist, and secularised male elite while women's voices disappeared. In the second part, I discuss the dismantling of the harem's institution in Egypt and the birth of an upper-class feminist movement. This emergent feminist movement struggled for women's right to education and continued the debates on women's appropriate modern appearance. These debates are represented by two upper-class prominent female characters: Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947) and Malak Hifni Naseef (1886-1918). The third section follows the intensive discourse on Muslim women's visibility and active participation in the public sphere that coincides with national liberation. I discuss the intersection between the national, religious, and social identity that prescribed the reception and perception of modern Egyptian women's bodies in the public sphere in light of Doria Shafik's memoirs *Doria Shafik, Egyptian Feminist: A Woman Apart* (1996).

## 1. 1. Modern European Dress Code and Muslim Egyptian Women

Egypt is considered the first country in the Muslim Arab world to adopt a modernization process by Mohamed Ali Pasha. Ali was an Albanian commander in the Ottoman army who joined the Ottoman forces, sent to expel Napoléon Bonaparte's troops that invaded Egypt in 1798. Bonaparte's invasion that lasted only three years in Egypt sought to bring the European enlightenment ideals to one of world civilizations´ cradles. Therefore, along with his military troops, Bonaparte was accompanied by 151

scholars. To uncover the mysteries of "a once-great centre of civilization to which they would bring their own form of culture" (Tignor 197-198).

Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 constituted the first cultural encounter between Western modernity with its Enlightenment ideas and Muslim societies in the Middle East with its traditional values and standards. The French invasion failed to achieve a military victory over Egypt, but it had significant impact on the social and cultural life. The attitude of the Egyptians towards the French culture varied from admiration to disgust and condemnation. There was undeniable admiration for the French scientific behaviour implemented in the experimentation and the use of scientific devices and tools. During their short stay in Egypt, the French established a new perspective on the political and social lives ground in modern enlightenment ideas and values. They introduced new administrative systems, including the records of births and deaths, legal systems and tax systems.

In addition, despite the Egyptians' hostile stance towards the French colonisers, the existence of the French with their different social behaviours and norms left an impact on Egyptian society's norms and traditions. According to the Egyptian Historian Al Jabarti (1753-1825), during the three years of the French occupation of Egypt, the intermarriage between the French soldiers and Egyptian women was noticed. A sector of lower-class female workers appeared in the public sphere unveiled. They were influenced by the presence of the French wives' clothing style. Moreover, after 1798, Cairo witnessed a remarkable mixing between the sexes in the Ezbekiyya Park, theatre, and cafes. Al Jabari condemned these behaviours and regarded them as a reflection the "the general loosening of Egyptian morals" (Vatikiotis 63). Although this cultural impact would not last long or gain popularity in the society, the French

Enlightenment modern values would come back slowly with the Egyptian male elite educated in France or French educational institutions starting from the 1850s.

After the French forces' withdrawal and the vacuum in political power, Mohamed Ali (r. 1805-1848) was appointed as ruler of Egypt by the public elites and religious *Ulama* 6 in 1805. After his ascension, Mohammed Ali, who was thrilled by Bonaparte's modern army, endeavoured to build a modern state that emulates European countries in all fields, particularly military, education and economy. Thus twelve higher educational schools were founded between 1816 and 1839, where European teachers mainly from Britain and France were hired. More than 300 students were sent to Europe to study modern science, languages, literature, and the arts between 1809 and1847. Moreover, Egypt witnessed a translation of numerous books in science and arts into Arabic and Turkish (Ead 3).

Mohamed Ali's essential goal was to provide a strong army to protect Egypt from any aggression from outside and not necessarily the people's social welfare or bringing change into social life. One can see this argument clearly in the absence of females in the educational missions sent to Europe. The graduation of the first Egyptian women from Egyptian universities responded to the state's need for female medical practitioners to treat women and children during the plague that spread during Mohamed Ali's reign. This plague reached Alexandria in 1813 and then spread to many other cities, threatening society. During this period, those female medical practitioners assured women's active participation in the public sphere and the importance of educating women beyond primary education. Ahmed (1992) wrote: "Egyptian women

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6 *Ulama* is a collective noun refers to the religious scholars who include jurists and theologians of Islam.

had been medical practitioners and recipients of government salaries, treating women and children in homes and hospitals and quarantine stations"(Ahmed 134). Ahmed explains the reason behind the state's temporarily support of females' higher education writing:

> The impetus to found the school for hikimas was a practical consideration: training medical practitioners who would have access to women. Storage of labour-power to the prevalence of epidemic and endemic diseases led Mohammed Ali to see the importance of organizing sanitary services and training doctors. The school was established under the leadership of Antoine Clot. Bey, a French physician (Ahmed 134).

The introduction of paid female practitioners to the public was, thus, intended to fill a temporarily state's need, and it seems that it was not a symbol of remarkable change towards women's higher education and position in society for the following decades. Ahmed states: "Aside from establishing a school for training women doctors in 1832, the state took no steps to institute girls' education until the 1870s "(Ahmed134).

Moreover, although women's presence in the public sphere through education was a step towards improving Egyptian women's status in the society on the long term, Mohamed Ali's modernizing measures harmed women belonged to the lower class who worked in various sectors to earn their livelihood or support their husbands during this period. Mohammed Ali paid great attention to agriculture by building dams and canals and establishing a news aggregation system. These developments that improved Egypt's agriculture supported a parallel growth in the industry, and the first modern factory (textile factory) was founded in Egypt in 1818. This factory used machines that Italian technicians operated. Mohamed Ali intended to emulate and even exceed the European modern textile industries and increase Egypt's revenues through founding textile factories.

By the second half of the 18th century, local textile production declined gradually because of the internal political conflict, excessive taxes, many plagues that struck Egypt and the European technological industrial revolution. Egypt imported "finished goods" from Europe and exported raw materials to Europe. The European products competed with the local production and affected women who relied on spinning, weaving, and bleaching to earn their money, and women who "Invested in local trade" (Ahmed131-32). The precarious situation of women working in textile production would not improve after establishing textile factories in Egypt, even if the state-run factories employed a small number of female workers.

Other modern factories were established, such as factories that produced metal products, sugar, soap, glass, paper and wax. Most of these factories were operated and run by Europeans while the Egyptians were relegated to work in a strict army-like environment. Women were also employed in these factories- even in small numbers- and received two-third of men's wage. Mohamed Ali introduced new laws that "concentrated land in the hands of few large landowners and led to peasants' disposition ". Peasants, both men and women, who had "no other means of support ", had to work in severe conditions in return for very little pay. Therefore, these measures added to women's suffering even if the new agricultural measures could increase "the area of cultivatable land"(Ahmed132).

After Mohamed Ali's death, modernizing Egypt started to slow down gradually with the hefty loans from European countries by Ali's successors, who overspent on extravagant ceremonies and building luxurious palaces. At the same time, poverty was prevalent among the lower classes. Egypt was under a despotic regime; Egyptian people had not enjoyed political rights. The state's ministers and administrators (mostly non-Egyptians) were assigned for their loyalty to the rulers and their families. Mohamed

Ali's family was not eager to replicate the European countries' modern liberal and democratic values model. Instead, it seems that modernization was mainly and only seen in architecture, industry and science.

Mohamed Ali's successors also followed this strategy except for his grandson Khedive Ismail (r.1863–1879). Khedive Ismail spent two years studying in Paris and was fascinated by its modernity in architecture and modern political and social values. He had a sincere desire to establish a modern Egyptian society that resembled the modern democratic European society and to turn his back on "traditional" Africa. In 1879, he states: "My country is no longer in Africa; we are now part of Europe. It is, therefore, natural for us to abandon our former ways and to adopt a new system adapted to our social conditions". Thus a great effort was made to turn Egypt, represented in Cairo, to appear like Paris. Tignor wrote:

> Ismail placed a high value on making Cairo a capital city that could hold its own with the modern cities of Europe. He regarded Paris as the most beautiful and most modern of the European cities. He wanted his urban planners to do for Cairo what Baron Haussmann had done for Paris during Napoleon III's reign.

> Cairo was to have the same boulevards, plazas, and gardens that Haussmann had brought to Paris. That Ismail wanted to impress European visitors is attested by the fact that he had his urban engineers build structures around particularly ugly and rundown areas of the city so that outsiders would not have to behold unpleasant sights (Tignor 221).

Moreover, to achieve his vision of establishing a modern life in Egypt, Ismail introduced many reforms, such as founding the first election system for the advisory council of representatives, introducing the slavery abolition law and granting remarkable advances in freedom of expression, in particular, in the press.

In terms of educational reform, Khedive Ismail built new schools, reopened old schools, and resumed the educational missions to Europe. Also, Khedive Ismail was the first

grandchild of Muhammad Ali Pasha, who attached great importance to education as the basis for all progress. He established an educational committee upon assuming power that recommended that education be made available to all Egyptians, including females, and develops the "kuttab"7 to integrate it into the state's educational system. Among the committee members was Ali Pasha Mubarak (1824-1893), who supported girls' education and work, even if he considered caring for their homes and family as their primary mission.

In 1873, the state established the first primary school for girls, and in 1874 established a secondary school. The number of girls in elementary school reached (890) girls instead of (5362) the following year. Although Khedive Ismail was in the process of founding many other schools to enable girls to acquire knowledge and education, his educational project was not completed, mainly because of the debt growing during his reign before he was forced to abdicate in 1879. All in all, Khedive Ismail's vision of turning social life in Egypt could not spread widely to affect the consciousness of grassroots or the majority of the masses. Nonetheless, during this period, the debates on women's modern roles in the public sphere started.

These debates were connected by names like the secular and government scholar Ali Mubarak (1823-1893), the religious thinker and reformer Mohamed Abdu (1849-1905), revolved around modernizing Egypt without abandoning its Islamic identity through a process of Westernization.Ali Mubarak's vision of modern Egyptian women focused on women's education while not abandoning their first duty, rearing children and taking care of their household. Mubarak's vision was implemented through his position in the

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7  The word "Kuttab" refers to a type of traditional elementary school in the Muslim world. In the Kuttab, Shykhs or religious teachers taught children to recite Quran, learn writing, reading and Arabic grammar.

education committee, through which he helped integrate females into the educational system, as I mentioned above.

Muhamed Abdu's vision of modernizing Egyptian women is considered the first feminist modern Islamic view that interrogates Islamic interpretation and Muslim practices that relegate Muslim women to an inferior place in society. Abdu's attempt was a response to the cultural encounter with the modern scientific Western civilization. He advocated freeing Islam of ignorance, stagnation and called for the pursuit of knowledge so that Islamic civilization could compete with other civilizations. Abdu's opinions regarding women's position in society were bold and unusual among clerics (Ulama) in during this era. He acknowledged the unjust backward practices followed in Muslim societies, such as polygamy and discrimination against women, but he argues that these practices are not essentially Islamic but reflect the corruption of Islam by Muslims. Abdu said:

> The claim of Europeans to have been the first to honour woman and grant her equality is false. For Islam was before them in this matter; even yet their laws and religious traditions continue to place the man above the woman... to be sure, the Muslims have been at fault in the education and training of women, and acquainting them with their rights; and we acknowledged that we have failed to follow the guidance of our religion so that we have become an argument against it (cited in Ahmed 139-140).

Furthermore, Abdu called for women's education and work like men. He argues that nothing in Islam assumes man's superiority over women. Abdu said: "men and women are equal before God in the matters of reward, when they are equal in their works.

There is, therefore, no difference between them in regard to humanity, and no superiority of one over other in works" (cited in Ahmed 139). Thus, Abdu's vision of modernizing Muslim women was not in clash with enlightened Western modernity that gave a special status to the science and knowledge acquisition, but he rejected a superficial blind imitation of Western culture in aspects like dress and lifestyle.

Indeed, "Ulama" and conservatives lamented the gradual change in Egyptian's behaviours towards consuming Western products and Western lifestyle. For instance, there was a remarkable consumption of Alcohol by the Egyptians, and women were slowly abandoning the veil in the public sphere. Some Women appeared "displaying their ornaments". Moreover, upper-class women were seen in the public sphere "in the gardens to enjoy the fresh air". Also, the relationship between men and women, particularly among the upper classes, was influenced by modern Western thinking.Some Egyptian wives joined their men on their travels abroad (Ahmed 140).

Abdu's ideas were published widely in Egyptian magazines between the 1880s and early 1900s. Female voices followed Abdu's ideas on women in magazines published by women amid widespread rejection. Women working in writing was considered a shameful phenomenon. The first magazine for women edited by women was published in 1898 and was followed by women publishing in journals and magazines edited by men.

During this period, most female writers were Arab Christian from Syria and Lebanon living in Egypt. For instance, the Syrian Hind Naufal, founded the first editorial journal," Al- fatat," meaning the "young woman" in Arabic in 1892. The journal concerned with women's position in society, and the Lebanese Zeinab Fawwaz published her article in the same journal under the title "knowledge is light". These women's articles encourage female education and interrogate women's place beyond their households (Ahmed 140- 141). Jamila Hafez is the first Egyptian woman to found a women's magazine, Al- Rehana, in 1907, and it was published monthly in Helwan.

Overall, European industrial and technological revolution had greatly influenced Middle Eastern societies. During the nineteenth century, these societies witnessed significant changes in education, industry, agriculture, architecture, and even furniture style inside their homes. The household's structure, namely, gender relations inside the household and men's and women attitudes towards dress, remained largely without significant changes even with granting upper-class harem women relative physical and intellectual freedom.

The debates on Egyptian Muslim women's dress and position in the society would gain popularity later with the appearance of a generation of educated elites (mainly men) after Egypt's British occupation in 1882. In what follows, I will look at the discourse on Egyptian women's veiling in the colonial/ nationalist discourse and its repercussions on the postcolonial discourse on Muslim women in Egypt.

## 1. 2. Traditional Egyptian Dress and Women's Modernization

Egypt fell under British occupation in 1882, mainly because of the excessive debts since Khedive Ismail. Many European powers interfered in the Egyptian situation, which caused the British to intervene to secure their investments in Egypt and ensure their expansionist policy. The British justification for its colonizing Egypt followed the same argument used in other British colonies. The British colonizers argued that these non- Western societies are politically and socially "backward" societies and thus needed the British intervention to improve their culture and ways of life (See Said 1978). In line with the nineteenth century's evolutionist thinking, different non-Western Islamic practices like veiling or gender segregation symbolize differences between the two cultures.They represented the superiority of Western culture  versus the inferiority of non-Western culture. In this respect, the British colonial encounter intensified the discourse on the difference between Muslim women's position and modern British

women, mainly through upper-class women's seclusion and veiling in the public sphere. The British colonizers were critical of women's seclusion and veiling forced on women who belonged to the ruling and upper classes. Gender segregation contradicted the Victorian ideals, and thus, instead of attacking upper-class Egyptian men, the colonizers directed their attack on Islam and its values. The colonizers compared superior rational Western men's attitudes to women to Muslim men's backward and irrational attitudes to their veiled women. In Egypt, Lord Cromer, the British Consul, stated that:

> The European is a close reasoner; his statements of fact are devoid of ambiguity; he is a natural logician, albeit, he may not have studied logic; he loves symmetry in   all things . . . his trained intelligence works like a piece of mechanism. On the other  hand, the mind of the Oriental, like his picturesque streets, is eminently wanting in    symmetry. His reasoning is of the most slipshod description (Earl of Cromer 2:146).

According to Lord Cromer, Muslim men's attitude is based on their belief in Islam; since unlike Western Christianity which "teaches respect for women, and European men `elevated' women because of the teachings of their religion, Islam degraded them", thus for Cromer, Egyptian Muslim women should "be persuaded or forced into imbibing the true spirit of Western civilization" (Earl Cromer 2: 538). Contrary to the previous feminist position, The British put forward restrictions on girls' education laws. According to Ahmed: "The policies Cromer pursued were detrimental to Egyptian women. The restrictions he placed on governmental schools and his raising of school fees held back girls' education as well as boys" (Ahmed 153). In this context, Ahmed argues, it was not women's status that the colonizers aspired to change, rather wielding the feminist rhetoric to subvert Muslim cultures and their religion and justify their colonial intervention. Cromer advocated Muslim women's emancipation through abandoning

the veiling and adopting a Western fashion while he was known for his opposition to women's rights at home.

All in all, Ahmed argues that the colonizer's desire of pushing Muslim women to adopt Western values instead of their Islamic and cultural values was expected to disintegrate Muslim women from Muslim men. This imperialism or what Ahmed calls "colonial feminism" (163) intended to substitute the domination of native Muslim men who forced the veil on their women with British men's dominance, whose goal was to force the modernization process by forcing them to abandon these Islamic practices.

In addition to Ahmed's argument on the reason behind the British attack on the Islamic tradition of veiling, other theories, although differing in their interpretations, are explained within the Enlightenment thinking of the superior European culture versus non-European inferior "Other" that had to be mastered. For instance, the veil's perception as a pre-modern backward practice has been influenced by the Enlightenment's ideal, which sees "knowledge which is power". (Adorno and Horkheimer 3). According to this Enlightenment ideology, everything should be rendered perfectly visible to the observant eye. This argument on veil and seeing is discussed at length in Meyda Yegenoglu's book *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (1998).

Yegenoglu argues that the West was derived by the desire to master during the era of modernity, a desire that cannot be achieved without knowing the Orient represented in its people to reshape their minds. Thus, following this line of thought, such knowledge cannot be attained without rendering those women and the Orient "perfectly visible" (108-109).

Another argument on the desire to unveil Muslim women suggests that the veil was regarded as a source of fear and anxiety of something hidden behind it. For them, the

veil is like a mask that hides a secret that could form a threat to them behind it. They feared the ability to be deceived by those who can see them without being seen. This threat of having something behind it can also be a symbolic threat of a different identity that could threaten the claimed universal modern model. Homi Bhabha, in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), maintains that the European civilizer's desire to emancipate Muslim women was entangled with his wish to enforce what he considered the universal ideals of the modern world on the colonized and to eliminate any differences that could threaten his universal paradigm of modernity. According to Bhabha's argument, the image of the veiled educated modern woman which differed from that of the modern Western women: "gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated… on anxiety and deference, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it" (107).

Overall, this does not imply that Muslim women's conditions in Muslim societies during this period contradicted what was claimed by European colonizers or missionaries. Or that Muslim women themselves did not aspire to push for laws and measures for their emancipation from the harem social system. Ahmed maintains that, "The social system had combined the worst features of a Mediterranean and Middle Eastern misogyny with an Islam interpreted in the most negative way possible for women, and Middle Eastern women have no cause to regret its passing "(Ahmed 128). Thus, in this context, I argue that European colonizers' modern feminist endeavour to end women's oppression and subordination in Islamic societies could be achieved by encouraging reform of Islamic laws that improved Muslim women's status in their native culture.

Furthermore, women´s empowerment could also be achieved through facilitating education and providing better work opportunities for Egyptian Muslim women to claim their active place in the public sphere. This measure could help Egyptian women

choose what is advantageous instead of imposing superficial changes that Europeans considered universal modern ideals.

## 1.3. Traditional Dress between Traditionalist, Nationalist and Secular Elite

Egyptian Muslims' reaction to the colonial attack on veiling and the harem system was not identical. Muslim societies were not culturally homogeneous. There were two different world views on Islamic culture and the path to modernization. The secularized elites mainly belonged to the upper class and upper-middle class and had received their education in European schools or schools that offered a European-based educational curriculum at home. These Westernized elites set themselves against those who were educated at religious-oriented schools and the low social classes. After being exposed to modern knowledge and values of Western culture, the young Muslim elites became looked down on many Muslim values and social norms. They became a representation of an educated class that British historian and politician Thomas Macaulay aspired to establish in India.

Thomas Macaulay (1800– 1859) introduced the Western education system in India to establish a class of modern men and women who mediate between the European and non-European cultures. Education is supposed to change those colonized Easters.

They would be Oriental in "skin colour" while Western in their way of thinking, taste, and language. Macaulay said:

> I feel... that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western

nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population (Macaulay 359).

As a result, like the European colonizer, women and their position in Islamic society were at the centre of the young westernized Muslim elites. Although the debates among Muslims on the need to modernize Muslim women started long before the so-called civilizing mission in the Orient, the narrative followed the European modernistic (colonial) discourse that focused on the different clothing styles.

An outstanding example is Qasim Amin, the French-educated lawyer and judge. Amin, who is considered by the secular-oriented Arab Muslim feminists the father of Arab feminism, regarded the traditional dress represented in the practice of veiling as "a huge barrier between the woman and her elevation, and consequently a barrier between the nation and its advance" (Amin, *The Women Liberation*, 54).

In his book, *al-Mar'ah al-Jadida* (The New Woman) (1900), Amin argues that Europeans' behaviour towards their women is considered the epitome of civilization. However, Amin disagreed with the aforementioned European claim that their civilized behaviour towards women is grounded in civilized Christianity, unlike "backward" Islam. Instead, Amin believed in science as the central pillar of modernity. According to Amin, Human civilization dividing the history of women's status into four evolutionary stages. During the first stage, women and men were equal in primitive societies. In the second stage, women lost their rights and were reduced to men's property after the family's foundation. Women started to regain some of their rights when humanity went forward towards civilization. The fourth stage represented Western women who could regain their complete freedom and reach the highest level of civilization. Thus, according to Amin, Muslim culture is semi-civilized compared to the civilized Western

culture. Therefore, what was needed was a cultural and social transformation in line with the European ideals to catch up with modern civilization.

Amin argues that Muslim women's modernisation lay primarily in abandoning the practice of veiling and adopting an emancipating modern Western dress, regardless of historical and cultural differences. Amin wrote:

> Civilized countries, regardless of race, language, nation or religion, are similar in the form of government, administration, legal system, family structure, education, language, writing, architecture and roads, extending even to many simple customs such as dress, greetings and food. From this, we infer that the result of modernisation is that humanity walks on one path; primitive peoples are different  because they did not develop a social system based on rationality. This is what leads us to cite Europeans as an example and urge that they be copied, and it is for  this that we have undertaken to call attention to European women (Amin, *The   Women Liberation*, 120).

Nonetheless, echoing Lord Cromer, Amin's stance on women's progress through education was "radical", advocating only women's need for primary education, which was far exceeded in Egyptian society by that time (Ahmed 159). Amin stated:

> It is the wife's duty to plan the household budget . . . to supervise the servants . . .      to make her home attractive to her husband, so that he may find ease when he returns to it and so that, he likes being there, and enjoys the food and drink and sleep and does not seek to flee from home to spend his time with neighbours or in public places, and it is her duty, and this is her first and most important duty to raise the children, attending to them physically, mentally, and morally" (Amin, *The Women Liberation*, 31).

In this context, despite Amin criticized veiling practice as a backward, oppressive tradition, drawing a comparison between the modern Western female's dress code and Muslim women's traditional veil, it seems that his "feminist "views revolved mainly on women's role to create a better atmosphere for their men in their domestic private sphere. Education for work outside the home for women belonged to upper-middle classes, and upper- classes were not acceptable during Amin's lifetime. The aforementioned secular ideas were supported by the pro-British administration and the

pro- modern Western outlook intellectuals, who descended from an upper-middle-class background. Many of them had a French education with a radical emphasis on science and secular ideals. Furthermore, this secular-oriented elite men's discourse was also held by secularized upper-class Muslim women alike, such as Huda Shaarawi, who is widely known as the leading feminist figure in the Arab Muslim societies.

## 2.1. Modern Dress and the Upper-Class Female Feminist Wave

Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947) was born in Upper Egypt to a Turko-Circassian upper-class family. Her father Mohamed Sultan Pasha, was the president of the first national assembly in Egypt during Khedive Tewfik's reign. She grew up and was educated by her Circassian mother and her foreign nannies in a harem. Shaarawi mastered Arabic, Turkish and French and memorized Quran. In 1940, Shaarawi documented her experiences in the harem, the status of upper-class women in the domestic sphere and outside it in her mudhakkirât or memoirs. Her memoirs were translated into English by Margot Badran and published in 1993 under the title Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist, 1879-1924.

Shaarawi describes the harem's daily activities before and after her marriage, ranging from education, relatives' and friends' visits, and female social and cultural meetings. She describes how she was exposed to different cultures as a daughter to a wealthy upper-class family through her Western education and her Western friends. This prepared her for a critical view of these other social and cultural attitudes towards women.

Shaarawi was forced into an arranged marriage at thirteen to her cousin Ali Shaarawi Pasha, a 40 years older man. She could not oppose her sick mother's will to marry her legal guardian. Shaarawi has the right to refuse a marriage proposal according to

Islamic law, but she had no choice according to the social customs. Shaarawi's mother saw that Huda's refusal to accept her family choice to marry her cousin would stigmatize the family's reputation in society. Shaarawi was asked, "Do you wish to disgrace the name of your father and destroy your poor mother who is weeping in her sickbed and might not survive the shock of your refusal?" (Shaarawi, *Harem Years*, 54). Their marriage lasted only a year before they separated after discovering that Shaarawi's husband was secretly visiting his former slave and children since Ali Shaarawi signed a contract to cut off this relationship with his former slave. This meant that marriage was annulled. Shaarawi made use of the chance and insisted not to return to her husband. Shaarawi states: "I was determined not to return to him whatever happened" (Shaarawi, *Harem Years*, 60).

After their separation, Shaarawi resumed her education and gained experience on women´s role in the modern public sphere. Shaarawi met Eugenie Le Brun or Madame Rushdi, a French wife of the first Egyptian prime minister Husayn Rushdi whom Shaarawi considered her mentor. She helped Shaarawi enrich her French language and grow intellectually, allowing her to choose precious books that "enriched her mind and soul with all sorts of beauty and perfection". She discussed with Shaarawi what Shaarawi read and explained what was challenging to understand.

Moreover, Shaarawi attended Madam Rushdi's first held salon for women in Egypt, which Shaarawi describes as an "intellectual awakening" of upper-class women (Shaarawi, *Harem Years*, 98).Shaarawi herself, with the assistance of other upper-class women, founded the Intellectual Association of Egyptian Women in 1914(Shaarawi, *Harem Years,* 98). Through Madam Rushdi´s Salon, Shaarawi was introduced to political and social issues like the practice of veiling and its connotation in a modern public sphere. Shaarawi recounts attending a women's salon where

Madam Rushdi showed her "admiration "of the Egyptian dress and her feelings of regret for the veil wearers who are shackled in backwardness. Shaarawi recalls this impression writing that Madam Rushdie expressed her:

> Admiration of traditional Egyptian dress and the beauty that the veil confers on a woman but she feels sorry for its wearers since the veil hinders their advancement and deprives them of enjoying a better share of education and physical practice. Moreover, the veil gives a false impression of the immorality hidden behind it in the minds of Westerners (Shaarawi, *Harem Years*, 213).

Within this context, although Madame Eugenie Le Brun, as a French convert to Islam, distanced herself from the harem's women's stereotypical representation as sexual objects or attacking Islam as the cause of women's oppression, she still reads the veil as a cover of women's immorality. Furthermore, she considered veiling as a backward social practice and an obstacle towards women's advancement. In this vein, one can argue that the Western attitude, represented in Madame Rushdi, towards the practice of veiling is not different from the Western female travellers' accounts even after almost a century.

Shaarawi returned to her husband after seven years because her beloved brother Umar refused to marry before reuniting with Ali Shaarawi. Even if Shaarawi agreed to yield to her family's desire, she refused to share him with another wife and stipulated that he leaves her former wife forever (Shaarawi, *Harem years*, 83). Moreover, Shaarawi wanted to sustain her family's political and social power that would be achieved through her husband's position. After their reuniting, her husband supported her feminist quest, and she even became involved in the political struggle for independence through discussions with her nationalist brother and husband. Shaarawi recalls her collaboration with her husband in political life during this period stating, "My husband kept me informed on events so that I could fill the vacuum if he were imprisoned or exiled"(Shaarawi, *Harem Years*, 116).

In March 1919, Shaarawi and other upper-class women participated in a demonstration against the British occupation. They carried flags saying "Down with occupation" and repeated "long live freedom and independence." (Baron 110) Although there were veiled and these demonstrations were only females, they used the nationalist struggle to assert their visibility and role in the public sphere's political life like their men. Shaarawi visited Europe and the United States and attended conferences on women's advancement. She maintained that Western women were astonished by Egyptian women's efficient participation at the Rome International Conference in 1923. Those Egyptian women challenged deep-rooted the image of veiled Egyptian women as ignorant and barbaric. Shaarawi endeavoured to correct Egyptian Muslim women's distorted image and introduce their real problems and actual image to the Europeans. She argued that the practice of veiling in itself did not hinder Egyptian women who sought to educate themselves as European unveiled women(Shaarawi, *Harem Years*,169-170), but it is a social ritual and a tradition that hindered women's advancement, relegating them to the domestic sphere. According to Shaarawi, the veil hinders "individual liberty and the interconnectedness of public and private spheres" (Quawas 220). Therefore, Shaarawi expressed her keen desire to pursue the European model of modernity concerning dress. She stated that Egyptian women: "could follow in the footsteps of the women in Europe in the awakening of our women so that we could take our land to its rightful place among the advanced nations" (Shaarawi, *Harem Years*, 252).

Shaarawi's symbolic unveiling at Cairo railway station in 1923 stood as the symbol of liberating upper-class Egyptian women from their seclusion and their invisibility in public space. Her act changed all Egyptian social order of women's in the public

sphere, where women who belonged to lower classes were the only women who were unveiled and active workers in small crafts. Doria Shafik (1908-1975), Shaarawi's disciple and a daughter of a working-class family and who lived in Tanta province, describes the impact of Shaarawi's revolutionary act, which reached every corner of Egypt. Shafik stated:

> Behind the shutters, Grandmother awaited the arrival of my aunt, saying I see the governess but where is Aziza? Because she was unveiled, Tante Aziza was mistaken for the governess. When Grandmother recognized her unveiled, she was shocked! When the initial emotions died down, I realized that Tanta Aziza's gesture was not an isolated event. The winds of change were erupting in Cairo. A signal for women had been initiated by a certain Huda Shaarawi, and I felt joy that women had at last opened away from the long route (Nelson 26).

In Egypt, Shaarawi then turned into a public figure pushing for social change through her political connections, using her husband's strong relationship with the government and political figures. Shaarawi's feminist programme's main objective was to enable Egypt "to reach a level of glory and might like that reached by civilized nations" (Shaarawi, *Harem Years*, 262). Indeed, Shaarawi's primary focus was on the struggle for liberating all Egyptian and Arab Muslim women from all social classes through education. For Shaarawi, education enriches women's mental capacities and can achieve social and cultural change leading to legal reforms. She endeavors to reform Muslim culture from within Islam and rejecting Islam for secular or Western thinking.

Therefore, she endeavoured to dismantle "the misogyny masquerading as Islam that so blatantly 'belittled' women and denied them their human rights which, after all, were Islamic rights"(Quawas 227). Like Fatima Mernissi, Shaarawi believed that gender equality and women's empowerment are granted to Egyptian women in Islam, whose laws and rituals were misused by men and misinterpreted by women who did not know their rights in Islam because of their ignorance and illiteracy.

Shaarawi's feminist endeavour was supported by her social class and her husband's position in the government and was felt mainly among the middle and upper classes.

Indeed, Egypt was under a severe hierarchical class system since the establishment of the Muhammed Ali´s regime. Wealth and political power were only at the upper classes of wealthy Turkco-Circassian and the Egyptian elite. These nationalist feminist Muslim women engaged with Shaarawi's activities belonged to the urban middle classes and upper-middle classes who had access to Western ideals through Western education and connections. Their ideas were expressed in the Western colonizers' language, which was regarded as alien to lower-class Egyptians.

In her article "Competing Agenda: Feminists, Islam and the State in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Egypt", Margot Badran highlights how using the French language in feminist discussions created an atmosphere of hostility for ordinary Egyptians, who did not speak the Western language connected to the Westernized elite. Badran wrote: "Because the [Egyptian Feminist Union] leadership was upper-class and because its feminist ideas were mainly expressed in French, feminism came to be considered, especially by detractors, as foreign" (Badran, *Competing Agenda: Feminists, Islam and the State*, 209).

All in all, a broad group of society viewed Shaarawi and other feminists who followed her as abandoning the required morality since they abandoned the veil and adopted the European dress. Unlike the aforementioned Western-inclined elites, sections of Egyptians rejected the secular-oriented discourse of renouncing women's traditional clothing styles as the primary step towards their progress. These Muslims included "Ulama", a status that refers to religious scholars from all social classes. In Muslim societies," Ulama" are regarded as keepers of the value of society. Moreover, lower classes like the sellers, bazaar merchants, and artisans who did not have access to

European schools in Egypt, and their economic status deteriorated with colonial existence and its new economic interests in the colonies. Besides, the nativist nationalists rejected the European lifestyle. They considered abandoning the traditional clothing style, not only as an attack on the veil and mantel but also as an attack on their cultural identity as (Muslim) vis-a-vis the Western cultural identity. In this vein, Ahmed argues that during this period: "the notion of returning to or holding on to an 'original' Islam and an 'authentic' indigenous culture is itself, then, a response to the discourses of colonialism and the colonial attempt to undermine Islam and Arab culture and replace them with Western practices and beliefs" (Ahmed 237).

Furthermore, for broad groups of ordinary Egyptian women, Shaarawi and elite feminists were mainly interested in feminist issues that mainly represented emancipation inspired by the European and upper classes but did not reflect most Egyptian women (Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and nation*, 4). Nonetheless, anger towards the Shaarawi's and her secular–oriented feminist followers would gradually fade away, especially after Shaarawi's social work included all social classes.  She established the "Egyptian Women's Union" in 1923 and was its president and through which Shaarawi opened a clinic and dispensary in the poor neighbourhood of al-Baghalah to provide free examinations for ordinary Egyptian women and children. Moreover, through the "Egyptian women's Union", Shaarawi demanded political rights that included all Egyptian women. She struggled for enacting laws concerning women's marriage and higher and vocational education. Also, she demanded raising the marriage age for females to 16 years and males for 18 years in 1921. Shaarawi also demanded laws that prevented male's absolute authority from unilateral divorce and introduced a petition demanding the electoral law amendment to ensure women's participation in electoral rights. Not all Shaarawi's demands were realized because of the resistance of a wide range of men, who had political, legislative, administrative and

religious powers. Nonetheless, Shaarawi's ideas on veiling and embracing Western dress went unchallenged in the Arab world. Shaarawi promoted her ideas through the Egyptian Feminist Union, her magazines, her charity initiatives and participation in conferences on women's advancement. Her views on a modern Egyptian woman's appearance was also supported by political power, which was at the hands of secular-oriented political leaders.

However, there have been different voices on modernising Egyptian Muslim women and their active role in the modern public sphere, such as the feminist and writer Malak Hifni Nassef (1886-1918). Nassef's voice tended to create a third space for modern Muslim women that liberates Egyptian women from a patriarchal culture beyond a blind superficial imitation of Western modernity, which does not consider Egyptian society's historical and cultural background.

## 2.2. Malak Hifni Nassef: An Alternative Modern Female Voice

Malak Hefini Nassef (1886-1918) was born to a middle-class family in Cairo. Her father, a lawyer and a member of Mohamed Abdu's party, supported her and encouraged her education. Nassef obtained her certificate in (1900) from Sennia school (the first Islamic school for girls), and then she moved to the teacher's section of the same school. After receiving her diploma in (1905), she worked in the same department in the same school.

In 1907, she married Abd al-Satar al-Basil Pasha, a wealthy married man in Fayoum and had to quit teaching since Egyptian law forbade married women from teaching. In Fayoum where she came face to face with the impoverished women's customs and behaviour. This close -observation led her to direct her activism to advocate reform and the liberation of women. Nassef engaged with the heated debates on women's modernisation during this period and published her ideas in a prominent newspaper

such as the *Umma Party* newspaper. She also gave speeches at the *Umma Party* headquarters and Egyptian universities. In 1909, she published a collection of her many speeches and articles. Moreover, she was the first woman to represent the Egyptian woman at the first Egyptian conference in 1911 to discuss ways to reform women's status. Nassef called for laws that prohibit polygamy and support female education to make choices that suited them.

For Nassef, adopting Western dress was not wrong in itself, but she advocated not abandoning Egyptian clothing style for the time being. According to Nassef, the Egyptian dressing style was part of women's cultural tradition and protected women from being exposed to men's harassment on the street. Nassef stated:

> Although adopting Western ideas was neither good nor bad in itself, indiscriminate adoption of Western ways without reference to their suitability in the particular environment was unwise. Therefore, what was essential was not for intellectuals to debate the veil but for "you (men) to give women true education and soundly and rectify new people are raised and improve your moral character so that the nation as a whole is well-mannered. Then leave it to her to choose that which is most advantageous to her and the nation (Nassef 25-28).

Moreover, Nassef contests the perception of Egyptian dress as ugly compared to the Western dress's superior taste. Nassef argues that: "Eastern modes of dress are lighter, less expensive and more suited to our hot weather than a Western dress" (Nassef 51), unlike the sophisticated Western dress, which consists of "an array of complex, multiple pieces that are difficult to wear and remove." She also remarks on hats full of pins and "birds and their feathers and branches with flowers and fruits". Nassef argued that they wasted time tying and untying these pieces of clothing that could have been better used for other valuable activities (Nassef133). Therefore, this feminist voice tended to situate a feminist subjectivity within Egyptian discourse by

dismantling the relationship between women's progress and dress and calling for women's choice of suitable comfortable dresses that suit active daily life.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that Nassef's ideas were in line with the Western women's critique of Western dress during the second half of the 19th century. This wave which defended function and usefulness over aesthetics, was represented in a wave led by the prominent reformist American Amelia Bloomer (1818- 1894). This Western activists called for freeing women from their restricting dress to a loose simple dress that suits active modern Western women in the public sphere. Although Amelia Bloomer's wave gained popularity among women in Western societies through newspapers, journals, and art, Nassef's ideas could not gather momentum in Egypt because of Nassef's premature death at thirty-two years and because of diverse interconnected political and socio-economic reasons.

Along with the heated debates over women's modernization during the second half of the nineteenth century, Egypt was witnessing expanding capitalism in line with Western economic orientation (Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and nation*, 11) and commerce played a central role in driving changes in upper-class and middle-class families in the urban space. The new modes of shopping, directed mainly to elite women, were supposed to change them to suit the model of "new women", mainly as women-consumers in the new department stores that started to flourish in Egypt from the 1910s. The department store's innovative culture heated the controversy on gender segregation, morality, sexuality, and nationality. During this period, the salesclerks were of non-Egyptian origin (Greek, Armenian, Italian, Maltese Coptic, Jews and Syrian). Although they did not consider themselves non-Egyptian, their attitude in enticing upper- class women to enter the shops and buy transgressed the fixed norms of interaction between women and unrelated men. This incited a wave of public anger

and this rejection of the foreign sales clerk's attitude was expressed in many editorials and cartoons in the local press. For instance, in December 1921, al-Lata'if al-musawwara, for example, denounced their behaviour writing:

> 'Please come in, Madam!'. . . a call that on the surface appears irreproachable, [but]   is a call to moral depravity [khala'a], flirtation [muda'aba], and immorality [fasad]. What can we do about these employees who stand at the doors of their shops and    lie in wait for women . . . until they accost them with 'please come in, Madam,' and       stretch out their hands to touch them and . . . say things that a modest pen cannot describe? What are we to do with them and their excuse that their work is 'not dishonourable'; that it is merely one type of promoting trade and attracting customers (*al-Lata'if al-musawwara* 12).

To deal with the problem above, females were encouraged to work as salesclerks in the department stores in Egypt. In her memoir, Shaarawi mentions that Chalons in Alexandria employed female salesclerks, and in Orosdi-Back's Cairo store, there were 13 women. By the 1940s, female salesclerks constituted a third or half of the department stores' staff. The female sales clerk was then necessary to keep the required "morality" for the increasing female clients. These female salesclerks came from diverse backgrounds, but most of them belonged to the working class, who endeavoured to climb the social ladder to the middle class. Their presence in their elegant dress, thus, also created a threat to the social order in a rigid class society.

Upper-class women as "new women" started to appear in the department stores to purchase items for their own modern home and grant themselves the liberty to arrange the furniture inside their home. Other middle-class women followed them to set the path for the female of the coming generation. The historian Mona Russell maintains that woman became: "the general administrator and purchasing agent for her home. Whether wealthy or middle class, she was responsible for the careful and efficient running of her household" (Russell 48).

Russell argues that:

> [e]ven if the role were not new for elite women, growing numbers of middle-class women began to serve as the arbiters of taste and function in their new homes. .. [N]ow urban homes were building blocks of the nation. To furnish their homes and to make life easier, Egyptians were exposed to new stores, products, and services (Russell 37).

Moreover, new neighborhoods in the European style were founded included hospitals, modern retail stores, and new transportation ways. All this supported reconstructing gender spaces among the elites. Lisa Pollard states: "Monogamous, bourgeois couples and modern, single-family dwellings" appeared to change the gendering space (Pollard 48).

 Nonetheless, unveiling during this period became possible for middle and upper- class women outside their homes became the norm, but their dress was socially accepted long as there was not too revealing. Wearing a revealing dress in a Western fashion on the beaches was read as an expression of attaching public immorality. This was able to trigger the anger of the conservatives and even the government to reconsider women's modern dress and their position in the modern public sphere. Even if the whole society was indulgent in Western products.

Ceza Nabaraoui, the president of the "Egyptian Feminist Union", describes the angry criticizing response of the press and conservative public towards Egyptian women's and girls' Westernized appearance on Alexandria beaches during the summer in the early 1930s writing:

> Significant changes have taken place within Egyptian society, customs and mores during the space of these past ten years. Simultaneously an excellent press  campaign has been mounted by some aspects in society to represent our beaches a place of perdition from which our young women must be turned away. Although Neither government nor the clergy attempt to close down gambling clubs that were   a greater threat to public morality than young women enjoying the healthy sun … aided by the spirit of regression which has

reigned in official circles for some time now, we read in the press the most absurd articles on the utility of the veil.

The dangers of higher education for women and for mixing with sexes which are leading to licentiousness and turning away from their mission. One could say that the authors of these writings knowingly want to ignore the irresistible power of modern ideas, particularly that of the emancipation of women (Nelson 58-59).

Nabaraoui's words support the argument that the tension over women's form of visibility in the public sphere was still going on during the 1930s. Indeed while upper- middle- class and upper-class women could indulge themselves in the Western dress in their Salon and clubs, the visibility of women's bodies in revealing dress in public spaces, such as the beaches were still creating controversy in the society even after the passage of more than a decade since Huda Shaarawi's revolutionary act of removing her veil at the Cairo station 1923.

Indeed, simultaneously and parallel to prevailing consumer culture, other conservative cultural forces gained support and popularity among the lower classes. In March1928, in the Egyptian city of Ismailia, Hassan al-Banna, an elementary teacher in Ismalia, founded "The Muslim Brotherhood "which aimed for political, social and economic reform based on an Islamic perspective. They claimed that their society required reforming the Muslim individual, family, community, and the Islamic government. They thus focused on returning to the practice of veiling as the primary signifier of their Islamic behaviour and Egyptian Muslim identity versus the colonizer's "secular" identity.

Muslim Brothers endeavored to construct a national identity that is grounded in Islam. This was in a clash with the secular nationalist movement. During this period, Egyptian national identity focused on the principle of citizenship (Vatikiotis 254). The national government and movement attempted to create a secular national identity grounded in the concept of the citizen and not religion. Their slogans were "religion for God and

the homeland is for all" (ildin Allah was al Watan Lil game) and "nationalism is our religion "(wantanaa dinuna). The clash between the government and the Muslim Brotherhood ended in banning it and arresting some of its leaders. Even though the masses and rural areas from the 1940s were still clinging to their conservative religious attitude concerning women's looks, middle and upper-middle-class women were abandoning their veil and long mantle for the Western dress.

In summary, there have two female feminist voices on women's modernization represented in Huda Shaarawi secular feminism and Nassef's Egyptian oriented feminism. Shaarawi and Nassef agreed on advocating women's right to education and changing laws concerning marriage and divorce, but they differed on modern women's clothing style. While Nassef did not advocate the necessity of adopting Western fashion as a symbol of women's modernization, Shaarawi supported a Western dress as a necessary step towards women's advancement. Shaarawi's view of a modern Western look and fashion in Egyptian society went popular, and the veil started to be regarded as a backward practice that belonged to lower classes or the religious traditionalists.

Nonetheless, embracing the modern "emancipating" Western dress was not an accurate reflection of modern feminist values that called for women's empowerment, gender equality, or even deconstructing the borders between classes in this patriarchal rigid class system society during the three decades.

In the following part, I look at the contradictory discourses on the modern emancipated fashionable female in Egypt in light of Doria Shafik's autobiography *Egyptian Feminist: A Woman Apart* (1996). Shafik's autobiography was written by Cynthia Nelson (1933-2006), an American anthropologist who founded the Institute for Gender and Women's Studies at the American University in Cairo in 2000 and was its head until her death.

### 3. Postcolonial Fashionable Muslim Woman and the Modern and the Question of Democracy

"I was aware that I had no position permitting me to play a significant social, political or moral role. I was not rich like Huda Shaarawi which might allow me to impose myself.But I had faith!" (Shafik in Nelson 105).

During the first half of the twentieth century, Egyptian society witnessed significant social changes. Egyptian women's conservative appearance changed for a daring liberal one in particular among wealthy women. Women aspired for social mobilization also dressed fashionably. Unveiled elegant working-class women presence in the public sphere increased in occupations like department stores. This shift proved Egyptian women's deep desire to break with their traditional dress and role. Nonetheless, dressing fashionably in work and university was still socially unacceptable. Doria Shafik's activism for unconditional gender and social equality presents a prism to discern the opportunities open for Egyptian women and their challenges during the assumed liberal secular era (1919 and 1952).

Doria Shafik (1908-1975) was a poet, writer, publisher, philosopher and feminist. Heartened by her charm, education and the claimed liberal atmosphere that encouraged women's active role in the public sphere, Shafik struggled to shatter all unjust social customs and gender norms. Her feminist efforts were directed mainly to achieving social equality for impoverished women in rural and urban poor districts through education and work. Although Shafik was educated in Western institutions and was influenced by the French culture and ideals, she always referred to Islamic teaching in justifying her political and social feminist demands. Nonetheless, Shafik's

radical and rebellious strategy in attacking all forms of inequality in her society was met by harsh public criticism and political punishment.

Her appearance as a fashionable, charming Muslim woman was manipulated against her, and she was silenced and excluded from the public sphere for eighteen years until her tragic death.

Shafik was born in her grandmother's house in Tanta in 1908. Her father, Ahmed Shafik Effendi, was an employee in the Egyptian railways who worked in Tanta, Al Mansoura and Alexandria. As for her mother, she descended from an influential, wealthy family. Shafik's wealthy grandfather died, leaving a young wife and her three daughters. As a result, Shafik's grandmother was obliged to move to her half-brother's house since it was not allowed for a middle-class young widow to live alone without a male. Thus, as the guardian of her grandmother's money, all the fortune came under his disposal. Also the half -brother had the right to arrange the marriage for his nieces. Shafik´s mother was married off to a man belonging to a lower social class. Shafik grew up in a loving Muslim family; her father was an open-minded, kind pious Muslim, who adored his wife and supported his children to get the best education as far as he could afford. As a child, she could discover diverse forms of social inequality in Egyptian society. Shafik detected discrimination based on class through the interactions between her family members and between her family and the servants. She could also discover the unequal gender relations through the stories she heard from her grandmother, relatives and servants. The feelings and experiences affected Shafik and contributed to her liberal feminist consciousness at a very young age.

Shafik realized that all women suffered from oppression and inequality, regardless of their economic condition. While wealthy women were still deprived of the right to be visible in the public sphere for work or education or choose their husbands, both men

and women belonging to the lower social classes suffered from poverty, ignorance, marginalization and contempt.

Egypt was under a severe hierarchical class system since the establishment of Muhammed Ali's regime. In such a rigid class system, titles based mainly on wealth would identify the person's status. In Egypt, three titles described once's a place in the society after the royal family of the khedive. The most prestigious title was the "Pasha ", a title that referred to wealthy and influential landowners or powerful politicians. Then came a lesser position title, the "Bey ", reserved for rich urban educated middle-class men, such as lawyers, doctors, wealthy merchants, and wealthy rural men. The third title, "Effendi", described the educated civil servants who worked in small jobs for the government. The "Effendi" are in a lesser status than the Bey and higher than impoverished masses and peasants who came at the bottom of the hierarchical class system but constituted the majority of the society (Nelson 4). The title "Hanim" was reserved for all wealthy women.The social class defined the individual's place in society and how he is treated, which impacted people's feelings and daily interactions. Shafik describes the relationship between her parents, who belonged to different social classes and shows how this difference deeply affected their psyche and personalities. Shafik wrote:

> There always seemed to be an unspoken feeling of mortification within Mama, who felt diminished compared to her cousins, the majority of whom had married wealthy landowners. And within Papa, a profound hurt. He loved my mother deeply and had received a high level of culture through his efforts, yet he felt irreconcilably outclassed. A great tragedy existed within my family, and they hardly even realized  it (Nelson 6).

The rigid class system affected Shafik´s psyche and she developed a sense of humiliation connected to the lower classes at a very early age. She recounts, "I always tended to place things and people into categories and classes. And as I

nearly always figured out that I was not on the class level that I imagined, I suffered terribly "(Nelson 10-11).

It is interesting here to stress that how class affected gender relations. In gendered politics of power, Egyptian women were subordinate to their men, while in class politics of power, middle-class women had power over working-class men. The class difference enabled Shafik's mother and grandmother to have the upper hand over the male in the family. They mastered everything and direct the father the way they wanted. The father was submerged under their demands and needs for their social meetings at home that exceeded his financial ability. Moreover, Shafik's mother insisted that her daughter be educated at the same French school which the mother attended. French missionary schools were considered the best schools for Middle-class and Upper-class girls.

Nevertheless, the mother, who was envied for her husband's love and care, could never overcome her inferiority feelings among her female relatives married off to wealthy men. Shafik wrote:

> Mama could never get used to the idea that she was married to a simple functionary   who had no other revenue than his salary. Her lavish attempts to maintain appearances in front of her rich cousins led to a continual exhaustion of the financial resources of the household—until the point of bankruptcy. There were  never sufficient funds from my father's modest salary to maintain the lavish style in which my mother entertained. This became the chief source of friction between my parents as well as creating within me a great feeling of insecurity. I felt somewhat deceived that Mama attached more importance to her innumerable friends, to the Monday receptions, to the visits of Grandmother, to the cousins from Cairo who came with their children, than she did to our comfort or that of Papa (Nelson10).

Shafik was sent to Notre Dame des Apotres in Tanta, and attending French school and acquiring modern French knowledge impacted Shafik's relationship to her Arabic language and Egyptian culture at a very early age. However, outside her school, Shafik

experienced another seemingly contradicting cultural environment. Tanta was (is) a central place for Sufism where the tomb of 13th-century Moroccan Sunni Muslim mystic and the most popular of Muslim saints in Egypt, Al-Sayyid al-Badawī, is located.  There are also many saints' tombs in Tanta that Egyptian pilgrims tend to visit all year-round. In addition, Shafik was influenced by her parents' personalities. Shafik, who learned to appreciate beauty from her mother, loved reading and developed a pious character like her father. She describes her father as "a man of intellect and piety" (Nelson 6).

These different cultural atmospheres and values constituted Shafik's identity and affected her understanding of Islamic values the emancipation of Muslim women's bodies in the modern age.

Shafik´s mother died when she was twelve years old. The death of her beloved mother shocked the child Doria who buried herself into her study to overcome her sense of loneliness. In the same year, Shafik cancelled her engagement to her cousin that was arranged since their birth. Shafik dared to challenge her family and take control of her life, and her decision did not from a social disgrace like Shaarawi´s, who was forced to marry her cousin at the age of thirteen. Both of them are Egyptian Muslim women, but their decisions are taken within their norms of their different social classes. Shaarawi´s decision is rooted in her social class and not in religion.  Shaarawi´s upper-class´ wealth, fame and reputation controlled her decision, unlike Shafik, who belonged to a modest social class. In this humble social class, women do not own valuable properties, and their life and behaviours are not closely followed or questioned by their social community.

After obtaining a baccalaureate degree, Shafik was awarded a scholarship to study at Sorbonne University with the help of Huda Shaarawi in 1928. She was encouraged by her father, but her grandmother rejected Shafik's stay in France alone. She argued that

no one would marry Shafik after her return, and Shafik herself was aware that finding a proper Egyptian husband would not be easy, and she risks spending the rest of her life without a husband. Nevertheless, she insisted on pursuing her study in France. She stated, "I also saw the possibility of finding myself alone until the end of my days without a man to help me…Tant pis! I would go no matter what the price" (Nelson 29).

Once again, Shafik´s actions and decisions reflect her feminist attitude that aims to challenge the prevailing social customs. This feminist consciousness is also present in her first speech at Qasim Amin's anniversary before leaving for France.

Shafik stated:

> Madam Huda Sharawy: one of your protegees has come from far to participate at this anniversary as much celebrated as painful. Qasim Amin Bey is the name which  has been engraved in our hearts with gratitude eternally. Has he not been our guide in darkness? I will try to be one of his disciples whose example will reach women to fend for themselves, despite material life necessities. What miseries the depths of the harems have concealed for so long! What experiences can one acquire if one simply made a trip from one part of the house to another? ... the woman was not aware of her captivity having always led the same life. She did not think she could liberate herself. I asked myself why certain men persist in isolating women!. Do they believe that age-old traditions can be adapted to the current modern life? Or it is that they do not understand the absolute value of liberty? (Nelson 28).

Shafik's speech reflected her early strong feminist consciousness and commitment to raising both men and women's feminist awareness on the importance of women's role in modern society and liberating women from the old patriarchal customs and norms. Shaarawi herself saw in Shafik a strong feminist character that could significantly impact society's gender roles through her academic role in universities in the future. Therefore, Shaarawi promoted Shafik's speech in Egyptian newspapers.

In Paris, Shafik was eager to pursue her study in philosophy to acquire deep knowledge about diverse cultures. Her choice was rejected by the director of the Egyptian Education Office at the Sorbonne. He insisted that philosophy is not

considered a feminine field and asked her to choose another branch such as history, geography, or nursery. Shafik did not succumb to the director´s choice and was determined to study what she chose for herself. She finally could specialize in philosophy with the help of Egyptian nationalists and defender of women´s education Dr Taha Husayn. Shafik stated:"I didn't come this far to give up! I shall study what I want and nothing else!" (Nelson 36). Shafik indulged herself in fashion and beauty while not neglecting her studies in philosophy. She saw no contradiction between logic and interest in her femininity and beauty. She got her degree in philosophy at the age of thirty-two. Her research was augmented by defending two theses related to her feminist struggle against women´s suffering in Egyptian society, her roots as an Egyptian Muslim, and her position as a Muslim woman between two cultural values: rational modern European and Islamic spiritual culture. Her first thesis focused on ancient Egyptian art and European philosophy, and the second thesis investigated Egyptian Muslim women´s liberation and modernity. Shafik´s ambition was to reconcile modernity and women´s rights with Islam. She wrote, "I decided to concentrate on a topic that was close to my heart…the conditions under which Muslim women lived in my country and their sufferings, to which I had been witness as a child growing up" (Nelson 75).

Shafik was loyal to her feminist views and attempted to set a model for modern Muslim women liberated from unjust traditional social customs in all her personal decisions. She cancelled an engagement because she could not fell in love with her suitor.  Also, she insisted on divorcing a journalist who threatened to publish her pictures in Miss Egypt poignant in which she appeared almost naked if she does not accept his authority over her. She did not fear the social disgrace and insisted on divorcing him. She got married at the age of thirty to a wealthy cousin she chose without any social pressure.

In France, Shafik married her cousin Nour Eldin Ragaey in 1938. Their marriage was a feminist statement that aimed to break with the traditional Egyptian social customs concerning marriage. Shafik chose to marry a 7- year younger cousin without the attendance of their families, and she rejected the bride's dowry as followed in Egypt. Shafik describes her marriage and choice, stating:

> An Egyptian woman can assume responsibility in choosing her own husband and thus seek freedom! Without dowry or jewels or material assets (which is the first condition of marriage in Egypt), was for me the ultimate symbol. It was freedom in my own eyes, freedom from all the outworn social conventions which had so enslaved Egyptian women. But I was also aware that to marry under such conditions would create a scandal in Egypt…and while I signed the contract without dowry (except for the symbolic twenty-five piasters), without diamonds, without trousseau, I felt I was engaging in an act of faith! A faith in a future of the liberation of the Egyptian woman from these outmoded customs.And I experienced a magnificent feeling of EQUALITY with my husband! (Nelson 82-84).

Shafik's unprecedented feminist act reflects her determination to support modern marriage that affirms the individual's free choices and guarantees an equal relationship between the husbands. Thus working and earning money like her husband was consistent with her belief in equal gender relations.

### 3.2. Doria Shafik: Rebellious Fashionable Feminist

Women's Westernized appearance was limited to their luxurious social clubs and department stores. In the middle -and upper-middle-class, women, did not work for a salary even if they were educated. Education was a privilege to attract potential suitors but not for encouraging women to be self-sufficient. Women were still reliant on their men through marriage. Therefore, when the charming Shafik demanded her right to work after holding a doctoral degree with honour from the Sorbonne, she faced criticism from all forces around her upon returning to Egypt. Shafik was already married to a successful lawyer and university professor and could lead a happy, luxurious life.

However, she was eager to lead a modern life unrestricted by the old traditions and patriarchal customs inside her home and outside it. Nonetheless, Shafik received the first blow when she went to the university dressed in an elegant Parisian style, demanding a College of Letters position. The Dean of the College of Arts, Dr Ahmed Amin (1886-1954), who hold a conservative religious background, was shocked by Shafik's French appearance and insisted on rejecting her demand. According to Shafik, the Dean was against women's role outside their traditional roles in their home, particularly when women are dressed in such a European dress. The Dean treated her haughtily and told her he could not appoint a bold, beautiful woman dressed in modern French fashion since that may threaten the university's image. Once again, the concept of women's revealing dress as a threat to public morality was conjured.

Shafik described the incident and her disappointment about the persistent patriarchal culture and social norms concerning women's appearance in society. She wrote:

> I still had all my illusions believing that it was sufficient to speak logically to be understood. I made an appointment with the Dean of the faculty of letters, a graduate of al- Azhar University, conservative by principle. Anti- feminist by temperament.I was dressed simply but elegantly in the latest Paris fashion. I approached, the unconscious of the tempest that my meeting would unleash. Our eyes met like the clash of two armies. His reaction to me was one of the astonishment, defiant, even hatred, why for goodness sake?

> To begin with, there was no gesture on his part to invite me to sit down. I waited to stand, already ill at ease. I opened the conversation, but could not sustain it very long. Without his having to say a word, I grasped a categorical refusal and left with a heavy heart (Nelson 99).

Shafik never criticized Islam, she was a spiritual liberal Muslim whose Islam was inherited from her devout open-minded father. She found all religions a source of peace, elevation, and justice. Nevertheless, it seems that her liberal ethical interpretation of Islam was neither recognized nor tolerated in such a conservative anti-

feminist social milieu. This opposition remained among the conservative male even in the university.

They rejected that male and females study in the same hall and rejected females' enrollment for a field reserved for men such as law, medicine, and engineering until the second half of the 1940s. Shafik failed to get the position in the university, and middle and upper-class feminists also reproached her for seeking work for earning money on the one hand and dressing in a simple Parisian fashionable way, which defies upper- class women's sophisticated dress. Shafik described her disappointment about women's role and appearance in Egyptian society fifteen years after Shaarawi took off the veil and announced the disintegration of the harem system.Shafik recounted:

> Women from all walks of life found in me something to reproach. Society women reached me because of my advanced education. They accused me of being a snob. When I got my doctorate, they never forgave me. They found fault with my clothes, whose simplicity contrasted with their more ornate styles. The intellectuals reproached me for spending money on clothes and attending receptions, which they felt was not dignified for my advanced education; the middle class reproached me    for    associating    with    the aristocracy. The upper bourgeoisie reproached me for defying their dress and wanting to have a career and work for salary; the religious fanatics reproached me for breaking old harem tradition. She sets a bad example for our girls (Nelson 90).

In this context, Shafik explodes the discourse that only women forced to stay in the harem are inherently subordinate to their men as an opposite to claim the emancipated fashionable Muslim women, who have access of the public sphere. Instead, the harem can also be extended to describe other women's situation in the public sphere when they are not allowed to work and earn their own money like their men, such as the attractive upper-class women.

### 3.3. Shafik between Muslim Women's Rights in Islam and the Modern Secular State

Shafik feminist philosophy aimed to improve the socio-economic condition of the masses suffering under severe poverty, ignorance and early marriage. In 1944, she launched her magazine "La Femme Nouvelle en Egypte" in collaboration with princess Shoueikar in the French language to encourage the elite and upper-class women to take part in improving the poor masses' lives. She called and urged elite women to support her stating,

> We are like a huge machine whose cogs fail to mesh. There has been too much progress at the top of society and none at all at the bottom. Yet it is on this basis that the solid foundations of any society, and particularity of female society, are laid, and it is from this layer of the society that the majority of mothers come.Here is an issue which we should devote the greatest attention (Nelson 114).

In November 1945, Shafik's magazine "Bint El Nile"(The Daughter of the Nile) was issued in Arabic to accomplish her social reform program. Unlike "La Femme Nouvelle en Egypte ", issued in French and gathering the support of high society and introducing the new Egyptian women to Western society, "Bint El Nile" was an Arabic-language magazine directed to the common Egyptian and Arab women. It aimed to nurture a feminist culture in nutrition, child-rearing and introducing the latest Paris fashion. Through her magazine "Bint El Nile", Shafik knew more about ordinary women's problems and sufferings that were still prevalent, particularly issues like early marriage and polygamy through the messages sent from the readers in a section to the readers. The magazine was praised and widely celebrated; its popularity continued to increase between 1945 and 1952 until the government closed it in 1957.

A year later, Shafik delivered her first lecture in Arabic on the Egyptian woman in Jerusalem accepting Luli Abu al-Hadi's invitation, the Jordanian prime minister's daughter. There, Shafik was introduced to another form of feminist culture that amazed her. She observed that women were everywhere besides men, and there was also a strong women's movement in all rural and urban areas. Moreover, Shafik recounts that most of the women who attended her lecture were veiled. She said:

> They are always beside the men of Palestine during troubled times. This is the true reflection of the strength of the women's movement in Palestine. These are women who helped and supported not just Arab women in Palestine but Arab women everywhere. They are a powerful force of Palestine and an emblem for true nationalism for all women. In every town and village, there is a leader to be found heading the women's movement. She is usually helped by the local school teachers and headmistresses who are all affiliated with the society for women's solidarity. It is not a contrived movement since women there read as much as men do. Knowledge to them is something sacred. … I was surprised that the majority of those attending my lecture were veiled women (Nelson 131).

Other forces in society endeavored to improve the status of the poor masses. For instance, the leftist movements included workers and students from the middle class, such as the "communist movement" represented in the Movement for Democracy for National Liberation. This movement was created and led by Henry Corell, an Egyptian Jew who rejects Zionism and the British colonisation. Other leftist political groups called for resisting capitalism and Westernisation but fighting Western capitalism does not necessarily mean fighting the class system at home with its robust structure. As a result, they did not support Shafik's position. On the other hand, the conservative Muslim Brotherhood movement was constantly increasing, especially after the skills and experiences they gained from participating in the Palestine war in 1948. They called for ridding society of Western imperialism, which they considered the cause of the country's economic and social problems. Instead, they called for a society that is ruled based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. They were able to gain popularity among the

poor masses and middle classes. In 1948, the number of Muslim brotherhood's centres amounted to two thousand in Egypt.

Shafik's program, however, was mainly social and not political; she embraced neither communism nor the Muslim Brotherhood's views, and both rejected her. According to the Muslim Brotherhood, Shafik was a "Westernized" character representing a materialist lifestyle and contradicted the true modest Islam. Simultaneously, according to the communist feminists from the left, such as Inja Efflaton, Shafik's indulgence in fashion and her connection to the palace "branded her as too bourgeois to be taken seriously" (Nelson 124). Nevertheless, since Doria's program and organisation were not political, her organisation was not banned like both the leftist communist and the Islamist later in the same year after a state of emergency had been declared.

Shafik's philosophy rejected neither her past Islamic, Egyptian culture nor modern secular Western culture, and she never saw them clash. Instead, she believed that cultures and civilisations are in a state of interaction and accumulation. Shafik was convinced that her target was the educated young people from the middle class looking for a society where social justice and political rights prevail. A year later, she opened a cafeteria to provide salary and meals for free meals to workers and provided a platform for cultural activities to raise awareness. This social activity also created a fit of conservatives' anger.

Moreover, during the same year, she established a school for literacy in poor neighbourhood Bulaq. She endeavoured to improve the literacy rate among rural and poor women. Educating those women could enable them to express their problems, and she encouraged the reluctant poor women to join her; she promised to give each woman "a scarf, a comb, a piece of soap, a packet of sweets ". Shafik also gave the regular attendants dresses and monthly gifts. Furthermore, women who dared to take

off their veils were promised beautiful aprons, which encouraged many women to take off their veils. It is vital to refer to Shafik's deep belief in the relationship between the veil and ignorance and backwardness in this context.

After four months, women were examined under the Ministry of Education's supervision, where 80% succeeded. Nonetheless, Shafik, inspired by successful literacy stories in countries like Turkey and India, eradicated illiteracy among adults. She established many centres in Cairo and the provinces until the number reached 30, in which women learned to read and write and enter a profession that helped them improve their income. The number of these centres even reached 80 in 1952. Shafik's social work was belittled by other fellow feminist forces like anti-colonial Marxist feminists. Shafik's embracement of her femininity and fashion like upper-class women, who gave much attention to their beauty and elegance, was taken as a pretext to reject and stigmatise her. For Marxists, Shafik represented a superficial "Lady of a Salon ", whose feminist work is a method to advertise herself, and she could not be taken as a seriously committed feminist.

In summary, Shafik sought to raise awareness among all social classes about social inequality on the one hand and to empower women through providing education and work on the other hand. Nonetheless, she was opposed by all feminist and patriarchal forces since she did not fully fit in the normative model of the class, religious, or Marxist ideologies. Nonetheless, the bald rebellious Shafik became sure that for the society to advance, all women must obtain freedom from both the constraints of old social traditions and the economic barriers, and this change would be achieved by gaining their political rights. Accordingly, in1948, Shafik founded her party, "Bint El Nil Union" which allowed the membership of women from diverse social classes.  She wanted the party" to be a bond, a hyphen between classes considered antagonistic". In the same

year, shafik held two conferences, one in French and the other in Arabic, to announce a new movement to call for realizing Egyptian women's full rights. According to Shafik, patriarchal Egyptian men use religion and traditions to deny women´s rights granted to them in Islam. Shafik addresses Egyptian men using a violent language. She asked:

> What tradition stands between women and their ability to do good?...In fact it is this inferiority complex from which some Egyptians suffer which makes them behave in this way… Gentleman make way for us and let the procession take its natural course" (Neslon 150).

Shafik realized that women's suffering could only be dealt with when women can participate in the legislation concerning women. However, while upper-class feminists supported Sharawy's movement two decades before, they were not ready to support Shafik, whom they considered not wealthy like them or Huda Shaarawi hanim.

## 3.4. Modern Secular Muslim State and Feminism

In 1922, Britain granted Egypt semi- formal independence. The colonial authorities changed the title of head of state in Egypt from the Sultan to the king, and within a year,agreed to promulgate a democratic constitution. The 1923 constitution was drafted based on Western liberal documents by Egyptian legal experts who were pro-Western modern political values. During this period, liberal politics and civil liberties began to take shape. The liberal ideologies of Western Europe inspired the young elite Egyptians. Liberalism was intended to rethink society through the principles of secular nationalism. Egyptian individuals and groups participated in genuine electoral competitions. These groups adopted diverse ideologies, including liberalists, Islamists, Marxists, feminists, and secular nationalists, and they belonged to diverse social classes even if the Westernized elite were still controlling the democratic practice.

European-style constitution and political pluralism were integrated into the country's political landscape while preserving Egyptian Muslim culture and values, particularly regarding women's place in society. In this context, while women's demands concerningwomen's political rights that Huda Shaarawi demanded, such as women's right to vote to participate in decision-making in society, were not recognized— demanding the right to vote triggered a battle between the male elite and women on Islam and women's constitutional rights in modern liberal society. Although this battle started with Huda Shaarawi in 1923, Shafik resumed the discussion and waged a fierce war on all patriarchal forces to achieve women's political rights. Shafik used Islamic interpretationsas a justification for her demands.Shafik's struggle to achieve women´s constitutional rights was not an easy battle, andthe government continued delaying fulfilling the promises on reforming the personal status laws, equal salaries for both sexes, the right to vote and a nomination for parliament. As a response, Shafik led a protest of 1,500 women from "Bint El Nil Organization "and other Egyptian feminist organizations to the Egyptian senate on February 19, 1951.

Shafik decided to "use violence towards those who understand only the language of violence "(Nelson 168).The protest ended with a new promise by the parliament's president to look into the women's demands but was not fulfilled. Instead, Shafik facedcharges of leading a march that assaulted the senate by the Attorney General. Although a week later, Ahmed Al-Hadari, a Wafdist member in the parliament, presented a draft law guaranteeing women's right to vote and run for parliament amidstsevere criticism from the local press by conservatives and anti-feminist writers. This debate ended with the King's interference against Shafik's demands. The King saw thefeminist movement as a plot against Egypt and Islam and insist that Shafik would neverobtain women's rights in his life. Furthermore, Shafik's case was finally adjourned indefinitely.

Nonetheless, Shafik ignored that women were not yet allowed to run for parliament according to the law. She was convinced that women's right to run for parliament "contradicted neither Islam nor the constitution ". Thus, she invited women to send theirnomination for the parliament each on behalf of her neighborhood, and she did the same. Nonetheless, their candidacy was rejected by the government and the conservatives, who argued that this nomination is against Islamic values.

The Grand Mufti rejected Shafik's feminist views. According to conservative Mufti, Islam establishes barriers between women and unrelated men. Thus, women's political rights that could grantee travelling alone and attending conferences like male ministers contradict Islamic values. Since Al- Azhar is the highest religious authority in Egypt, even for the Muslim world, and the Mufti's opinion in Egypt cannot be contested even by the government, Egyptianwomen´s struggle for nomination for the parliament failed. As a result, the government's decision that was on its way to amend the election laws ended with negating the previous promise based on an article of the Egyptian constitution that says "Islam is the religion of the state". According to Shafik, such a decision was able to end the discussion of the feministquestion and crush a robust feminist movement in Egypt during this period. Shafik comments on this moment three decades later, bitterly saying:

> Women, the Grand Mufti admonished, were permitted by the early Caliphs to callto prayer from mosques.' He then asked,` does woman now want to cross the barrier and join men and the chambers of parliament in elections. In propaganda,in committee meetings, in calling on ministers and travelling to conferences and other matters more serious than being a judge between two opponents, which was, however denied them in early Islam? Answering his question, the Grand Mufti stated categorically: 'No one accepts this nor can Islam approve this. No one would take a decision contrary to his conscience and Religion' (Nelson182).

Although Shafik considered challenging the Mufti's opinion a "daring" act, she opposed his views on women's constitutional rights in Islam. Shafik maintained that Quranic verses do not support the Mufti's views that undermined Muslim women's changing daily life needs. These daily life needs have been the basis of religious scholars interpretation of Quranic verses and Islamic traditions. She triggered the debate on the discrepancy between conservative interpretations of Islamic texts and women in modernsociety. Shafik published an essay replying to the conservative Mufti's opinion. She argued that:

> The excuse of the conservatives has been proven false since women in Syria, Turkey and Pakistan—all Islamic countries—have won their political rights. Islamdoes not require that women be deprived of their rights. So what is the excuse ofthe conservatives now! (Nelson 181).

Shafik was trying hard to establish her feminist vision on an Islamic basis that is compatible with modern values, and she was able to turn the debates about women's constitutional rights into a question of public opinion between intellectuals,conservatives, the liberal elite and clerics in the Egyptian newspapers and on aninternational level.

The debates revolved around a conservative interpretation of Quranic verses versus an interpretation that considers the people's current daily needs and diverse views on Islamand its relation to modernity and the democratic state came from Muslims from outside Egyptian geographical boundaries. For example, the Indian Minister of Education, who translated the Quran into Urdu, argued that Islam does not deprive women of their constitutional rights. Also, the Pakistani Mufti, Abdul Hamid Badaiuni, chairman of the Associate of the Association of Ulimas of Pakistan. He argued that that:

> History reveals the diversity of roles women undertook in times of war and peace,and Islam acknowledges their role and accords to women all rights

accorded to men. At present, Egypt seems to be passing through confusing stages where much of the debate centres around the right to vote, unlike Pakistan where the right is both secured and practised (Nelson 181).

Nonetheless, despite her effort, Shafik failed to achieve women's rights during this stagebecause of the hostile religious-political atmosphere.

I argue that Shafik´s struggle is in line with Fatima Mernissi's argument on Muslim women'srights granted to them in Islam but are hindered by male elites in many Muslim societies. Yet, the Muslim rebellious Shafik was able to attract the attention of the Arab and international press on women's reality, the legal system and the social milieu in Egypt during this period. She invited women from all other feminist fractions to join a "hunger strike" in front of the Press Syndicate to demand their rights when the constitutional committee was announced without women's presence. Most local press that dealt with the strike did not focus on women's demands but rathertheir appearance and body. The local press ridiculed those women, did not take them seriously and accused them of immorality, mainly since they dressed in their light homemantels and pyjamas without a head-cover.

However, those women who participated in the hunger strike were praised by Arab feminist organisations and the international press. Western media covered the eventand discussed the "strike" as part of the ongoing debate about women claiming the modern public sphere and constitutionality, not only in Egypt but also worldwide. George Waller, Chicago Daily News reporter whose wife joined the strike, wrote anarticle describing the event writing:

> For five days, these women - five brunettes and two blondes, all but one marriedand one wearing her husband's pink pyjamas - have been uncomfortably sharingfour mattresses crowded together on the floor of Cairo's Journalists' Union. Two of the original nine have toppled over due to weakness, but none have yielded.

> The military junta ruling Egypt has tried to snub the strike hoping that it will collapse quickly. But Doria Shafik, who after having two children, still preserves a Marilyn Monroe figure, told me 'I am sticking it out till they give us a written guarantee (Nelson 202).

The strike ended after President Mohamed Nagib's new government's promises to consider women's demands, and Shafik travelled on a three-month journey around theworld to gather more international support for her feminist goals and vision in October 1954. She was able to visit many Eastern and Western societies where not only was she introduced to prominent politicians, but she also gave several lectures in French and English on the new system and political rights, women and their rights in Islam, women, spiritual life in the modern era, and even on women and poetry. Furthermore, she attended sessions in Congress and tried to enlist her feminist work in Egypt, especially her "literacy" project. In her memoir, she mentions her admiration for the American woman present at home as a wife without necessarily giving up their active participation in the public sphere. Shafik was attracting attention "as one of the most important women in the world ". She was praised for her ability to be a practical and attractive, elegant woman. She was, thus, opposite to the supposed ignored and ugly traditional veiled women in her culture. The Daily Mirror described her as "Wanting to become the 20th century Cleopatra", while she was ridiculed and reduced her elegantappearance in Egypt.

The whole story of Shafik and the solid feminist movement came to an end after Shafik´s clash with Gamal Abdel Nasser's view of modern post-colonial Egypt. Starting from the 1952 revolution and establishing Nasser's regime, Egypt witnessed a vigorous political discourse that revolved mainly around socialism, nationalism (Egyptianization), anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism. Nonetheless, Abdel Nasser ruled the country with an iron fist amidst an unstemmable tide of a populist wave. According to the new constitution of 1956, the governmental system

transformed into a presidential system instead of a parliamentary system. This system gives the president more power. Previous governmental decisions that were expected to lead to establishing a democratic parliamentary life were cancelled. Even ifNasser summarized his goals to the public on television, saying:

> There are six goals; to put an end to colonialism, to put an end to feudalism, toput an end to the exploitation of capitalism, to have social justice, to have a strong national army for the people, and to build up real democracy (Salem 9).

All forces that opposed him were excluded; the Muslim Brothers, who was able to gain supporters from diverse classes, even in the influential official institutions, including the army, were put in jail. Also, communists and other political oppositions were arrested. On July 26 1956, the press was nationalized, private and voluntary organizations were closed, the constitution was abolished, and all feminist organizations were placed underthe state's control. Within this context, Shafik's struggle turned into a struggle for democratic life in Egypt, not just a struggle for women's rights. Therefore, her struggle became directed at Abdel Nasser himself. Although Shafik refrained from commenting explicitly on Egypt's politicalsituation during her travel around the world, she was regarded as challenging the state's authority as an anti-Western and anti-capitalist nationalist project. The local press ridiculed Shafik, describing her as "The Perfumed Leader", and a violent campaign was launched against her supported by the state. She even appeared in an article where herhead was placed on the body of a belly dancer. This insulted her and urged her to respond to press criticism for the first time. She recounts this incident after thirty years with the same anger, writing, "My head had been superimposed on top of the body of a belly dancer in a very obscene pose. It had the taint of blackmail. The worst propagandafor a Muslim feminist leader! "(Nelson 260).Indeed, the belly dancer represents debauchery and immorality in the Egyptian Muslimsocial culture.

Even as a fashionable feminist, Shafik did not stand against the mainstream morality system concerning sexuality and the relationship between men and women outside marriage. She never transgressed the morality expected in her social environment, even when she was outside her society. According to Shafik´s daughter, she was "always very strict with herself. She was a beautiful woman and certainly must have had men running after her. But she never encouraged anyone. Shehad a lot of intrinsic honesty "(Nelson 260).

In this context, one can argue that although Shafik's struggle to liberate her body from its confinement to the private space, she was not liberated from her traditional understanding of the proper place of a female's body and sexuality. Shafik's attitude became apparent in her relationship with a French poet, towards whom she developed feelings of love. She cut off her relationship to help keep her reputation in Egypt untarnished after her Egyptian female colleagues stole his letter and sent them Egyptianstudents' administrator in Paris. Even after he proposed to marry her, Shafik rejected going back to him. Shafik expressed her happiness because she got married to a wealthy Egyptian Muslim and not a European. Since marrying a non- Egyptian and non-Muslim was unacceptable among the middle classes (Nelson 260). In this respect, Shafik was loyal to her Egyptian identity and her devout upbringing and did not compromise it. Therefore, presenting Shafik as a belly dancer was a shaming position and the worst tool to silence and assassinate her personality in the social domain.

Once again, one can read stigmatizing Shafik's body according to the Muslim prevailingtraditional imagination of public/private spaces. The Muslim male enters the public sphere as powerful, courageous and trusted, while women are considered intruders whose bodies could bear immorality and threaten the social fabric. Women

have to conform to the public perception and regulations of the female body´s presence in thepublic sphere. In the assumed modern post-colonial, their feminine bodies are still imprisoned through the traditional deep-rooted public imagination of Muslim Egyptianwomen's place in the male public sphere.

In addition, Carol's concept of "the personal is political" is relevant when discussing manipulating Shafik's body to silence her in the political struggle. Hanisch argues thatpoliticising what was placed under the category of "personal issues" asserts wideningthe authority of power that penetrates an individual's domestic private life. Here, Shafik's body, an intimate private issue, is also used as a public instrument, manipulated and understood by the public power structure over women's bodies.

Shafik's body did not conform to the Nasser state's model of women's fashionable bodies in the post-colonial public sphere, where their presence was to work or be educated and not revolt against the state.In this vein, Shafik's body and feminine appearance, which are read as a subversionof the various patriarchal forces in her society, were used against her from various feminist, liberal, and conservative social forces. As a result, she was facing Abdul Nasser alone. Shafik's battle ended when she was put under house arrest, banned frompublishing, and all her administrative institutions were closed by the state. (Nelson 243- 250).  Shafik was defeated and forced to return to the private sphere "harem", which she struggled hard to get all Egyptian women out of it to demolish the gendered and class borders in the modern Egyptian public sphere. Shafik aimed to raise social and political consciousness that could lead to the emergence of a pro-women society from within their Islamic culture that is not necessarily opposed to modern Western values.

However, Shafik was radical, and she wanted to "change the objective conditions, not adjust to them" (Hanisch 4). Nevertheless, fighting alone led to her defeat and suffering,as Hanisch had argued in her article "The Personal is Political ". According to Hanisch, activists have to consider the limited effectiveness of personal action in dealing with social and political issues. In such moments there are "only collective action for a collective solution" (4). Hanisch unpacks her argument, writing:

> Women are sometimes smart not to struggle alone when they cannot win, and the repercussions are worse than the oppression... the individual struggle does sometimes get us some things... because our oppression often takes place in isolated circumstances like the home, it still takes individual action to put into practice what the movement is fighting for. But the individual struggle is always limited; it's going to take an ongoing Movement stronger than any we've seen sofar to put an end to male supremacy (Hanisch 4).

Shafik's experience highlights her resistance and her defeat by the patriarchal forces insociety, along with the silence or maybe the short-sighted vision of the feminist organizations that were drawn to the state that supported their demands. During this period, Naser granted women many rights along with his project to achieve social justice and equality, particularly in education and work. Women were granted equal access to higher education and encouraged by the state to join the labour force according to their qualifications. The labour code granted women fifty days paid maternity leave and day-care in workplaces demanded by the feminists.

All in all, the state was able to apply its new form of the modern nationalist post-colonial state through control of the public sector not only concerning the economy but also controlling the whole public sphere through a two-fold strategy: spreading its ideology inthe media and education and when necessary excluding all the oppositions.

To sum up the beautiful, fashionable devout feminist Shafik endeavoured to ground an alternative model for an emancipated Muslim Egyptian modern. She believed in

both Islam and universal human values. Shafik's struggle to achieve social justice and gender equality failed, and her gender subjectivity was marginalized twice. She was silenced as a female and as a fashionable active Muslim woman in a class conservative society. Moreover, her struggle shows the blurring borders between the private and the public and affirms thelimitation of the individual effort in a "collective struggle", as argued by Hanisch.

Furthermore, Shafik's struggle challenges the linear narrative of Egyptian women's liberation from an oppressed veiled woman into an unveiled emancipated woman. Shafik's feminist identity and struggle complicated the claimed binarism between Eastern Muslim culture and secular Western culture. It affirms that modernizing Egyptian Muslim women during this period cannot be reduced to arguments advocatingan affiliation with Western culture and secularization versus preserving indigenous Egyptian Islamic culture.

It is worth mentioning that although achieving women's liberation during this period isdepicted only in line with the Western feminist modern discourse that calls for abandoning the veil and adopting the Western dress as the symbol of post-colonial emancipated modern Muslim women; there was another form of feminism representsthe view of lower-class modern Egyptian Muslim women.In this vein, one can refer to Um Kulthum (1904-1975), who is considered the cultural icon of Egypt. Um Kulthum is the most prominent Egyptian singer who achieved unprecedented fame independently and a high level of respect for a female singer in all Arab cultures.She offers a different model of independent modern Muslim women other than the attractive Westernized women.

Um Kulthum was an Egyptian singer, songwriter, and film actress active from the 1920sto the 1970s. She was born to a low-income family in the countryside in the

Egyptian delta. Her father, a Shaykh (religious teacher), discovered her talent in singing when she was six. She started singing at wedding ceremonies in her villages and other villages. Her father insisted that she wear a boy's galabyya and headgear to assert following morality in his conservative environment. Unlike the upper class and middle- class females who were educated in Western schools or by Western tutors in their harems, Um kulthum had to insist on going to the Kutab to learn like her brother. Her father could not afford the teaching fees for his two children and, like poor rural fathers,preferred to educate his son.

In 1920, Um kulthum moved to Cairo with her family to follow her singing career, and she became the family's primary financial source. Um Kultum took off her headgear inCairo and started wearing elegant dresses but never abandoned her loose, long sleeved dresses and modest appearance. Her loose robe represented her connectionand loyalty to her countryside's roots and she was regarded as the symbol of Egyptian authentic identity by the masses and ordinary people.Um Kulthum achieved unprecedented fame and success in the entertainment industry in Arab countries. In 1945, she nominated herself for President of the Musician's Union and succeeded in getting the position. Her nomination was also unprecedented and rejected by Egyptian men such as Khalil al-Masri, union member and artistic director of Odeon records. He angrily states: "As long as men were available, men, should lead" but Umm Kulthum was not ready to succumb to their patriarchal view. She replied: "I also am able to serve as a leader. I also have ideas and solutions to problems.' 'But men come first!' said al-Masri. 'A woman can be president,' answered Umm Kulthum, and so she was"(Danielson 120).

Although the singing profession is not respected in Egypt and is considered immoral for females, Um kulthum ensured fame as a respectfulwoman in Egypt and Arab

countries, mainly through her strong character, demeanour, and wearing modest, loose dresses. She became the cultural symbol of Egypt and is entitled "The voice of Egypt" and "Egypt's fourth pyramid".

Although Umm Kulthum did not identify herself as a feminist, was an example of an independent Egyptian woman and a feminist model of lower-class andrural women that could have been promoted and celebrated along with other modern feminist models. Um Kulthum" in her modest dress and behaviour with the assertion of the role of women in the public sphere illustrates the subversive, non-binary nature of the ideal model of the emancipated modern woman that assumes an unveiled fashionable emancipated modern woman vis-a-vis a modest subordinate traditional woman. Moreover, this feminist model from below opens the possibility of another post-colonial third space different from the Westernized secular-oriented third space. This feminist model, however, was marginalized by the privileged women and the post- colonial state. Affluent women marginalized this model of modern Egyptian women in atraditional national dress since they were eager to break away with their stifling tradition represented in their traditional dress, whether the new elegant Westernized look represented strong independent modern Muslim women or not. In her autobiography *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1994), Mernissi compares the harem women's attitudes to the fashionable Westernized princess Asmahan8(1917-1944) and Um Kelthum in her loose traditional dress. Mernissi argues that although both these twoArab Muslim women lived in Egypt and could gain

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8 Asmahan or Amal al-Atrash(912 –1944)was a Syrian singer who lived and became a well-known singer andactress in Egypt .she died in an automobile accident amidst rumours about her turbulent personal life and allegations about her espionage role during world war II.

a reputation as distinguished Arab women, they did not receive equal admiration from affluent harem women. Even thoughUm Kulthum achieved her goals through hard work and seemed "an unusually determined, self-assured Arab woman who had a purpose in life", she could not achievethe same popularity among those women as Asmahan did. Unlike the firm Om Kulthum who wore traditional "long, flowing robes" that covered all her body while performing, (Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass*, 104), Asmahan the Aristocratic princess transgressed the Arab dominant cultural and social rules. She finds her happiness in following a Western-like lifestyle in all its aspects, from dress code to way of conduct.

Asmahan wanted to "dress up, put flowers in her hair, look dreamy" (Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass*, 105).Asmahan went to "frequent dance halls where people sat in stiff Western chairs around a high table, and talked nonsense or danced until dawn" ( Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass,* 108-109). Mernissi maintains that Asmahan's new lifestyle and behaviour transgressed the dominant perception of morality, and Muslim men and the masses criticized her. Her lifestyle and behaviours even triggered anxiety and ambiguity in the wealthy harem women. Those women were unsure whether this new lifestyle is good or bad, and this filled their "hearts with self-doubt and bewilderment". In this context, even if Mernissi is against veiling women and relegation them to the public sphere, she subtly highlights the dangers of a groundless, superficialand reckless adoption of the new culture without considering the social, historical- cultural paths or even the individual's preparation and education about the new ideals. This represents itself mainly in her use of phrases such as "completely confused", "self-doubt", and "bewilderment", oblivious", "past", and "present" (Mernissi, *Dreams ofTrespass,* 105).

Furthermore, Egyptian postcolonial nationalists looked only toward Western Europe, "even when shaping their resistance to it" (Powell, 2003, 11). The post-colonial state promoted a fashionable modern dress model over the traditional national dress, whichpeasants and lower classes were still wearing, evenif the agricultural sector was the first sector to receive the support of the revolutionary government after 1952. The agricultural sector was considered an essential resource forthe industrialization project by assuring raw materials for the processing industry and exporting products in return for foreign currency needed for importing industry production. The government enacted new laws to reform the agricultural sector and improve peasants' lives. Nonetheless, on a social level, the socialist state despised the peasants' and traditional lower-classes appearance vis-à-vis the modern Western appearance. Nasser himself appeared only dressed in an elegant suit and tie with his daughters posing in short dresses and short haircut. Scholars argue that although the official discourse praised the peasants and their culture, Nasser's modernization view adopted and increased a middle-class´s cultural model. This view was represented in the look of government officers in their Western look .The government raised the slogan"*Albadla al-sha´ biyya ahsan min al-galabyya*: the popular suit is better than the galabyya (the long peasant robe) " (Abaza, *Changing Consumer Cultures,* 114).

Other influence tools like television were also utilized to promote the state's modernizingvision.  In line with this official orientation, one hardly saw a woman covering her head or wearing galabyya other than the servants and uneducated women in official ceremonies, television shows and films. Leila Abu-Lughod maintains that television wasalso a medium to direct Egyptians' values concerning gender relations, religion, nationalism, and social problems. This, however, was mainly carrying the view and norms of the "middle class ", neglecting other social

classes and groups what Abu- Laughed calls"middle-class bias" (Abu-Lughod 83). Abu-Lughod argues that there was a "larger modernist discourse dominant in state culture for much of the twentieth century: the educated, cultured individual represents the good, the law, culture, nationalresponsibility and pride in the greatness of the nation's heritage" (Abu-Lughod 60)Magazines played a central role in the popularity of Western fashion during this period.Magazines such as the *Ruz al-Yusuf* weekly magazine included articles that introduced"modern" middle-class and upper-class Cairene women to the latest fashions from Europe, such as the weekly article "Tahiyati ila Zawgik al-Aziz "(my regards to your beloved husband). These magazines contained: "illustrations and sketches of the latestfashions often accompanied the articles from Paris, London, and Rome and the latest hairstyles, shoes and accessories. Some of these designs were reproduced directly from western magazines; others were emulations of western fashion drawn by Egyptians, foreigners and valentines living in Cairo "(Abaza, *Changing Consumer Cultures,* 117).

Nonetheless, these values and goods of the modernizing vision were beyond the reachof the peasants and lower class. Economists posit that even if the Nasserite state raised the slogan of "social justice, the reproachment of class difference" (Abaza, *Changing Consumer Cultures,* 102), the government's goods and "investments" targeted mainly the educated urban middle class, who constituted less than half of the population.

Abaza wrote: "the government investments in the 1960s and 1970's were directed mainly to the new middle class. These 'were beyond the reach of a good proportion-say40 percent or more of population.' If Nasser regime did satisfy the needs of the urban middle classes, consumer durable goods failed to reach the peasants and the poorer classes... the spread of television, cars, fans...did not take place before the

mid- seventies. This was due to the massive migration to the Gulf countries (Abaza, *Changing Consumer Cultures,* 95).

Overall, Western uniforms became the official uniform in schools and government workplaces following the urban middle class and upper-middle-class, while dressing in the local and regional attires (galabyya), particularly in rural areas and lower-classes, symbolized a lower social status, adding a new dimension to the local Egyptian dress during the colonial era(Abaza, *Changing Consumer Cultures ,*18). The traditional national clothing styles became a representation of women´s oppression and a social stigma of its wearer. This made the survival of different individual feminist forms almostimpossible. Within this context, the other strand of post-colonial independent modern Muslim that contradicted the model promoted by the state and Muslim elite was marginalized. This still asserts that there are fractions within the subaltern group who cannot voice their views, and even when they speak, they are not heard because of their modest socio-economic position in a class post-colonial society. Overall, the post-colonial modernizing feminist project was not necessarily inclusive of all oppressedpost-colonial women. This feminist project bore a "hegemonic aspect of centralizing state projects of cultural homogeneity" (Ali, *The Other Side of the Track,* 12).

The following chapter discusses the emergence of a new wave of fashionable, educatedEgyptian women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The widespread wave is grounded in Western consumer culture, and Islamic culture could be strongly read as a feminine, fashionable Muslim body resistant to the Orientalist and patriarchal Egyptian society to negotiate its own third space in a modern age.

**Chapter IV**

**Post-Colonial Egyptian Women and Fashion between Patriarchy and Consumer Culture**

"Consumption is the very arena in which culture is fought over and licked into shape"
(Douglas and Isherwood 37).

Until the 19th century, all Egyptian women wore long loose robes and some kind of headgear. Urban wealthy women wore face veils and were generally secluded in their harem, or a special quarter for women and not allowed for male strangers. In general, Egyptian women's dress was considered backward dress by the European colonisers. The civilised colonisers called Egyptian women to renounce their oppressive traditional Islamic clothing style and adopt Western European modern, stylish dress to usher in their emancipation and modernity. This discourse was also upheld by the Westernized elite and the secular political leaders after the political decolonisation (Ahmed 1992).

The modernist intellectual male elite, who studied mainly at European institutions in the colonies or Europe, was fascinated by European modernity and strongly influenced by its 19th-century historicist thinking. According to this perspective, the non-Western traditions represent a given historical stage of Western history that the less developed non-Western societies are still passing through (Chakrabarty 7). Therefore, those Westernized elites desired to establish a new Western-like society according to the modern European model, particularly women's dress. The westernised male elite, thus, encouraged women to adopt the assumed refined modern Western women's dress

and abandon the assumed backward national dress, despite not necessarily rejecting their firm belief in Islam or supporting Western political colonialism.

In contrast, the religious scholars, the nationalists and the lower- classes resisted wearing Western-style dress and abandoning their national/ Islamic dress. They read embracing Western dress as an attack on their Egyptian Muslim identity and affirmation of the coloniser's cultural victory. The official promotion of Western dress as the symbol of modern Egyptian woman was supported through magazines for women, advertisements, television, and department stores' popularity (Abu-Lughod 83, Abaza 114-117). By the 1920s, the Egyptian dress was roughly divided into two principal subdivisions: the national dress (loose garment called Jalabya) worn by the masses of the "traditional" social classes, rural and urban. Those classes did not have access to Western values and goods of the elites' modernising vision. And the fashionable Western dress is worn by the educated, primarily urban, classes. This dress conforms in its features to transnational clothing style. However, from the second half of the 1960s, a new form of sociability characterised by the rise of visible religiosity arose. This religiosity spread alongside the spread of education and women's participation in the labour market. One could trace this religiosity to the growing number of mosques, practising fasting and ritual prayers, and the growing number of headscarf wearers in the public sphere. Although no one can deny that religious tradition was deeply rooted in the masses of the middle and lower classes. Those masses were different from the Westernized political and cultural elites, who considered those masses as a hindrance to their way to modernisation (Wu 63). Many ethnographers and sociologists argue that the "return "to a "pious" attitude was also grounded in socio-economic and local and international political contexts.

This chapter follows the impact of the intersection between the deep-rooted conservative social norms, the growing gap between the rich and the poor, the widespread consumer culture, the rigid class system and the patriarchal political system on women's position in the public sphere in postcolonial Egypt. These factors above pushed broad sectors of Egyptian women to embrace shifting attitudes toward practising religion and modern Western values. The new attitude represented the spread of models of clothing style called "Islamic" fashion.

On the one hand, those women attempted to use fashionable dress as a strategy to challenge both sexism and classism in their society and the stereotypical Western representation of veiled Muslim women as subordinate, passive traditional women. On the other hand, Egyptian women's "Islamic" fashionable dress appears as an aesthetic medium for expressing ideas and convictions in contemporary Egypt, challenging the claim of universal secular modernity. Muslim women's current innovative and fashionable dress can work as a counter-discourse to the Orientalist and exclusive representation of non-Western Muslim culture as an inherently inert timeless culture.

## 1. Islamic Revival and the "Comeback" of the Dying Veil: Modernity, Modesty and Patriarchal Society

During the 1970s and 1980s, Egyptian society witnessed a resurgence in Islamic practices among older impoverished, illiterate generations and the young educated Muslims from diverse social and geographical backgrounds. Educated women appeared on the streets wearing the assumed backward veil. However, the so-called Islamic dress was not the pre-colonial national "Islamic" dress. Instead, it was a new elegant dress combining elements from their Islamic modest clothing style and modern

Western accessories. Educated girls appeared on the streets wearing modest long dresses, skirts and blouses, Islamic headscarves, and sunglasses (Carvalho 337).

 This perplexed Eastern and Western theorists.  The Egyptian anthropologist Fadwa El Guindi comments on this new form of women´s appearance in the public sphere writing:

> One recent phenomenon incomprehensible to many observers of the Egyptian scene today is the visible presence of a new Egyptian woman: the young urban college student on her way to or from the university campus – carrying her books, wearing eyeglasses, alone or in the chatting company of other college women, and completely "veiled (Carvalho 337).

Some sociologists ascribed this phenomenon to the Muslim Brotherhood's (founded in 1928) activism which sought to assert an Islamic identity through a renewal of Islamic values that is grounded in 'the glorious past „in the face of Western imperial modernity. They called this return to an Islamic lifestyle "re-Islamisation or Islamic revival" (CF. Schielke, Ambivalent Commitments, 162). During this period, Islamists regarded the return of an Islamic clothing style as a victory of the Islamic worldview over secular Western ideals promoted by the Westernized elites. Thus, they sought to propagate and claim this phenomenon to their political affiliation as Sherif (1987) states: "there is hardly an Islamist magazine publishing an article on women without emphasizing the importance of the 'Islamic dress code' and proudly displaying pictures of women, even young children of preschool age, adorned with it" (Sharif 151). The Islamists' rhetoric intended to affirm their claim that they represent Islam and all Muslims in their society to win the political and social battle against the secular-oriented politicians. Simultaneously, a wide range of the secular intellectual elites read this return of Islamic rituals in the public sphere as inherently and merely a symbol of women's affiliation with a religious ideology in the West and the East. Those secularized elite negated the possibility of embracing such religious rituals for different

and diverse sociological, psychological and cultural reasons along with or without a political affiliation. Within this context, I find it essential to differentiates between four categories of individuals who identify themselves as Muslims. Firstly, the "ethnic Muslims" or those who regard themselves as Muslim because of their Islamic background. Secondly, "cultural Muslims" grow up in an Islamic culture that constitutes their social behaviour. Thirdly, "religious Muslims or spiritual Muslims" are those who believe in Islam as the source of their spiritual daily practices and rituals. Finally, "political Muslims or Islamists" refers to those who desire to establish a society based on Islamic law in its social and political domains (Sander 187). A Muslim individual can belong to one or more than one category of the categories above. Thus, a woman's motivation to embrace religious identity and observe Islamic rituals such as wearing the headscarf cannot always be interpreted through one motive.

In contrast to the superficial view of the return of the traditional "Islamic" clothing styles, there were more critical views on this emerging attitude from outside Muslim societies during the 1970s and the following decades. Many scholars argued that Muslim women of this generation were not returning to the black veil worn by the middle and upper-middle classes of the previous generation that confined women to their domestic sphere. Instead, their veil reflected the impact of the cultural encounter with Western values and the struggle of women activists of previous generations. During this period, women used "hijab" as a resistance strategy to imperial Western and local conservative culture. The hijab could enable them to claim their place in the public space for education and work in such a patriarchal society without surrendering to Western imperial culture. According to the Canadian-Iranian sociocultural anthropologist Homa Hoodfar, those Muslim women endeavoured to: "choose that marshals the best of both value systems for them, and empowering choice that works, that offers pragmatic advantages, for these particular Egyptian women in their specific

set of "givens", just as unveiling offered practical, empowering advantages for an earlier generation" (Kahf, *From Her Royal Body the Robe was Removed*, 36).

Furthermore, a sector of educated Egyptian women tended to wear the veil to reaffirm their Islamic identity in the face of the deep-rooted "Orientalist "attitude towards Muslim women without returning to women's traditional role in the domestic sphere. The journalist and critic Safianaz Qassem recalls moments from her stay in the United States between 1960 and 1966, saying:

> I stayed in the United States from 1960 until 1966. It was a great experience... I learned there many things, but above all, how to be myself. Back then, I had been hit by the wave of Westernization and our ideal was the American or French woman. Anyone but ourselves. I considered myself cosmopolitan. "People [in the US] would ask me: 'Why you are not dressed like them?' I would ask them, 'Like who?' 'Egyptians.' 'But I am dressed like them.' They would tell me, 'No, they're veiled.' At first, I would challenge them: 'No, we wear bikinis. No, we can be naughty too. We get into the same mischief as you. We are civilised. Some of us drink alcohol and eat pork—not me. But some do, I swear. Some people go naked. We're good people just like you (Qassem: 00:30-00:32).

Qassim's experience reflected Western Orientalist views that negate Muslim women's dynamic status, despite the secularized feminist delegations to the West and the "secular" government's effort to promote modern Egyptian picture women in their post-colonial Westernized look during the previous decades. In the Western public imagination, the discourse was still between "We", the unveiled modern good Westerners, versus "them", the bad veiled traditional Orientals. This pushed a sector of modern Egyptian women to resort to a formula that achieves their emancipation and affirm their Islamic identity. This identity is grounded in their Islamic culture and values as opposed to the secularized Egyptian identity.

Indeed*, Egyptian identity* is a multi-layered identity based on the long history of interactions with different civilizations. Egyptians describe themselves as "pharaohs, Arabs, Copts or Muslim". The choice of the identity can focus on one aspect of these

layers or even combine more than one. Socio-political circumstances mainly ground the choice of the focus of the identity. Nadji Al –Ali wrote, "Egyptians themselves, however, could 'always resort to a multi-layered past and choose between Pharaonic, Coptic, Islamic, or Arab origins and symbols (or some combination thereof) to construct their "Egyptianness" (42). In this context, the modest headscarf was utilized as an instrument to enter and possess the designated male's public sphere in a conservative social milieu on the one hand and revolt against the Western racism on the other hand. One other factor that has to be considered when discussing the return to the headscarf is the uneven impact of the secularization process on the social classes. Berry LaVerle Berry and Robert Rinehart interpret the return of head-covering among educated Tunisian girls arguing that the Westernized lifestyle could not affect the masses' religious consciousness. They write:

> Outside the small but very conspicuous circle of a Westernized elite, however, the secularism that it promoted had not struck roots, even among the young who were supposed to be the beneficiaries of modern education, economic growth, and a liberalised social environment that had dispensed with the strictures of Islam. Beneath the surface, traditional values persisted or awaited renewal (Berry & Rinehart 123).

This argument can also be used regarding Egyptian society. I discussed in chapter III that although secular values were widespread among the Westernized elite and promoted by them, there were social classes that did not have the same access to the Western secular value. Most of these masses were also influences by the religious-oriented culture promoted by a class of religious scholars. In this context, some interpretations of the resurgence of religious culture understand this phenomenon in light of Stark and Bainbridge's "compensatory theory". Stark and Bainbridge argue that secularization is dependent upon the individual's reward system. An individual who can fulfil his needs requires fewer compensators. At the same time, the impoverished sectors tend to rely on a supernatural hypothesis to fill the gap between their

aspirations and their actual possibilities, namely, that he/she assumes that their "reward will be obtained in the distant future or in some other context which cannot be immediately verified" (Stark & Bainbridge 6).Therefore, those sociologists argued that Muslim societies suffered from financial difficulties facing economic challenges and widening the gap between the poor and the fewer rich during this period. This could push a wide range of Egyptians to return to their religion (Cf. Berry and Rinehart 124-125). The economy witnessed a decisive blow due to the costs of war years (1967-1973) in terms of military weapons and human loss; having a wave of unemployment that followed the end of the 1973 war added to this.  Within this vein, those sociologists read the comeback of the "outmoded" religious practices as a false consciousness grounded in their physiological consequences of the period. Nonetheless, this new attitude was (is) not exclusive to impoverished lower-class individuals, but it was (is) also present among educated and middle-class and upper-middle-class Egyptians (Mahmood 2005).These interpretations are interwoven together to result in a resurgence of this sociability form. Furthermore, the state's religious-political discourse on Islamic identity and values starting with Sadat's era supported the popularity of religious practices.

## 2.  Sadat's Open Door Policy: Consumerism,  Feminism,  and Fashion

Anwar Sadat's era (1970-1981) ushered a new attitude towards Egyptian gender relations and life in general. Sadat adopted "The *infitah "or "*open door policy ", turning towards the United States and the West. His goal was to make Cairo the Middle East's financial capital through realigning with the American and European trade partners and encouraging Western foreign investors to return to the country after periods of interruption during Nasser's socialist era. Through his new economic policies, Sadat

abandoned Nasser's state social justice project to a capitalist regime directed towards individualization of the economy, expansion of the private sector, and liberalization of the market. This new economic policy revolutionalised both the social and cultural environment. With the government new economic policies, a new consumerist paradigm was being created and encouraged. The consumer drive curbed under a series of governmental austerity measures under the previous government was unleashed. This consumer culture had a significant impact on the individual's lifestyles. The Egyptian sociologist Abaza describes Sadat's economic policy impact on changing social behaviour in all sectors of society during this period. She wrote:

> Many belonging to the generation coming to maturity in the 60's world agree that the most drastic changes they ever experienced in their lifestyle were during Sadat's i*nfitah* (the open door policy), which revolutionised their consumer habits. It was during Anwar al-Sadat's time that Egyptians discovered unlimited desires, but also frustrations and deceptions, related to the eternal unfilled wishes (Abaza, *Changing Consumer Cultures,* 109).

The consumer drive created a new social order that relied on individuals' ability to participate in this consumer culture. The middle class earlier constituted from the educated state- employees, particularly those who worked in the civil services, were replaced by wealthy individuals who could consume private commodities. The urban educated middle class represented the good values in the society and could lead a good stable life during Abdel Nasser's era would shrink and fell in the social ladder during this consumer period. Scholars argue that this new economic atmosphere resulted in crumbling love marriage among the modest classes and middle-class civil employees who could not afford to establish and nurture their own homes in such difficult economic circumstances. In these middle and lower classes, conspicuous consumerism and the neoliberal reforms had a remarkable impact on family values and gender relations. The impact on families and gender relations was reflected in the contemporary press, films and novels. Sonallah Ibrahim's novel *Zaat: The Tale of One*

*Woman's Life in Egypt during the Last Fifty Years* (2004) is a cultural critique of gender relations amidst this era of political and social contradictions. It subtly follows the construction and reconstruction of Egyptians' social identity during the last fifty years through the details of a lower-middle-class family's daily life. Their domestic problems mirror the social, economic, and political discourse and changes in Egyptian society and their impact on Egyptian identity formation. The title *Zaat* means "self", "identity ", or "being" in Arabic. Thus, the title stands for both anyone and the process of identity formation of all Egyptians during these periods.

Zaat's family's dreams, as middle-class, were shattered in a society where consumption, fashion and appearance defined one's class and status in the society. Firstly, Ibrahim depicts the difference between Nasser's affordable living costs and Sadat's capitalist system and the rise of poverty through the shift of Abdel Maguid's attitude towards Zaat's participation in the public sphere through work and education. In fact, according to economists, the 1960s were "an economic boom ". The average economic growth rate of the whole period reached 6% compared to the average annual rate of 3.8% described in the 1950s. Moreover, during Nasser's era, the state enacted laws concerning the ceiling prices of rents to regulate the "relations between the landlord and the tenant "(Kenawy 590-591). Abdel Majuid orders his fiancee, Zaat, not to pursue her university studies since he alone would be able to afford their needs after marriage while she takes care of the household and children.

> Abdel Majuid "silenced "his fiancee" with a stern look that reminded her of her father before announcing, in his uncompromising tone, that the house would need all her time, especially after the hatchery started working and the babies came along. He would provide for all their needs from now on and technically after getting the long-promised degrees. Once again, Abdel Maguid was drawing the borders: outside the house belonged to him, inside belonged to her (Ibrahim 9).

The quotation above explicitly reflects the argument that the state's feminist laws did not touch the middle-class's intimate family life during Nasser's era. It was still considered that a woman's place was first and foremost in her household, while the public sphere was still the manly space. Furthermore, far from seeing seclusion as an inherently oppressive force in Egyptian society, one can see it as a luxury few can afford. This saves women, first of all, from sexual harassment on the crowded streets and public transportation. In this context, a sector of Egyptian women considered being ordered not to work or pursue education as the privilege of not being forced to work outside the home to earn money like their men. The novel depicts this argument in the following lines:

> Zaat accepted the proposed borders with certain satisfaction and submitted to the sturdy shelter bestowed upon her, which seemed to her a natural extension of the shelter that her father had provided. She also found an opportunity to score a point over her cousin whose husband had forced her to go to work from the first day of their marriage so that they could move up to the ground level (Ibrahim 9).

In this vein, one has to discuss that preferring not to work and wearing the veil to avoid sexual harassment still implies an anti-feminist feature. Since women who cannot push for feminist laws that punish sexual harassment opt to accept men's patriarchal values and abandon their active participation in the public sphere. Nevertheless, with the change in the economic situation and turning towards neoliberalism, women would be forced to change their position and attitude accordingly.

Egyptian wife was expected to work to help her husbands to support the family needs. As Ibrahim says: "one day Abdel Maguid announced, in the same uncompromising tone of voice, that her staying at home had no meaning and that she would have to work like other women (Ibrahim 10). As a result, the wife had to work outside the home besides her work at home. In the novel, Zaat, who works in the public service sector,

has to bear a load of extra chores at home to support her family at home, cooking, cleaning, sewing and helping her kids with their homework. This workload and daily pressure that Zaat has to deal with appeared in the form of repeated bouts of crying stirred even by minor events. For example, when her husband, Abdel Majuid, accidentally dropped the sewing machine that Zaat put on the balcony, and although the machine itself did not break, her feeling that it might have been damaged pushed Zaat to another fit of crying.

> Zaat came rushing out of the kitchen when she heard the noise and stopped, aghast at the sight that met her eyes… Zaat approached the machine and bent over it, feeling the damage done, before flopping down in the chair and bursting into tears. The machine was unharmed, except that the small plastic cover of the box for the needles and thread had flown off and now lay shattered on the floor. Was that enough to start off the tear ducts of a sensitive person like Zaat? Of course, it was. Nor did it mean that there were no other reasons (Ibrahim 87).

In this vein, one can refer to the previous generation feminists' argument that women's labour required a state's commitment to social welfare. They predicted that women's labour is not expected to improve women's position in society without the state's social welfare. Instead, both men and the state would take part in women's subjugation in 137 modern society. Within this context, women are under two kinds of patriarchy, the "private patriarchy that is enacted in the authority of men over women in the family and public patriarchy as manifested through the state and the religious establishment, particularly Islam." (Jaber 101). This led Maria Mies (1986) to argue that "capitalism cannot function without patriarchy. Capitalism requires never-ending capital accumulation; therefore, it requires patriarchal man-woman relations" (170-1). Capitalism and patriarchy are not two separate systems but intrinsically connected as capitalist patriarchy. Furthermore, in this consumer-capitalist society, women had to suffer under a severe class structure. The rise of conspicuous consumerism was crucial for social mobility in a society where individuals' superiority is assured through

displaying one's wealth and prestige. Thus, clothing and appearance became the perfect visual sign of someone's worth as the value of a dress could be quickly evaluated by an onlooker based on style, fabric, colour, accessories, and makeup. This new consumer culture encouraged all social classes and groups, including religious individuals, to display their social status through their dress. According to Abaza, women belonging to affluent economic and political Westernized elite indulged in modern Western commodities, turning more foreigners. Those Westernized wealthy Women dressed in expensive Western fashion. In contrast, the rich conservative and those who migrated for work in the Arab Gulf states would turn towards commodities and luxuries that mixed Islamic lifestyle with modern technologies. In this class, women wore headscarves, long black Abaya and gold accessories to show their high social position. In this context, the once modest hijab also has to comply with the new consumerist wave. Otherwise, headscarf wearers are stigmatised as poor lower-class women. Consumer culture was able to change the individual's conviction and attitude towards practising their religion. Abaza maintained that:

> Society, being organised around consumption instead of production, creates a full new understanding of individuality and a different awareness of one's body. It sets new norms of pleasure…consumption has affected our notions of beauty and self-perception. It plays a decisive role in distinction and value judgment of what is good and bad taste, distinguish what is classy from the baladi and bi'a. The term bi 'a literary means environment (Abaza, *Changing Consumer Cultures*, 11).

As a result, the urban educated middle class and impoverished lower classes who suffered from poverty had to suffer contempt in the public space for not participating in the prevailing consumer culture. Moreover, it was not only the inability to afford an extravagant lifestyle that caused the individual marginalisation but also not wearing the hijab that became the norm in Egyptian society attracting women from diverse social, geographical and educational backgrounds. During this period, the state official

political orientation supported the popularity of religiosity in society and the borders were opened to conservative culture from within and without the Egyptian society. Muslim Brothers who were banned during the Nasser era were allowed to resume their publications and religious activities. Sadat tented to utilise them as an instrument to resist his Nasserite and Leftist opponents. Nevertheless, Muslim Brothers' publications were soon able to reach a wider audience amidst the absence of all other secular forces. They even directed their attack to Sadat himself and his secular government, endeavouring to implement their "religious idioms" in the political discourse to change the political domain according to their Islamic view (Ahmed 217). In response, Sadat attempted to nurture an Islamic discourse that appeases the conservative masses to gain their support but did not necessarily clash with the political authority. Sadat was called "the faithful president "that built modern Egypt on two Pillars (Faith and Science). This phrase (science and faith) was the title of a popular television show by the former communist intellectual Mostafa Mahmoud to promote, on the one hand, a return to traditional Islamic values and, on the other hand, to affirm the compatibility between faith and science. Abaza comments on the aforementioned historical context, stating:

> When Sadat launched a smear campaign against the secular forces, figures like Mahmud were certainly utilised by the regime's propaganda machinery. Mahmud's public Islam´s far from being 'subject to increasing differentiation vis-à-vis the state'; instead, it originated from within the state's Islamic discourse. Mahmud's television program al-ilm and iman was part and parcel of the official state Islamization of the seventies which later went out of control (Abaza, Changing Consumer Cultures, 57).

Parallel to what Abaza calls "official state Islamization", Sadat's government launched a crackdown on the leftists to eliminate his communist and socialist opposition. Many of the feminist activists who opposed Sadat's new economic policies and ideological shift were imprisoned. In this authoritarian patriarchal government, utilizing the female's body was also part of the state's attack on the female opposition. A salient

example of using the female body to humiliate and dismiss female activism during this period is the feminist Latifa El-Zayat, who narrates how her body was centred in her political activism in her autobiography *The Search: Personal Papers* (1996). El-Zayat was one of the most famous Egyptian writers and political feminist activists who stood against oppression in all its forms. She fought for liberating her country from colonialism and women from male's subjugation. El-Zayyat was born to an Egyptian middle-class family in Damietta in 1923. She studied at Cairo University and was a leader in the political student group. Later, she joined the communist party under the monarchy, and in 1946 she was elected as leader of the National Committee of Students and Workers. El-Zayyat was imprisoned during the monarchy in 1949 and again during the last years of President Sadat's rule for her political activism.

In 1960, El-Zayyat published her famous feminist novel The Open Door. The novel is set during Egypt's anti-colonial struggles of the 1940s and 1950s and aimed to raise feminist consciousness among middle-class women. Although she never joined a women's movement, her feminist activism happened through her engagement in politics and her writings, including her autobiography. Although she did not stand against Naser being president, she continued her political activism and joined Al Tagamu' party, the 140 only legalized leftists party during the Sadat years; she was arrested in 1981. El- Zayyat recalls how she was forced to stand naked in front of the prison's guards. Uncovering, her female body was used to humiliate and repress her as a female activist. Overall, like Nasser's regime, Sadat's state continued to manipulate the feminist question throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, but it did not have a clear agenda for improving women's status. Women's issues revolved around laws concerning women's rights inside the marriage institution. There were two main issues that the feminist lawyers and academics demanded the state to reform: the issue of women's obedience (al-ta'a), meaning forcing women to return to their

husband's houses when they disobey them and leave. The second issue was men's unilateral right to divorce, child custody and polygamy (Bier 112). Also, due to legal centres' campaigns during this period, women were allowed campaigns without their husbands' permission, the marriage age was raised from 16 to 18. Some scholars argue that Sadat's administration accepted these women's laws to promote itself internationally since it was the United Nations Decade for Women in 1975 (Al-Ali 71-74).

The question concerning women's bodies and their presence in the public sphere was marginalized in the feminist discussions from the state and feminists. Women participated in the public sphere as a labour force either in the public service or for private companies, but their bodies were still under the control of the patriarchal state in the public sphere and their men inside their homes. On the other hand, Sadat wanted to weaken the Muslim brotherhood's popularity among women whose appearance reflects the strength of the conservative Islamist discourse in society. In line with all these contradicting socio-economic and political forces, a tide of a new clothing style, known as *al-ziyy al Islami* or the Islamic dress, dominated the Egyptian and Arab societies from the 1980s on. Women wore headscarves and long loose dresses or long-sleeved -blouses and long skirts. It was read mainly as a "feminist choice "that reflected a sign of inner piety that rejected Western beautifying products that commodified women's bodies to attract men. Nonetheless, a form of religiosity would change gradually towards an attractive and seductive look with the emergence of a more worldly mode of religious discourse during Mubarak's era.

## 3. 1. Civil Society Feminism: Ordinary Urban Egyptian Women between Religion, Fashion Market and Stat

The assassination of President Sadat in 1981 at the hands of Islamists and the seizing of political office by President Hosni Mubarak marked a new economy and a political reality for Egyptian women. Mubarak's new economic program further privatized more companies in vital sectors of society, such as electricity, water, education, and health. These reforms were described as a success on a global scale. The state tended to facilitate and encourage investment and build a public-private partnership, but it had significant negative impacts locally, particularly for state employees in those public sectors; over half of them were made redundant between 1994 and 2001 (Hanieh 24). Scholars and economists argue that adopting such a complex reformation process succumbing to the market forces without considering the average citizens, formalised the alliance with the United States' neoliberal policies. This led to the polarisation between the classes, particularly with the growing income inequality that would intensify during the following thirty years of his rule (Osman130-182). Such economic policies helped wealth end up in the hands of the elite few; simultaneously, citizens who were encouraged to participate in the new economic systems failed to join mainly because of deteriorating socio-economic conditions. In terms of political freedom in the public space, the political space intended mainly to restrain a turbulent state without achieving more significant political reform, especially concerning a corrupt system of checks and balances within the government. Democracy did not allow for a political atmosphere related to political debates and discussions about other possible political forms. This led to promoting limited democratic participation and prosperity only to the extent necessary for neoliberal policies to thrive. Nevertheless, it failed to promote meaningful popular political participation. Parallel to these economic and political reforms, women's movements witnessed a shift becoming more and more under the

auspices of the two forces (Western and Egyptian); with the government endeavoring to gain international support, the government ratified the Convention on *the* "Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*"* (CEDAW) in 1981 through which the state obliged itself to stand for gender equality and put an end to discrimination against women. Furthermore, many civil feminist and human rights organizations were founded, such as the "New Woman Foundation" and "The Alliance of Arab Women and legal centres that provided information and legal support for women", such as CEWLA (Center of Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance). Also, Egypt held "The International Conference on Population and Development" (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994, gaining an international celebration of Egyptian women's rights. Kamal (2016) comments on hosting the conference, writing "it was another milestone in placing women's rights on the national agenda, with Egypt hosting the conference and the Egyptian civil society organizations emerging as the most knowledgeable and concerned about women's rights ". Moreover, Kamal describes Egyptian feminists' effort to end discrimination through non-governmental initiatives that tended to compare the Egyptian women's condition to women internationally, maintaining that:

> They campaigned for women's reproductive rights, including the formation of female genital mutilation (FGM), among many other issues directly related to women's bodies and sexualities. During the ICPD, the human rights movement and the rising feminist movement cooperated to create networks, pressure groups, and campaigns nationally and internationally. The aim was to highlight continuing gender discrimination against women (Kamal 11-12).

Nonetheless, the atmosphere of relative freedom that resulted in the growing number of strong NGOs was not without challenges from the state, which sought to restrict the influence and power of the feminist NGOs by introducing laws that hindered them. Kamal writes: The state introduced legal changes in the form of the Law of Association in 1999, which enforced legal frameworks restricting freedom of association. An organised campaign proved this law unconstitutional, which led again to the state

issuing the new Law of Association in 2002 and further restrictions ... The most recent was implemented in 2014, forcing all civil society organisations, institutions and centres to register and gain governmental approval via the Ministry of Social Solidarity. This led several civil rights entities to freeze their work or modify their statuses, among ongoing threats of the imposition of further restrictions (Kamal 13).

 Furthermore, to curb the power of secular activism (NGOs) and continue the state's manipulation of the feminist issue, the state established the National Council for Women in 2000. The (NCW) was widely covered nationally and locally, with the former first lady Suzann Mubarak appearing regularly to speak on behalf of Egyptian women. Therefore, NCW) competed with the NGOs and claimed the right to represent all Egyptian women and their needs. Within this vein, one can refer to Jad Islah in his article "The NGOisation of Arab Women's Movements" (2004) that discusses civil organisations' issues and the question of women's movements in the Arab region. Jad argues that civil society feminist organisations in the Arab world ended up in the hands of upper-class women who decided what had to be discussed and dealt with, rather than issues relevant to women from all strata of society as expected by a democratic tool. This resulted in what Salim calls the "gender mainstreaming" method; namely, other NGOs and donors also focused on the same particular issues when funding projects for women's improvement in the region. The donors' endeavors were directed towards "concepts such as good governance, democratisation and human rights ". This argument underlines the link between neoliberalism and the feminist quest in Egypt, where neoliberalism dictates and promotes specific development agendas while marginalising other issues (Salim 18).

Overall, although this period witnessed the involvement of women in political committees, the feminist issues centred around the role of women in the family and

issues concerning females' bodies came to a discussion like honour killings, virginity test, FGM and reproductive rights, domestic violence and sexual harassment. Issues like women's suffering under classism, corruption, capitalism were marginalised. In contrast, the average impoverished Egyptians were interested in fighting poverty more than concepts beyond their daily life problems. In this context, one can argue that although the goal of all those women's movements was women's empowerment, different perceptions of freedom would stand between achieving such a goal for all women in post-colonial contemporary Egypt.

### 3. 2. The "Cool" Preachers and the Fashionable Islamic Dress

During Mubarak's era, the increasing intersection between capitalism and religious consumerism would be tightening its grip on the society with the popularity of the "cool" preacher presenters bringing about a new mode of religiosity. During the 1990s and turning towards the new millennium, the veil was undergoing a process of "gentrification" in line with the domination of consumer culture. Women started to give special attention to the colour and shape of their "harsh looking jama'at antiestablishment "and "pro-Islamized ideology "(Abaza, *Changing Consumer Cultures*, 198). In this context, a range of post-colonial scholars argues that contemporary Muslims, unlike the former generation who expressed negative sentiments towards the West because of the political independence movements and wars with Israel, the young generation is fascinated by the Western hedonistic consumer attitude. Those young Muslims tend to adjust Western products in a way that suits their Islamic values. The hostile attitude towards elegant clothes and extravagant looks among headscarf wearers would gradually loosen with the spread of the local fashion industry. Muslim women who opted for wearing the veil before 1980th made and designed their clothing style. In Muslim societies,

importing modest fashion from Western Europe and the United States started in the 1980s, and this proved to be a successful business and encouraged local designers to create a niche for modern fashionable headscarf wearer. Abaza comments on the role of the new Islamic- oriented culture in promoting the fashion industry during this period. She writes: if the fashion industry is now blossoming in Egypt, it is both in the Islamic dress domain and the local private companies selling locally produced modern western clothes. The Islamic dress has now become fashionable (Abaza, *Changing Consumer Cultures*, 199).

This emerging culture was met by and promoted by a channel that would satisfy the taste of consciousness of those young Muslim men and women. For instance, besides the modern Western-oriented television channels, the transnational satellite television shows with Islamic themes and Islamic records all began to gain popularity. Amr Khaled, who appeared in Time magazine as one of their "100 most influential" people, is not only an Islamic da'iya (preacher), but he was also a television host, author, motivational speaker, and an international media celebrity. Khaled's Ramadan show "Kalam min al-Qalb" (Words from the Heart), airing on satellite in 2001, received an extraordinary media celebration. His show was the first example of what was to become a successful "modern" preaching style directed to the "cool "middle-class youth to offer them the Islamic knowledge they needed through following the stories of the journey from a lax life to "true" Islamic lifestyle. Other young presenter preachers such as Moez Masoud and Mustafa Hosni would follow in his footsteps and achieve equal success. These preaching programs were presented in an easy-going colloquial Egyptian dialect innovatively and entertainingly. These TV shows discussed youth's daily common issues like friendship, love, job, and sex. In an interview, Abu Haibah, the first producer and director of Amr Khaled program, comments on Islam and contemporary modern

youth, saying: "I consider myself a religious man, but I don't spend all my time in front of sheikhs speaking about the Qur'an because I don't like the way they're speaking. I'm bored! It's natural." He offers a definition of "Islamic media" that goes beyond conventional boundaries, saying: "An Islamic program doesn't have to speak about the Qur'an or the Prophet. I consider speaking about friendship Islamic; speaking about love is Islamic, about sex is Islamic. What matters is what I'm going to do behind that. The values." (Wise 2005). Hirschkind, in his book *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (2006), comments on the popularity of the taps on which these programs came out, acknowledging that: There can be little doubt that the great popularity of such tapes owes in some degree to their ability to compete with non-Islamic entertainment and to offer their consumers the sorts of pleasure that other media products provide. Furthermore, these talk shows differed from the traditional conventional preaching attitude in which a preacher is the only voice, rather they engaged and invited their audience (viewers in the studio or from their homes) in active participation (Hirschkind 193).

Those presenters were ordinary Muslims and not Muslim scholars who introduced a new profound interpretation of Islamic texts. Their fast superficial Islamic knowledge suited ordinary Muslims and attracted them to take part in the discussions. The involvement of ordinary people in the discussion can also be read as ordinary Muslims claim different views on practising Islam by telling stories grounded in ordinary individual's current daily experiences. Furthermore, these preacher-presenters did not convey the picture of Islam that negates luxury or the materialistic aspect of life in contemporary consumer Muslim society. Those new Muslim presenters appeared in glamourous studios wearing bright, colourful suits or loose dresses for female presenters even if most of their audience belonged to

the low, impoverished class. Nevertheless, Khaled himself acknowledged that his main target viewer is the secularised middle and upper-middle-class youth. He says: We don't have to worry about the poor. They have always been more religious. The problems come in with the money. We've been losing the upper class on drugs, loud music, films and dating (Moll). Those presenter-preachers tend to integrate piety with wealth, praising and encouraging "good Muslims" to take part in the world of making a profit. Thus, they do not hesitate to borrow Western concepts like self-empowerment, wealth, and profit among bourgeois Muslims. Amr Khalid even borrowed examples from famous works of Stephen Covey's "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" from its Arabic version. Amr Khaled would also focus on the headscarf wearer's role in the public sphere as an embedded preacher. In one of his shows on the Iqraa TV channel, he discussed what he called a "visual da'wa", namely, encouraging others to embrace their Islamic attitude through their appearance. In this vein, the headscarf is read as "a walking symbol of Islam". Khaled addressed girls stating: Wearing your higab at the beach, even if surrounded by semi-naked girls, will lead to society becoming more religious. This is the way to fix society." In another episode, he urges women saying, "remember you are a da'wa to God with your higab. Your higab combined with your education, beauty and wealth is a powerful blend. Through this, you will purify society (Moors 116). In this context, the role of "Islamic dress" in pushing for a new form of sociability in the public sphere can be read in light of Moors' argument on the different forms of communication in the public sphere. Moors argues that conceiving the public sphere as space where communication is based mainly on "verbal debate" ignores other vital forms of communication such as body language and clothing styles. According to Moors: "public spheres are not simply sites of disembodied debate but also arenas for the formation and enactment of embodied

social identity" (Moors 116). Headscarf wearers are both subjects and objects. They are receivers of the discourse and thus objects acted upon, and active subjects act to change those around them through wearing the headscarf. Moreover, by promoting a new style of religiosity that combines faith, education, elegance, and wealth, Amr Khaled and other preacher-presenters managed to turn the image of being a traditional modest ugly, practising headscarf wearer into a modern, fashionable, feminine practising girl. Following the trend above, young Muslim women sought to adjust their traditional Islamic dress according to the contemporary Western consumer market. Western brands like French or English names would be adopted in local stores and Muslim women started wearing new glossy hijabs, which could be ornamented with beads and strass, is inspired by Western designs and colours set by fashion lines in Europe, Canada or the United States.

Starting in 2000, the fashion industry of "Islamic chic" was booming. This success was triggered by national and local fashion companies' interest in making a profit. Local 148 companies started producing competitive local fashionable products that enabled a broader sector of Egyptian women to integrate into fashion at affordable prices. Unlike the previous decades, the fashionable dress was made mainly from Western materials exported from the West and afforded by the affluent Egyptian women. Their fashionable Islamic dress enabled ordinary Egyptian Muslim women to blur the fixed border between the social classes distinguished by their fashionable look. Abaza describes the wave as a "possible democratization in taste". She stated:

> These companies are truly producing highly competitive fashionable products with excellent finishing, at a quite affordable prices compared to imported clothes. One can conclude that the younger generations have more choice. From this perspective, one can see a possible

democratisation in taste, in that Egyptian fashion, although not particularly cheap, now offers an alternative to a wider middle class. In fact, class disguise through dress become subtler than it was twenty years ago (Abaza, *Changing Consumer Cultures*, 200).

Headscarf wearers' stylish clothing styles challenge the rhetoric of a "pure" Islamic culture adopted by Orientalists and conservative Islamists. Thus, headscarf wearers' attitudes triggered further critique from conservative Muslims. For those conservative Muslims, covering the head is no longer a symbol of loyalty to political Islam that rejected Western hegemony over Muslim "authentic" modest culture. In this context, one can refer to Amel Boubekeur's argument in her article "Cool and Competitive: Muslim Culture in the West" (2005). Boubekeur argues that the conservative religious discourse of "political Islam" has failed to gain momentum among young Muslims since it did not consider those youths' current needs and challenges. According to Boubekeur, those consumer-oriented young Muslims seek to meet their needs by integrating their Islamic values into the modern global market. Indeed, Egyptian fashionable headscarf wearers and their attitude to fashion started to attract international attention. For instance, in spring 2004, the German designer Suzanne Kuempel organised a fashion show at the "Geothe Insitute in Cairo". The show that was made primarily for the unveiled Egyptian women was reported in German magazines "Der Spiegel" that stressed the headscarf wearers' participation and "unexpected "designing creativity in the title: "The 149 Veiled Girls Mach a much(whole) Unveiled women ". The article describes the claimed paradox of headscarf wearers' creative designs that are even more seductive sexy than unveiled women while being proud of wearing their headscarf. For Abaza, those talented modern headscarf designers have to be encouraged "if Egyptian designing is to meet international standards" (Abaza,*Changing Consumer Cultures*, 201- 202). Unlike their mothers, who passively embraced Western

fashion or entirely rejected it, those young Muslim women tend to mix Western-modern and Islamic-traditional designs and attitudes. They design a model that suits them in their Egyptian sociopolitical context. Their model is inspired by Western fashion, but they modify it to suit them. They design their model of Egyptian Islamic modernity within a globalised consumerist culture. Indeed, ordinary Egyptian girls took the initiative and design their dress and ideology. In 2009, a group of young women started their hijab-modelling trend, and they even organised their fashion shows. They aimed to mix elegance with faith. The founder of the group, Yasmine Mohsen, mentioned to Arabyia. Net that "she wanted to offer suitable clothes, makeup and accessories to meet the demands of women who choose to wear the veil "—being aware that the practice of veiling was no longer limited to impoverished lower-class women. Mohsen says, "Now many veiled women come from rich classes and need to dress fashionably," she explains. "Some of them even hesitate to wear the veil as they think it will make them less elegant." Not only did Mohsen's group address the local community, but she wanted to challenge the stereotypical Western representation of Muslim women as veiled, ugly and poor women as she maintains in the following words: "We are saying that hijab is elegant and that being veiled is not equivalent to ruggedness and lack of femininity". Moreover, Mohsen aimed to counter objectifying and commodifying women's bodies by exposing them and manipulating them in commercial ads and shows under the disguise of femininity. She says, "We are here today to fight the nudity trend that objectifies women and presents them as bodies for show and sale... Exposing the body is not by any means elegant or feminine" ("Hijab into a Fashion Hallmark").

Nonetheless, Mohsen's league did not go without criticism from conservatives and liberals who regarded her as belonging neither to the "true" Islamic dress nor the

fashion field associated with revealing a modern dress code. Nevertheless, Mohsen's initiative attracted ordinary Muslim women and hundreds of professional models in television commercial ads, video clips or YouTube channels joined Mohsen's league and could get work through her league. She states: "With the increasing number of veiled women, the idea of a veiled model became more acceptable. It didn't stop at women's products; I also made a video clip and several commercials for Gulf channels" ("Hijab into a Fashion Hallmark").

All in all, these emancipated fashionable Muslim women are looking for a model of modernity that does not have to fully fit in the Western model of modernity while rejecting the Eastern traditional role and place of Muslim women in their society. This visibility of beautiful, elegant headscarf wearers' models added weight to the popularity of a new wave of attractive young headscarf wearers. These fashionable girls are in a state of chasing the latest hijab designs and clothing styles that suit them on various daily occasions. Their appearance challenges the assumed fixed borders between modest religious women liberated from the Western beauty contest race and the consumerist secular women. I argue that this stance towards women's appearance that combines religious elements with secular values interrogates the religious and secular boundaries. In this context, some scholars argue that fashionable Muslim women fell prey to consumerism clutches and idealised a beautiful modern female image by combining the headscarves with heels and makeup. They argued that the hijab as post-colonial resistance was a method that enabled Muslim women to avoid "the commodification / objectification trap," and it offers them a way to retain their own authentic "personhood". Their modest Islamic dress code liberates them from men's gazes and "saves women from the ravages of the beauty game", in which Women endeavour to make "themselves into the images of beautiful women that they see all around them".

Therefore, the modest headscarf wearers felt emancipated from the "bondage of the swinging pendulum of the fashion industry and other institutions that exploit females" (Bullock 20-21). In this context, one can discuss the dilemma of contemporary Muslims who became obsessed with the picture of the beautiful woman despite wearing the veil in light of Fatima Mernissi´s comments on the dilemma of women in contemporary modern capitalist Western society. She argues that while Western women are granted access to the public sphere, which is denied in the women's Muslim world, they are not entirely free from male's domination. Instead, they are controlled by the concept of beauty in the public sphere, where men define women's size, age, and makeup. This led Mernissi to claim that women in the West are also subtly dictated by men's power, even if men's power is different due to different interests. Mernissi writes: "To be considered beautiful on the European side of the Mediterranean is to dress as the market- Imam demands "(Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West*, 114).

 In contrast, in the consumerist West," men dominate women by unveiling what beauty ought to be. If you don't look like the picture they unveil, you are doomed" (Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West*, 112). Thus, following the argument above, the fashionable headscarf wearers, while challenging the patriarchal traditionalists and Western stereotypical public imagination through embracing attractive looks, their attitude still implies the domination of men's perception of the "good" women from within their culture and Western culture well. All in all, I argue that ordinary Egyptian Muslim women - have transformed from being passive receivers of Western consumer goods and Islamic conservative discourse. They challenge both models and create a third negotiable space. Despite being criticized by conservatives and traditionalists, this new wave of fashionable "Islamic" attire witnesses popularity among Muslim women, and this was even supported by new

outlets for them either in traditional stores or through online shopping. Nevertheless, with the political conflict between the Muslim brothers and secularized forces after the 2011 revolution, the discourse on the headscarf as a symbol of a conservative political ideology and low-class values resurfaced. In the following section, I discuss how the revolution that politicised the headscarf wearers also encouraged a new feminist attitudes towards women's bodies in the public sphere.

### 4.1. Hijab, Political Islam: Egyptian Identity versus Egyptian Muslim Identity

What gender or, for that matter, sex has to do with the Arab spring? It should have everything to do with the revolution. This is our chance to dismantle an entire political and economic system that treats half of humanity like children at best. If not now, when? (Eltahawy 5)

After the fall of Mubarak's regime and his National Democratic Party's dissolving in 2012, the country came under The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces rule for eighteen months. Then, in the parliamentary elections that followed, religious-oriented political parties achieved a noticeable presence. Muslim Brothers' political party "the Freedom and Justice Party" and their candidate Mohamed Morsi won 40 per cent of the voters, and Salafis' Nour Party could reserve more than seven million votes. This outcome gave Islamists dominance over the secular political parties concerning parliament seats. In these elections, women's presence in number was minimal and disappointing for secular feminists who maintained that this outcome does not reflect what was propagated as the winds of freedom, dignity and equality after the revolution. The American Egyptian Feminist Mona Eltahawy describes this blow to women's active participation in the public sphere writing:

> After the start of its revolution, Egypt's first parliamentary elections were dominated by men stuck in the seventh century. Only 984 women contested seats, compared with 8,415 men. A quarter of parliamentary seats were claimed by salaries whose belief in a woman's rights begins and ends with her "right "to wear the niqab, a full-face veil. When filling female candidates, Egypt's Salafi Nour Party superimposed a flower's image on each woman's face in campaign materials. Women are not to be seen or heard; even their voices are a temptation (Eltahawy 16-17).

After the parliamentary election, the second blow to the secular women and women activists was the win of Muslim Brothers' candidate Mohamed Morsi in Egypt's first competitive presidential election. Morsi was in power for a short period amidst 153 opposition from diverse sectors against the Muslim Brothers before the revolution. However, the rejection was even ignited by "Muslim brothers endeavour to broaden and tighten their power over Egyptian society after securing the political leadership. Morsi issued a constitutional decree in November 2012 that gave him broader political powers in both the administrative and legislative sense. Moreover, ordinary people attacked Morsi's government for its failure to meet the basic economic needs that they revolt to achieve in the first place. On June 30 2013, a mass demonstration took to the streets against the Muslim brothers and Mohamed Morsi, which resulted in Morsi being ousted and the Muslim brotherhood being outlawed; their activities were banned by the Military which supported Abdelfatah El-Sisi, who became President on June 8, 2014. Abdelfatah El-Sisi was (is) seen by Muslim brothers' opponents and a broad sector of ordinary politically unaffiliated Egyptians as a saviour of Egyptians from religious backwardness and regression and a supporter of women. After 2013, Egyptian females were appointed for the first time as a governor, a national security adviser to the Republic president, a deputy to the Central Bank governor, and a judge to chair a court. Moreover, the number of female ministers even reached eight women in the 2018 cabinet, women constitute

15 percent of the parliament members, and the number of female voters exceeds males ("For the First Time ").

In addition, the National Council for Women also makes huge efforts; to empower women and improve their social status through many initiatives. Its projects aim to turn women into productive workers, earning their living rather than borrowing money. Even with the governmental recommendations and the official approach for empowering women in public and private spheres, the World Economic Forum 2020 Index shows that although Egyptian women's economic participation in the labour markets is improving, it is still relatively low. According to Gender Gap Report, Egypt ranked 134 out of 153 countries in 2020, closing 62.9% of its gender gap. Only 24.7% of women are in the labour market, out of which only about 5 % are on a full-time contract. The index also shows that only 7.1% are in managerial roles (7.1%), and their presence as firms' owners or managers is even (2.4% and 4.9%, respectively) ("World Economic Forum" 149-150).

 Scholars argue that although many obstacles hinder achieving gender equality, such as widespread poverty, women's illiteracy, and lack of services, particularly in rural areas, the prevailing patriarchal culture plays a vital role in the position of women in the public sphere. The main channels of influence in society, namely the state's media, educational curricula, and mosques, discourage gender equality and support a traditional role of women in the public imagination. These channels form and nurture the consciousness that reads woman as obedient, mother, wife, nurse, farmer, or martyr for the homeland's sake. Thus, women may participate in public life, but this does not give them independence or imply their equality with men (Nazeer 106).

## 4.2. Revolution and Women's Body

The 2011 protests shook the political, social, and cultural life of Egyptian society. According to eyewitnesses, 20 to 50 per cent of Tahrir Square protesters were women (Hafez 38). Women belonging to various social, regional, ideological backgrounds participated in the uprising. Gender and women's rights were not the initial primarily trigger of those female protesters. Women, men, Christian, Muslim, veiled and unveiled gathered under one slogan "bread, freedom, and social justice". They demonstrated against three decades of corruption, poverty, authoritarianism and repression (Sholkamy 153). Nevertheless, a broad sector of women desired to use the revolutionary spirit to redefine women's place in the public space, and many new women's rights groups and organisations were founded to push for change and negate women's repression and ongoing violation of their bodies. During the revolution that began in 2011, both men and women were arrested and assaulted, but women's bodies were also present and tortured for being active on the streets. Women were harassed and sexually assaulted on the streets by the mob or thugs during the revolution and forced to undergo humiliating "virginity tests" under the state's supervision. These incidents were documented in local and international media. Eltahawy documented these shameful violating moments in an assumed revolutionary era, writing:

> It was in Egypt, too, that less than a month after President Hosni Mubarak stepped down, the military junta that replaced him, ostensibly to `protect the revolution' detained dozens of male and female activists after it cleared Tahrir Squire. Tyrants oppress, beat, torture all we know. Yet, reserved for female activists were "virginity tests. Rapists disguised as a medical doctor inserting his finger into the vaginal opening, searching for an intact hymen. This is where the soldiers in our regimes and men in our streets unite: they both sexually assault women to remind us that public

space is a male prerogative. Security forces and civilians alike violated women in Tahrir Squire, and men of revolution – be they from the left or the right - have set us back with their insistence that `women's issues cannot dominate revolutionary politics' (Eltahawy 17-18).

In a response to those violations, Egyptian women, who were heartened by the winds of revolution, formed alliances and coalitions between the diverse women's organisations to denounce and stand against such abuses against women. The alliance consisted of sixteen groups, including feminist and legal centres such as "New Woman Foundation", "Women and Memory Forum", "Center of Egyptian Women Legal Aid", "Women's Forum for Development", "Alliance of Arab Women", and "Egyptian Association for Family Development". These coalitions were able to document more than a hundred rapes and sexual assaults on women, particularly during the demonstrations between 2012 and 2014. They aimed to raise public awareness and call for the investigation and prosecution of the wrongdoers. They also provided medical and psychological support to sexually assaulted victims.

On the other hand, the controversy over wearing the veil (full-face veil) that the state attempted to ban in primary schools in 1994 and again in 1996 remerged after the 2011 revolution but included other state's institutions. In 2018, some parliament members presented a draft to ban the veil in public places, arguing that wearing the veil is against security as it is a symbol of terrorism and extremism, but this draft was not submitted. In 2019, the Minister of Culture, Enas Abdel Dayem, cancelled an exhibition of the head of the Kafr al-Dawwar Culture Palace in Beheira Governorate because she was wearing the face veil. This action responded to intense criticism from public and political figures who rejected wearing the veil. This controversy ended in January 2020 with the Supreme Administrative Court ruling against the appeal of 80 teachers wearing the niqab in Cairo University. AS a result, the University of Cairo and Ain Shams banned lecturers, faculty members,

assistants in laboratories and lecture halls from wearing the veil during the lectures or their work inside the university. Also, doctors, nurses and their assistants were prohibited from wearing the veil during medical examinations and work in university hospitals. This ban was celebrated by some secular feminist forces who considered it an imported habit from the Arabian ultraconservative culture and its Slafaist ideology "Wahabism ", which is alien to Islam in Egypt. Nevertheless, it triggered anger from conservatives who still argue that abandoning the veil is abandoning true Islam. The religious authority in Egypt represented in Al-Azhar Grand Mufti; however, it did not challenge the ban. AlAzhar Grand Imam Ahmed al-Tayyeb left the decision for women themselves to decide whether to wear it or not. Al-Tayyeb considered it "permissible" and not "mandatory "in Islam. He said, "I cannot tell her who wears the niqab that she is doing a lawful action for which she deserves to be rewarded. It falls within the circle of the permissible" (Ibrahim). For a broad sector of ordinary Egyptians, the political Islam's movements failed to deliver their promises to vast segments of Egyptian society. Besides, the involvement of these religious-oriented groups in politics shook their image-based mainly on charity and aid works during the last thirty years. These two reasons left many ordinary Egyptian Muslims in a state of confusion. Those Egyptians linked the teachings of the Islamic religion with these groups' performance, which resulted in their alienation and rejection of all that can symbolise an affiliation to these conservative political Islamic groups. Mainly the practice of head covering that Islamists have been claiming as the symbol of their support. Samuli Schilke (2015) describes the shift in Egyptians' feelings towards faith, morality and attitude towards Islamic practices during this period, writing:

> Hope and trust in Egypt at the turn of the millennium have found their primary expression in religion...Among the Muslim majority of the

population, an Islamic revival has made a scripturally oriented and conservative sense of religiosity the most powerful course of moral certainty and existential hope. During the Muslim brotherhood's brief rule in 2012 and 2013, this revivalist sense of religion also gained political power.The polarisation that marked the moment, however, also destabilised the power of religion as the source of moral certainty. And, three years after the January 25 uprising, the consensus about the importance of piety among Muslim Egyptians had been shattered and replaced by a violent competition of militarist-nationalist, Islamist, revolutionary leftist, and other sources of moral certainty(Schielke, *Egypt in the Future Tense*, 20).

Therefore, this shift towards religion and religious rituals like the veil was partly an outcome of a revolutionary young generation's desire to change and bring about a liberal democratic atmosphere beyond the religious discourse and partly pushed by the tension between the secular and Islamist parties that ended with the secular government assuming power. These factors above emboldened and helped a group of headscarf wearers take off their headscarf. At the same time, head-covering returned to the first Westernized feminist wave's rhetoric on the veil as a symbol of lower-class women and a symbol of the political affiliation to the disposed of an Islamist government, in particular, the hijab in its traditional forms like the one covered the breast and shoulder (khimar) or the full hijab that covered the women's face (Niqab). Mona Eltahawy describes the impact of the revolutionary spirit on her feminist choice against the headscarf. She says:

> I took off my headscarf, and I began to demand rights. The revolution has made me much bolder. I am now much more likely to speak and know I am entitled to demand rights, especially when it comes to men. My rights to have men respect me as an equal ... What the revolution changed was our mindset; it empowered us to say, who am I in this country when I am going to get my rights?" (Eltahawy 70-71).

The cited words above affirms the impact of the revolutionary political and social atmosphere on  those females and their keen desire for changes towards gender equality in Egypt. Moreover, it implies that segments of Egyptian women chose the

veil under social pressure or believed in tradition without questioning them. Nonetheless, those Egyptians still find it challenging to take off their headscarves, particularly in crowded conservative neighbourhoods where most Egyptians live, but their families support them. In an article published in the title "Egypt's Untold Hijab Stories ", Bilah Darder uncovers the feelings and experiences of ordinary women who decided to take off their headscarf in these neighbourhoods. For instance, Solafa Magdy, a 30-year-old news reporter, found the support she needed from her now-husband, Hossam. She says:

> Everything started with the revolution; I was born again, and with my new birth, I've decided to go over all the old rules … I needed two things to get through the hijab issue: Financial independence to face my family and a man who understands me to face my street and community, as I lived in the crowded local neighbourhood of Ain Shams.

Hossam offered emotional support and was also there whenever people from the street harassed Solafa due to her taking off the hijab. Solafa said: "Because he couldn't be there all the time for me, he bought me a taser and told me to use it on anybody who thinks of harassing me" (Darder).

Another story that affirms changing attitude towards women's choices is told by Nehal Al Hagin, a 30-year-old architect who received the utmost support from her aunt and sisters as the only unveiled girl in her family. She says:

> I didn't have any problem with any member of my family; I had some discussions with my mother who opposed my decision at the beginning but afterwards declared her support as long as I kept my relation strong and solid with Allah.

Nehal admits that taking the hijab off symbolised catching a whiff of freedom in her "depressive country ". She says:

> I connect with things through touch, smell and all my senses, so the idea of me covering my hair and my ears, not hearing properly and not feeling the wind around me was depressing for me. We are already in a very

depressing society in a very depressing country; this kind of small thing is what keeps us alive (Darder).

Nonetheless, and within these contradictory discourses, the political conflict between Muslim brothers and the "secular" forces enhanced the resurgence of the discourse on the practice of headscarf as the symbol of lower-class backward brainwashed women versus the "open-minded" unveiled wealthy women. In an article for the "BBC monitor" entitled "The surprise place where hijab can spell trouble ", Dina Aboughazala interviewed some headscarf wearers to tell their experiences in such reach places. Heba Mansour (30-year-old), who holds a master's degree in educational leadership and worked as a senior progressive adviser at the American University of Cairo, describes her experience after returning with her family to Egypt four years ago, saying: "You are mocked and downgraded because of the hijab". Another example is Dalia (47 years old), who works in the IT field. She describes the changes in the Egyptian attitude towards hijab wearers. She compares it to London, where she visited her children, stating:

It is easier to be wearing hijab in London than Cairo…I feel judged in Egypt more than I do here …After a certain time in the evening, you are not allowed into some restaurants or what is regarded as 'cool' places, especially in the North Coast in Egypt "(Aboughazala).

In this vein, therefore, I argue that this reductive discourse that connects the headscarf mainly to a political ideology or lower-class women negates its diverse meanings as an expression of broad sectors of ordinary Egyptians' spirituality, cultural identity or social identity. Moreover, it ignores the whole clothing style and focuses mainly on the headscarf that has also undergone significant changes throughout the last two centuries. Indeed, the educated headscarf wearers' dress today, despite wearing the headscarf, is a Western dress and not the traditional lower-class or peasant's galabya nor it the Gulf Stats' black Abaya. Educated Egyptian women's dress today consists of a trouser- set or long-sleeved blouse

and skirt. In line with the relative revolutionary atmosphere, contemporary educated Egyptian headscarf wearers became vocal about their right to choose beyond the small elite's choice.

Overall, this chapter argues that ordinary post-colonial Egyptian Muslim women have been caught in contradictory discourses throughout the last fifty years. Women are urged to wear modest clothes, particularly the headscarf, to gain respect and access to the public sphere activities in their conservative patriarchal society and affirm their Islamic identity versus the Western cultural hegemony. This discourse is promoted mainly by the official state institution, such as the schools and mosques. Nonetheless, headscarf wearers are stigmatized as lower-class ignorant women by the Westernized elite even if they dress in the most elegant Western fashion. Moreover, headscarf wearers are caught in the struggle for power between secular-oriented forces and Islamists. The headscarf, in particular the full-veil, is read as an affiliation to the Islamists and their endeavour to establish a state grounded on "Sharia". I argue that the Islamic dress, represented mainly in wearing the headscarf, is by no means always religiously motivated or a symbol of a lower social class ignorant woman. Instead, contemporary Islamic dress should be read in light of diverse intersected social and political discourses. These discourses brought about heterogeneous attitudes towards clothing style and practising Islam in post-colonial Egypt. Some women wear the veil as a marker of their spiritual identity or to affirm their Islamic cultural identity without necessarily returning to the full- veil that relegated women to the domestic sphere. Most of those Egyptian women wear headscarves and long loose dark dresses. Some wear the headscarf to avoid sexual harassment and gain respect in their conservative social milieu, even if they dress attractively. Those headscarf wearers look sexy and fashionable, wearing flashy headscarves, tight jeans and makeup. Their fashionable clothing

styles affirm the impact of the encounter between modern consumer Western culture and Islamic culture. Those Egyptian headscarf wearers combine their Islamic clothing style with an attractive appearance to blur class borders in a consumerist society and the rigid borders between Islamic and Western secular values. Some Egyptian women decided to take off their headscarves, encouraged by the revolutionary atmosphere after 2011. Read from a post-colonial perspective, what is striking about Egyptian women's dress debates today is that they stress diverse voices on Egyptian Muslim culture and Western values. One can argue that these choices of Egyptian women challenge the Orientalist, mainstream post-colonial discourse that reads Muslim women as a monolithic category. Moreover, Egyptian Muslim women are not "passive" subordinate women as part of "Othering" Muslims and need Western outsiders to liberate them. Nonetheless, I argue that Egyptian women's resistance and endeavour to achieve women's emancipation and gender equality in the public sphere is still limited and conditioned by their patriarchal social norms. One can see this argument in the reaction to segments of Egyptian Muslim women's choice to take off the headscarf and wear revealing clothes using the relative atmosphere of freedom after 2011. Those women are still faced with prevailing conservative social values that link women's morality to their modest dress. Even with the relative atmosphere of freedom supported by the government and feminist organizations, one cannot assume that sexist culture has changed significantly.

The discourse on women's bodies and wearing revealing clothes is still prevalent. Dressing in revealing short clothes, women still risk sexual harassment on the streets and social rejection in conservative neighborhoods. One can refer to the public reaction to sexual harassment incidents during New Year's celebrations in 2020. A 20-year old girl dressed up in a mini skirt and revealing blouse and walking

alone on the street in the Egyptian governorate of Dakahlia has experienced mass harassment. Although seven suspects were detained and accused of the so-called "mass harassment," the public reaction in the media and among ordinary people on the street was hostile. They blamed the girl for appearing in such sexy clothes that reflect the forbidden girls' moral looseness. This widespread negative view on women's revealing clothes is supported by the ubiquity of the discourse that connect morality to covering women's bodies. This discourse still urges women to cover up or be relegated to the private sphere despite the official support of women's visibility and empowerment in the labour market after 2013. The public sphere is still imagined as a male space. Women are considered intruders who have to stick to males' regulation of their presence in the public sphere or be punished by harassing them on the street. Within this context, one can read the issue of prevalent harassment on the streets despite the state's harsh punishment of sexual harassment and the absence of explicit laws restricting women's movement and their active participation in public space. Indeed, in 2017, a survey conducted by BBC on the safety and protection of women in the public sphere Cairo was described as the most dangerous" city for women among 19 megacities ("Cairo' most Dangerous' Megacity"). In such a conservative atmosphere, headscarf wearers can pay lip service to tradition and assume morality, even in their attractive, seductive look. In contrast, unveiled women in short revealing clothes are considered immoral and experience the most harassment on the street, particularly in crowded conservative neighbourhoods.

Overall, this supports the argument that although the agency of ordinary fashionable headscarf wearers can subvert and challenge Orientalist and Islamist patriarchal attitudes towards Muslim women and subvert class borders in their society, it also implies that those Muslim women assert themselves only within a

specific prescribed role of Muslim women's bodies in the public sphere. Outside the small Westernized elite, ordinary Egyptian women cannot transgress the public perception of morality represented by headscarves and hiding women's allegedly destructive and evil femininity or what Mernissi calls "fintah" meaning sexual temptation.

**Chapter V**

**Post-Colonial Egyptian Muslim Women's Identities and Fashion in**

***Lyrics Alley*** **(2010) and** ***Bird Summons*** **(2019)**

"We wouldn't recognize a community as human if it had no stories, if its people had no narrative imagination"(Appiah 29).

Drawing on Foucault concept of power-knowledge, Edward Said (1935-2003), in his foundational book *Orientalism* (1978), attacks Western discourse on the non-Western cultures, which started mainly with the European Enlightenment and its colonial enterprise in the Orient. This Orientalist view portrays the oriental cultural identity as a static character, lives in a timeless culture and cannot develop or progress. In this representation, Muslim men are depicted as barbaric, cruel chauvinistic while their females as submissive needs rescuing from their oppressive Islamic cultural values which are forced on them. Said maintains that this knowledge, produced on the Orient and its people by travel writers and painters, was linked to ideological, political and economic interests in the East. According to Said, starting from the eightieth century onward, the West maintained its discourse on the Orient as backward inferior "Other" in line with its imperial governance in the Orient. Calling this Western discourse "Orientalism", Said maintains that this discourse whose goal was "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3), also provided "Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, atmosphere; most important, they allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics"

(42). In this vein, critic Robert Young, agreeing with Said, maintains that reading the concept of "Orientalist" as a "discourse" is the main reason behind its sustainability for centuries (308).

Said's concept of "Orientalism" has been criticized by many Western and non- Western critics. Those critics argue that Said needed to read Orientalist discourse in its historical contexts and to avoid falling into the pitfall of this overgeneralization about Western scholars and intellectuals in their work on the Orient over such a long period (Horani 1976, Malik1996). However, the Western discourse on Muslim women can be safely theorized under Said's concept of Orientalism as argued by many feminists, critics, and scholars. In her book, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (1992), Leila Ahmed maintains that Western discourse on Muslim women from the eighteenth century onward has not seen a noticeable change. This discourse read all Muslim women, in particular head-covered Muslim women, as silent, a passive and backward women in need of modernization and emancipation by the civilized liberal Westerners.

Indeed, Orientalist discourses on non-Western different traditions and practices persisted, and they are far from dead, particularly in the public imagination. Representations, which take the form of paintings, drawings, movies and literary texts, have been powerful means by which the 'Middle East' has been portrayed in the last two centuries, and, as such, have triggered both Orientalist and self-Orientalist fantasies, essentialized perception of the Middle-Eastern "Other", and accused of covering imperialist projects in the region. In these discourses, Muslim women have been introduced to the Western audience as veiled women. The Islamic practice of veiling or "wearing hijab" has been used as the primary tool for representing Muslim societies as backward patriarchal societies, and all veiled Muslim women as oppressed

subordinates regardless of their geographical place, social class, or educational background.

Engaging with this discourse on Muslim women's representation and their relation to dress and clothing style in the modern age, I use a socio-cultural approach to discuss Muslim Egyptian women's representation in Leila Aboulela's post-colonial fictional texts *Lyrica Alley* (2010) and *Bird Summons* (2019). I aim to present the changing meanings and attitudes towards practising faith and clothing style in modern / post-colonial Egypt, particularly wearing a headscarf among educated Egyptian women. I aim to deconstruct the deep-rooted representation of Muslim women as ugly, passive, and ignorant veiled women in Western literature, cinema and media. Furthermore, the research urges the readers and theorists to think beyond the Western normative paradigm that puts the oppressed veiled traditional Muslim woman as an opposite to the emancipated unveiled modern Western woman. I argue that this approach could potentially work towards the decolonization of Muslim elite intellectuals' literary landscape that remained mostly secular, excluding Islamic identity and rituals.

This chapter, thus, interrogates the concept of post-colonialism regarding embracing Islamic practices in a modern secular age and provides an argument for why such a deconstruction of the images is necessary for rethinking post-colonial Muslim women in Eastern and Western discourse today.

I divide this chapter into three sections. The first section gives a brief historical overview of Muslim women's representation in Orientalist Western literature and mainstream post-colonial literary text. In the second part, I discuss the superficial adaptation of Western fashion in Egyptian society during the early 1950s, which divided Egyptian society into two categories of Women in line with a colonial modernist discourse on modern women and dress. Then, I argue that this Westernized look in Egyptian society

lacked the legal and social base and support required for profound changes concerning women's emancipation in light of Aboulela's text *Lyrics Alley.* The third section looks at the resurgence of Islamic "fashion" and its meanings and limitations concerning women's emancipation in Egyptian and Western society through the character of Salma, an educated middle-class "stylish" headscarf wearer in Aboulela's novel *Bird Summons*.

## 1. Representing Muslim Women in the Orientalist literature

Since 19th-century colonialism, the controversy over Muslim women and their clothing styles has never lost its momentum among intellectuals, feminist literary texts and politicians. They stigmatize Muslim women's traditional dress, particularly the practice of veiling as a symbol of Muslim women's subjection and subordination to their "barbaric" Muslim men. However, literary critics and post-colonial scholars maintain that the Western literary representation of Muslim women was not stable throughout history; instead, it changed according to the ideological, political and economic relationship between Muslim societies (Islam) and the West (Said 1978, Kahf 1999).

Stuart Hall argues that Europe has identified its distinct identity through differentiating itself from the non-European, adopting a dichotomy model throughout its history. During the Middle Ages, religion was central in identifying European identity. Christianity and its good values were the only true religion vis-a-vis false Islam and its bad values during this period. From the fifteenth century on, Europe has identified itself with "Christendom" to differentiate itself from the Islamic East (Hall, *The West and the Rest,* 326).

This idea of Christian Europe persisted until eighteenth-century secular modernity. Starting from the eighteenth century onward, the formula of difference transformed from barbaric heathen vis-a-vis civilized Christian into a modern emancipated secular

vis-à-vis traditional irrational religious oppressed "Other", dividing the world ontologically into a binary model of the West versus the Eastern "Other" as A.L. Macfie puts it:

> Europe (the West, the "self") is […] essentially rational, developed, humane, superior, authentic, active, creative, and masculine, while the Orient (the East, the "other") (a sort of surrogate, underground version of the West or the "self") Is […] irrational, backward, crude, despotic, inferior, inauthentic, passive, feminine, and sexually corrupt" (67-68).

Muslim women turned into passive oppressed veiled Muslim "maiden" in need of rescue by the "white" civilized man starting from the 19th-century colonial encounter (Kahf, *Western Representation of the Muslim Woman*, 58). In this context, Ahmed (1992) argues that a central part of the colonial discourse on Islam has been:

> That Islam was innately and immutably oppressive to women, that the veil and segregation epitomized that oppression, and that these customs were the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies (Ahmed 152).

Within this context and in line with the Enlightenment thinking, the representation of Muslim women in travel literature and paintings intended on the one hand to produce the "Other" of modernity by highlighting the difference between the modern Western woman and her dress and values and the backward Eastern Muslim woman and her oppressive Islamic values. Many of these works on Muslim women were influenced by the Eurocentric understanding of the Muslim backward "Other". They were commissioned or supported by Western rulers to justify their colonial existence in Muslim societies (See Alloula 1986, Yegenoglu 1998, al-Ani 2004). Those male travel writers and painters were not allowed to Muslim women's interior private space; they relied on their accounts or their female wives and sisters or fantasies. Some notable classical texts include Edward William Lane's *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836) and Richard Francis Burton's translation work *Arabian Nights* (1885–1888).

Lane's text is based on his observations during his stay in Egypt. It describes Egyptian daily life and the impact of Islamic thinking and laws on Egyptian social and political life during the 19th century. Although the book is praised for such a detailed description of daily life in Egypt and the writer's fascination with Egypt, critics argue that the haughty colonial spirit is present in reading and interpreting Egyptian customs and manners. Moreover, though the accounts relied on the middle and upper class' life and manners in a specific socio-political and historical context, the text has been used to describe all Egyptians and Arab in general (Said, *Orientalism*, 337).

Also, Burton's translation work Arabian Nights' legacy is still present in the Western public imagination of Muslim women until today. What differentiated Burton's translation from other translations was its focus on the erotic content in the tales that shocked the 19th-century Victorian audience. However, this image of the highly-sexualized Arab Muslim private sphere, where women lay naked and enjoy being looked at, is still widespread in the Western public imagination.

Some criticized as Orientalist texts written by female Western travel writers on Muslim women and Islamic values during the 19th century include Jeannette *Pickersgill'sTales of Harem* (1827) and Julia S. H. Pardoe's *The Romance of the Harem* (1839). These Western females' texts from within the harem were based on actual observation and personal experiences that dispelled Western males' fantasies on Muslim women. In these texts, however, Western women could not side aside their Western supremacy of Western Christian/ modern customs and values in line with the dominant Western discourse on Muslim women and culture.

Overall, this led Yegenoglu to claim that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European female travellers' account of the Muslim women did not radically challenge the

structure of knowledge/power, and this made them appeared to be complicit in the process of "epistemic violence" (Yegenogo, *Colonial Fantasies,* 11).

## 2. Muslim Women, Dress and Religion in Mainstream Post-Colonial Text

The Orientalist narrative on practising Muslim women went, to a great degree, unchallenged in the post-colonial literary text, as an anti-colonial text that tended to correct the long-distorted cultures and histories of the colonized Muslim women. Many critics and scholars argue that most post-colonial texts followed the Orientalist binary representation of oppressed backwards ugly veiled Muslim women versus emancipated fashionable secular unveiled Western women. Early post-colonial texts by Muslim feminist writers regarded abandoning the practice of veiling and women's seclusion and embracing Western dress as inevitable for women's emancipation and advancement in the modern age. Those early feminist nationalist elite Muslim women writers belonged to urban middle classes and upper-middle classes, who were forced to wear the veil as their social class mandated and they were also influenced by Western ideals through their Western education. Mernissi describes the early Arab feminist wave writing:

> The nascent liberation of Muslim women has indeed borrowed many characteristics of Western women's way of life. The first gesture of the 'liberated' Arab   women was to discard the veil for the Western dress, which in the thirties, forties, and fifties was that of the wife of the colonizer" (Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, 167).

In this vein, according to Mernissi, embracing Western dress meant embracing the whole Western cultural values concerning women and family structure. Exposing women's bodies implied a different sexual pattern that appalled the Eastern men and conservative classes. The exposure of women's femininity in the public sphere as a destructive force of society is deeply rooted in Muslim men's minds. These Muslims put the desirable good sexually conservative Muslim woman and supposed stabled

respectful family structure vis- a- vis- the "degrading images of Western sexuality" and disintegrated family structure (Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, 167). Nonetheless, although most early Muslim feminists did not explicitly attack their belief in Islam, they defended secular modern Western values and liberal feminism that the masses lower classes read as cultural colonization. In particular, since those elite urban feminist Muslim females expressed their ideas in Western colonizers' language, which was regarded as alien to the Muslim society (Badran, *Competing Agenda: Feminists, Islam and the State*, 209).

Within this context, it is essential to indicate that "post-colonialism" does not mean "after colonialism". Instead, the term "post-colonialism" refers to the changes that the process of political independence from the former colonizing countries entailed, mainly the governmental structure and institution. However, in particular, colonialism's legacy represented in the cultural and economic dependency is still there either implicitly or overtly. The continuing process of colonialism referred to as "neo-colonialism" is mainly the outcome of establishing "new élites" in politically independent societies. The "new elites" are "often buttressed by neo-colonial institutions, developing internal divisions based on racial, linguistic or religious discriminations, the continuing unequal treatment of indigenous peoples in settler/invader societies". These features reflect "the fact that post-colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction"(Ashcroft et al.2-4).

Nonetheless, the upper-class' views of modern Muslim society were lost when directed to the Western audience. In 1940, Huda Shaarawi (the founder and president of the "Egyptian Feminist Union") documented her experiences in the harem during harem's last decades and women's role in the domestic and public in her mudhakkirât or memoirs, which she dedicated to her secretary to write in Arabic. Sharaawi's original

text" which is published under the title Huda Shaarawi's Memoirs: The Pioneer of Modern Egypt, is narrated from the first-person perspective in 329 pages divided into 44 chapters.

Although Shaarawi herself stood against the practice of veiling in her memoirs in its original Arabic version, she focused on the political struggle for independence from the British colonization. Two-thirds of the memoirs describe Shaarawi's involvement in Egypt's political and social life, particularly between 1919 and 1924, during the national struggle for political independence in Egypt and on an international level. Furthermore, Shaarawi's text tented to struggle for liberating all Egyptian and Arab Muslim women from all social classes through education (the word education is mentioned more than sixty times in her original text). For Shaarawi, education enriches women's mental capacities and can achieve social and cultural change leading to legal reforms.

Shaarawi's original text is a revolutionary resistant Egyptian and even Arab voice that endeavoured to raise a Muslim female's voice on her rights to equal participation in the public sphere heard. Rula B. Quawas (2006) maintains that Shaarawi's text preceded both the concept of democracy and public feminist movements: "that is, before any women's rights movement as such yet existed and before the term "feminist" was invented in Egypt" (Quawas 220).

Nonetheless, although the word "harem" itself is mentioned only once in the original text, Shaarawi's memoirs published under the title Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist by Margot Badran (1986) focused mainly on Muslim women's lives in the private sphere. The translated text is divided into four parts: The Family', 'Childhood in the Harem', 'A Separate Life', and 'A Wife in the Harem' followed by an 'Epilogue' that includes Shaarawi's memories of her participation in the political field between 1919 and 1924.

The English title reflects Badran's awareness of Western readers' continuous eagerness to enter the harem's hidden world. For Badran, the text "will appeal to anyone eager to know about life in the harem – a word highly charged in the western popular imagination" (Shaarawi, *Harem Years*, 7). Moreover, the depiction of the veil and the eagerness to adopt the Western dress in *Harem Years* is similar to its representation in Western harem literature, even if it does not have the same strength in the original text. The practise of veiling is depicted as the fundamental cause of women's oppression and subordination. This manifested itself in Shaarawi's description of her veiling on her wedding day. In the English text, she wrote, "Then a woman came and lowered a veil of silver thread over my head like a mask concealing the face of a condemned person approaching execution" (Shaarawi, *Harem Years*, 57). Here, the veil is compared to the mask of a persecuted prisoner and conveys the gloomy feelings of Shaarawi towards wearing the veil, which also symbolizes the end of her active life, namely, her isolation in the private sphere after marriage. Contrary to the veil's depiction above in the translated text, Shaarawi describes this particular incident without using the word "prisoner" nor describing the veil as a "mask". In the original text, she states:

> I saw the Turkish language teacher in front of the door, and when I greeted her I saw a white veil in her hands which she put on my head immediately and a version of Quran under my ambit. I became more surprised by this action which I did not understand its meaning, nor was I used to" (Shaarawi, *Huda Shaarawi's Memoirs*, 50).

In this context, Kahf argues that, in the English translation, Shaarawi, as all harem females, is constructed as an oppressed Arab Muslim woman who escapes her Islamic patriarchal values for liberating Western ideals in the Western imagination mainly through embracing the Western look (Kahf, *Packaging Huda: Sha'rawi's Memoirs,*149). This image is supported by the editorial modification in the process of translating

Shaarawi's text into English. Whereas the Western influence on Shaarawi's character is over-emphasized, her representation as an upper-class privileged woman treated like a lady and politically active and has her "satisfied relationships with Arab males in the Arabic text is "minimized" in the translation. Kahf wrote:

> Shaarawi's engagement with Arab men in relationships that she saw as satisfying and enriching is minimized; her orientation towards Europe is exaggerated, and her command of class privilege is camouflaged'. Besides, many parts were omitted, like her father character and the incident of a French woman murdering a man defending her sexual honour due to this editorial rendition (Kahf, *Packaging Huda: Sha'rawi's Memoirs*, 149).

All in all, Badran´s text tends to meet the Western feminist autobiographical genre whose primary focus is to challenge "gender ideologies and the boundaries they place around a woman's proper life script, textual inscription and speaking voice" (Smith 44). In the feminist autobiographies, female characters "look back towards the moment at which they found the courage to move forward into as yet unnarrated and unexplored ways of living" (Heilbrun 21). Therefore, in the English text, Shaarawai remained in Western harem literature undifferentiated from the "Orientalist" representation of Muslim women (Kahf, *Packaging Huda: Sha'rawi's Memoirs*, 164) even if the original text conveyed her character to the Arab readers as a role model of a modern emancipated Muslim Arab character. This encourages a researcher to consider that Shaarawi's agency is contested and re-considered within the different paradigms and power equations.

After decolonization in the second half of the twentieth century, prominent Muslim women feminist writers, who also belonged mainly to the Middle classes and upper-middle classes, tended to be the defenders of modernity and secular values. Many of them followed the Western feminist movement in the 1970s. Even if most of them were reluctant to use the word "feminism" in their writings because of its Western connotation, this contradicted their nationalist identity. Moreover, their feminist writings

ignored the changes concerning Muslim females clothing styles that included the veil in new diverse styles and ideologies, which started to be dominant in Arab societies starting from the 1970s.

For instance, the static attitude towards Muslim women's clothing styles and Islamic practices that read it only as oppressive practices is omnipresent in literary works of the prominent Egyptian feminist Nawal Elsaadawi's texts. For instance, in *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* and *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (1980) and *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* (1988), Elsaadawi criticized the practice of veiling as the symbol of women's misery, oppression and subordination to Egyptian Muslim men. According to Elsaadawi, the practice of veiling has its roots in the pre-Islamic communities, and Islam failed to get rid of it. Nonetheless, she rejects a discursive correlation between unveiling women and their emancipation in Muslim Arab society. Instead, Elsadaawi argues, all Egyptian women are shackled by the patriarchal sociology-economic and political system. It is worth mentioning here that Elsaadawi's novel *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* is also far different from its original title, *The Bare Face of Arab women*. The title *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* seems to be appealing to the Western audience that expects and reads Arab Muslim women as hidden and mysterious women. This argument is still in line with Kahf's argument on the role of translation and Orienalizing non- Western women.

Besides, the representation of oppressed, veiled Muslim women and their traditional clothing remained unchallenged in a wide range of Muslim women writers' texts in the Western diaspora. Their texts still inform the dominant expression of Muslim women's identities in post-colonial texts. Even if Egyptian women are rarely present in these texts, still they are included as Muslim women. For instance, Ayaan Hirsi Ali's film

*Submission* (2004) depicts Islam and Quranic texts as the source of Muslim women's oppression. This is represented through a Muslim woman wearing a veil, albeit a transparent loose black dress. Also, in her text *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* (2006), Ali's explanation of Islam is coupled with the creation of dichotomies between Muslim East and secular / Christian West to demonstrate why "Muslim nations are lagging behind the West", as she puts it (Ali 2006: xi). One can find the same argument in her well-known memoir *Infidel* (2007). Ali describes Islamic values, particularly wearing the veil, as a leading cause of women's oppression and backwardness as opposed to enlightened peaceful Christianity. She urges her audience to look at the subordinate passive veiled women's status in Saudi Arabia, where Ali argues that authentic Islam is practised. Ali is trusted as a "native informant" of her Islamic culture, and her memoir is based on her experience in a patriarchal Muslim society. Still, she does not consider reading women's status in Saudi Arabia or other Muslim countries in light of a conservative political context.

Another example is Fadia Faqir's novel *My Name is Salma* (2007) which follows the journey of a Jordanian girl, Salma, whose religion was the cause of her suffering at the hands of her Muslim male family members who chase her down for an honour killing. Salma's miserable condition is indicated on the book cover through her veil and loose dress. In England, Salma retains her freedom through being adopted by a Christian family and renouncing her Islamic tradition.

Many of these post-colonial texts are celebrated in the West, and many have even won numerous literary prizes. Still, they were condemned by a wide range of Muslims who argue that they felt betrayed by those meant to represent all Muslims and their long-distorted history in the Orientalist colonial discourse. Besides, these texts still

reproduce the binary model of good modern Christian/ Western values versus wrong Islamic values, having no place in the modern enlightened age. At the same time, headscarf wearers' voices are marginalized in post-colonial text.

Nonetheless, the privileged position of the Western dress and secular values in post-colonial literature has been challenged by a wave of post-colonial Islamic literature. This wave introduces the Western reader to "emancipated" educated practising Muslim women who prioritize their Islamic rituals and dress items, which are not part of the Western dress code even in most liberal secular societies. They aim to assert the significant role played by Islam as a faith and a historical and cultural past in their present life. These literary works include, for instance, Mojha Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006), which follows the Journey of Khadra Shamy, a Syrian immigrant in Indiana. Growing up in a devout family, she embraced her Islamic values as a part of her historical and cultural self, and her pious behaviour was supported by surrounding Muslims with varieties of backgrounds during her childhood and adolescence. After leaving America for Syria after her marriage broke, she started praying again to discover her prayers' spiritual real meaning, Randa Abdel-Fattah's novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2014) follows the voice of a young Australian-Palestinian girl who decides voluntarily to wear a hijab (headscarf), and Ayisha Malik's novel *Sofia Khan is Not Obliged* (2016) narrates the life of Sofia Khan, a Pakistani-British hijab - wearer. Sofia takes her faith seriously, even though she is a modern Londoner. The Romantic comedy depicts the challenges committed Muslims face in modern liberal culture.

In this chapter and engaging with this post-colonial "Islamic" literature wave, I find it essential to discuss Egyptian Muslim women's dress in both the patriarchal culture in Egypt and the liberal West. I aim to challenge the claimed inherent association between

a specific dress and emancipating secular modernity. I am encouraged by the absence of representation of ordinary practising Egyptian women as opposed to the supposed emancipated urban unveiled Egyptian woman in post-colonial literature. I discuss the varied images and meanings of Egyptian women's headgears and dress in the chosen literary texts. I argue that those women's sorrows and the challenges differ according to their historical junctures, geographical locations and socio-political contexts and not necessarily caused by their dress and veil, as represented in the mainstream post-colonial text.

I chose the Egyptian Sudanese Leila Aboulela's fictional works *Lyrics Alley and Bird Summons* for three main reasons. Firstly, Aboulela's texts are among the most prominent examples representing Egyptian women in patriarchal Muslim societies and Western diaspora. Secondly, Aboulela's texts trace Egyptian women's diverse and changing attitudes and sentiments towards their religious identity, dress, and Western culture, starting from the 1950s onward.  Thirdly, Aboulela´s works go beyond the binarism of the Muslim East - Secular West. They tell a third story that endorses a multicultural community, where identities are in a process of ongoing negotiation and progress towards shared cultural values and understanding. The fictional characters´ attitudes stress the multiple facets of the post-colonial identity and the continuous redefinition of their Islamic identity within a globalised world. In this sense, Aboulela's fictional characters' attitudes call into question the long-anticipated sweeping nature of the secular liberal form of emancipatory feminism.

## 3. 1. Religious Identity and Modern Dress in Leila Aboulela's Literary Texts

Leila Aboulela is a well-known middle-class Muslim writer who writes only in English. She was born to a wealthy Sudanese father and a university professor Egyptian mother

in Cairo in 1964. Aboulela got her first university degree in Economics from the American University in Khartoum before moving with her husband to Scotland in 1987.

In Scotland, she started her writing career, portraying Muslims' lives and identities in a secular Western culture. Aboulela's fictional scene is not limited to Europe; instead, it includes African and Arab countries. Her fictional characters interrogate the relationship between Eastern and Western identities in light of the ongoing changing discourse on post-colonialism, secular modernity, Islam, feminism and migration.

Aboulela published six novels and one short story collection that include The Translator (1999), *Coloured Lights* (2001), *Minaret* (2005), *Lyrics Alley* (2011), *Kindness of Enemies* (2015), *Elsewhere, Home* (2018), and *Bird Summon* (2019). Aboulela's novels *The Translator* and *Minaret* were longlisted for the *Orange* and *IMPAC* prizes, and *The Translator* was also shortlisted for the Saltire Scottish Book of the Year Award. Aboulela also won the first Caine Prize for African Writing for her short story *The Museum* in 2000.

## Muslim Women, Fashion and Modernity in *Lyrics Alley*

Leila Aboulela's novel *Lyrics Alley* is a novel loosely- based on the true story of Aboulela's late famous poet uncle "Hassan Awad Abulela" (1922-1962). He experienced a tragic accident while diving in the sea in Alexandria. The promising Victoria College's student and family trade's heir Hassan Awad Abulela's head had hit a rock submerged under the waters during a summer holiday. This accident left him completely paralysed and moveless until his death. In the novel, the character of Nur represents Hassan Awad Abulela, but Aboulela moves the events of this tragic accident to the 1950s to set it against the backdrop of a moment of shifting power in both Egypt and Sudan. The novel is set at the moment of Sudan's independence from the Anglo-Egyptian condominium and the end of monarchy in Egypt. Although the story

does not delve into this historical and political turmoil, it describes the social, psychological and ideological conflict between the British colonizing culture and African Muslim traditional cultures represented in the Westernized Egyptian elites and the "traditional "Sundanese during the 1950s.

*Lyrics Alley* is narrated from the third person's perspective in twenty-three chapters. It depicts the quotidian life of an affluent liberal Sudanese Mahmoud Abuzeid and his extended family. The events are set in Abuzeid's Saraya (mansion) in Omdurman, his office in Khartum, Cairo and Alexandria. Abuzeid runs a private limited liability company and holds trading ties with the British officials in Sudan to "steer his family firm through the uncertainties of self-determination and stake a place in the newly independent country" (40).

Abuzeid is fascinated by the modern European lifestyle and customs, and he is eager to emulate them in his business and at home. He has two wives; his first wife, the illiterate Sudanese Hajja Waheeba, and the 20 year- younger educated Westernized Egyptian Nabilah. His two wives' different backgrounds and worldviews depict two clashing perspectives on the Western culture and modernity in colonial / post-colonial Muslim society, particularly concerning women's appearance and manner. On comparing his two wives, Abuzeid describes his Sudanese wife as a "stupid woman" (45), "ugly and ignorant" (113), but his Egyptian wife Nabilah as "refined and polite and her wording was pleasing too" (113). Thus, according to the modern progressive Abuzeid, his two wives belong to "different sides of the Saraya", and "two worlds" (43).

Moreover, the two wives differ not only spatially but also in a temporal sense. The Sudanese wife Hajja Waheeba is associated with the past while Nabilah symbolises the modern present and future, and Abuzeid affirms his desire to embrace modernity by marrying Nabilah. He declares that he: "would never regret... It was not a difficult

choice between the stagnant past and the glitter of the future, between crudeness and sophistication (45).

In the novel, the most visible remarks of Nabilah's modernity represented in her elegant, fashionable Western dress and manners, which Abouzeid appreciates as a source of pride and confidence that enable him to set himself on equal footing with English people., even if Abouzeid is neither dependent financially on the English people nor feels inferior to them when it comes to money. H says, "Money and goods are what makes men equal". He believes that "true righteousness is not in taking a political stance or on serving slogans. It is in fair trade" (196). Nonetheless, it seems that it is a modern Western look that is considered incontestable and a "universal" symbol for everyone who strives to affirm his/ her modern identity and grant a high social status. Therefore, Abuzeid is conscious about choosing his clothing items when he meets British people. For instance, when he meets the English Bank's manager, Nigel Harrison, to discuss a deal, he "was wearing his best suit, purchased from Bond Street, and his Bally shoes" (48), and when he meets Harrison once again by chance, Abuzeid is proud that his wife Nabila "was next to him in her jewels and cocktail frock, her fair skin radiant in the lamp-lit garden...satisfied that they made a favourable impression" (53).

Nabilah herself compares herself to Nigel Harrison's wife, sue and is proud that she is more fashionable and more knowledgeable on the latest fashion than the English lady. According to Nabilah's, Mrs Harrison "was lacking in sophistication and beauty" (88), despite her gorgeous complexion. Nabilah was" also surprised and flattered" to discover that she knew the names of the famous fashion houses and their creations than sue" (90). Even when Abuzeid has to take his sick son, Nur, on a medical trip to London, he cannot think of accompanying Nur's Sudanese mother, Hajja Waheeba, in

her traditional look to England. So instead, he asks Nabilah to join them. As the following dialogue between Abuzeid and Nabila tells:

> I am taking Nur to London, and I want you to come with us'. She paused and then said, 'Of course I want to come with...But don't you think Hajja Waheeba will take offence?'
>
> London is not a place for her. I will be meeting people there and making new contacts. I want you with me.' (114).

In this context, Nabilah's fashionable Western look can be read as Abuzeid's and his wife's attempt "to elevate himself to the white man's level" (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, 60). Nevertheless, the modern Western look is not only a strategy to "elevate" the non-Westerners to the "white man's level", but it can also be seen as an empowering instrument in their own culture. Nabilah's self-esteem comes from her appearance as an elegant, fashionable modern woman in a society where women compete to get admiration is primarily seen in their appearance as the following passage describes:

> There was the evening they had gone to see Um Kulthum in a concert, the nightclubs on Pyramid Road where they would go for dinner or a show. Oh, the fun she had had, watching the belly dancer and looking around at the tables, comparing her clothes with those of the other ladies, her hair with their hair, and always feeling good about herself (29).

Moreover, Nabilah herself is conscious of her superiority in dress and manner to the other traditional Sudanese, even if she was a second wife for a man much older than her. The narrator tells:

> She was his new wife, much younger than him, but that was not uncommon….True, he had given her a lot, and he did not want much from her in return. Not much but to bear this exile, to tolerate his family, and to decorate his new mansion in Omdurman simply by being herself (29).

Nabilah is aware that she is objectified as a beautiful piece of art that decorates the husband's home in Sudan, where she is alienated from her positive good Egyptian environment. Moreover, Describing Sudan as an exile, Nabilah stresses the sense of

isolation where she is surrounded by her husband's traditional family, whom she considers a burden. Nonetheless, Nabilah uses her beautiful Westernized appearance to show her superiority over the Sufdanse first wife. Therefore, one can argue that imitating the Western look in Nabilah's search of modernity "create situations in which mimicry becomes a way of life, an adaptation strategy, and sometimes a form of empowerment" (Cara& Baron126).

Mahmoud Abuzeid even falls in love with the picture of Nabilah before meeting her when he first saw her in a window of a photographer's studio. He searches the pretty young lady in the portrait until he finds her and proposes to her. Nabilah's mother, Qadrryia, acceptance of Mahoud Abuzeid's proposal was in the first place because his elegant appearance resembled Egyptian men more than the "backward "Sudanese in their traditional clothes.  The narrator recounts Nabilah´s first impression saying:

> In those days, she had forgotten that she had married a Sudanese. Mahmoud was light-skinned enough to pass for an Egyptian, his clothes were as modern and as elegant as any other Bey (29).

Thus, Nabilah laments her presence where she perceived as backward outside history Sudan. In "her fashionable dress and elegant high heels", Nabila "was wasted in this place "(31) that is not like the metropolitan modernised urban Cairo or London. For Nabilah, even if Sudan was like "a province of Egypt" (38), it was still far away from civilisation and the centre of modernity. She describes Sudan as:

> The bottom of the sea, an exotic wilderness, soporific and away from the momentum of history. It was amazing but constricting, threatening to suck her in, to hold her down and drown her. Sometimes, she was able to hold her breath and accept, but on most days, she struggled to rise up to the surface, working to recapture a routine like that of her mother in Cairo, a life of fresh air and energy, the natural bustle and order of civilised life (24-25).

Aboulela's lines mentioned above, in particular, using words such as "wilderness, exotic versus modern, bustle, and civilised" (24-25) is a pastiche or reworking of the

Polish-British writer Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* (1989). *Heart of Darkness* recounts a cruise to the Congo, in the heart of Africa, during the heyday of the British Empire and the period of scientific explorations and voyages to the East. The protagonist Marlow tells his fellowmen his thoughts on the first journey to dark Africa from Europe, saying:

> I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago--the other day. . . Light came out of this river since—you say Knights? Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker--may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday... Imagine him here--the very end of the world, a sea the colour of lead, a sky the colour of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina--and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages,--precious little to eat fit for a civilised man, nothing but Thames water to drink (55-56).

In this context, Nabilah, who seems dismissive about the African people's physical features, culture and traditions, internalised the orientalist discourse on the centre and the margin. According to this thought, Western culture has reached the epitome of civilisation and became the centre of the world while the Non-Western cultures are in the periphery dark exotic place in their infant stage in history. They have to path through the same historical stages to catch up with modern Western civilisation.

Secondly, both Nabilah and her husband embrace the Western discourse on the claimed "universal" relationship between women appearance and modernity. According to this discourse, "Non-modern dress, read as non-western, is a sign of backwardness or under development" (Eisenstein 4). This argument can be strongly seen in Nabilah's attitude towards her co-wife Hajja Waheeda. Nabilah, who is not against objectifying her into just a decoration source, does not see any danger in the traditional first wife's existence based on her appearance. She exclaims:"How could she compete with me! She, who was obese, menopausal, illiterate. She, who had no concept of fashion or travel… or even been inside a hairdresser" (33).

Furthermore, when Nabilah meets Hajja Waheeba for the first time, the reader detects Nabilah's gaze focuses on Hajja Waheeba and other Sudanese women. According to Nabilah, these women are all just traditional Sudanese women undifferentiated by their marital, educational or economic status. She recounts:

> When many family members came around to take a good look at her, the women had made no attempts to hide their curiosity and simply filed in… she had not even known which one of them was Hajja Waheeba. They had all looked similar to her. Middle-aged Sudanese women swathed in tobes, their faces without makeup and their hair in traditional tight braids close to the head. Later, she had come to know that waheeba was that one with tribal scars on her cheeks, those vertical scars looked like cracks on a French loaf… her tobe was falling around her soft round stomach and slipping down her head and hennaed braids…there was a pinch, like a bracelet around her elbow and above that the moving fat of her upper arms (31-32).

In this vein, Aboulela uses Nabilah's feelings and attitude towards her non- Western culture to depict the middle-class and upper-middle-class urban elite who embraced the Orientalist's assessment of their non-Western culture vis – a- vis the Western culture.

On the other hand, Nabila as a fashionable, beautiful wife, can also reflect an Orientalist picture of the sexy Muslim woman who always has to be ready for Arab Muslim men's sexual gratification. In this context, those fashionable women are not emancipated through embracing Western latest fashion; instead, they are still under the control of their men's needs. However, although according to Nabilah, Egyptians are mainly the educated middle-class Cairene, excluding the lower classes and peasants. She compares her life in Sudan to hers in Egypt, saying that in Cairo she:

> was out of breath when she reached the bus station. She had been walking fast, clutching her purse, aware of the swish of her dress and the tap of her high heels. Now she felt at ease because she was just another Egyptian lady, attractive and elegant, waiting for the bus like everyone else (93).

In the line above, Nabilah expresses her feelings as an elegant lady in the modern Cosmopiltan Cairo. In Cairo, women take good care of their looks, and Nabilah feels comfortable to be surrounded by fashionable women like her and not being surrounded by the "backward" traditional women in Sudan.

Following an anti-colonial narrative technique, *Lyrics Alley* subtly attempts to rivet the Western audience's attention to the heterogeneity of the subject(s) of Muslim Egyptian women she is dealing with. She gives voices to various Egyptian characters with their different regional, educational, and socio-economic backgrounds that can affect their diverse subjectivities. Although Nabilah puts herself as a representative of modern liberal fashionable Egyptians versus the ignorant traditional Sudanese, Aboulela presents Ustaz Badr and his family as a representative of the lower-class peasants' world view on modernity. For instance, in contrast to Nabilah's previous description of an "ugly" traditional Hajja Waheeba, Aboulela introduces the reader to another perspective that looks at Hajja Waheeba within her African context and liberates her from the comparison with a modern unveiled Western woman. The children's private tutor Badr's sees Hajja Waheeba's beauty within her own particular culture using African references. For Badr, Hajja Waheeba:

> Was more African in features than her husband, and on each side of her cheeks ran three tribal scars, like cracks on a dry riverbed, which made her face looked broader and more open. With her wide eyes and excellent teeth, her colourful tobe and the bangles of gold that glittered from her wrist to her elbow, she was more attractive despite her age. (16-17).

Also, Ustaz Badr himself finds the European dress code imposed on the government teachers a suffocating garment compared to his comfortable rural loose Jalhabiya. This is present in his description of his day during the school's summer holiday when there is "no need to dress formally. He felt relaxed and free (25)".

Coming from Assyut, a province in Upper Egypt, Ustaz Badr was the only one in his family to "complete secondary school and graduated from teacher's school" (15). It was also the traditional galabyya that differentiated him from other uneducated people around him. For instance, "when he went out to the mosque or souq he wore his jellabiya. His father, seeing him in the clothes of Egyptian peasants, mistook him for his older brother, Abdel- Salam "(125).

The lines above thus show how the Western dress code that reached the rural areas through the educational system set a new hierarchical social system that conjures a new attitude and feelings towards individuals even in the same family.

In her "article Shifting Landscapes of Fashion in Contemporary Egypt" (2007), Mona Abaza describes this new cultural attitude. She writes:

> Fiffty years ago in Egypt, as elsewhere, it was much easier to identify a person's class by their clothes than it is today. Uneducated Egyptians could be identified first through the jalabeya, which was worn by both men and women...Styles of headscarves also distinguished lower-class women and to some extent, the jalabeya and headscarf still designate Baladi and peasant classes (285).

This argument and debate on the "proper" formal European dress versus the "improper" dress in governmental institutions are still ongoing in Egypt. One can refer to an incident in 2015 when the principal and faculty staff in a primary school in Sharqiya governorate was referred to an investigation by Governor Rida Abdul Salam. He was on a surprise visit to the governorate. The investigations were because teachers were wearing peasants' galabyya or what the governor called "improper outfits" while carrying out their government job ("Egyptian Street" 2015).

Ustaz Badr left his village for Sudan, seeking a better work opportunity to save more money and improve his financial status. He is the only religious character in the novel, and his religiosity also helps him overcome his societal marginalisation as a poor lower-class person. He is also a representative of a group of jealous traditional Muslims

whose wives were not allowed to mingle or seen by male strangers. Ustaz Badr imagines his future flat in the high building, saying: "Hannayyah would need to go to the balcony hang out the washing, and he did not want any man watching her. The balcony on the right was more secluded. (Aboulela, *Lyrics Alley*, 126).

Ustaz Badr also expects women's segregation even in affluent Sudanese family-like Abuzeid's, and he was surprised to find the Sudanese women are at ease in the presence of a male stranger like him. For instance, upon entering Mahmoud Bey's mansion.

> He cries "ya Satir" to announce that unveiled women could either flee or cover their heads... Hajja Waheeba squatting on a stool frying fish, looked at him, at first vaguely, and then started to call us, ` Nur, son, your teacher is here!'. She shifted and settled her tobe around her stout body…The Coach, always busy, was today overfilled with visiting women...He felt awkward, even though his presence did not bother the women, true they covered their heads, them of them in earnest and other reluctantly. But they continued their chatting (16).

Also, Ustaz Badr's wife, Hannayah appears on the street with her husband wearing her traditional "black outdoor abaya" (194) and scarf without wearing makeup, even if she does not appear religiously strict. Hannayah never voices her opinion on the clothing style throughout the novel, but there are specific passages where one can detect that she can communicate her opinion on what she needs. For instance, her eagerness for modernisation is expressed by urging her husband to find a flat in a modern building.

> His own Hannayah had aspirations for a flat in a tall building, for a salon and bacony. Why else had they left Egypt, if not to better themselves? She hated the Sudanese -style house they had been allocated by the school and complained about it day and night. It was something that rankled in their marriage (17).

This can imply that wearing makeup and embracing the Western look was not an issue in this social class. In particular, since these lower classes did not have access to Western culture or contact Westernised people who adopt a different Western attitude or worldview towards women's appearance. In particular, mediums of influence, mainly

television, were not available to ordinary lower social classes. Moreover, in the rural area and among lower classes, although a sector of men started embracing the Western look required by the school, most women who belonged to these classes did not have access to education due to the prevalent poverty and preferring male's education over females.

Also, *Lyrics Alley* introduces us to different female's clothing styles, even in the same place where Nabilah lives in Cairo. For example, the maid in Nabilah's house also covers her hair as Nabilah's arrival to Cairo scene describes:" The door of the flat would be already open when they stepped out of the lift. Her mother's maid would be there, in her long patterned dress and Kerchief" (Aboulela, *Lyrics Alley*, 29).

Nonetheless, one can argue that there is no explicit clash between believing in Islam and embracing diverse clothing styles and look during this period. For instance, Nabilah does not renounce her belief in God even if she does not bind worshipping God to regular rituals and practices believing that: "religious observance was associated with the rural lower classes; only the poor and the uneducated prayed… Her gratitude, though, had an element of worship to it, a step that extended beyond temporary relief and fleeting elation" (283).

Also, Nabila's progressive liberal husband does not renounce his firm belief in Islam. Abuzeid believes that he should be an honest, sincere trader and hopes that he will be included with the faithful Muslims in paradise, quoting the prophet's following Hadith saying:

> The truthful and honest merchant will be with the prophets, affirmers of truth martyrs" I am not a perfect Muslim...' Mahmoud d picked up his glass of whiskey and held it up in the air '...but when I die and meet my Maker, I say to Him, this is what I have done. I have never cheated, and I have never defaulted (196).

Overall, both Nabilah's and her husband's convictions and lifestyle mirror the westernised affluent liberal Muslims and Arabs during this period. They did not explicitly put their Muslim Eastern identity versus secular or atheist Westerners. One can not simply identify Nabilah as an unveiled secular woman vesus the head-covered traditionally dressed religious Muslim women. Within this vein, one can argue with Justin Neumann in his book *Fiction beyond Secularism* (2014) that the secular and religious borders can not easily be defined. Instead, they are in continuous change with the changing social, political and historical circumstances. Therefore, it can be misleading to consider that the secular is opposite of the religious and urge us to think "beyond secularism means moving toward a more complex account of social, political, and historical forces that frames both religious and non-religious modes of being"(Neumann 7). Within this line of thought, one can also argue that the religious aspect, which is deeply rooted in the culture, is not expected to entirely disappear in the modern individual in these Muslim societies, even with those individuals endeavoured to comply with the modern rational bureaucratic behaviour work lives and embracing the Western look. This argument implies a resistant strategy against the neo-colonial discourse.

Moreover, the novel shows no reference to the Islamic practice of veiling and covering the face during this period after the upper-class women already abandoned it, nor that covering the head symbolised women's strict religiosity and subordination versus the fashionable feminist women. Instead, covering the hair and wearing traditional clothing marked social differences between the modern urban educated Middle -classes and the peasants and lower social classes in Egypt and Muslim Arab world.

## B. Fashionable Unveiled Egyptian Women and Emancipation

In *Lyrics Alley*, Nabilah looks like a modern Western woman, but she represented the superficial groundless modern thinking regarding women's independence and gender-equal participation in the public sphere. Nabilah was born and brought up in a liberal middle-class family where women relied financially on men since women's work for money was still considered an improper shameful thing for these classes during this period. Nabilah's father, who was a liberal provincial judge, died when she was nine years old. Her mother married after a year of his death to depend on the second husband financially. Nabilah even believes that marriage in her society is mainly for financial support. The narrator says:

> Nabilah's father had died when she was nine, and her mother remarried within a year. But if Mahmoud died, Nabilah would not marry again because she would have an income and an inheritance share in Mahmoud Bey's wealth (28).

Moreover, Nabilah showed no resistance in her family concerning her dress or her marriage to a twenty-year older married Sudanese. It seems that her life was orchestrated by her mother, whom Nabilah considered the: "idol "of everything good in life: "Nabilah idolised her mother...Nothing was good or real without her mother's acknowledgement. That was exactly why Nabila's marriage had taken place and lasted for nine years (38).

Once again, Nabilah's attitude asserts that the impact of tradition on individuals can not easily get rid of only through embracing a Western appearance. Her stance towards marriage reflects the prevailing social norms of her society concerning monogamy that the Western and Egyptian feminists attacked but still "was not uncommon" (38). Instead, her "dissatisfaction, her low-grade unhappiness, was not entirely because of the unmatched marriage by this second-wife status or by this backward place. It was the banishment from mother that was hard to get used to" (38). She even felt superior

to the first wife and other women around her because of her status as an elegant, fashionable Egyptian woman.

Nabilah leaves Sudan to Cairo and insisted that Mahmoud divorces his first wife, Hajja Waheeba, after she circumcised Nabilah's daughter when she was away. Nevertheless, as the narrative progresses, Nabilah's character grows, and one can detect moments of feminist attitude. Towards the end of the novel, Nabilah shows her readiness to rely on herself to bring up her children and lead her own life instead of relying on her mother or husband after leaving Umdorman.

When Nabilah's mother: "was subdued and helpless. Nabilah stepped into the role of the mistress of the house. When she enrolled the children at a nearby school, a decisive step, which solidified her presence in Cairo" (277), and when her husband came to ask her to go back with him to Omdurman, "Nabilah sat stiffly in front of him in the Salon and said' I can't live with Waheeba in the same house, not even different quarter...Her voice didn't waver; she was beginning to grow up" (278).

Nabilah was not willing to return to Sudan and leave the "grand, bustling Cairo" (279) since she was enjoying her life without the restrictions put on her by her husband. This also stresses that her choice to wear Westernized clothes was not an accurate reflection of actual emancipation from men's authority over her. The narrator tells that: "Even though Nabilah was not yet divorced, she revealed in her new situation, a life without duties and restrictions imposed by men" (278). But Nabilah's feminist effort to choose for herself and liberate herself from the suffering of being a second wife and living in a "backward" Sudanese environment was met with resistance from her mother and then from her friends, in particular since she would be able to sustain herself financially in case she insists on a divorce. Nabilah was relying on her husband's

money even after leaving him for Cairo. Nabilah's mother urges her to return to her husband, saying:

> This situation cannot continue, my dear,...it is one of three things; either you make peace with your husband and go back to him, Or Mahmoud Bey will stop sending you the allowance or, God forbid, he will divorce you and take the children (281).

Nabilah was talented in designing and tailoring dresses. She mended the old dresses that did not fit her anymore and designed dresses for her mother and the neighbours.

> The neighbour brought her own material, and there were pleasurable visits for the fittings, changes here and there to the dress, at the end, when the neighbour was thoroughly satisfied, she gave Nabilah a gift because it would not be polite or tactful to give money (279).

Although Nabilah is not ready to take her designing skills as a profession to earn her own money instead of relying on her husband's money, it was still improper for women to work in return for money. Nonetheless, one can argue that the process of altering the dresses in their Western fashion can also be read as an allegory of a constant process of changes in women's needs due to the changing social experiences and daily changes. This implies a need to construct an altered model of Western modernity that accommodates both women's social experiences and their need for women's emancipation, which still obstacles the social and political discourse.

In this context, reading the fashionable Westernized Nabilah's contradicting actions can be understood within her Egyptian social context. One can refer to Frantz Fanon's argument on imitating the coloniser's lifestyles and values in non- Western societies without considering the socio-economic, political and historical differences. According to Fanon, the Westernized colonised individual "betrays himself by his speech" (Fanon, *Black Skin*, 13) since he is conscious of the fact that his imitation cannot enable him to "climbs up towards whiteness and light" (Fanon, *Black Skin*, 165). Furthermore, Fanon argues that the colonised "have their drama"that hinders the expected changes in their

non-Western societies even if "Western history… writes off the history of the non-West" (Fanon, *Black Skin*, XV).

Nabilah's return to her husband and Mahmoud Abuzeid's rejection of divorcing his Sudanese wife and moving to Cairo could also be read as an allegory of appreciating Western modernity and the past non- Western cultures. Unlike Nabilah, Abuzeid was not dismissive of his own culture. On the contrary, he wanted to improve his own culture by founding schools, hospitals and modern institutions to implement real change. Abouzeid considered his people's misery" his misery and this backwardness his duty" (268); thus, he was ready to bear the responsibility to take part in "his country's progress" (268).

Abuzeid goes on to blame Nabilah for believing that his modernity requires dismissing his own culture and people" he says:

> She had shared his life and not understood him. Not understood that he could not leave Omdurman, not understood that Waheeba was Nur's mother for all her faults. Here on this bed was when he would one day die...Even if Nabilah c ame  back, he brooded, her dismissiveness might continue to rankle, her desire to wrap his Sudanese identity and limit it with spatial classification. From early on, she had mistaken his spirited love for modernity for a wholehearted conversion...He had prided himself in harnessing both, in gliding gracefully between both worlds (Aboulela, *Lyrics Alley*, 267-268).

Abuzeid's desire to embrace two worlds' values hints at the rise of a new post-colonial educated generation with a different position towards their traditional culture and Western modernity. The new socio-economic and political atmosphere will support the new hybrid post-colonial identity during the following decades.

All in all, I argued that *Lyrics Alley* sways between resistance and confirmation of Western discourse on Muslim women. On the one hand, it dismantles the Western Orientalist narrative that all Muslim women are ugly veiled women. Also, she challenges the narrative that emphasizes the relationship between modern Western

dress and women's emancipation vis-a-vis the headscarf that relegates women to the domestic private space. On the other hand, the novel does not negate the polygamous Muslim men and the subordination of Muslim women willingly or unwillingly in the affluent classes during this period, particularly with the novel's ending that disappoints the Western reader, as the elegant Westernized Nabilah returns to her husband and is not able to emancipate herself through work for instance. With this ending, Aboulela affirms the impact of tradition and social norms on individuals' decisions. In this vein, Aboulela utilises Western fashion and consuming Western products to show that superficial imitation of appearance without considering the cultural, socio-economic factors may not achieve profound changes in the society concerning women's position and family structure.

 *Lyrics Alley*, however, discusses fashion and clothing styles as a salient factor in dividing post-colonial African/ Egyptian society into two groups: Western-oriented urban elites and affluent classes represented in Nabilah's Egyptian family Mahmoud Abouzied and that of the anti-Western. The Anti Western includes both the nationalists represented in Abouzied's wife and the impoverished classes and peasants represented in Usatz Badr and his family. The second group opposed Western goods and lifestyles, claiming that Western materials and cultures destroy their societies and values. In contrast, the first segment has been indulged in Western products not only to exhibit their higher economic status because Western products and goods considered better than the cheap local products but also because of their convictions that Western goods represent the modern refined taste vis- a- vis the traditional low taste local goods.

Overall, *Lyrics Alley* employs a deconstructive anti-colonial strategy by giving voices to diverse characters in their education, gender, class and political ideologies. Through

this narrative technique, Aboulela creates a space for discussing the diverse attitudes towards appearance, tradition, and religious identity from different angles, including the less-privileged and their histories.

## Practising Fashionable Muslim Women and Feminist Hybrid Identities in *Bird Summons*

Seven decades passed between the events represented in Aboulela's novels *Lyrics Alley* (2010) and *Bird Summons* (2019). The socio-economic and political circumstances have been changing over these years, leading to radical changes in Muslims' religious identity and practices worldwide. Muslim women's attitude towards their Islamic identity and clothing styles are read as among the main remarks of such a psychological, social and political shift towards Islamic identity and Western fashion. Scholars and sociologists argue that this shift can be read as a direct consequence to trapping Muslim women between patriarchy from within their own Muslim cultures and the racist "Othering" attitude towards the non-Western "Other" from Western culture, in particular after the terrorist attacks in Western societies in the name of Islam. One can see this view in the position of post-colonial Muslim headscarf wearers, who live in Western modern secular societies and this an argument that Aboulela's novel *Bird Summons* discusses.

*Bird Summons* is a fictional work narrated in seventeen chapters and set in Britain and Arab countries (Egypt, Sudan and Syria). The novel tells the stories of three Arab Muslim female migrants who live in Scotland. These three fictional characters are not bound by economic status, education or nationality, but by being Muslims. Their belonging to their Islamic cultural identity is seen in embracing standard Islamic practices such as wearing the hijab, eating halal food, being in contact with the Muslim

women community, and other acts of resistance, integration, and belonging in the West.

The three female migrants go on a trip that Salma initially organised for members of the "Arabic Speaking Muslim Women's Group" to visit Lady Evelyne Cobbold's grave, the first British woman to go to Mecca for performing pilgrimage. Many members have cancelled, but Moni and Iman join Salma on her trip, which she decides to do by her car.

During this short trip, the three female characters (Salma, Moni, and Iman) search for answers to their struggles as religious females in the West. Salma finds herself torn between her endeavour to belong to a community where her four children were born and her longing for her roots and Egyptian identity. Salma's feelings are fueled by her former fiancé appearance in Egypt (Amir) as an allegory of her past. She finds herself facing a choice between stable family life and a return to a country that she believes she belongs to, where her dream of practising medicine can come true. In Scotland, Salma works as a massage therapist; because she failed to pass the professional practice exam that qualifies her to practice medicine. Moni is a Sudanese Muslim woman who finds herself turning from a successful and energetic bank employee into a wife and mother struggling to choose between obeying her husband and her family stability with him and the psychological and medical care required for her disabled son in Scotland. Iman is a traditional, beautiful, attractive Syrian in her twenties, who left behind her three unsuccessful marriages, and finds herself finally homeless without any qualifications for a decent life in a foreign liberal culture.

During the trip to the grave, Aboulela delves into these immigrants' psyche and sufferings. Their sufferings and feelings are intertwined with embracing their different cultural values in the West, such as the meaning of faith, freedom, responsibility and

belonging. These are the main issues that move the events and underline the drama among the three Muslim female characters who decided to go on the trip to the grave.

### 1. Post-Colonial Fashionable Egyptian Woman in the West between Emancipation and Belonging

"Maybe no one in the world really has a choice. Even men. If you're born in a certain place or a certain century, you just fell in line, and dress like everyone is dressing. The kind of clothes you would find in the shop."(Aboulela, *Bird Summons*, 184)

*Bird Summons* starts directly with a clash between the Eastern Muslim and Western cultures represented in the claimed "universal" Islamic values and practices versus Western secular ideals. The group members cancelled an arranged trip to the grave of the first British Muslim Lady Evelyn or Zainab Cobbold in Inverness. They reject to go on the trip after seeing a photo of the gravestone with its inscription of Quranic verse defaced:

The outrage held blown up right in her hands. One minute she was taking confirmations, collecting money… the photo was posted on the group page- a photo of the headstone broken off and the plaque bearing the Quranic verses of light crossed out. This was followed by a deluge of comments seemingly from all thirty six members of the group. Is that what u want our children to see? That u can be from the Scottish aristocracy, buried in the middle of nowhere and still the haters will get u". (2)

Furthermore, most group members doubted that Lady Evelyn could be considered one of them, objecting that Lady Evelyn did not wear a hijab or was in touch with the Muslim community. Thus, for them, her Islam is different from theirs.

After the initial anger, further doubts surfaced and were posted - why did not were hijab? Why wasn't she in touch with other Muslims? Sounds like eccentric Imperialistic no offence… then women started dropping out of the trip because their friends were dropping out or because their husbands discouraged them" (3).

As the narrative progresses, even the three practising Muslim characters disagree on the claimed "proper" Islamic dress and its relation to Muslim identity. Their stances,

feelings and attitudes are weaved into the narrative to deconstruct the stereotypical representation of oppressed, subservient monolithic Muslim women's identity.

Salma was born and brought up in a middle-class family in Egypt, where she studied medicine. She came to Britain with her convert Scottish husband, who was working in Egypt. Salma, the eldest among the three females and a mother of four children, "was the most stylish" (19). She wears a headscarf, but she is also obsessed with sport and her body shape. In Egypt, she played Tennis with Amir, and in Scotland, she did not stop working out even in open places, which embarrassed and confused some Muslim women like the overweight, relatively conservative Moni. Moni considered working out in an open area for headscarf wearer an improper behaviour, and it even reveals the influence of Western culture on their Islam. On watching Salma exercising in the forest:

> Moni was unmoved. Salma looked fit and sweety, emitting waves of heat. She put her bottle down and pushed herself forward, face down the grass, she started to do push up, Moni was vaguely impressed but felt somewhat embarrassed for her friend. Salma was acting Western. Sometimes, Moni did sense a gulf between them and became actively conscious that Salma had crossed a line Moni would never cross (102).

Associating headscarf wearers with specific expected actions would intensify when Moni asks Salma about her work as a massage therapist, which involves close physical contact with men. Salma replied that she consulted Muslim scholars on the matter; one of them allowed her work, and the other rejected her mingling with male strangers.

Salma said:" 'I asked two scholars...and they gave me different answers". Moni replied, "You got no answer first, I'll bet. Otherwise, you wouldn't have tried again' (149)".

Moni's expectation was correct since it seems that Salma decided to take the Islamic opinion that suits her situation and convictions better as the narrator says:

> Sama smiled.' that's what happened. But I work in a hospital, so I rarely had the bad experiences other therapists had. There are weirdos and perverts out there.'

> She sometimes felt that her hijab protected her, made her hazy and distant, further out of reach. The signals she sent out were muffled by clothes, obscured by layers, buried out of the way (149).

In this respect, Salma's headscarf has the power to signal that these women are not sexually available; the headscarf can turn the public sphere into desexualised" private sphere, challenging the rigid border between the public and private sphere in the West. El Guindi, explains the importance of wearing the hijab in the light of different perceptions of privacy in Islamic culture than those in other religions. She starts with defining privacy as "the need for individuals, families or other social groups, to separate themselves from others at various times, for certain well-defined activities." In this vein, EL Guindi argues, Islam considers sexuality a crucial part of human life, identifies a private space for sexuality and thus, public space should be desexualised" (Cf. Cotton 31-32). In line with the argument donning the veil is a part of its practitioners' historical and cultural identity and a commitment to their religious belief. Their pious choice is taken consciously in line with their spiritual worldview. Emma Tarlo, in her book *Visibly Muslim Fashion, Politics, Faith* (2010), an anthropological study on the meaning of the Islamic practice of hijab in contemporary London, maintains that the contemporary headscarf, in its modern styles, brings to the foreground the agency of the religious practice in the making of the self. She affirms that "for many women, the adoption of hijab transforms not only their sense of self but also their relationship to others and the wider environment". This also underlines "the agency of hijab in people's lives" (132). Here, according to Talro, the real and imagined impact of the veil matches what Alfred Gell describes as a secondary agency of objects, that is, "the capacity of artefacts which are the products of human agency to take on an agency in the lives of humans" (Tarlo 151).

The modification of an imagined universal modern public space and individual makes Salma, in her headscarf in its new style and ideology places herself in a hazy position.

Salma is not the assumed veiled Muslim entirely hidden in her domestic sphere or the unveiled modern woman. She claims a third space between the traditional Muslim conservative and Western secular spaces. Within this context, the movement of the diverse dressed bodies offers the possibility of re-evaluating the diverse identities. It is workplaces where these bodies, namely Muslims and non-Muslims, interact and negotiate their values with their diverse cultural identities. Aboulela says: "Often work, or a work location is a place which brings together people from different cultures and backgrounds. They work together and respect each other because of their skills and work ethics" (Kamal 9).

Ironically enough, the Muslim character Moni held the western view on Arab headscarf wearer as an ignorant and unqualified worker, an idea that Moni describes when she first meets the Salma in the hospital:

> The first time they met, Moni thought they were the same age. It was just another massage therapy appointment for Adam, but instead of Kathy or Anne, there was Salma in a plain navy headscarf that matched her uniform. When she spoke Arabic, Moni was won over, though she had to admit that, at first, she doubted Salma's abilities. Surely, Moni thought Salma would neither be as professional nor as qualified as her white British counterparts. But Salma was even better with Adam. She was patient and interested (Aboulela, *Bird Summons*, 30).

Here, it seems that Salma's reluctance to accept an anti-feminist Islamic opinion on her presence in the public sphere follows Mernissi's advice that all Muslim women should think for themselves and do not blindly follow an assumed timeless, universal valid male interpretation of Islamic texts or doctrine. Salma's decision to take the opinion that suits her feminist convictions reflects the attitude of a group of Muslims who are eager to rationalise life their belief to cope with their daily life needs in a secular society.

Moreover, one can argue that post-colonial Salma follows what Meriam Cook calls the "strategy of a double agent". This means resisting both patriarchal interpretations of qur'anic verses that reject mixing between Muslim women and male strangers and challenge the Western Orientalist image of Muslim headscarf wearers who are passive dependent on their men. The stylish Salma endeavours to accommodate both the modern feminist ideals lifestyle and her Islamic values, "asserting and balancing multiple overlapping and sometimes contradictory allegiances" (Cooke, *Women Claim Islam through Literature*, 107).

Salma is even introduced to the reader as a strong independent woman, who is not afraid to go on her chosen path alone. Therefore, she is not ready to be" stopped or coward by the Arabic Speaking Muslim women's Group" (Aboulela, *Bird Summons*, 3). The group members refuse to join her on her trip, but she insists on going on the trip. According to Salma, a group leader "forged ahead without the need of followers" (3). Furthermore, even the two female characters who joined Salma relied on her in one way or another. Moni felt "beholden to Salma for all the help with Adam's condition, and when the other women in the group started pulling out of the trip, she had decided to express solidarity with her ". Iman is "like a devoted, much younger sister" to Salma (3).

The novel even takes the reader back to Egypt when Salma was a university student. Salma is an active student who can participate freely in the public sphere's activity. She goes on trips and organises them. Nevertheless, the reader is shocked by Salma's inability to accept Iman's free decision to take off her headscarf. Iman started doubting all her convictions after being dumped by her chauvinist possessive Muslim husband and seeing varieties of female's dresses of different historical periods in the closet

where she stayed. Salma takes Iman's decision as rejecting her friendship. The narrator says:

> When Iman took off her hijab, Salma took it personally, as if Iman was rejecting her, turning away towards another ideal, ditching all that they had shared. Alone, she found herself in tears, shocked and speechless, as if betrayed (189).

Salma's response to Iman's decision is two-fold. Firstly, it brings to the fore the discussion on the headscarf as a symbol of Muslim women's solidarity in societies where Muslims are a minority. When Iman took off the headscarf, which Salma regarded as the marker of their Islamic cultural identity, Iman turns from the Muslim sister into one who resembles of the Scottish unveiled women. According to Salma, Iman now belongs to the other side. Iman leaves her otherness as a Muslim headscarf wearer and all the vulnerability that comes with it and secure a safer space for herself. "The special aura of vulnerability and preciousness that had surrounded her was gone. She was another glossy, wind-tousled head of hair, bland and common (191)".

Through Salma's reaction to Iman decision to take off her headscarf, Aboulela shows that although the headscarf, despite its diverse forms, is considered a potential marker of Muslim women's "Otherness" in their Western diaspora, it also reflects the strength and solidarity of the whole Muslim community in the West. Salma thus loses Iman's solidarity, which seems Salma's ideology to face her internal feelings of marginalisation, loneliness, and inferiority. She feels inferior to the British people as a woman who comes from the "backwards" East. Salma's faith, as a manifestation of her cultural identity, could raise her self-esteem.

> Salma felt that she was embarrassing David in front of his own people, though he never reproached her … she didn't want him to be ashamed of her, to feel that he had picked her up from the back of beyond, and so she became more careful, often not at ease. No matter how many clients she massaged and nor matter that she had given birth to children with Scottish blood, deep down his people would think that she was not really one of them, that she was not British enough(42).

Thus, feeling that she had been left alone, Salma turns to her assumed certain safe symbolised in her former fiance with whom she secretly flirts via social media.

> Careful to avoid Iman even in the cottage, she found herself turning more towards Amir, towards their shared past, a time of certainties and hopes. The regret that she had married David and moved to Britain began to gather into an emotion, almost a fact. She had made a mistake. Amir was her ideal mate, her home city, the true beloved (190).

In this respect, one can argue that the Islamic clothing styles, represented in the headscarf, is not a simple piece of clothes; rather, it considers a source of Salma's empowerment and security outside the various secular feminist forms available to her in the West where she feels inferior as a female coming from a previous British colony.

Furthermore, Salma's reaction to taking off the headscarf is based on a conservative discourse that re-emerged in Arab Muslim societies even among the educated middle-class women starting from the 1970s. This discourse regards the unveiled woman as sexually available immoral women who are eager to tempt other men, as discussed by Fatima Mernissi in chapter II. In this respect, Salma ponders the possibility of going further with a close relationship with her homeless attractive, unveiled friend.

> Without her hijab, did Salma really want Iman in close proximity to David? In the past, it would have been easy to joke,' Gorgeous, keep away from my husband,' now it wasn't. And yet, she would insist that Iman moved in with them. It was the right thing to do. The poor girl had nowhere else (203).

Indeed, head-covering is still women's card to gain respect even in most liberal Muslim societies today, even wearing makeup and attractive tight-fitting trousers, skirts, or dresses. Within this context, Salma is struggling to discard the idea that Iman's character changes because she took off her hijab:

> Salma could not hide the nervousness from her voice. She reminded herself that Iman was the same person, with or without her hijab; nothing had changed, nothing could change. She needed reassurance (206).

Thus, even if Salma does not comment on her choice to wear the headscarf in contemporary urban Cairo before leaving for Britain, one can understand her choice to wear the headscarf without discarding her desire to be "stylish" and active independent in the public space. It seems that her choice is taken within the dominant social norms and conventions.

All in all, this means that even Salma's representation, as fashionable headscarf wearers in her patriarchal social environment could subvert patriarchal attitude towards women in the public sphere, it still implies that those women assert themselves only within a specific prescribed role assigned to them by men, while not allowed to step beyond them. Nonetheless, what urges us to agree with Seba Mahmood's argument (2005) is that Islamic females' forms of moral subjectivity and embodied spirituality have to be read beyond the claimed universal Western notion of emancipation. This Western notion entails binaries of resistance/subordination. Therefore, rather than seeing Salma's Islamic clothing styles and faith through the Western narrative about Muslim female subordination to the patriarchal values, one must consider the broader socio-political context in which Salma's agency is taken.

Aboulela even moves beyond the technique of writing back to the Western discourse on headscarf wearers. She acknowledges the presence of oppressed subservient uneducated Muslim headscarf wearers through the depiction of Iman, who will find and achieve her emancipation only in a Western liberal society. Iman's decision to stop wearing the headscarf comes from the realisation that the hijab and different dress forms have always been decided for her in her patriarchal social environment, even when she was married in Britain. She starts questioning all that she embraces. She asks herself:

> Why I dress the way I dress? Because that's how my mother dressed and the women in the village. Or that's my husband of the time wanted me to dress. Each one had an opinion. The first wanted me to wear these long, loose abayas or plain coats. The second thought I should lighten up and wear trousers and colours, not attract attention to myself. Then Ibrahim encouraged me to copy you, Salma, and we started to go shopping together. There was never time to think, what I wanted to wear and why? Well, I've made my decision ...from now on, I will stop wearing a hijab. That's it. I will take my headscarf off (183).

Iman discards her headscarf and also grows up to declare her independence and autonomy. Salma describes this transformation in Iman's character, saying that she: "now came and went without telling her(Salma), without urging her (Salma) to join her, without checking up first what she wanted to do" (190).

But, unlike the Western tradition that followed the female's journey from Islam into secularity in the West, Iman does not reject Islam as her belief, rather the practices that she believes were forced on her, and this was accepted in the end by her Muslim practising friends. "Iman had grown up. She wore maturity like a cape, and it was the best piece of clothing she had ever put on" (261). The diverse new experience impacted the feelings and attitudes of Salma and Iman. Yet it still the West that offers them, to use Hassan words in a similar context, "a critical interrogation of their feeling of identity vacillation and creates a useful framework for thinking about their religious observances, which eventually helps to conceptualise and articulate their sense of Belonging" (Hassan, *Seeking Freedom in the 'Third Space*, 89).

In their liberal Western environment, Iman and Salma reflect on their religious identity born in response to social and socio-economic circumstances. They turn from institutional and socio-political Islam that is forced on them into a spiritual Islam that is not bound either by a geographical space or by individuals' appearance. This reflection seems to reach a stage of negotiating a third space. This third space springs from a new identity layer that endeavour to rid itself of the oppressive patriarchal practices

and appreciate a feminist liberal attitude without renouncing their belief in Islam. One can argue that this understanding and transition deconstruct the binarism between the claimed Muslim headscarf wearers and non-Muslim unveiled women.

## 2. Emancipated Practicing Egyptian Woman and a White Muslim Man between Orientalization and De-Colonization

The relationship between men and women in Islam is at the heart of *Bird Summons*. Aboulela utlizes Salma's husband character vis-à-vis her former Egyptian Fiancee Amir and other Arab Muslim male characters to subvert the notion of Eastern masculinity on the one hand and to resist the Orientalist depiction of Islam and women on the other hand. David is a Muslim European convert introduced to the reader as a kind, devoted and supportive husband to his Muslim wife and children. The novel starts with describing David's kindness towards Salma before leaving for her trip to the grave:

"'He's so sweet'... Last night, he had hugged her as she was packing her suitcase, pressed his palm against her lower stomach and had felt pleased that it was flat" (7).

Salma describes him as a loyal and responsible husband not only towards his daughter, whom he supported to choose her study for herself instead of studying medicine as her mother wishes. He also is the one Salma's trusted to help with Iman's dilemma after being left by her irresponsible and chauvinist Arab Muslim husband.

> She could rely on him to be supportive and, that was even impressive; David was the only man Salma knew who was immune to Iman's beauty. This normally fascinated her and boosted her self-esteem. ` Iman needs to become more independent. He texted back straight anyway. 'She needs to get a job or else a reliable husband. Someone who can be trusted '(55).

Iman represented a stereotypical Muslim woman who was forced to leave school and married off at fifteen. Her first husband died in the uprising against the Assad regime.

Her second husband, who brought her to Scotland, was jailed because of acting violently, while her third husband, Ibrahim, came from a conservative family. He came to study in Scotland, where he suffered from "homesickness and culture shock" (33). Her marriage to Ibrahim was the solution prescribed for him by the mosque's imam. He marries Iman secretly without his family's consent. When his parents knew, Ibrahim could not refuse their order to divorce his wife, Iman.

> Iman was Ibrahim's saviour. The one who meets all his needs so that he could settle and study. And he was her saviour too. Dumped by husband...who ends up in prison and divorced her as a courtesy), she had been unsure what to do next,   how to proceed (34).

The novel describes how Iman relied financially on her husband Ibrahim.

> Every morsel she put in her mouth, every piece of clothing, was provided for her by Ibrahim. The rent, the gas, the internet. She did not have to beg, borrow or steal. She did not need to get up at the crack of dawn, take orders from a line manager or clean up other people's homes. Instead, she was as pampered as a racehorse and as busy as geisha(34).

Nonetheless, despite being so generous with his wife, Ibrahim is also described as a lustful husband who needs his wife near him mainly for his sexual needs. Iman described his reaction when she pleaded with him to go on the trip with Salma. He said: "I can't bear you out of my sight, what am I going to do?' he wailed in his boxers shorts, punching pillows and slamming the door "(34).

In this context, Aboulela explicitly brings the heating debate on marriage in many Muslim societies where men work and support women financially in return for their needs. Iman describes this relationship as a form of "the religiously sanctioned prostitution. In this relationship: "Man pay and women serve. He houses, clothes and feeds her to get something in return. So what was the difference between the two? (35)". Nevertheless, later, Iman realizes that it is love is the solution to change the form of the relationship between man and woman:

> Put love in the equation. He gives because he loves her and would give regardless of whether services were rendered or not; she gives because she loves him and would keep giving even if he didn't pay. Or they both give and receive in a flow generated by love with neither one keeping tabs, with neither one viewing the relationship as a transaction (72).

However, the question that poses itself here is: is it possible to find love marriage in such a socio-economic context, where the women expect rich partners that can afford marriage costs and average young men can't afford it? The answer can be implied in Salma's case. The educated middle-class Salma was in a romantic relationship with Amir during their university years, but their love story did not end happily. Salma was unable to convince her family to wait for Amir until he affords marriage costs. Salma's mother insisted that Amir should go further with official engagement, but he excused that his family undergoes financial difficulty and his mother is ill at the moment, and thus he is not ready to take such a step in such circumstances. Salma's mother was sceptical about his seriousness concerning marriage plans and convinced Salma to stop contacting him. Salma recounts this situation, saying:

> My mother listened to all that Amir had to say, but she seemed sceptical. She said he should go ahead anyway and speak to my father. He said he wouldn't do that behind his parent's back. She said how about sending an aunt or an uncle as a substitute for his parents. He said he wouldn't feel comfortable doing that. She started to get annoyed. She felt he wasn't cooperating enough, was not flexible. She was generous; she was giving him a chance. He was a student without a penny, and after graduation, he still had three years of military service to complete. She wanted him to make an effort. He, though, felt that she wasn't sympathetic. I sat there between barely getting a word in (105).

In Egypt, marriage costs include mainly the home and furniture, usually the groom's responsibility. A study conducted in Egypt in 2007 shows that increasing education and migrating to the cities play a significant role in turning towards living independently at marriage and forsaking the family- buildings. Another study shows that 77% of couples who married during 2007-2011 constituted nuclear household at the start of their marriage instead of 63% during the period from 2000 to 2005 (Salem 7). A prospective

groom has to secure a good "prestigious" job that enables him to secure the marriage costs, which hinders the average young male even if they already have a stable job. In Egypt, Economists claim that housing is "estimated to constitute 38% of total marriage costs and furniture and appliances include an additional 30% of costs".These costs amount to eight years of savings of average wages in Egypt. These economic circumstances play a pivotal role in delaying marriage age, particularly among men, and therefore widen the gap between the spouses in contemporary Egypt (Assaad et al. 3).

In *Bird Summons*, one can follow the aforementioned economic impact regarding accepting David's marriage proposal. Unlike Amir, David, who worked for an international British Company in Egypt, had a "good position with nice flat and car" (104), and Salma was suggested for him as a Muslim wife by one of her father's friends.

Her marriage was accepted first by her family. The arranged marriage of Salma implies that the family still interferes in female's decisions even if these Muslim women are highly educated. In this context, the novel highlights how a group of Muslim women are ready to sacrifice love marriage for a conventional arranged stable marriage in such a socio-economic circumstance that did not allow sexual relationship outside the institution of marriage and marriage costs is still a considerable hindrance for young grooms.

Salma's character still resists both Eastern and Western representations of Muslim women regarding gender relations in the public sphere. In Egypt, Salma is not a passive woman in a patriarchal society; instead, she participates in public sphere activities. She was in a conscious, continuous state of negotiating pressures, borders, and responsibilities as a Muslim woman in a conservative social environment.

She compares her authority before getting married in Egypt to that after marrying David. The narrator says:

> When she was young, holidays meant days on the beach, sticky sand and the roar of the Mediterranean. They also meant increased parental interference and telling off...Then, in university, there were trips with the Beloved club. Sometimes she would be so involved in organisation that the trip would pass her...Afterwards, she could not remember what they had seen or experienced exactly; she had been too busy, caught up with assessing whether her authority had been challenged or whether she had taken the correct decisions" (69).

In contrast, David is introduced as the white enlightened kind man "saving" the brown Salma from her harsh, poor and patriarchal milieu.

> It was meeting David that changed her, he took away most, if not all, of her anxieties, her sporadic harshness towards others and herself. With him, she softened and learnt to enjoy those things that were essentially meant to be pleasurable but had descended into sources of stress (69).

Salma compares her authority in the public sphere with her former Egyptian fiance, Amir, and her British husband, David. Even if they are both highly educated, the relationship between Amir and Salma reflects the patriarchal culture that men have to show that they are better than women; otherwise, their ego is shattered. For instance, when dating Amir, Salma had to be careful not to hurt his ego by showing/ pretending that he is better than her even in tackling simple tasks.

> He always had to take the lead, pay the bill and decide what we did. When his allowance from his dad ran out at the end of the month, I had to pretend that I was unwell and that I didn't want to go out, so as not to embarrass him. Amir was like that, and If I opened a juice bottle he couldn't open or get a better grade than him in a test, he would sulk for hours...That was their pattern, what came naturally to them both - she did the legwork and the research so that they could brainstorm and fumble towards a decision in which he would have the final word (109,132).

In contrast, with David Salma felt free of such a psychological load. She says:

> I started buying the tickets and speaking to the waiters. He wouldn't say a word. He let me haggle and bring the price down as I used to doing. It made me feel

important...What I wanted mattered. What I wanted I got. He even stood up to my parents and took my side (109).

In the quotation above, Aboulela complicates the concept of a "White man saves a brown woman" through marriage. The scene depicts Salma, who leads the white man and does things better than him without him feeling insulted. Moreover, even though David supports Salma to get what she wants, Salma is not a passive, silent Muslim female; instead, she can voice her wishes and desires to her parents. David was also admired by Iman and Moni, who acknowledge his difference from the Eastern men:

David was a Scottish convert, and that meant that she was treated better by him than her friends who were married to Arab, African, or Asian men. David gave her all the freedom she wanted. He respected her opinions. He shared all the household tasks (10).

In this context, *Bird Summons* can be read as Aboulela's attempt to write back to the Western discourse on Islam as an oppressive religion versus the liberal benevolent secular / Christian West. *Bird Summons* presents the western convert David as a representation of a real Islam that is free from the oppressive traditions and values practised in the Eastern Islamic societies. Aboulela distinguishes between culture and religion, challenging the Orientalist discourse that depicts Islam as the main reason behind women's oppression and subordination to their Muslim men. Through the kind, loyal, and devoted convert David, Aboulela follows the Western tradition of depicting Eastern Muslim men as cruel chauvinists versus a rational, responsible white man. Thus, Aboulela's representation follows Mernissi´s argment that Arabs dominate their women and not Islam. This depiction saves Islam but is still problematic since she turns what Keshavarz calls the "Islamization of wickedness" and Westernisation of goodness" (Keshavarz119) into "Arabization of backwardness vis-à-vis Westernisation of goodness" that is based mainly on the disintegration of the culture and the corrupted Atabs and not the true Islam.

## 3. Toward a Post- Secular Multicultural Society

*Bird Summons* ends with the three Muslim female characters' rejection to return to their Arab Muslim countries, unlike Aboulela's previous fictional protagonists. In her novel *The Translator* (1999), Samar returned to Sudan, and she was joined by the British convert Rea. Also, her *Novel Minaret* (2005) ends with the return of Najwa from England to Mecca. Through the heroines' return to their Arab Muslim societies, Aboulela presents these Arab Muslim societies as a valid cultural model of living in contemporary modern society, instead of Western society as the universal and only admired lifestyle. Moreover, Aboulela challenges the Western literary representation that claimed universal linear progress of history, which tends to emancipate non-Western Muslim characters by liberating them from their religious values and embracing secular values in modern liberal Western societies.

In contrast, *Bird Summons* introduces a new vision of Muslims' attitude towards Western culture in light of the current ideological conflicts and political and economic turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa after the 2011 uprisings. The three fictional characters rejected a return to their Muslim countries and decided to remain in the West without renouncing their belief in Islam. Moni refused to go with her husband, Mortada, to Saudi Arabia and then to Sudan; she believes people there cannot accept her son and his disability as people in Scotland do. Moni convinces her husband to come and live with her in Scotland. Also, Iman remains alone without a family or shelter, but her family urges her not to return to Syria, where a civil war is still ongoing. She decides to start a new life alone without relying on her Muslim friend and mentor Salma or only on her femininity. Iman will fight to find work after improving her language and to bring her mother from Syria to Scotland for a visit.

*Bird Summons* ends with the main character, Salma, reaches Lady Evelyn's tomb, and she is also the only one who reached it. Salma was torn between her Egyptian culture and identity and Britain, where her husband and children live. Slama was "the one who struggled. She left her country and followed David, she had run after Amir's red T-shirt, she was tired and bitter" (260). Salma, realizes that she has to appreciate her husband, her children and herself as an independent, educated Muslim woman in the West. She liberates herself from the idea that she belongs only to Egypt as an Egyptian Muslim woman. Salma became convinced that she will live like other Muslims in Britain, not bound by geography or place of birth. Salma's journey was a journey of self-discovery, and she chooses to be part of British society. She wants to reach the tomb to learn about the "history of Islam in Britain, to integrate better by following the example of those who were of this soil and their faith, those for whom this island was an inherited rather than adopted home "(1).

In a symbolic scene towards the end, Aboulela deploys a form of magical realism to draw a picture of a multicultural society where Muslims and non-Muslims help one another and live together peacefully. In the scene, Salma's Christain mother-in-law rescues her from her imagined distant past in Egypt, which Salma chased through the character of Amir. Salma chasing journey of the past ends in her disappointment and exhaustion. She finds herself put on Amir's operation table in his hospital. There, Salma was left alone, unable to move. Salma is rescued by Norma, who appears in her 1960s haircut and dress. Although Norma helps Salma get out of her distant past, she does not tell Salma which path to go. The return to the 1960s style is symbolic in the scene. It can be interpreted as a symbol of the period before the discourse of the clash of civilizations. Even if the imperial discourse emphasized a universal path to modernity that defended secular modernity during this period, it seems that Aboulela reconsiders this view through her Western fictional character.

Norma looked down at her.' you poor thing', she said. She dressed Salma, and then she pushed the bed. She pushed it through the clinic and down the streets. She pushed it across the whole city. Salma dozed and cried, she rambled about how she comes to him with desire, and he had greeted her with a surgical scalpel. When she remembered who was helping her, she said, thank you, thank you.

'You helped me too', said Norma.' you've always been kind.' Salma couldn't remember what she has ever done for Norma. Nothing special, nothing to be proud of. A free massage once in a while, taking an interest in her aches and pains. Nothing more. perhaps that is what counted at the end, the actions one considered small and casual, not the big of self -righteousness" (245)

Following the same argument, the above mentioned scene introduces characters who are not proving one true good religion versus the wrong, bad religion. Salma is introduced as a benevolent Muslim daughter-in-law who takes care of her old Christian mother – in law. They lead a peaceful relationship based on their daily human interactions with one another beyond their beliefs. In such a multicultural peaceful society, individuals are appreciated based on their active participation in the society through work and the services they do to one another.

Furthermore, the novel deconstructs the argument that supposes a homogenous Muslim East versus homogeneous Western Secular / Christian West. In *Bird Summons*, we are introduced to historical and fictional characters that endorse multifaceted identities and celebrate a multicultural society. The Aristocratic Lady Evelyn's willingly converted to Islam without leaving England for a Muslim country. Lady Evelyn was the daughter of the 7th Earl of Dunmore, widow of John Dupuis Cobbold. She spent her childhood in Algier and Cairo, and it was during this period that Islam's spirituality penetrated her soul as she writes:

These feelings come out unplanned when a Pope asked her reply rose sincere... I am a Muslim," and where had that come from?

From her childhood in Algiers and Cairo, the kindly servants who bowed to Allah alone and not to her parents, the murmur of their prayers, the sound of the azan floating through the window...all that she had absorbed. But her experience was

not unusual for the colonial child. As a teenager, she had written in a poem,' I felt his presence within and around' but this in itself was not an explanation either. Perhaps it was, as she described, the weird cadence of the Muzzin's cry. Maybe that sound went in and lodged itself years after she came home, her home (275).

The novel shows that Salma became inspired by Lady Evelyn's faith that sticks to the individual faith behind "atmosphere or organised religion... where there were simplicity and balance. Not the indulgence of the secluded life, neither the gratification of services nor the voluptuousness of identity" (274). Salma's character grows to accept Iman's right to the free choice of clothing style without abandoning her faith. Salma appreciates her faith that stresses her individuality. One can read Salma's new attitude towards the practice of head-covering, her Islamic identity, and her place in Western liberal culture in light of Stuart Hall's notion of the multi-fasted identity. Hall argues against the notion of an essentialist model of identity.

According to Stuart Hall in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1996), identity is connected to representation, making it constant construction and reconstruction. He defines identity as an invention "never complete, always in process, and always constituted within…representation" (Hall 222). This perspective means that identity construction is influenced by both subjective internal and external social forces, namely, the process of self-reflection and social and political circumstances. This understanding of identity acknowledges the multifaceted, dynamic and negotiable feature of identity is also compatible with theories that affirm the dialogic nature of culture and challenges the claimed fixed boundaries between different cultures, particularly in the post-colonial context. In this vein, one can also read this identity in light of Homi Bhabha's theory of "hybrid "post-colonial identity in his seminal collection of essays, *The Location of Culture* (1994). According to Bhabha, due to the encounter between the Eastern and Western cultures, the post-colonial emergent hybrid identity

is situated in a state of in-between colonised (Eastern) and coloniser (Western). According to Bhabha, the third space guarantees the post-colonial emergent identity a space to represent a counter-hegemonic agency; since the hybrid identity can maintain a negotiation space. This continuing negotiation between Eastern and Western cultures enables new positions to emerge. Their emergent identity does not follow the post-colonial secular third space. I argue that a group of Muslim women's feminist attitude can be grounded in a more extended version of feminism that includes religion's commitments as integral to their Muslim identity in a secular age, particularly Muslim women in the West where the religious aspect of their identity is highlighted over their nationalism. In this context, I argue that to dismantle the Eurocentric discourse of Muslim headscarf wearers in the West, one should not separate women's activism from their historical, cultural experiences and the context they live in and remain open to the continuous potentiality of constructing and reconstructing their identities. Therefore, I argue that the protagonists' decision to stay in Britain is not a call to assimilate into Western society. Instead, it stresses the severe economic and socio-political circumstances that hindered a return to the country of origin on the one hand, and it offers an attempt to celebrate the multicultural nature of the society in an age when immigration is an actual reality that cannot be denied.

Over all, I argue that *Bird Summons* celebrates a multicultural society where Muslims and non-Muslims live together without the dominance of one religion and "othering" other different religions, as depicted in Orientalist literary texts that adopted conversion to depict the clash of civilisations and the ideological conflict between Islam and the West. Unlike the Orientalist representation that has been historically shaped by political agendas and ideological assumptions that reflect the political conflict between Islam and the West, Aboulela chooses to represent ordinary Muslims who are not interested in politics. In her text, one can see this argument in the absence of depicting the war

of terror or conflict between Political Islam and the West, which is common in contemporary literary texts and discourse on Muslim women in the West.

In summery, in this chapter, I have attempted to examine the diverse meanings of dressing the body of Egyptian post-colonial women in Aboulela's literary texts *Lyrics Alley* and *Bird Summons*, using a socio-cultural approach. The question of dress is explicitly discussed by the fictional characters, particularly the practice of head-covering. The language of clothes expresses the characters' gender, class, ethnic and ideological affiliations.

Following Aboulela's representation of Egyptian women and their changing attitude towards dress, this chapter does not imply that the stereotypical representation of Egyptian headscarf wearers does not necessarily contradict Muslim women's actual situation in various Islamic or Arab worlds. Instead, it argues that this narrative does not pay much attention to the socio-cultural and political circumstances behind post-colonial Egyptian women's choices to wear or not to wear head-covering. Secondly, a female head-covering does not have a monolithic static meaning; rather, it varies according to the social and political contexts.

In *Lyrics Alley,* Aboulela urges both the Arab Muslim and Western audience to be aware of the constraints put upon Muslim women because of the entanglement between religious, social norms and cultural identity discourse. She illustrates how the Western dress (for both men and women) implies diverse psychological feelings and meanings. We cannot reduce dress merely to the symbol of women's emancipation versus subordination. Following the same line of thought, *Bird Summons* does not merely challenge Muslim women's stereotypical images in post-colonial literature by reversing them; instead, Aboulela changes the discourse by digging deep into Muslims' feelings and psychology. She aims to highlight the reasons behind accepting or

negating Islam or its values in different socio-economic and political contexts by weaving diverse Muslim women's stories with their different backgrounds. Doing so, Aboulela avoids reproducing the Orientalist overgeneralization that imagined a monolithic Western cultural identity vis-à-vis an Eastern cultural identity.Instead, Aboulela's texts offer a space for a dialogic nature of cultures that celebrates multifaceted hybrid identities and diverse experiences in today's globalised societies.

## Conclusion

Dressing the body reflects how social groups interact concerning gender, religious and class borders in different socio-economic and political circumstances. Following this argument, I attempted to look at Egyptian Muslim women's changing attitude towards clothing style, feminist quest and practising faith in light of the political and socio-economic shifts, focusing on the encounter between Egyptian Muslim culture and Western secular modernity. Before the nineteenth century colonial encounter, although Egyptian Muslim women did not keep modesty rules or were relegated to the domestic, feminine sphere all the time, they were subjected to religious and political decrees that used religion to curb women's presence and attractive appearance in the public sphere.  For instance, around 1000, a royal decree banned all women from appearing in the public sphere. Al- Hakim, the ruler of Egypt, claimed that the decree intended to implement "proper" Islam and another decree was issued after a serial of plagues that struck Egypt during the fifteenth century.  Religious scholars argued that women´s "improper" dress and behaviours in the public sphere caused the rage of God to manifest itself in the plagues.  Egyptian Muslim woman's status, thus, contrasts the Mideaval European travellers' accounts and romantic literature that depict a Muslim woman as a strong, sexually liberated, knowledgeable female protagonist vis-a-vis the "good "obedient sexually conservative Christian European women. Moreover, in these Western medieval texts, there is no reference to the practice of veiling as an oppressive Islamic clothing style. In this context, I argued that the medieval Western depiction of Muslim women did not necessarily reflect Muslim / Egyptian women's actual situation during this period.  Moreover, Muslim women's image in Western texts tended primarily to serve the ideological thought and the cultural conflict between the West and Muslim

societies. This argument manifested itself in the 19th-century discourse on the practice of veiling in the public sphere that came in line with their colonial interests in the region.

Chapter III attempted to follow the gradual but radical social changes starting from the 19th-century colonial encounter and modernizing Egyptian society. I argued that embracing modern values concerning gender relations and women's status in the public sphere was not firstly encouraged or supported by the state during this period. Nonetheless, upper-class feminists started to push for gender equality and women's rights in the public sphere starting from the first half of the twentieth century. This feminist endeavour focused on women's education, work, and changing laws concerning polygamy. Nevertheless, gender equality was under the control of the state's political orientation and the religious institution, Al-Azhar, and their attitude towards Muslim women's place in the public sphere, as I discussed regarding Doria Shafik's struggle for women's right to work, vote and election during the assumed liberal age (1923-1956).

In this vein, I argued that during the first half of the 20th century, we still find that the fashionable Westernized clothes Egyptian women chose to wear or were encouraged to wear did not necessarily reflect gender equality, women's sexual emancipation or deconstruct the class system in Egypt. Instead, women's dress identified women as either upholder of the dominant social norms supported by the religio-political discourse and thus respectable, or challengers of the dominant socio-political discourse and thus subversive and have to be punished and excluded. Two central feminist figures manifest the argument above: the upper-class urban Huda Shaarawi and Doria Shafik. While Shaarawi upheld and represented her upper-class values that reflected the prevailing political views, the elegant, educated middle-class feminist, Shafik transgressed her class and cultural borders and challenged her society's

dominant political views. As a result, whilst Shaarawi has been celebrated as the Egyptian feminist movement leader and nationalist icon, Shafik, who stood against all discriminating cultural forms was silenced and excluded from the public sphere and discussions. Shafik ended up committing suicide.

Starting from 1970s practicing religion has been in a constant transformation process due to economic and political circumstances. Egyptian women became under the dominance of the anti-Western identity discourse, a conservative religious discourse, the increasing poverty in society and widespread consumer culture. These forces brought about a new attitude towards piety, female dress and women's position in the public sphere. Egyptian Muslim females eager to participate in education and work in a conservative social environment started to wear modest long loose robes, long skirts, and long sleeve blouses combined with colourful head-gears during the 1970s, particularly among students from rural backgrounds.

During the following decades, Egyptian Muslim women's dress and headscarf would witness what Mona Abaza calls a "gentrification" process, reflecting the widespread consumer culture due to new economic policies that introduced a whole set of new values to a society whose members became increasingly concerned with appearance. The rise of conspicuous consumerism became necessary for social mobility in a society where individuals' superiority is not guaranteed through birthright but by displaying one's wealth and prestige. This new consumer culture encouraged all social classes and groups, including religious individuals, to display their social status through their dress. This wave was also supported by the unmissable impact of globalisation and the state's feminist programs.

The well-off religious-oriented women indulge themselves in products and lifestyles that reflect the Gulf states´ culture. They wear loose long, expensive dresses and

headscarves and augmented their looks with gold jewellery. The Wealthy secularized elite continue consuming expensive Western products.  In this class, unveiled women wear mini-skirts, skimpy blouses, tight jeans and makeup. Another emerging cultural identity between these two dominant cultural views encompasses the ordinary educated Egyptian women and girls. Those girls endeavoured to design a style that suits their conservative social milieu and the dominant consumer culture.  They wear the headscarf as a social and cultural marker, but they are not necessarily religiously motivated.  Their dress is in its imitation of the fashionable Western sexy dress despite wearing the headscarf.   Those girls use the freedom to consume to challenge the gendered and class borders in contemporary Egypt.  Following this line of thought,I argue that post-Nasser consumerist fashionable ordinary headscarf wearers whose feminism is not confined by feminist organizations are feminists in practice. Their fashionable Islamic dress challenges diverse forms of pressure because of their gender, class, and race in contemporary post-colonial Egypt. Those women choose to fully engage in fashion and consumer culture that is allegedly reserved for the Westernized elite without renouncing their religious belief or their right to participate in the assumed masculine Muslim public sphere. Their feminist attitude can be read as a hybrid model of modern secular culture and traditional religiosity, and this attitude is a fluid attitude contingent upon the intersection of historical, political, and socioeconomic factors. Their new attitude and appearance challenge the definition that puts "Muslim feminism "as an opposite to 'western feminism and the imperial/ colonial narrative that defines clear boundaries between the categories "Islamic East" and "secular West".

**Dress and Women's Body in Egypt: A look into the Future**

Ordinary educated Egyptian women and girls became vigilant to diverse forms of oppression in their society represented in patriarchal social norms and class system.

Encouraged by the revolutionary feminist spirit after 2011, local Egyptian feminists communities and ordinary women became critical and vocal of the oppressive forces in the society. They use mainly social media, which provided an unprecedented platform for introducing diverse female voices from diverse socio-economic, religious and geographical backgrounds. These feminist voices counter and deconstruct the hegemonic male elite's patriarchal discourse that manipulates traditional media such as television, school, and mosques. One can refer to the recent debates incited by what has been known in the media as "TikTok girls ".

In April 2020, the police launched a crackdown on female social media influencers on the accusation of posting what the court called "indecent" videos of themselves on the Chinese application TikTok. In these short video clips, ordinary Egyptian females of diverse ages, social classes appeared lip-syncing to popular Arabic songs. The Public Prosecutor ordered the detention of many of those girls. The most famous girls among them are Haneen Hossam and Mawadda Al-Adham.  Al- Adham is a 22 years old university student. She got the title of Egypt's Miss Teenage in 2015. At the age of 19, Al-Adham left her family home to live independently.  The ambitious girl wanted to earn money and become famous through modelling brands on different social media platforms. Al- Adham is followed by more than three million followers on Tik Tik and 1.6 million on Instagram. Al-Adham's daring, revealing clothing style subjected her to fierce public criticism, and the prosecutors accused her of wearing "indecent" clothes and act in a way that violates Egyptian family values.

Hossam is a 21 years old university student. She is a social media influencer, followed by 1.2 million on social media. In her videos, she appears wearing a headscarf, fashionable tight-fitting clothes, and heavy makeup. In these short videos, she was lip-syncing and moving her hands with the music. Advertising the app, Hossam called other Egyptian girls to join her and post their videos on TikTok to earn money online.

Hossam was arrested on accusation of violating family principles and Egyptian society values and inciting immorality. Hossam was accused of declaring through her accounts on social media to hold "immoral" meetings by inviting both girls and boys to hold video chats in return for fees determined by the number of followers of these chats on the social networking application called "Likee". Hossam denied these allegations.

The Cairo Economic Court sentenced Haneen Hossam, Mawadda Al-Adham and three others to two years in prison and a fine of 300,000 pounds each. Furthermore, on August 18, 2020, the Cairo Criminal Court upheld a decision to seize Al-Adham and Hossam's funds. In addition, even though Hossam's and Al-Adham's sentences were commuted and released on January 13, 2021, the Cairo Criminal Court punished Hossam with ten years in prison in absentia and sentenced Al-Adham and three others to 6 years in prison and a fine of 200,000 pounds at the June 20 hearing.

On June 21, Hossam appeared in a video without wearing a headscarf and makeup, crying but defiant. She recounts what happened to her during her trials and said that she challenged the judges for not listening to her complaint that she had not done anything wrong. Hossam addresses the judge, asking,

> What did I do wrong? You are sentencing me to ten years because I wore a headscarf and tight-fitting clothes in a video! Does my look in the videos insulted the public opinion! Whom exactly did I heart in the society! If my look and movements in these videos violate the family laws, why are you punishing me only! What about all those TV stars and upper-class women wearing their

> Bikinis, dancing and singing and post their videos in return for money on the same  application! (Hossam, My translation).

Inside Egypt, The TikTok girls' detention incited a public debate on the street and the social media platforms. These debates attracted women and men from diverse age groups, geographical and socio-economic backgrounds. The reaction varies between praising the state's interference and these heavy sentences as a warning for all young girls and females who dare explicitly challenge social norms and the public perception of morality. On the other hand, many feminists and human rights activists criticize these sentences and argue that they tend to restrict freedom of speech and attack women based on their gender.   The founder and executive director of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, Mohamed Lotfy says, "Like many social media influencers around the globe, she used TikTok to speak her mind, express herself and encourage other girls to make money from the popular social platform...Prosecutors have taken it upon themselves to be the guardians of morality and family values, but no one has ever defined these values". Lotfy criticized Hossam's re-arrest and affirmed that the accusations against Hossam by the prosecutor were "false." He states to Al-Monitor that Hossam was released on an accusation of violating family was, but her re-arrest was because of "daring to exercise her basic right of freedom of expression"("TikTok Girl's Detention").

Also, other Egyptian groups and individuals criticized these crackdowns and argued that they stress discrimination directed mainly against ordinary women based on their class. A petition was launched on Change. Org by a group of Egyptian feminists. The petition called for stopping targeting females on TikTok and inciting hate and discrimination against women based on their class and gender.  In the petition, they stated:

> We are a group of Egyptian women calling on state authorities to stop this crackdown on women on social media. We are also calling for the National Council of Women to provide legal support for all the nine who have been arrested. International support can make a real difference.
>
> Some of these women are social media stars with millions of followers. In their videos they are just laughing, dancing and enjoying themselves. Now they are being punished, and denied their right to own their bodies; to dress freely, and to express themselves. The TikTok women are ordinary working or middle-class women. Because of the way they dress and express themselves, they are deemed to be behaving outside of what is permitted by their class and outside of 'Egyptian family values'. The State is using them as an example to tell other women that you will be punished too if you do the same ("Change. Org").

More than 1,500 people signed the petition during its first days.

In this context, I argue that those ordinary young girls who grow up in a consumer class society represent their lifestyles and dress that blind Western culture and Muslim traditions without feeling alienated from their claimed authentic Egyptian Muslim cultural values. Their attitude results from a cultural atmosphere that appreciates individuals based on their luxurious appearance and possessions, despite claiming to follow Islamic modesty.

Their dress and lifestyle have been there but not seen (marginalized) by the conservatives and the Westernized elite. These ordinary young Egyptian girls lacked the support and resources to expose their lifestyle and convictions that are different from a dominant image of ordinary Muslim woman presented in the official media and falsely assuming a representation of a dominant culture. This claimed dominant Egyptian culture imagine a modest, religious, veiled, lower-class and upper-class conservative woman versus the small fashionable, Westernized elite. The stereotypes legitimize the status quo in Egyptian class society and ignore the experiences and desires of a wide range of young Egyptian women in contemporary Egypt. In contrast,

TikTok's girls used the virtual platform and dared to present their different characters. It seems clear that it was not precisely about a beautiful, fashionable girl wearing a

headscarf with tight-fitting clothes or a Tiktoker appears on social media in revealing clothes. Instead, their daring explicit femininity, which is deemed as a source of threat and destructive force of society in the Muslim public imagination, was gaining massive popularity among ordinary girls, even headscarf wearers, for the first time.

Their presence threatened the elite Ulama class and conservative men, who claimed that headscarf wearers support their vision of true modest Islam versus secular imperialism. On the other hand, the picture of an elegant feminine TikTok's girl threatens the image of a fashionable emancipated upper-class woman who dominated this space and exposed her luxurious life and femininity that is considered restricted to her wealthy neighborhoods. Consequently, those young girls are silenced by the rigid class system and patriarchal Muslim culture while still marginalized by the Western prevailing stereotypical representation of Muslim women as veiled, ugly, and passive.

Moreover, the widespread silence of the upper-class modern Westernized men and women on stigmatising those ordinary girls through their bodies calls into question their claimed stand against the oppressive patriarchal culture and traditional social norms. Their stance still affirms that although feminists struggle for equality in education and work, the question of sexual emancipation and controlling women´s bodies in the public sphere is widely undressed by all feminist fractions. This still affirms that all Egyptian women are still under the control of the concept of public morality, even if some of them dared to take off their headscarves.

Overall, I argue that Egypt is more liberal than many other Arab countries and although Egyptian women make undeniable progress in women's presence in the public sphere concerning education, work, and even challenging class borders. Nonetheless, the TikTok girls' case affirms that the religious-oriented third space opposes Bhabha's secular third space, which fashionable headscarf wearers in Egypt could fill, is only

considered for those who willingly choose to wear headscarves as a marker of their faith while being active in a public sphere. Their feminist view is close to Jasmin Zine's definition of faith-centred feminism: "[T]he critical faith-centred perspective attends to the salience of faith and spirituality in framing the worldviews, beliefs, and practices of faith-centered people and accepts this as a valid way of negotiating and understanding of notions of community, selfhood, gender, identity, and feminist engagement and praxis" (Zine, *Creating a Critical Faith-Centered Space*, 182).

Nevertheless, since one cannot assume that all fashionable headscarf wearers' choice of dress is an expression of their free will or that their decisions are always religiously motivated, their free choice of clothing style is still hindered by the patriarchal atmosphere supported by the Muslim elite ans state. Thus, one can not assume that all fashionable headscarf wearers in patriarchal Muslim societies can represent a feminist religious oriented-third space. Although Egyptian society is witnessing a slowly but steadily change towards gender equality in the public sphere, Egyptian women still have to continue their feminist hard work to create a tolerant pro-gender equality culture that acknowledges diversity and deconstructs the patriarchal cultural forces within their society. Only then they will be able radically to challenge the stereotypical Western representation of the claimed fashionable unveiled emancipated woman versus the modest oppressed Muslim veiled woman.

**Egyptian Muslim Fashionable Women in Post-Colonial Literature:**

In Leila Aboulela's text *Lyrics Alley*, I discussed embracing cosmopolitanism in taste and dress upheld and encouraged by the local urban elites during the first half of the twentieth century. I highlighted that embracing cosmopolitanism stressed the Westernized elites' eagerness to leave the assumed traditional backward local taste, views, and dress embraced by lower social classes and masses. However, embracing

the Western dress code did not necessarily mean that the Westernized elites entirely abandoned their belief in Islam or that the fashionable Egyptian Muslim woman was emancipated in the sense of secular Western feminism.

In *Bird Summons*, I discussed moving from cosmopolitanism to stressing identity and cultural differences starting from the second half of the twentieth century and the return of religions globally. The novel deconstructs the binarism between a passive religious veiled Muslim women versus an autonomous secular unveiled Western woman, stressing the diversity of Muslim women's subjectivities. The novel presents Muslim characters far from the ideal conventional Muslim characters the Western readers expect. Iman, the traditional uneducated Muslim Syrian, takes off her headscarf and doubts God's choices for her life before accepting religion as spiritual salvation for her soul. Salma, the Stylish independent Egyptian, has an online affair, and she struggles to return to the right path, and Moni, the wealthy, relatively conservative Muslim, rejects obeying her husband. She believes obeying her Muslim husband is not unconditional, as claimed by the prevailing traditional Islamic interpretation. The depiction of those Muslim fictional female characters with their behaviours is not what the reader expects from mainstream literary texts or discourse on practising Muslim women. This depiction stresses the diversity of Muslim religious identities, the dynamic nature of religious Muslims, and their relation to practising their faith in response to their changing psychological needs and socio-economic experiences.

The ending of the novel also supports the afore-mentioned argument. *Bird Summons* ends with three Muslim women take three diverse paths to their emancipation through diverse transformation processes in response to their existence in a Western liberal society. In their liberal environment, they were allowed to choose for themselves without pressure from their conservative relatives or a social environment. Their

choices respond mainly to their psychological needs and stress the diversity and heterogeneous subjectivities of Muslim women. I argue that these images of Muslim women are real and honest representations of Muslim women´s diverse psychological needs, cultural identities, and socio-economic and political environments beyond the reductive binarism that imagines a modest, subordinate static Muslim identity versus an assumed rational emancipated Western identity.

## Post-Secular Multicultural Society in *Bird Summons*

*Bird Summons* ends with three Muslim women cling to their religion as a cultural and historical aspect of their identities and as a spiritual, sacred empowering force that strengthens them to face their limitations in life. This ending of Bird Summons as a post-colonial novel can be read as a dystopia from the secular narrative stance since it reflects nihilism instead of championing individual rationality and the belief in the human's agency. Nonetheless, one can read it from a post-secular point of view. The ending can be interpreted as symptoms of the contemporary crises in the Western societies in the current context concerning migration's different religious, cultural identity and the suppressed histories of the non-Western cultures.

*Bird Summons* deploys a form of magical realism that mixes fictional fantasy with actual events like the news on deporting immigrants. Aboulela creates a fictional plot derived from this actual moment to tackle an existing problem in contemporary British society. The news creates a crisis for Salma. The Egyptian Salma is the only one in her British family who is considered an unwanted migrant by the British political discourse. Salma is torn between her Egyptian Muslim culture and her British family. She struggles to find a place to accommodate her Egyptian cultural and historical identity and her British family. Aboulela's ending creates a fictional alternative where Muslims with diverse identities and secular / Christian Westerners lead their diverse

lifestyles and live together in harmony in Western society. The novel imagines a utopia where religions and the secular co-exist without tension. Salma decides to remain in Britain with her British family. She leads a peaceful relationship with her British Christain mother-in-law, Norma. Both Salma and Norma are not trying to convince one another to convert to the other assumed "true" religion.

Furthermore, I argue that although religion is present in this post-colonial novel, it is transformed. In the Western liberal environment, the three Muslim female characters move from the communal institutional religion into individualized religion grounded in an apolitical ethical version of religion that Mernissi calls "Islam Alrisalah".  They take three different paths to practise their religion without being bound by other Muslims' visions of Islam. They acknowledge various versions of practising Islam in the real world beyond the claimed universal interpretation and the *Umma* concept. Their faith is present to meet their individual psychological needs. In this context, one can argue that in this liberal environment, the religion of a group of Muslims has been secularized to acknowledge equality, diversity and call for tolerance of other religious and non-religious individuals.

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Eigenständigkeitserklärung

Statement of Own Work § 7. Abs. 4 Promotionsordnung Hiermit versichere ich, alle Hilfsmittel und Hilfen angegeben und die Arbeit auf dieser Grundlage selbstständig verfasst zu haben. Die Arbeit ist nicht schon einmal in einem früheren Promotionsverfahren angenommen oder abgelehnt worden. I hereby confirm that I have indicated all resources and aids and that I have independently written the thesis on this basis. The dissertation has not been accepted or rejected in an earlier doctoral procedure. 11.August 2021.