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# Egyptian Secular Feminism After the Egyptian Revolution of 2011

An Analysis of Transformation of the Patriarchal Bargain  
Between Egyptian Secular Female Feminists and Political  
Leaderships

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## Abstract

The Egyptian Revolution of 2011 opened up the public space for Egyptian women from very different backgrounds. However, although women played a decisive role in revolutionary events, this did not result in the abolishment of the patriarchal bargain between Egyptian secular-oriented female feminists and the state in post-Mubarak Egypt. Even though certain conditions caused the suspension of the patriarchal bargain regulating relationships between Egyptian secular-oriented female feminists and the state during the Muslim Brotherhood regime, these conditions did not indicate the entire cancellation of the bargain. The patriarchal bargain between Egyptian secular feminists and the political leadership has been reestablished during the presidential rule of El-Sisi. This study aims at explaining how and why Egyptian secular-oriented feminist women's coping mechanisms and the strategies in dealing with successive political leaderships, the Muslim Brotherhood regime in power from 2012-2013 and the El-Sisi regime during the presidential term between June 2014 and June 2015 differed from each other. Based on my interviews which were conducted with the activists, domestic and international legal instruments, secondary sources including UN human rights reports and NGO reports, as well as scholarly articles and media reports, I found out that the majority of secular women activists' strict ideological differentiation with the Muslim Brotherhood regime emanating from gender-discriminatory policies of the Brotherhood led them to suspend the patriarchal bargain with the state. Furthermore, I also demonstrated that activist women's disdain of the Brotherhood along with their support for new progressive laws on the protection of women's rights in the Egyptian's Constitution of 2014 have made them support El-Sisi's military rule with some reservations even though the recent regulations of El-Sisi's leadership have allowed the state to restrict NGOs' activities and freedom of association.

**Keywords:** *Patriarchal bargain, Egyptian secular feminism, the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, post-Mubarak Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood, El-Sisi*

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## Abbreviations

ACHPR	:	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
The CEDAW	:	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
EFU	:	Egyptian Feminist Union
FGM	:	Female Genital Mutilation
The FJP	:	The Freedom and Justice Party
IBAHRI	:	The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute
ICCPR	:	The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
The MB	:	The Muslim Brotherhood
NCW	:	The National Council for Women
UN	:	The United Nations
UN CSW 57	:	57th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women
UNDP	:	The United Nations Development Program
PSL	:	The Personal Status Law

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# 1 Introduction

The Egyptian Revolution of 2011 opened up the public space for Egyptian women from very different backgrounds. Women played an important role during the protests and revolts that led to the overthrow of the 30-year Mubarak regime and the demolition of its ruling apparatus. According to eyewitness testimonies, women constituted 20 to 50 percent of the protesters in Tahrir Square and its vicinity (Hafez 2012: 38). Gender was not a motivation affecting the participation to the protests and demonstrations. “The revolution was planned, executed, and supported by both men and women” (Sholkamy 2012: 153). Moreover, regardless of age or status, rural or urban, rich or poor, veiled or unveiled, women took to the streets and articulated their demands for change.

While in the past, feminism and the struggle for women’s rights were substantially made by upper middle class and highly educated people, today feminist activism creates new perspectives of gender and class relations by attempting to redesign the political sphere (Sorbera 2014). As well, a lot of feminist initiatives and organizations were formed that have been working for various issues such as violence against women, sexual harassment and political participation.<sup>1</sup> Change is already happening. With the words of Hala Shukrallah, who was elected in 2014 as the first Egyptian woman to head a major Egyptian political party (Al-Dostour/Constitution Party) and also first Coptic Christian (cited in Kingsley 2014): “What we’re seeing here is that something truly on-the-ground is happening”.

However, although women played a decisive role in revolutionary events, this did not result in the abolishment of the patriarchal bargain between Egyptian women and the political leadership. This is particularly relevant for Egyptian secular-oriented feminist women. Certain conditions caused the suspension of the patriarchal bargain regulating relationships between Egyptian secular feminists and the political leadership, but did not lead to the entire cancelation of it.

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<sup>1</sup> In regard to different feminist initiatives that were formed after the revolution, these are some examples: ‘Ganobia Horra’, ‘Ashtar’, ‘That’. Also, there are other groups that formed responding to rampant mob-sexual assaults and gang rapes in Tahrir Square and its vicinity. These include: Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault (OpAntiSH), Tahrir Bodyguard, and Basma (Imprint Movement).

Throughout the brief parliamentary experience of the Freedom and Justice Party (the FJP, hereinafter), political branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (the MB, hereinafter), and the presidency of Mohamed Morsi, Egyptian secular feminists did not regard patriarchal bargaining with the political authority as a useful tool to maximize their power and opportunities (Al-Ali 2013, Hatem 2013). I call this the suspension of the patriarchal bargain. Nevertheless, the patriarchal bargain between Egyptian secular feminists and the political leadership was reestablished during the presidential rule of El-Sisi who previously led a coalition to remove President Mohamed Morsi from power and suspended the Egyptian Constitution of 2012 as well as to outlaw the MB (Pratt 2015).

Despite detecting the reemergence of the patriarchal bargain with the state during El-Sisi's presidency, previous studies predominantly focus on authoritarian and undemocratic character of the political transition led by the Egyptian military and cannot seem to make sense of the reestablishment of the bargain given the state cooptation and top-down impositions from El-Sisi's rule (Al-Ali 2013, Magdy 2013, Pratt 2015). On the other hand, when it comes to the suspension of the patriarchal bargaining with the political leadership taking place during the MB-dominated government term, analysts in general tend to agree with the decision of secular feminist women not to bargain with the Brotherhood regime given the undemocratic and exclusive politics of the Brotherhood (Al-Ali 2013, Hatem 2013, Hafez 2012). Studying the factors behind the different strategies followed by secular Egyptian feminists in two successive periods, during the period of the MB regime (2012-2013) and during El-Sisi's presidential term between June 2014 and June 2015 respectively, can contribute to knowledge on the motivations behind the changes in women's strategies in dealing with the state. This can also pave the way for a more comprehensive picture of the connection between leaderships' policies and women's strategies and motivations. In this thesis, I will attempt to fill this gap by not only examining how secular-oriented feminists' strategies changed but also by pursuing explanations on the reasons of these changes.



## **1.1 Purpose and Research Question**

The aim of this thesis is to analyze how and why Egyptian secular-oriented female feminists' coping mechanisms and strategies with the successive political leaderships were differently shaped after the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. In this study, primarily, postcolonial feminist theoretical framework and semi-structured interviewing method are used to generate the aim. However, the rapidly changing landscape during subsequent weeks in Egypt led me to confine my analysis to a certain period of time while analyzing women's patriarchal bargaining with the El-Sisi's leadership. Therefore, my investigation on El-Sisi's presidential term will be confined to dates between June 2014 and June 2015. The reason why I chose this period to analyze emanates from the fact that I conducted my last interview in June 2015. In order to achieve the aim of this study, the following research question was designed:

- Why and how did secular-oriented Egyptian female feminists' coping mechanisms and strategies with the state during the political leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood (2012-2013) and the political leadership of El-Sisi between June 2014 and June 2015 differ from each other?

## **1.2 Conceptual Considerations**

In line with the postcolonial feminist approach that I employ throughout my research, this thesis puts specific emphasis on the stories of the subjects that I am 'translating' into the language of academic research. Therefore, I usually adhere to concepts and words that my interviewees use when expressing their own feelings and thoughts about our conversation.

### ***Feminist or Women's Rights Activist?***

The women I interviewed generally do not differentiate the 'women's rights movement' from the 'feminist movement'. In contrast to earlier narratives of members of the Egyptians women's rights movement that I came across throughout my literature review (please see: Al-Ali 2000, Hafez 2011), interviewed activists did not reject the label 'feminist'. Despite the fact that the English term 'feminist' has negative image in the Egyptian society due to its

assumed ‘westernized’ implication, a great number of activists do not refrain from using the term when talking with me as a researcher who does not need to be convinced about the legitimacy of struggle for women’s rights.

However, that is not to say that activists insist on their use of term ‘feminism’ when creating the dialogue with the state bureaucracy and grassroots. The major reason behind the reluctance of activists to identify themselves with feminism lies in the public opinion that the use of the term feminism glosses over the larger problems such as imperialism, economic injustice and Zionism. However, as mentioned above, I detected that once they have the opportunity to talk with someone who has a similar ideological and political orientation regarding women’s rights, they preferred the use of ‘feminism’ without any doubt. That is why I do not imply any different connotations when using ‘feminist’, ‘women’s rights activist’, ‘feminist activism’ or ‘women's rights activism’. However, for the sake of avoiding repetition, I sometimes use ‘feminist’ and ‘feminist activism’, and other times ‘women's rights activist/activism’.

### ***Organization, Movement and Activism***

In this thesis, regardless of the formal or informal character that they have, I use ‘organization’, ‘movement’ and ‘group’ synonymously. Concerning the use of ‘activism’, I allude to a broad range of involvements and activities that can be performed at any given point of time such as active participation to gatherings, research, lobbying and advocacy. Therefore when I refer to ‘activist’, I address the people involved in women’s rights issues. In this sense, I avoided standardizing and over-generalizing various political or ideological engagements and priorities of feminist movements.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Being ‘secular’***

I believe that it is better to use preliminary framework while appealing to the

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<sup>2</sup> There are different goals and priorities of Egyptian feminist organizations that are translated into various projects and activities including legal assistance programs; legal awareness workshops and publications; campaigns to change existing laws (particularly the Personal Status Law and the Law of Association); the establishment of a Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Task Force; setting up a network to research and campaign around the issue of violence against women; organizing seminars; workshops and conferences to address and raise awareness about certain issues.

notion of the 'secular'. My use of the 'secular' thus addresses the acceptance of separating religion from politics without essentially being anti-religious or anti-Islamic. The main source of legislation that women's rights activists appeal is also my point of departure in differentiating secular feminism from other women's rights activists. In this thesis, I classify women's rights activists on the basis of their endorsement of civil law or Islamic law (*shari'a*). I suggest that – regardless of their personal religious observance – secular feminists approve civil law and resolutions of human rights conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the CEDAW) and UN-Stipulated World Conferences on women as frames of reference for their struggle.

### ***Why Secular Feminism?***

As it is stated in the beginning, this study aims at examining female secular feminists' motivations that led to the suspension and then the reestablishment of the patriarchal bargain with the state. In this regard, this work intends to shed light on secular feminist activism in Egypt in post-Mubarak Egypt. However, this is not to suggest that all feminists in Egypt have to be secular. Nor it is my intention to indicate that Islamists can by no means feminists. Apart from my early experience in the field of Middle Eastern Studies that led me to engage in secular feminism, throughout my research, I have come to realize that secular feminist activism in Egypt tend to be homogenized and labeled as anti-Islamic (see, for example: Daly 2010). I also detected that much of the recent feminist scholarship studying Egypt overlook secular constituencies while drawing particular attention to Islamist tendencies and activism (see, for example: Hafez 2011). Furthermore, while some academics tend to see Islamic feminism as the next stage of secular feminist activism (Dally 2010, Badran 2005, El-Safty 2004, Posusney et. al. 2003), some even claim that the majority of Egyptian feminist activists refer to Islamic laws as the frame of reference for their activism (see, for example: Younnis 2006).

On the contrary however, my interview experience with members of different women's rights organizations and independent feminists, I came across different meanings being ascribed to the notion of 'secular'. As I will show in the following chapters, and particularly in chapter entitled 'Analysis', it is also my argument that the implication of secular feminism in Egypt is not discriminatory

against religious people and discourses. Rather it inclusive of all Egyptians by having space for and respecting religious difference without emphasizing any particular religion.

### ***The Muslim Brotherhood, The Freedom and Justice Party and Morsi's Presidency***

Even though the FJP is an Egyptian political party whereas the MB is a transnational Sunni Islamist organization known for its “political activism and Islamic charity work” (Ghattas 2001), I used sometimes the FJP and the MB synonymously. It thus should be underscored that while using ‘the Muslim Brotherhood’ and ‘the Muslim Brotherhood’s regime/rule’, I generally refer to the FJP. The fact that the MB has strong links to the nominally independent FJP led me to use the names of those two allegedly different organizations correspondingly. In addition to this, despite the presidential term of Mohamad Morsi (30 June 2012 to 3 July 2013) not corresponding completely with the executive term of the MB-dominated parliament (lower house which began execution of its functions in early 2012, but was dissolved by the constitutional court in June 2012), phrases such as ‘Morsi’s regime’ and ‘the MB regime’ were used synonymously given that Morsi was nominated as the MB’s presidential candidate (see also: BBC).<sup>3</sup>

### **1.3 Essential Theoretical Concepts**

In this section, definitions of essential theoretical concepts are provided in order to clarify the language used throughout the study.

#### ***Patriarchal Bargain***

Kandiyoti (1988) argues that under some circumstances, women historically and strategically agree to negotiate with patriarchal politics and different forms of patriarchy of any given society. These negotiations can get different extents based on class, caste or ethnicity (Ibid.). Kandiyoti (1988: 285) describes this strategic

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<sup>3</sup> However, the executive term of Shura Council (upper house which began functioning in February 2012 and, and which was dissolved by the constitutional court in 5 July 2013) corresponded to presidential term of Morsi.

position as ‘patriarchal bargain’ to explain mechanisms consisting of a set of constraints in which women choose to endorse patriarchal norms and acknowledge gender roles in order to “maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression” (1988: 274). According to Kandiyoti (1988: 285), “Patriarchal bargains do not merely inform women’s rational choices but also shape the more unconscious aspects of their gendered subjectivity, since they permeate the context of their early socialization, as well as their adult cultural milieu”.

However, while Kandiyoti (Ibid.) regards patriarchal bargain as a negotiation with patriarchy to explain the relationship between the genders; having inspired by Sharine Hafez (2014), I use the term ‘patriarchal bargain’ here to mainly address the patriarchal bargain between Egyptian women and the country’s political leaders.

### ***Political Leadership***

The concept of ‘political leadership’ is challenging to define, “because it is dependent on institutional, cultural and historical contexts and situations – both particular and general” (Masciulli et al. 2009: 4). However, political leadership includes such elements as the nature of the “leaders’ interpretative judgements” (Ibid.: 5), and the organizational context in which the leader being either as the legislative branch or the presidential authority in determining state-society relations. According to Masciulli et. al. (2009: 6), “ ‘Political leadership’ overlaps significantly with the higher levels of military, legal, organizational, and religious and ideological leadership, and is a special part of ‘social leadership’ in general”. This is particularly relevant to the Egyptian context. In the Egyptian case, I thus use the concept of political leadership to point out the country’s most powerful political authority, which sometimes implies the MB (to put it differently, the MB regime), and sometimes indicates military rule under the leadership of El-Sisi (in other saying, El-Sisi’s regime) according to the context. In this regard, the state is generally used correspondingly with the political leadership. The notion of ‘political authority’ is also used synonymously with the political leadership.

### ***Sexual Violence/Gender-Based Violence***

Sexual violence contains sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. It indicates any

attempt or threat of a sexual nature that (is likely) to lead to emotional, physiological and physical harm. Article 2 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (UN 1993) provides that, “Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

- (a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
- (b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
- (c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.”

### ***Gender***

According to the UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 (UNDP 2014) ‘gender’ refers to:

the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in woman or a man in a given context.

### **1.4 Disposition**

This thesis is structured into six chapters. Following this introductory chapter, a historical background of the patriarchal bargain between Egyptian feminists and the state is given to understand the context in which the suspension and then the reemergence of the bargain took place respectively after the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. In the subsequent chapter, the theoretical framework is explained. In the fourth chapter, the methodology of the thesis is presented, including sections on case study method; interviews; and domestic and international legal instruments,

secondary sources such as NGO and UN human rights reports, scholarly articles and media reports. Through analysis of the collected data, chapter five provides an analysis of women's motivations and other factors that can reveal the suspension and then the reemergence of the patriarchal bargain. In the last chapter, discussion of the findings and the conclusion will be provided.

## **2 Background: Historical Patriarchal Bargaining with the State**

In this chapter, I will give a brief account of the historical patriarchal bargain between Egyptian feminism and the state. While doing so, relevant accounts in the existing literature will be discussed. In addition to this, I sometimes appeal to feminist activists' own interpretations and understandings regarding the history of the feminist movement. In this regard, four successive periods will be analyzed: Beginnings (1919-1952), Gamal Abdel Nasser's Leadership (1952-1970), Anwar Sadat Period (1970-1981) and the Hosni Mubarak Era (1981-2011). The chapter ends with the brief conclusion on the historical patriarchal bargain between the Egyptian feminism and the political leadership.

### **2.1 Beginnings (1919-1952)**

Feminism in Egypt is almost a century old. Many scholars begin their analysis on Egyptian women's rights movement with women's active participation in the 1919 nationalist revolution against the British colonial<sup>4</sup> rule and the following growth of feminist activism with Huda Sha'rawi and Egyptian Feminist Union<sup>5</sup> (Ahmed 1982, Hatem 1986, Philipp 1978). Many studies analyzing Egyptian women's movement ascribe the intellectual legacy of early fights for women's emancipation to male reformers such names as Muhammad Abduh, Gamal Al-Din, Al-Afgani and Quasim Amin (Ahmed 1982, Al-Sabaki 1987, Hatem 1986; cited in Al-Ali 2000: 56). More recent literature, however, argues that women's involvement into the 1919 revolution should rather be seen as the perpetuation of decades-long women's rights struggle (Ahmed 1992, Badran 1995). However, regardless of the debate over the 'gender origins' of the Egyptian feminist

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<sup>4</sup> The British Occupation in Egypt lasted from 1882 until 1956. Even though the 1919 revolution caused the British acknowledgment of Egyptian independence, the Britain did not pull out its force from the Suez Canal Zone. In 1956, the Occupation officially ended by the withdrawal of British forces in accordance with the Anglo-Egyptian agreement in 1954.

<sup>5</sup> Huda Sha'rawi established the The Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) in 1923. The Union was more into the struggle of political rights for women. Among their demands fulfilled by the government are compulsory educations for girls in 1925, and women's admission to the national university in 1933. EFU's activism was determined by both the interplay and tension between feminism and nationalism (Badran 1995: 94-98). According to Badran (1995: 96), founding members of the union were coming from wealthy families.



movement, the emergent feminism in the (post)colonial Egypt associated itself with secular nationalist discourse for a long time (Al-Ali 2000: 56-7).

Rather than exploring the question whether roots of the historical women's movement should be traced back to male or female reformers, various scholars draw attention to 'gendered discourses' produced by male reformers which were disguised behind the nationalist patriarchal discourse. This is why Baron (1994: 4) objects to "pattern of stressing male thinkers at the expense of female ones". Leila Ahmed (1992) also strongly argues that historical origins of Egyptian feminism cannot be subsumed under the works of aforementioned male intellectuals mainly due to their patriarchal engagements. Ahmed (1992: 162-3), shows that in the context of Amin's works that overwhelming majority of male reformers "merely called for the substitution of Islamic-style male dominance by Western-style dominance".

Philipp (1978) demonstrates that it is not that likely to connect the feminist struggle to the nationalist movement in a positive way. Even though prior to 1919, the period when the nationalist struggle had yet to be achieved, nationalists approved the nationalist struggle of women (boycotts, demonstrations etc.) against British colonial rule, "after 1919, when nationalists pressures emerged in the wake of promulgation of a constitution for Egypt, women's political rights were not mentioned. Their equality with men was not discussed" (Ibid. 278).

While some earlier academics concluded that "feminism formed part of the content of nationalist thought (Hourani 1962: 215; cited in Philipp 1978: 277)", it soon became "clear to many feminists that during the nationalist struggle, and certainly afterwards, [that] men's nationalism had a patriarchal character' (Badran 1988: 31)" (cited in Al-Ali 2000: 61). In this regard, the portrayal of the feminist activism during post-independence period demonstrates that the idea of emancipation of women was upheld by postcolonial state policies as long as it served the interests of the anti-colonialist struggle which was in harmony with the official state policies.

## 2.2 Gamal Abdel Nasser's Leadership (1952-1970)

Various scholars underline that Nasser's regime inaugurated a new period for women by altering the class structure and through the ideological and legal inclusion of women in the new state (Al-Ali 2000, Ahmad 1992, Hatem 1994, Hatem 1992). The 1956 Constitution declared that all Egyptians are equal irrespective of gender. Labor laws were also amended to guarantee state sector jobs for "all holders of high school diplomas and college degrees irrespective of gender" (Hatem 1992: 232). After women received suffrage and the right to run for government offices by the 1956 Constitution, as Al-Ali (2000: 68) points out, "the education system was reformed to increase enrollment, both for primary and secondary education, which particularly affected female participation in higher education".

It is interesting to see that many feminists who were young during the Nasser period identify Nasser's regime with progress, secularism, development without foreign aid (Al-Ali 2000: 68). When it comes to Nasser's struggle with Islamic constituencies and organizations that were excluded by the regime, these women usually appreciate regime's efforts. Al-Ali (2000: 68) cites Summaya M., a secular feminist who is in her 60s, in order to reveal shared thoughts on Nasser's policies towards the MB among these activists:

I believe that nobody fought the Muslim Brotherhood as he [Nasser] did and nobody knew how to defeat them. He met their logic with the secular logic independently, as opposed to Sadat and Mubarak.

However, dramatic achievements of the Egyptian state, in education, social mobility and employment, referring the progressive feature of Nasser's regime were paralleled by the preservation of the conservative Personal Status Law (PSL, hereinafter) of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>6</sup> Women's achievements with regard to economic and political rights were thus accompanied by the gendered and discriminatory legal provision within PSL (Elsadda 2011: 86-8). The existence of PSL serving to regulate women's position as submissive to male authority in the private sphere in this regard caused a bizarre dichotomy. Hatem (1992: 232) thus

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<sup>6</sup> Law regulating divorce, marriage, child custody etc.

convincingly argues that

state feminism<sup>7</sup> under the Nasser regime produced women who were economically independent of their families, but dependent on the state for employment, important social services like education, health and day care, and political representation. While state feminism created and organized a system of public patriarchy, it did not challenge the personal and familial views of women's dependency on men that were institutionalized by the personal status law and the political system.

Even though the gender gap diminished during Nasser's political leadership, the regime's pledge to women's rights issues as part of its wider agenda for social justice appeared to be juxtaposed to the abolition of feminist organizations functioning independently from the state.

Moreover despite social welfare was available to all, patriarchal gender ideology that prevented women from involving in economy and politics remained largely unchanged. "What was worse, the Islamic personal status law still controlled domestic matters and were not changed by the new ruling regime" (Hafez 2011: 69). Although certain endeavors to set up a state-sponsored feminism which attempted to incorporate women into certain 'ability zones' that males were already enjoying, women's political roles remained unchallenged during this period.

### **2.3 Anwar Sadat Period (1970-1981)**

After becoming president, Anwar Sadat (1919-1981) put into action his new agenda. Throughout his presidency, the role that the state played as an economic and social agent of change was reduced. Not only were many of – albeit contentious – gender equality programs canceled which were active during Nasser's regime, but also *intifah* (open door) policies committed to international corporations, foreign investment and economic policy of the privatization – to put

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<sup>7</sup> I find Zheng's (2005) definition of 'state feminism' most relevant to the Egyptian context. According to Zheng, (2005: 519) 'state feminism' can be conceptualized "to enable scholarly examinations of the institutionalization of feminism in state agencies in a variety of political and economic systems". Without any doubt, state feminism as top-down approach to women's rights issues reveals a set of constraints in which women try to maximize their life options. In this sense, state feminism can be seen as an excellent example of the patriarchal bargain between the leadership and Egyptian women.

it differently, new capitalist orientation of the regime – widened the gap between poor and rich (Al-Ali 2002). The majority of Egyptians experienced negative outcomes such as “high inflation; serious shortages; particularly in housing; low wages; reduced employment prospects and poor working conditions” due to the state’s departure from the policies of social equality and equal opportunity (Ahmed 1992: 219).

There were divergent outcomes of Sadat's *infitah* on women. One of them is directly pertinent with certain class positions that women occupied. As Al-Ali (2000: 73) clarifies, “Upper-middle-class and upper-class women certainly benefited more from Sadat's *infitah* than lower-middle-class and working-class women”. While Sadat economic policies led some few privileged women to rampant consumerism and extravagant wealth, the status of rest of them deteriorated due to *infitah*’s broader effects. Their integration into the economy as a part of Nasser’s ‘state feminism’ was dismantled by high inflation, chronic shortages of basic goods and reduced employment opportunities.

According to the literature (El-Guindy 1981, Hafez 2011, Hatem 1992), polarization of social inequality as a result of *intifah* also allowed Islamism to rise by the 1970s. Sadat’s initial cooperation with Islamists organizations being marked by the early 1970s aimed at achieving greater legitimacy in the public eye by using religious jargon. Sadat also needed the support of his new companions to take positions against leftist and Nasserists who were constantly charging the Sadat administration of withdrawing from social equality oriented policies that were followed during Nasser's regime (Ahmed 1992). Sadat for instance explicitly heartened the MB to continue their activities which Nasser had banned (Hafez 2011, Ahmed 1992). By permitting the MB to the publication, Sadat helped them to reach a wide audience. It also helped the dissemination of religious idioms as the mainstream jargon within the Egyptian political discourse. Ahmed (1992: 217) says in this regard:

Furthermore, as their publications turned to criticizing not only Nasserism and communism but also Sadat's policies, particularly after the treaty with Israel, their religious idiom also became the language of dissent and discontent. With other discourses of opposition silenced leftist publications had been banned – the Islamic idiom became the only vehicle of dissent. Once allowed to gain popularity and

legitimacy, the Islamist position was difficult to limit: (...) once the Islamists had gained ground, he could afford to lay himself open to the charge of being anti-Islamic.

The state during Sadat's regime did not have a clear agenda to address women's rights and did not support independent feminist activism. Paradoxically however, "it was under Sadat that PSL was reformed in favor of women's rights" (Al-Ali 2000: 73). The Personal Status Law (PSL) was issued during the Sadat's presidential term. The law gave women the right to divorce, right to travel regardless of her husband's permission. Also, the legal age of marriage was raised from 16 to 18 among other stipulations. In the following year, Egypt ratified the UN Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women, albeit with reservations.<sup>8</sup>

Some argue that the start of United Nations Decade for Women in 1975 triggered the Sadat administration to advance women's rights to promote its image internationally (see, for example: Al-Ali 2000: 71-4). In the attempt to seek robust economic and political support from its new allies, particularly from the US, the state anticipated that advancing gender issues could be also useful to encourage the secular alliance among men and women. In this instance, Sadat hoped to weaken the role that Islamists played in politics and to differentiate the state's political agenda from that of Islamists (interestingly, echoes of both earlier coalition formed with Islamists).

To conclude, during Sadat's period, much like under Nasser, women were destitute of independent organizations and were reliant on the regime's specific needs. Despite the progressive laws of 1979<sup>9</sup> which granted women legal rights in marriage, polygamy, divorce and child custody, and the CEDAW ratified in 1980, the state lacked a clear agenda to address women's rights and discouraged independent feminist activism.

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<sup>8</sup> For comprehensive analysis of reservations to the CEDAW, please see: Freeman, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> According to Al-Ali (2000: 74), The Personal Status Law of 1979, "granted women legal rights in marriage, polygamy, divorce and child custody; it was implemented by presidential decree along with another law that introduces changes to women's representation in parliament. "

## **2.4 Post-infatih Feminist Activism and the Bargaining with the New Leadership: Years with Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011)**

The early years of Mubarak's presidential term were marked by the conflict with the Islamist groups over the implementation of *shari'a*<sup>10</sup>. The increasing power of Islamic organizations which gradually gained grassroots legitimacy in the eyes of conservative constituency pushed the Mubarak regime to legislate and implement conservative laws towards women's rights issues. On the other hand, in parallel with the Islamic pressure that Mubarak faced, the Egyptian economy increased its dependence on the United States and international organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF. Western pressure for the political restoration of Egypt compelled Mubarak regime to promote democracy in compliance with the 'western' set of values like human rights and UN conventions on women's rights (Botman 1992). Uncertainty and struggle with conflicting forces thus constituted the regime's primary preoccupation from the very beginning until its last years.

In the search for reconciliation with Islamists, The Personal Status Law was revised in 1985 in that it was regarded anti-Islamic by conservative groups. As a result of amendments, various rights that women acquired from its earlier version were canceled (Bibars 1987). However, the 1985 Nairobi Conference which was held two months after the implementation of the regressive 1985 law created strong lobby pressuring the government to restore the law. Immediately after the conference, a new version was enacted which provided women some of the advantages that they gained by the Personal Status Law of 1979 (Al-Ali 2000: 75).

The struggle over the Personal Status Law which also allowed open discussion of such taboo subjects as clitoridectomy and contraception in 1985 was accompanied by the emergence of independent feminist activism in Egypt (Ahmed 1992: 214). Resistance to the implementation of the law in the course of widespread nation-wide discussion also demonstrated various strands within the movement. For instance, whereas Arab Women's Solidarity Association (established in 1981) – which was vocally arguing against the Islam as a point of

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<sup>10</sup> Among the outcomes of the fact that Islamist forces comprised powerful constituency in Egypt are the establishment of Islamic schools, both informal and formal social welfare groups and even banks (Zaki 1995).

reference for the advancement of women's rights – launched a campaign to preserve it, Progressive Women's Union (PWU) – affiliating with the leftist Tagammu Party – argued against the 1979 Law based on the idea that the law was passed unconstitutionally by Sadat. PWU's opposition against the appeasement policies towards Israel as well as the open door policies of Sadat were major reasons behind their arguments against the law (Al-Ali 2000: 76). It can thus be argued that the discussion over the 1985 Personal Status Law made leftist women stand with Islamist groups for this very instance. As Al-Ali (2000: 76) remarks, "This debate clearly shows the 'instrumentality' of women's issues and their submergence into broader political questions. What was at stake was not the actual substance of the issue, but a joint opposition against Sadat's general policies".<sup>11</sup>

Even though Mubarak followed pro-democracy policies to some extent mainly due to the external factors and forces mentioned above, the Egyptian state not only pressured the activities of Islamic groups, but also implemented repressive measures towards feminist activists and organizations. For instance, Law 32 of 1964, which had been in practice since Nasser, resumed to be performed as means of monitoring voluntary organizations including feminist organizations and human's rights associations, "with regard to their fields of activity, number of members allowed, number of organizations, within a particular region, record keeping, accounting and founding" (Al-Ali 2000:67). However, the level of pressure on NGOs was based on the political atmosphere, specifically determined by the international arena.

The international community's pressure became evident by the middle of the 1990s, particularly after the International Conference of Population and Development, 1994 and Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995. The level of control of the state over feminist organizations manifesting itself in Law 32 of 1964 decreased during this period (Al-Ali 2000:67). In 1998, with

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<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, nationwide discussion during the 1980s as to whether the revision of the Personal Status Law is constitutional opened up the floor for a shift from popular nationalist discourse merely focusing on women's rights in the public space – where women were supposed to participate in education, job market and politics to some extent – towards more holistic approach (Ahmed 1992, Hatem 1993). While prior to the 1980s, women's rights within the 'private' or family domains were being overlooked; throughout the post-*infitah* period, previously denied aspects of women's rights issues begun to be emphasized (Al-Ali 2003).

international donor organization's support, Egyptian NGOs achieved to persuade the government to tighten the control over NGOs<sup>12</sup> (Al-Ali 2000: 80). The tendency (see, for example: Daly 2010, Zuhur 2011, Al-Ali 2003) in the scholarship detects the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995 as the starting point of NGOization of feminist activism in Egypt. As of 2000, Al-Ali (2000: 81) remarked that "While there is certainly room for negotiation over goals and means, it is obvious that the international women's movement as well as agendas of funding agencies influence and partly direct[ed] the movement in Egypt".<sup>13</sup> In addition to this, in 1993, in preparation for the NGO forum in cooperation with the International Conference of Population and Development 1994, state-appointed Gender and Equality Committee approved the project for procedural amendments in PSL which finally became law in 2000 (Law No. 1).

In 2000, the National Council for Women (the NCW) was established with tremendous visibility of Suzanna Mubarak. Following Elsadda's own words, "Gradually, what many activists feared when the National Council for Women was established came true: the NCW competed with existing women's rights organizations, sought to appropriate women's activism and work and tried to monopolize speaking on behalf of all Egyptian women" (Elsadda 2011: 93). The NCW members became immensely visible in local, regional and international media and forums while the voices of independent feminist organizations were being marginalized. I had noticed the tendency among my interviews that the NCW is sometimes being blamed of taking credit for the accomplishments succeeded by NGOs. On the other hand, they also acknowledge positive efforts made by the NCW. In this sense, my respondents greet the Law No.1 of the year 2000 which granted women the right to no-fault divorce (*khul'*) in that this law

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<sup>12</sup> However, I was told by many interviewed women that it was, and is still, also common phenomenon in Egypt that various feminist organizations in Egypt registered with the Office of Property and Accrediation in an effort to avoid the danger of being demolished by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

<sup>13</sup> Despite the growing number of NGOs triggered the emergence of independent feminist activism, according to the literature (Daly 2010, Zuhur 2011), the major influence of tremendous growth in the number of feminist NGOs in Egypt on the struggle for women's rights during the Mubarak regime was the NGOization of the feminist movement. The opportunity of making a professional career canalized many activists to compete for job opportunities which in turns caused rivalry and struggle for funding possibilities among different feminist groups (Ibid.).



was campaigned by the activists for more than a decade.<sup>14</sup> However, it seems that the NCW-led damages to the struggle for women's rights, in general, outweighed the contributions of the NCW. Amal, a member of Nazra for Feminist Studies, talked to me regarding the role that the NCW played during the Mubarak era:

The creation of the NWC was promising. The NCW was expected to formulate policies and come up with strategies to advance women's rights and the nation. But the problem is that they were very politicized and served the regime's own interests in the end. The council competed with the feminist organizations rather than supporting them. They got donors' money and co-opted our efforts.

The establishment of the NCW in this sense can be conceptualized as “gender conditionality” (Kandiyoti 2011) which allowed the regime to support women's rights “moderately” as long as the regime can use women's rights issues as a bargaining tool in the international arena. The case of the NCW also shows the increased influence of international agencies in the 1990s and 2000s and regime's ‘appropriate’ response to their demands concerning the struggle for women's rights.

## **2.5 Subconclusion**

Even though Egyptian feminist activists achieved impressive gains, they also faced a set of constraints throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>th</sup> century. Nasser's period (1952-1970) was marked by the crackdown on independent feminist organizations and the preservation of conservative Personal Status Law of the 1920s and the 1930s in return for having suffrage, the right to run for government offices and diminishing gender gap in education, social mobility and employment for women. When it comes to Anwar Sadat's presidency (1970-1981), despite the fact that the progressive law of 1979 granted women legal rights in marriage, polygamy, divorce and child custody, the regime did not have apparent program to advance women's rights and discouraged independent feminist organizations. Under Mubarak, the same gendered phenomenon resumed. Even though the

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<sup>14</sup> It is also interesting to see that Suzanne Mubarak's tremendous effort during the ballot in the parliament earned this law the title of Suzanne's Law (Elsadda 2011).

establishment of the NCW was promising, women's rights agenda soon was to be co-opted by the leadership of former first lady Suzanne Mubarak which also limited the freedom of association.

In short, it appears that patriarchal bargaining with the state outlines a significant aspect of the historical Egyptian feminism until the end of the Mubarak regime.

### **3 Theoretical Framework**

To answer the research question, postcolonial feminist theory is used. Before providing a postcolonial feminist theoretical foundation and the essential aspects of postcolonial feminism being relevant to my research, firstly, I will offer applicable aspects of postcolonial scholarship in order to demonstrate a nexus between postcolonialism and postcolonial feminism in section 3.1. In sections 3.2 and 3.3, primary aspects of postcolonial feminist scholarship will be discussed. In order to do that, firstly, underlying commitments and concerns of western feminism will be explained as postcolonial feminism was born out of critique towards western feminism. Then, in section 3.3, the goal of postcolonial feminism will be briefly discussed. Section 3.4 discusses the notion of ‘patriarchy’ within the framework of postcolonial feminist scholarship.

#### **3.1 Postcolonial Theory**

In its broad sense, postcolonial theory refers to the investigation of the experience of colonialism as well as its past and present outcomes both in ex-colonial societies and in the western world, following the national liberation movements of the majority of the world’s countries (Quayson 2000: 2). Even though postcolonialism implies the end of colonialism, the novel forms of colonialism are also analyzed within this framework. In the light of this, colonialism is not tackled merely with regard to economic or military penetration. Various social, religious and cultural aspects also take up some important spaces within the context of (post)colonialism.

Generally speaking, postcolonial scholarship aims at abandoning Eurocentric narratives in social sciences as the most powerful current grand narratives are Eurocentric. The domination of Eurocentric premises in the social sciences is the result of post-Enlightenment European constitution and history what Barriteau calls “the enlightenment promise” (Barriteau 1998; cited in Sa’ar 2005). According to Sa’ar (2005: 684), “This promise of a better quality of life assumes a linear view of progress, a rational approach to human affairs (...) as part of a mode general inclination to compartmentalize complex reality”.

Dirlik (1997: 329) depicts the goal of postcolonial scholarship as being the

destruction of all respective separations between ‘center’ and ‘periphery’, and other dichotomies which are purportedly “a legacy of colonialist way of thinking and to reveal societies globally in their complex heterogeneity and contingency”. Stuart Hall (1996) also emphasizes that processes of decolonization among both the formerly colonized societies and the colonizers indicate the postcolonial period. However, even though postcolonial period is marked by a wide array of changeovers and transition towards the decentring of the West (Al-Ali 2002), it is not to suggest that all earlier conceptualization of the world or all power relations between formerly colonized and colonizers are over (Rattansi 1997). Various scholars emphasize that postcolonial times also embrace “neo-colonial dependency” on the first world and the rise of powerful local elites (Hall 1996, Rattansi 1997, Said 1993).<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it should be noted that postcolonial scholarship does lessen neither the role of the colonizers nor that of the neo-colonial powers. On the contrary, it attempts to remove the binary oppositions such as east versus west, colonized versus colonizer, First World versus Third World, local versus global, traditional versus modern, or religious versus secular by annulling the old colonizing-colonized contrasts.

### **3.2 Postcolonial feminism: The Critique of Mainstream (Western) Feminism**

Stereotypical representations create boundaries and make firm and separate what is in fact fluid and much closer to the norm than the dominant value systems care to admit. Many definitions of the ‘West’, and categories such as ‘western feminism’ are similar to the process that, in Said’s words articulated almost two decades ago, seeks “to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is closer to it and what is far away” (Said 1978: 55; cited in Al-Ali 2000: 33).

At divergent specific periods over the course of the last hundred years, women’s rights and human rights activists considered the concept of feminism with unambiguous doubt (Johnson-Odim et. al. 1991). As Sa’ar (2005: 686) points

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<sup>15</sup> I am using the notion of ‘First World’ to refer to “so called developed, *capitalist*, industrial countries, roughly, a bloc of countries aligned with the United States after World War II, with more or less common political and economic interests: North America, Western Europe, Japan and Australia”. (Nationsonline 2015)

out, there are two underlying reasons for this. First is the constant disposition of western feminism, to put it differently, mainstream feminism, to entirely address their struggle within the framework of gender discrimination whereas staying away from focusing on other forms of struggle such as ethnic conflicts in gender-mixed settings. This resulted in western feminism solely dealing with those strata of women who are well-educated, middle-class and 'white'. Postcolonial feminists argue that in such a way that ethnic research glossed over the gender aspect, feminism was lacking the impacts of ethnicity as well as the history of colonialism (Abu-Lughod 1998). The colonized subject, therefore, has been mainly regarded as the man, whereas women of colonized countries has been categorically seen as 'white' since this perspective has stepped away the intersection zone in which 'coloured' and 'women' are intertwined (Loomba 2005).

From this point of view, it can thus be argued that the main preoccupation of western feminism is western women who relatively and moderately position themselves by the side of liberal order.<sup>16</sup> In case this specific focal point considerably is marked by concerns with gender discrimination, personal experiences and premises of marginalized women are being ruled out. This inclination arguably makes western feminism exclusionary practice and ideology leaving out the 'rest'.

The second reason is more polemical: Extensive discontent particularly prevalent in the 'Third World' with historical identification of feminism consisting in cultural imperialism or colonialism.<sup>17</sup> On the basis of this, Sa'ar (2005: 686) claims that "Feminism became widely construed as a form of ideological imperialism, despite the fact that indigenous feminisms sprang up throughout the colonized world as long ago as the early twentieth century". Relevant aspect of addressed discontent is a large-scale discursive link between the progressive discourse of modernity aiming at re-configuration the lives of women in the Muslim world and level of cultural development of these countries (Abu Lughod 1998, Badran 1996, Hafez 2011).

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<sup>16</sup> By 'liberal order', I imply the system working and being sympathetic mainly with the US and other industrial countries.

<sup>17</sup> By 'Third World', I specify developing countries of Africa, Asia and America.

It can thus be argued that the link between political disempowerment, culture, and women stems from the specific historical crossroad of modernity and colonialism, which expeditiously acquired “the status of an ahistorical truism” (Sa’ar 2005: 687). In the following section, I will touch upon principal aspects of postcolonial feminism.

### **3.3 The Aim of Postcolonial Feminism**

In its broadest sense, “postcolonial feminism’ is an exploration of and at the intersections of colonialism and neocolonialism with gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities in the different contexts of women’s lives, their subjectivities, work, sexuality, and rights” (Schwarz et. al 2004). Postcolonial feminist scholars particularly scrutinize the construction of the ‘Third World Woman’ by referring to singular monolithic subject in (mainstream/western) feminist texts (see: Abu-Lughod 1998, Mohanty 1988, Spivak 1999). The definition of colonization used in this master's thesis is, in some respects, discursive through which performed by the western feminist writings that “discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in Third World, thereby producing/representing a composite, singular ‘third-world woman’ — an image which appears arbitrarily constructed but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of western humanist discourse” (Mohanty 1988: 62).

Mohanty (1988: 78) draws attention to the abundant literature assuming ‘Women’ as a category of analysis in the attempt to make binary generalizations specified below:

Interestingly enough, however, almost all the texts assume ‘women’ as a category of analysis in the manner designated above. However, in the particular texts under question, each text assumes ‘women’ have a coherent group identity within the different cultures discussed, prior to their entry into social relations. Thus, Omvedt can talk about ‘Indian Women’ while referring to a particular group of women in the State of Maharashtra, Cutrufelli about ‘Women of Africa’ and Minces out ‘Arab Women’ as if these groups of women have some sort of obvious cultural coherence, distinct from men in these societies. The ‘status’ or ‘position’ of women is assumed to be self-evident because women as an already constituted group are placed within religious, economic,

familial and legal structures.

Accordingly, as a backlash to western feminism, postcolonial feminist scholarship attempts to illustrate that women is not an already produced and consistent group with the same interests irrespective of their ethnic or racial location, which stands for the religious affiliation to some extent, universally (Huston 1979, Kristeva 1980, Mohanty 2014). This contested cross-cultural validity attributed to women all around the world assumes a homogeneous notion of the oppression towards women which served the representation of an ‘average third-world woman’. As Mohanty (1988: 65) clearly dwells on, “This average third-world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being ‘third world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)” in contrast to the portrayal of western women as educated, modern and having control over their own bodies.

That is why Rosaldo (1980) accuses (western) feminists of approaching other cultures as being archaic and of presenting themselves as the norm referent in such a twofold analytic. Western feminists, Rosaldo (1980: 392) argues, consider non-western women as “ourselves undressed and the historical specificity of their lives and of our own becomes obscured”. As postcolonial critique reminds us that ‘modern’, or ‘civilized’ as a rigid conceptualization(s) implies the clear articulation of the ‘non-modern’, or ‘uncivilized other’ –in order to clarify and delimit ‘modern’s own attributes by mostly detailing what ‘modern’ is not. This process of authorization marked by an absolute delimitation is itself ruptured. Having placed itself as both modern and indigenous, the ‘women question in Egypt’ is a perfect example of how local nationalist discourse enunciated in very intricate ways with colonial discourse. It is an ambiguous construction of both identity and discrepancy with the West (El Shakry 2007: 158).

### **3.4 Patriarchy**

Attempts at confining Egyptian feminism with an enclosure of western colonialism preserves a colonialist scripting rooted in binary oppositions. By hiding the complexity of feminist activism that surfaced against a background of

anti-colonial struggle in Egypt, such reductions exclude the emergence of new researches seeking to map out the unique conditions regulating relations between the political leadership and women. This section thus places the articulation of 'patriarchy' within the context of postcolonial scholarship. Underlying attributes of the concept will also be presented in line with the Egyptian case. The concept is then extended to a pervasive analysis of the bargain between Egyptian secular feminists and the political leadership in 'Analysis'.

Firstly, I would like to address the notion of the 'patriarchy' in its wider sense. In order to do that, I use Lerner's (1986: 239) definition to simplify the term:

The manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in the society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to power.

Nonetheless, as Mohanty (1988: 78) shows, above cited understanding of patriarchy is likely to shape the world as if it is made out of binary and dichotomies "where women are always seen in opposition to men, patriarchy is always necessarily male dominance, and the religious, legal, economic and familial systems are implicitly assumed to be constructed by men". The assumption of patriarchy designing women as an already coherent set of 'victims' with indistinguishable interests implies an understanding of gender difference as well as patriarchy which of both can be applied universally.

It thus appears that the implications that 'patriarchy' reveals are far from monolithic (for various examples, please see: Anzilotti 2002, Hardwick 1998, Kandiyoti 1988, Lee et. al. 2000, Miller 1998). Whereas socialist feminists advocate a very limited usage, offering to examine the relationship between patriarchy and class; radical feminists are sympathetic with a broader usage in order to employ the term to any form of male domination (Kandiyoti 1988: 275) Therefore, it is problematic to appeal to the notion of the 'patriarchy' even in the attempt to briefly address the monolithic conceptualization of male dominance, where women are situated as congruent recipients of vertical power relationship



between men and women, irrespective of their class, ethnic or racial location.

At this juncture, I would like to draw some attention that even in the same country patriarchy can take different forms and can thus influence women's strategies and coping mechanisms differently. This is overly determined by the background of women based on their class, and particularly in our case, the level of religiosity and political ideologies. This is especially relevant in a country such as Egypt which is at the crossroads of three continents and which hosts competing discourses between religious and secular ideologies as well as between colonial culture and anti-colonial struggle past to present. The suspension of the patriarchal bargain between secular Egyptian feminists and the state during the MB period and then the reemergence of it throughout El-Sisi's presidency clearly show that different political actors being in power in different periods, despite their commonalities, can lead women to choose different strategies while negotiating with the state.

The framework while outlining the notion of the 'patriarchy' in this section could overcome what I shall call 'postcolonial premises'. Explicit critique of binary portrayals such as 'oppressed Third World women' (particularly in those countries where majority of people are Muslim) or totalizing approaches to women, which see women as a set of category with identical desires and deprivations cross-culturally regardless of geographical or cultural differences, play an important role in underplaying the differences between the "intimate inner workings of culturally and historically distinct arrangements between the genders" (Kandiyoti 1988: 275). The postcolonial feminist scholarship comes on stage at this very point by attempting to undermine the monolithic assumption of women which suggests that the woman is an already produced and consistent group with the same interests and lack of resources.

## 4 Methodology

This chapter is designed in order to frame the methodological choices made. In Section 4.1, research design of the study is explained. The choice of the case is introduced in section 4.2, followed by a discussion of data collection. Section 4.4 outlines interview method as well as ethical considerations, researcher's position and limitations within the research. In section 4.5, a brief description of transcription and analysis of collected material are placed.

### 4.1 Research Design

The type of research question establishes the choice among various research methods (Shavelson et. al. 2002: 99-106). Case studies are applicable when a research focuses on either an *explanatory* question – such as “how or why did something happen or has happened?” – or *descriptive* question – such as “what has happened or what is happening?” (Yin 2011: 10-12). *A modern dictionary of sociology* (Theodorson et al. 1970) explains case studies as follows:

A method of studying social phenomena through the thorough analysis of an individual case. The case may be a person, a group, an episode, a process, a community a society, or any other unit of social life (...) This approach rests on the assumption that the case being studied is typical of cases of certain type, so that through intensive analysis generalizations may be made which will be applicable to other cases of the same type.

While ‘what’ questions are exploratory in nature, as ‘who’, ‘how many’ etc. questions are, ‘how’ questions and ‘why’ questions are rather explanatory and “likely to lead to the use of a case study, history, or experiment as the preferred research method” (Yin 2011: 10). If the researcher wants to know the answer such questions as ‘who’ and ‘how many’ – types of questions which are justifiable for conducting exploratory research – would be more likely to rely on a survey or an examination of archives. On the contrary, it is more plausible to use a case study if the research requires the researcher to ask questions concerning “operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence” (Ibid.).

This master's thesis addresses an *explanatory* question and seeks to answer the *how* and *why* questions (Yin 2011), instead on merely focusing on “revealing the average strength of a factor that causes an effect” (Given 2008: 69). In other words, rather than seeking causal linkage between events of factors, I aim at expanding the understanding of the phenomenon of interest – namely, implications of different political leaderships on secular feminist activists' strategies which in turn determine the status of the patriarchal bargain between the state and the women – and explaining the ‘how’s and ‘why’s of the case. Although no generality will be claimed in the end, relevant parts of the analysis can be adapted to similar cases in other settings.

The study is of a feminist engagement. Feminist scholars do case studies for the identical goal that non-feminist scholars conduct them. Such goals as obtaining overarching awareness of a single or small number of cases, illustrating the limit of generalizations as well as analyzing the specific process over time are common (e.g. Reinharz et al. 1992, Yin 2011) . However, feminists concerns with case studies arise out of admiration of repairing the negative sides of previous researches which have been clouded by misogyny, gynopia and male-dominant theorizing (Reinharz 1992: 167). Because, as Reinharz (1992: 168) puts it, “Traditionally, the presence of women was limited to their being mentioned as there. Women's being, when noted at all, was defined in terms of men's needs”. Accordingly, feminist interest in case studies began as a backlash to this gendered misinterpretation. Case studies of previously overlooked individual feminists and members of feminist groups are predominant examples of this appreciation of feminist viewpoint.

There is an abundant literature of feminist case studies of organizations (see, for example: Reinharz el. al. 1992: 164-75). These studies can allow us to realize male-dominant settings of theorizing the certain phenomenon. In addition, case studies of women's movements also serve to illustrate the nature of these structures sometimes even by confronting the accepted categories of feminism. Needless to say, one of the rigorous motivation for this study is my strong feeling that western feminism glosses over the particular settings in studying feminism in Egypt.

## **4.2 Case Selection**

This study is a qualitative case study of feminist activism with a particular emphasis on secular feminists' strategies within a set of concrete constraints, namely patriarchal bargains. Particular focus is given to those activists who live in Cairo in that the contemporary feminist activism in Egypt, as during the previous decades, primarily limited to big cities, particularly to Cairo. However, components of Egyptian secular feminism differ in regard to various institutional structures and activities. Ad hoc networks being organized around specific issues and tasks are established and collapsed – once the particular aim is achieved – by activists who are engaged in other groups or activities at the same time. Others are NGOs with more apparent frameworks than ad hoc groups and decision-making structures, formal groups which were created in the attempt to avoid state monitoring over organization, as well as a number of individual women who work independently through their specialty or non-affiliated or loosely-affiliated feminists who refraining from being part of institutional frameworks. Therefore, I tried to place the heterogeneity of secular feminist organizations and different priorities in the movement by transferring various voices into this research. Participants of this research are people from NGOs, formal groups and independent feminists.

## **4.3 Data Collection: Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews, Secondary Sources and Domestic and International Legal Instruments**

Qualitative semi-structured interviewing as a data collection method is the most appropriate in answering the research question.<sup>18</sup> The major aim of the semi-structured interviewing is not to homogenize participants' comprehensions and experiences on certain issues, but to take into consideration and uncover participant's various, unique point of views on the everyday world. Semi-structured interviewing as qualitative data gathering technique is the method highlighting the importance of opening quotes (Reinharz 1992: 18). Open-ended interviewing maximizes discovery and “produces non-standardized information

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<sup>18</sup> I tend to interchange the terms, 'semistructured', 'in-deptht', 'intensive', 'open-ended'.

that allows researchers to make full use of differences among people. In this study, open-ended, semi-structured interviews with members of Egyptian secular feminist movement conducted.

However, “a major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence” (Yin 2014: 119). That is why in addition to conducting semi-structured interviews, I used domestic and international agreements and secondary sources as the supplementary source of evidence. According to Yin (2014: 107), the most significant use of documentation is to authenticate and strengthen evidence from other sources. Documents thus are also helpful in confirming the specific names of organizations, people, places and dates that respondents addressed during interviews. Throughout my case study research, I also tried to verify correct spellings and names through documents for the most of the time. More importantly however, documents provided me specific details and other perspectives about the particular cases. I drew inferences from documents and come up with new questions that I will mention in the following chapter. Types of documents that I used in order to gather additional data include applicable domestic and international agreements, secondary sources including NGO and UN human rights reports, media reports and scholarly articles.

#### **4.4 Interviewing Egyptian Female Feminists**

Both non-affiliated and affiliated women who define themselves as ‘feminist’s or ‘women’s rights activists’ were interviewed during the research. It was not my aim to focus on finding people with strong organizational affiliations to interview, although four respondents were members of NGOs with clear agendas and decision-making bodies. In addition to respondents who are involved in either formal or informal feminist groups with different but interrelated focuses such as prevention of sexual assault against women and improvement of women's civic and political rights, I also had an opportunity to do interviews with three individual feminists. Having the conversation with loosely or non-affiliated women’s rights activists allowed me to observe a wide range of positions and attitudes towards women's rights issues, current political context and various political orientations within the feminist movement.

The first process was to design the interview guide. I divided the interview into three parts in line with themes I intended to focus on. The first part comprises of questions about the personal background, life-stories and type of activism getting involved. The second set of questions deals with selected aspects of Egyptian politics and women's rights issues in the previous periods. The third part, the fourth part, the fifth part and the sixth part aim at gaining understanding on the women's rights activists' thoughts and stances both about El-Sisi's presidency between June 2014 and June 2015 and the Brotherhood's policies between 2012-2013.

Due to temporal and monetary limitations of conducting fieldwork, I conducted 4 online semi-structured face-to-face Skype interviews and 3 semi-structured, in person interviews with female activists. All Skype interviews were conducted with activists being in Cairo during our online meetings. Even though semi-structured, in person interviews were not done in Cairo – but in, Lund, Stockholm and Umeå – I spent time with some of the respondents in different settings and I witnessed their conversation with their feminist and non-feminist Egyptian peers (in English) on women's rights in Egypt which I myself sometimes got involved. While four of the people I interviewed are members of at least one network or group, three interviewees are working without specific organizational affiliation. All in-person interviews were carried out in cafes and restaurants and most of them were conducted during one meeting. All interviews were tape-recorded and conducted in English. The actual length of recording ranges from 40 minutes to 1 hours and 20 minutes.

The participants were determined through two methods. The first method I used was getting contact information of feminist organizations and groups in Cairo from different sources ranging from academic channels to web searching and then e-mailing them. Each time, I outlined my subject of interest and asked them if they could provide me with personal e-mail addresses of interested members. As I pointed out from the beginning that I would not travel to Cairo, I tried to arrange in-person meetings with activists who are temporarily inside Sweden for academic reasons such as conference or Master's degree or short-lasting visits even though they actually live in Cairo. The second method was related with the first one: snowball method. In some cases, interviewees helped me to find more people with which to conduct in-person interviews and online

interviews when physical meetings were not possible.

#### **4.4.1 Ethical Considerations, Researcher's Position and Limitations**

Each interviewee was invited to voluntarily take part in the research. Aside from explaining the purpose of the thesis, I provided my interviewees with written information about the research including my contact information before shifting to the actual interview process. Privacy matters were addressed from the inception of the research to every respondent. Every interviewee was informed about the confidentiality of research data. Also, I made clear that interviews would be recorded only if the interviewees felt comfortable with it. In order to protect the anonymity of interviewees, I used pseudonyms.

This study places itself within the framework of postcolonial feminist theory, according to which, academic research cannot be confined to the study which is “(...) done within a specific academic context [that] emphasized the role of social scientists as collectors and analysts of objectively verifiable data” while treating interviewees as ‘data provider’ (Oakley 1985; cited in Reinharz 1992: 27). On the contrary, being listened to and respected, but not merely being ‘data providers’ caused active participation of respondents to the research.

Simmons (1988, cited in Brown 1996: 20) sees awareness of researcher's “biases, blind spot, and cognitive limitations (...) as high a priority as theoretical knowledge”. Self-discovery thus is vital to finding out more about qualitative research (Brown 1996, Mehra 2001). According to Thomsson (2011: 47) the researcher should read a lot of resources including non-academic ones through which s/he can learn essential aspects of the subject of interest in order to control the prejudice. In the attempt to overcome researcher bias and subjectivity as much as possible – which are generally perceived as being inevitable by the majority of quality researchers – I have read plenty of academic and non-academic articles and books on Egyptian feminism from various sources.

When it comes to gender factor, I do not think that being a male was a disadvantage in persuading people to be interviewed. On the contrary, the reaction I got for most of the time was encouraging. People I got in contact with for interviews usually greeted me for my interest in Egyptian feminism in that scholarship on gender in the Middle Eastern Studies is generally occupied by female researchers. On the other hand, throughout my research I felt that my

'Turkish background' provided me with an open gateway to accessing Egyptian feminists. Being educated in one of the Middle Eastern countries and being a so-called 'non-westerner' made me feel comfortable with the way many interviewees have regarded me 'good' and 'trustworthy'. My conversations with interviewees also encouraged me to rethink the 'west-east' division and my own position as a person who always feel in-between more critically once again.

Due to small samples, most qualitative research cannot generalize to a population. Instead, in qualitative research the generalizability question can be explained in more realistic style: "Why will knowledge of a single or limited number of cases be useful to people who operate in other, potentially different situations?" (Given 2008: 372). It should be also pointed out that research participants in my study only presents a minimal segment of the members of secular feminist activism in Egypt. That is why it is impossible to draw *de facto* conclusions about the current state of secular feminism in Egypt. Rather, the results should be seen as a contribution for anyone aspiring to raise their comprehension of the subject of interest (Thomsson 2011: 30).

#### **4.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

An inductive thematic analysis was employed in order to analyze the collected data. Throughout this process, meanings as well as structures that respondents implicitly expressed were tried to make more clear (Braun et. al. 2006). I organized main themes after transcribing interviews by conducting thematic coding (McEvoy 2010: 133). In the following, I modeled the codes and drew relevant information to my case study in line with the type of answers received. Finally, the data was interpreted corresponding to themes.



## **5 Analysis**

In this chapter, I will examine two chronological political leaderships in the post-Mubarak Egypt, namely, the MB's political leadership and El-Sisi's political leadership, through an analysis of secular female feminists' strategies in dealing with them. This chapter ends with an investigation of the conditions to the suspension and then the reemergence of the patriarchal bargain with these leaderships. In the first section, I will look at the conditions contributing to the suspension of the patriarchal bargain with the Brotherhood regime. In the second section, the reasons behind the reestablishment of the patriarchal bargain taking place during El-Sisi's presidential period between June 2014 and June 2015 will be discussed. Throughout the analysis, along with feminist activist's own interpretations, I will place my own conclusions while unpacking particular conditions leading to the patriarchal bargain between Egyptian women's human rights activists and the leadership during the MB regime to be interrupted which existed in the previous periods and then the reemergence of the bargain during El-Sisi's presidential term between June 2014 and June 2015.

### **5.1 The Brotherhood Regime: Non-Bargaining with the Leadership**

This section seeks to find an answer to the question, 'why did not bargaining with the patriarchal Muslim Brotherhood regime seem useful as a negotiation tool for Egyptian secular feminists to maximize their power and opportunities?'. The results show that there are three main reasons paving the way for the suspension of the patriarchal bargain between Egyptian secular women activists and the state during the MB regime. These are the Brotherhood's policies on women's economic development, their policies and attitudes towards international agreements and declarations on women's rights, the 2012 Constitution and the Brotherhood's perspective on combatting sexual violence against women.

#### **5.1.1 The Brotherhood's Economic Policies Aimed Towards Women**

There is a consensus among interviewed secularist feminists that the FJP attempted to separate its women's empowerment policies from that of secular

feminist movements during its brief legislative and executive experiences. Sarah, a journalist and nonaffiliated feminist, told me that the Brotherhood regime took advantage of negative public perception identifying women's rights activism with the political corruption in the Mubarak administration, “*it's top-down secularist, western-oriented agenda and the NCW's activities*”.<sup>19</sup> Dalia, Marian and Nancy also mentioned that the connotation that secular feminism hold allowed the MB to make their gender agenda — which merely focused on the basic needs of less privileged women — legitimate in the eyes of the majority of Egyptian people who have suffered poverty for many years.

The political history of the country being revealed by scholarly articles verifies interviewees' accounts. For instance, in her 2011 article Elsadda (86) potently articulates that “key obstacles that women's rights activists will face in the months and years to come is a prevalent public perception that associates women's rights activists and their activities with the ex-First Lady, Suzanne Mubarak, and her entourage—that is, with corrupt regime politics in collusion with imperialist agendas”. After the 2011 Revolution, critics of these reforms called them ‘Suzanne's Law’.<sup>20</sup>

What Elsadda (2011) says for feminist activists is particularly relevant for secular feminists given the postcolonial political and economic settings of the country. Western pressure for the restoration of women's rights issues<sup>21</sup>, the increased dependence of the country on the US and its donor organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF (particularly beginning from the Sadat's rule) as well as the colonial history of the country<sup>22</sup> have resulted in backlash and

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<sup>19</sup> As Abou-Bakr (in Parvaz 2012), a leading figure in the *Women and Memory Forum*, argues that Islamists began calling for cancellation of ‘Suzanne's laws’ introduced by Suzanne Mubarak “to initiate divorce, greater muscle and in custody battles and more”. According to Abou Bakr (Ibid.), these demands emerged “under the pretext that these laws were corrupt because they were created under [ousted President] Hosni Mubarak's regime”, but this is “a false politicisation of the laws and an excuse to rescind certain women's rights - such things lead to the cancellation of the women's quota in parliament.”

<sup>20</sup> This particular phenomenon can be called “first lady syndrome”. The phrase is coined by Okeke (1998).

<sup>21</sup> International community's pressure became clear by the middle of the 1990s, particularly after the International Conference of Population and Development, 1994 and Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995. The level of control of the state over feminist organizations manifesting itself in Law 32 decreased during this period. In 1998, with international donor organization's support, Egyptian NGOs achieved to convince the government to tighten the control over NGOs (see: Al-Ali 2000: 80).

<sup>22</sup> Megahed et. al. (2011) investigate how reigning western powers during the colonialism period inadvertently empowered the grassroots opposition to the secular norms associated with so-

grassroots legitimacy against all things widely associated with the European culture including the secular ideas of emancipation and equality of women (Megahed et.al. 2011, Younis 2006). In other words, the enormous influence of the western institutions on domestic politics during both the colonial and the post-independence periods as well as what the MB can call “corrupt regime politics in collusion with imperialist agenda” (Elsadda 2011: 86) allowed the MB regime to oppose legal and social reforms, especially those concerning women’s rights.

Taking into consideration aforementioned details, it is easier to make sense of why the FJP wanted to differentiate its politics from that of secular feminist movements. However, it is equally important to answer the question, ‘through which policy did the MB regime attempt to differentiate its agenda?’. Hatem (2013) argues that the FJP addressed the situation of impoverished women during its first brief experience in the parliament. The party tackled women’s rights merely from the economic perspective and turned its attention to health insurance policies for female households (Ibid: 14). The prominence given to the economic dilemma of Egyptian women by the FJP was aiming at underplaying the role of secular feminists who are blamed of being elitists with such “secondary interests” as sexual and reproductive rights and violence against women (Hatem 2013). Through women's health insurance policy aimed towards female-headed households which corresponded to almost 30 percent of Egyptian families, the MB regime sought to represent itself as the supporter of average Egyptian women (Ibid: 14).

The arguments above should not be misunderstood. For the sake of clarification, I should point out that many people I interviewed did not refute the urgent need to address the poverty and underdevelopment level of Egyptian women. Also, all of them are convinced that improving the situation of Egyptian

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called “European values” particularly in regard to issues on empowerment of women’s rights. They (401-2) argue that by means of legal reforms made during the pre-independence period, colonial powers “gradually increased their control over education in the region. This control took the form of imposing French and English as the languages of instruction at all levels”. For instance, in the course of the colonial rule in Egypt, the British endeavored to anglicize language of instruction in the state schools. Thus, as Megahed et. al. (2011) claim, in an attempt to build up a visible pattern, some religious groups began to voice their discontent with the state of gender issues due to the political and socio-economic transformation of the country. These arguments also seem useful to explain continuing fundamentalist Islamic revival as being the most important symbols of resistance against all things connected with Europe, including women’s rights standards and violations against women acknowledged by various conventions and declarations.

women should be widely acknowledged not only by the government bodies but also among NGOs. As Al-Ali (2000: 153) maintains, “all the women involved in the Egyptian’s women movement in one way or another acknowledge that within the wider framework of fighting of the conditions of underdevelopment, which affect society as a whole, there are issues of particular relevance to women”. My findings are also similar to that of Al-Ali’s. The majority of the interviewed activists’ approach characteristically pays great attention to the issues of underdevelopment and poverty. As Asra puts it: “*We did not clearly feel and conflicts with their (the Freedom and Justice Party) efforts when it comes to improvement of the situation of average Egyptian women. Of course poverty is among the issues that should be addressed first*”. I encountered similar reactions on many occasions.

However, when I asked activists about their priority issues, they often regard economic issues as being contingent upon other issues such as illiteracy, consciousness raising and legal awareness campaigns or policies. Therefore, the link between improving the situation of women in Egypt and other problems addressed by feminist activists such as eradicating illiteracy, changing existing laws and to legalize women’s rights are extensively recognized. The majority of the activists emphasize that along with the alleviation of poverty, the most important issue that should have been focused on during the FJP government was to advance women’s rights, but not reversing them.

#### **5.1.1.1 Welfare Policies or the Tool for Hiding the Secret Agenda?**

Many women I interviewed found it difficult to ‘rely on’ the idea that the FJP aimed at empowering Egyptian women. The majority of them concurred with the view that the FJP’s attempts to define itself as being in harmony with the average Egyptian women’s needs conflicted with the party’s efforts to undermine the legal status of women in both the public and the private sphere. Throughout the interviews, I also detected that the majority of activist are convinced that the Islamists’ calls for the cancellation of laws — those passed under Mubarak which all interviewed activists had viewed positively — which resonated in the media and legal courts before the first free parliamentary election of 2011-2012 (Al Arabiya 2013, Pratt 2015, Hussein 2012) showed “*real intentions*” of the MB government (Asra). Amongst them; rising child custody rights for mothers, the

criminalization of FGM, fixed parliamentary quotas for women and the rights to unilateral divorce are of particularly importance (Sorbera 2014, Wickham 2013: 253). Amal exemplifies this:

It does make always sense to campaign for NGOs and to formulate policies for governments. You cannot struggle for women's equality if women are destitute of basic means of survival. However, what the Brotherhood regime was trying to do was to make people believe that we (*secular-oriented feminists*) are elitists, and interested in so-called corrupt western values instead of turning to real needs of Egyptian women. If they were thinking of the Egyptian women and their needs, they would not have tried to reverse our gains that we got in the previous terms.

Therefore, even though the majority of activists regard alleviation of poverty as being high on the list of priorities, they did see the Brotherhood's economic agenda on women's rights deceptive. As Nancy points out that secular feminist are outraged by the fact that the FJP differentiated itself from secular feminists by emphasizing their allegedly 'western-oriented' agenda and its 'secondary, alien interests'. She says that "*while they were planning on regressing women's rights which were legalized in the previous periods, there was no reason to support their economic policies for activists*". I received very similar reactions on many occasions when it comes to 'dichotomy' between the Brotherhood's willingness to advance the situation of Egyptian women and its gender discriminatory stance. Many of the interviewed people also find it misleading to support the Brotherhood regime considering their stance in regard to international agreements such as the CEDAW and various UN Declarations. The next section provides secular activists' own perspectives regarding the Brotherhood's viewpoints concerning international agreements and declarations.

### **5.1.2 The Brotherhood's Policies and Attitudes Towards International Agreements and Declarations on Women's Rights**

Egypt has obligations emanating from general international law and various UN human rights conventions to make provisions to eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls as well as to provide survivors with full reparation.

Egypt is responsible for guaranteeing the rights of women and girls under a number of UN human rights instruments such as the ICCPR, ACHPR and the CEDAW. Among these conventions, the CEDAW is of particular importance in the eyes of my respondents due to the fact that it was purely designed to eliminate all forms of discriminations against women (see also: Amnesty 2015: 72-3).<sup>23</sup>

General recommendation No. 5, on Article 4.1, of the CEDAW (the CEDAW 1979) “recommends that State Parties make more use of temporary special measures such as positive action, preferential treatment or quota systems to advance women's integration into education, the economy, politics and employment”.<sup>24</sup> However, many activists I interviewed emphasized the idea that although Egypt ratified the CEDAW in 1981, the Brotherhood rule tended to resist the active participation of women in the government. The majority of respondents particularly underscored Brotherhood-dominated government’s role in abandoning the women’s quota system in the parliament despite Egypt’s commitments to meeting its gender obligations under international conventions, as Asra did, when I posed the question on the FJP’s attitudes towards international conventions: “*What we firstly had to fight against is the regressive, anti-women laws such as the cancellation of quota system introduced by the Islamic government which are in conflict with the CEDAW*”.<sup>25</sup> At this point it should be remembered that women consisted of less than 2 percent of the parliament throughout the MB dominated parliament, while the minimum quota for women parliamentarians was 12% under the presidency of Mubarak which allocated 64

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<sup>23</sup> As a state party to the CEDAW, Egypt is obliged to: “take appropriate and effective measures to overcome all forms of sexual and gender- based violence, whether by public or private act; ensure that its laws against family violence and abuse, rape, sexual assault and other gender-based violence give adequate protection to all women and girls, and respect their integrity and dignity; and provide appropriate protective and support services for survivors, and gender-sensitive training of judicial and law enforcement officers and other public officials to ensure the effective implementation of the convention” (the CEDAW 1979).

<sup>24</sup> In addition to this, according to General Recommendation No. 23, on Article 7, of the CEDAW (the CEDAW 1979) “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right: (...) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government”.

<sup>25</sup> By accepting the Convention, States commit themselves to take all appropriate measures to achieving gender equality between men and women “through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life -- including the right to vote and to stand for election -- as well as education, health and employment (...), legislation and temporary special measures, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms” (the CEDAW 1979).

seats in the parliament lower house to women (Toliver 2013, UN 2013).

Apart from the new law passed by the Egyptian parliament during the MB dominated government, equal attention has been paid to declarations made by the MB on the international legal instruments on women's rights. Regarding the Brotherhood's negligence of international conventions on women's rights, Amal and Nancy emphasized the reactions that the Brotherhood regime gave to the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2013 (UN CSW 57; hereinafter). In March 2013, the MB condemned the UN declaration to end all forms of violence against women and girl (UN CSW 57) by claiming "it eliminates Islamic values, and seeks to destroy the family (...) which would lead to social disintegration" (Ikhwanweb 2013). Dalia emphasized that by officially condemning the UN document on combating violence against women, the MB also conceded that there is no room for stopping the violence against women, but encouraging it. Dalia also mentioned that there is a belief appearing among secular feminists "*like her*" that Islamist governments cannot be democratic and in favor of gender equality. She told me that even though she participated in anti-Mubarak demonstrations and welcomed the MB's election victory, she "*would rather stand by the military anymore*". Marian drew my attention to the MB's "medieval position" regarding sexual freedom of women and gender self-determination:

They are against sexual freedom, freedom to decide people's own gender and gender of their partners. They are against the legal minimum age of marriage for females. They have acknowledged that.<sup>26</sup>  
To be honest, I prefer Mubarak regime to live. Yeah, it is true that we were having the NCW which co-opted our own activities. And without a doubt, the NCW was serving the interests of the regime. But at least, albeit by foreign pressure, the Mubarak administration promoted women's rights in compliance with UN conventions irrespective of whether they are clashing with Islamic principles and so-called family values.

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<sup>26</sup> According to the statement in the website of the Brotherhood (Ikhwanweb 2013), "this declaration [the declaration announced after the 57th Session of the UN Commission of the Status of Women (UN CSW 57)] if ratified, would lead to complete disintegration of society (...) [by] granting full sexual freedom to decide their own gender and the gender of their partners (ie, choose to have normal or homo-sexual relationship), while raising the age of marriage".

To conclude, in the context of conflicts with Islamists, particularly in regard to the FJP's stance which was seemingly in stark opposition to the "global standards for achieving gender equality" (UN Brussels), secular-oriented feminists appear to enunciate similar series of discourses, values and fears. A declaration made by the UN Commission on the Status of Women on Equal Rights for Men and Women (UN CSW57) and the Brotherhood's attack against it by defining the declaration as being have "destructive tools meant to undermine the family as an important institution" (Ikhwanweb 2013) are of particular importance for the majority of activists in condemning the Brotherhood regime's policies towards international agreements.

### **5.1.3 The Egyptian Constitution of 2012**

The 2012 Constitution, in general, seems to introduce deeply religious provisions which opened the door for a regression in women's rights for a large number of activists. This is not to say that Egyptian secular activists categorically tackle the religion and religious way of living as being antithetical of women's rights.

At this juncture, it is also significant to maintain that among the activists I interviewed, the majority of them stated that their religious observance has much to do with customs and cultural tradition rather than religiosity. For example, such practices as fasting during Ramadan and/or visiting families and friends during Eid al-Fitr (Feast of Breaking the Fast) are mostly understood as being involved in the cultural event and particular lifestyle.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, the majority of secular-oriented feminists tend to tackle religion and cultural practice synonymously as long as it is not used against the advancement of women's rights. Sometimes religiously and cultural practice can thus come together, as expressed by Dalia:

I believe in Islam. I pray and I sometimes fast. However, I drink. For me, those things do not contradict each other. Because I am religious with my own set of values and standards. In contrast to Islamists, therefore, I am totally against marginalizing others and reject the issue of discriminating others on the pretext that they are not abiding by

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<sup>27</sup> It should be pointed out that my findings on values attributed to religious observance by secular activists are similar with that of Al-Ali's (2000) on her analysis on secular activists. This correspondence shows us the preservation of some set of values and beliefs shared among secular activists regardless of which generation they belong to.



Sharia law. There are specific values in Egyptian culture such as solidarity and helping others. Religion is there as a background, not as a point of departure.

Nancy points out that religious observance can refer to only one aspect of everyday life and cannot thus represent the basis of women's lives:

You can be religious. But even in this case, the religion would compose only a limited part of your own existence and ideology among many other things. Social norms, personal experiences, similar way of life and thinking, and the interlace of different cultural practices are not less important than religion in making the source of values in people's lives.

Even though religion in itself does not seem to unconditionally contradict the advancement of women's rights, there is a consensus among all activists that women's role in the public life was substantially undermined in the 2012 Constitution. The Constitution specifically neglected the rights of women in the name of protecting religion. Article 219 introduced Sharia law as the principal source of country's legislation (Bastawy 2013, the 2012 Constitution) by declaring it the "fundamental rules of jurisprudence". A lot of activists told me that state authorities had used the provision as a base to perform discriminatory practices against women and girls. Therefore, fear is common feeling among activists when it comes to Sharia law. The majority of them believe that under Sharia law many of the basic rights of women are likely to be disregarded regardless of whether these laws are stipulated under the international law. In this regard, Asra perceived the 2012 Constitution both "*anachronistic and irrational*":

It was anachronistic, because through the Constitution, the Brotherhood tried to undermine all of the gains that Egyptian women obtained in the past in the name of religion. It was irrational because they thought that people would remain silent.

Nancy emphasized the quasi-judicial power granted to Sharia scholars at

Al-Azhar University<sup>28</sup> in Cairo, who were “to be consulted on matters of religious laws” (the 2012 Constitution, Article 4). After telling me that she is a Copt and self-proclaimed believer, Nancy addressed her account of religion, and particularly the Sunni Islam which was the point of departure of the 2012 Constitution:

The Brotherhood regime granted authority of religious institutions so that they can close the doors on others. This is the case in Egypt. In 2012, the Brotherhood tried to discriminate against non-Muslims as if Egypt is an Islamic state relying on a particular religious denomination.

It is not unexpected to detect that Coptic activists have a particular stake in the discussion about religious provisions in the 2012 Constitution. Asra points out that “*their position*” in the society were weakened during the Brotherhood era:

Our second-class status — you know, we are both woman and Coptic — got worsen during the brotherhood era. The 2012 Constitution allowed them to discriminate other religions. Exclusionary discourses and politics against Copts increased during the Brotherhood rule. Now, imagine how to be a Coptic woman in Egypt.

Both scholarly and newspaper articles confirm interviewee’s accounts that many Copts felt that the 2012 Constitution has less to do with religious equality. During the Brotherhood era, violence against Copts rose (see, for example: Armanios 2013, Malsin 2014). The majority of Copts felt threatened by the Brotherhood regime who followed sectarian agenda and had failed to prevent them from being assaulted by extremists (please see: Malsin 2014).

Asra and Nancy leave me in no doubt that both of them are preoccupied with the issue of the Sunni-Islamic foundation of the 2012 Constitution. Likewise, particular attention has been paid to the fact that the Constitution allowed the justification for discriminatory policies against the people who are not Sunni Muslim.

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<sup>28</sup> Al-Azhar is the oldest degree-granting university in Egypt and is famed as one of the most prestigious university in Sunni Islam. It is also associated with Al Azhar Mosque in Cairo.

In the context of exclusion of women from the public space, Amal, Hafah and Sarah drew my attention to Article 11 of 2012 Constitution which provided that “the state promotes morality, decency and public order” (The 2012 Constitution). This article allowed ‘morality police’ to ‘guard’ public spaces in Cairo (IBAHRI 2014: 16).<sup>29</sup> In short, regardless of their religious affiliations, when it comes to religious-based articles included in the 2012 Constitution, I got adverse reactions from all respondents.

#### **5.1.4 The Brotherhood’s Attitudes Towards Sexual Violence against Women**

According to a survey by UN Women published in April 2013 (cited in, FIDH et. al. 2014) [during which the Brotherhood was still in power], 99.3% of Egyptian women told that they were sexually abused while 91% of them reported that they do not feel secure in the public space. Throughout my interviews it appeared that there is much similarity among the period under the Mubarak regime and the post-revolutionary SCAF period, the Brotherhood and the El-Sisi regime when it comes to extent of systematic sexual assault and violence used. Concerning the similarity among patterns, as Amal, from Nazra for Feminist Studies, told me that: “*Always the same scenario... Baltagiyya man*<sup>30</sup> *systematically isolated a women protestor from her friends and surrounded her. A victim is encircled by a group of this men attempting to clutch her clothes and she is penetrated by their hands. This did not change after the revolution. They (paid thugs) are still there*”. Some man verifies claims about the continuation of ‘*baltagiyya system*’. They argue that they were sponsored under the Mubarak regime and since the revolution they have been paid by the state security forces (Al-Shishani et.al. 2012).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The report by International Bar Association Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI 2014: 30) also reveals firsthand testimonies regarding the experiences of women rights activists: “Not only women but also Coptic Christians were in danger of being side-lined in the judiciary because of a policy – both overt and covert – of Islamicisation. Certain key articles in the 2012 Constitution entrenched the relevance of religious principles to be applied by judges and delegates were told that this could present a problem for the judiciary in the future as one such principle is that a Christian cannot exercise authority over a Muslim and that women should not judge men.”

<sup>30</sup> *Baltagiyya* is an Egyptian word that refers to gangs of hired thugs by the regime to attack opposition protesters (Jacinto 2011). Nonpolitical baltagiya men showed up in Egypt in the 1980s and the 1990s, and then Egyptian security forces decided to pay them well and train “to use sexualized brutality (from groping to rape) in order to punish and deter female protesters and male detainees, alike” (Amar 2011).

<sup>31</sup> That is not to say that all sexual harassment cases are perpetrated by paid thugs. Women have

“The truth is, regardless of who has been in power, the Egyptian authorities have undermined women’s rights and failed many Egyptian women” (Amnesty International 2015:5). Successive governments have used violence against women and failed to acknowledge the challenges faced by women as well as the extent of the dispute. Nowadays, sexual violence against women is a widespread phenomenon in Egypt both in the private sphere and in the public space. Those responsible include state actors such as security forces and non-state actors like unknown attackers in the street (Amnesty International 2015:5, Nazra et. al. 2013).

It is not possible to find official data on crimes of sexual assault as Egyptian state authorities do not collect the data on the rape crimes and other types of sexual assault. However, I detected that there is a pervasive perception shared by all of the interviewed people that sexual harassment and mob attacks against women are more common than ever in the public space in the post-revolutionary Egypt. In addition to this, the post-Mubarak regimes’ patterns seem to be more violent towards women and comprised increasingly multiple and public sexual assaults.<sup>32</sup>

That is why rather than the nature and extent of sexual assault, Egyptian feminist activists mostly focus on whether or not the certain political leadership has a national strategy such as reforms or constitutional changes to combat violence against women. I detected amongst the majority of interviews that there is a consensus regarding the Brotherhood regime’s unwillingness to confront gender-based violence.

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been also sexually assaulted by officers from the police and Special Forces Unite, especially during the SCAF rule (FIDH et. al. 2014: 14-5).

<sup>32</sup> Ironically, increasing violence against women in the post-revolutionary regimes also paved the way for new tools for challenging the sexual harassment of women such as the establishment of anti-sexual assaults initiatives. Nancy says that “*we have also revolutionized discourses and practices for challenging the sexual violence and patriarchy in general in contrary to a discourse of protection that encourages fear among women after the revolution*”. Sarah talked about these practices, to put it differently, the creation of anti-sexual harassment initiatives: “*If you look at the efforts to combatting against the mass sexual harassment — you know it existed in Egypt before even though it increased by 2011 due to the bigger gatherings with the prominent presence of women — you see that people formed rescue teams to keep women away from the assaults. Consciousness is raising in the society against the sexual assault and those initiatives are getting volunteers more and more*”. Hafah drew my attention to the gender equal structure of some of the anti-sexual harassment movements: “*They way of keeping women away from mob assailants also revolutionized and changed. The rescue teams are not just made up of man, but also women also try to rescue other women from the hands of attackers*”

Regarding the sexual violence against women, a lot of respondents regard the MB regime's attitudes and actions undemocratic and gender-discriminative. Amal explained this:

During Morsi's brief presidential time, they had no will to advance women's rights. Even though both Nazra's and other feminist NGO's attempts, they were very clear about not including the gender perspective in the Constitution. They did not see the role for women in the public space. For example, take a look at this... Despite reported epidemic mob sexual assaults and systematic rape cases during anti-government protests, Muslim Brotherhood deputies of Shura Council's human rights committee accused women of subjecting themselves to assaults<sup>33</sup>.

Nancy points out that, by discriminating against women, the MB tried to impose the idea that the role women can play in the social life cannot conflict with the familial issues. According to her, *“Women's professional work, political roles, and education were acknowledged inasmuch as they are at variance with the interest of family during the MB era”*.

### **5.1.5 Subconclusion**

Bargaining with the patriarchal leadership did not seem a useful tool for secularist women during the Muslim Brotherhood regime. It appears that the majority of interviewed women's disdain for the Muslim Brotherhood leading to the suspension of the patriarchal bargain emanates from the widespread conviction that the MB's politics were not democratic, inclusive, and most importantly, contradicted gender-equality. In the eyes of many of them, there existed an obvious effort on the part of the MB regime to deteriorate Egyptian women's acquired political and civil rights and their status in the society. The MB's efforts

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<sup>33</sup> Regarding the increasing wave of the sexual assault against women at the beginning of 2013, Reda Al-Hefnawy (cited in Taha 2013), the FJP member of The Shura Council Human Rights Committee, states that “women should not mingle with men during protests” and asked, “How can the Ministry of Interior be tasked with protecting a lady who stands among a group of men?” (Ibid). Moreover, in the same session, Salafi Al-Nour Party — the second biggest party in the parliament after the FJP with the 27.8% of all votes — member Sarah Abdel Salam explicitly meant that women were responsible for sexual assault: “Women sometimes cause rape upon themselves through putting themselves in a position which makes them subject to rape” (Ibid.).

to marginalize secular feminist activism by means of welfare policies arguably targeting the empowerment of ‘ordinary Egyptian women’, religious and gender-discriminative provisions included in the 2012 Constitution, the MB’s unwillingness to combat sexual violence, and the Brotherhood’s backlash against international agreements and declarations on women’s rights resulted in the backlash against the MB regime.

## **5.2 Women’s Bargaining with the El-Sisi Regime**

This section discusses factors that contributed to activists’ willingness to bargain with the El-Sisi rule. The investigation is conducted in three subsections, namely, ‘constitutional reforms’, ‘combatting against sexual violence’ and ‘towards a new patriarchal bargain’. While findings show the reestablishment of the patriarchal bargain between Egyptian secular feminists and the political leadership taking place during El-Sisi’s presidency, it is argued that the majority of activists’ antipathy with the Brotherhood rule contributed to secular activists’ decision to support the military regime even though the regime threatened the independence of feminist groups.

### **5.2.1 The Egyptian Constitution of 2014**

After the defeat of Morsi, a drafting committee – consisting of Islamists, albeit a limited number of people – started to work on amending the Constitution which was passed by Morsi’s regime in 2012.<sup>34</sup> In an effort to prove how the new regime would be different from the MB rule, a committee was appointed to draft a new constitution that can arguably overturn the preceding “Islamization efforts” (Al-Ali 2013, Pratt 2015). The 2014 report published by the IBAHRI underlined the fact that the 2014 Constitution has more potent protection for women. According to the Article 11 of the 2014 Constitution (the 2014 Constitution), “State commits to achieving equality between women and men”. In the IBAHRI report (2014:14), it is also mentioned that the 2014 Constitution provides that the state is responsible for protecting women from arbitrary implementations, and

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<sup>34</sup> Amr Moussa (cited in IBAHRI 2014: 15), head of the drafting committee for the 2014 Constitution, claims that “an invitation was extended to all Islamic groups, including the MB. Of the parties of political Islam, only the Salafist Al Nour responded (the Brotherhood did not)”.

particularly for guaranteeing women's rights to be appointed to the state institutions. In Article 11, "The State shall take the necessary measures to ensure the appropriate representation of women in the houses of representatives, as specified by Law. The State shall also guarantee women's right of holding public and senior management offices in the State and their appointment in judicial bodies and authorities without discrimination" (The 2014 Constitution).

In our conversations, all of the respondents regarded this effort as an important milestone given the MB's publicly stated objection against the idea of 'gender equality' (please see: Ikhwanweb 2013). Regarding the 2014 Constitution and its explicit commitments to the advancement and protection of women's rights, Nancy told me:

It is a cause for hope among feminist activists. However, we should wait the rest to see how they are going to implement our hope.

Marian exemplified this:

There is a huge struggle in Egypt now. A struggle between feminist NGOs and state institutions. We are forcing them to implement the laws. And we will keep forcing them. The current situation is not as bad as that of during the MB era. At least, the El-Sisi rule is advancing women's rights constitutionally, and they are not talking about anymore if female genital mutilation should be legal or not.

Both the joint report published by Egyptian feminist organizations (FIDH et. al. 2014) and IBAHRI (2014) acknowledge that the 2014 Constitution has much more effective protection for women's rights. As Amal, Nancy, Hafah and Dalia emphasized a couple of times that while according to the 2012 Constitution, which was passed by the MB government, the Article 11 provided that "the state promotes morality, decency and public order" which allowed morality police to "guard" streets from "indecent" deeds of the citizens, this provision has been completely abolished from the new constitution (the 2012 Constitution). It is not possible to come across the notion of the 'decency' in the 2014 Constitution anymore. Moreover, Article 11 of 2014 Constitution specified that "state commits

to achieving equality between women and men” and stipulates that the government is obliged to take the necessary measures “to ensure appropriate representation of women in the houses of parliament, in the manner specified by law” and protects women’s rights of be “appointed to judicial bodies and entities without discrimination” (the 2014 Constitution).

During our conversations, a lot of activists brought my attention to Article 11 of the 2014 Constitution several times. Sarah explained the reason behind the article’s inclusion into the Constitution:

It was an amalgam of a lot of reasons. The committee wanted to distinguish themselves from the Islamists. They wanted to show that how they are women-friendly, unlike the MB. Through this article, they explicitly admitted the fact that women’s participation in the revolution is valuable.

In addition, the majority of interviewed people drew my attention to Article 74 of the 2014 Constitution which forbids the formation of political parties on the basis of religion (see also: IBAHRI 2014: 16). Their sympathy with the Article 74 arguably shows that they associate the lack of Islamist parties and organizations with the mitigation of patriarchal politics and settings.

#### **5.2.1.1 Constitutionals Reforms: Just on Paper?**

On the other hand, whilst the state has expressed its commitment to advancement of women’s rights, it is not likely to be able to argue that new articles in the Constitution devoted to state’s responsibility to achieve gender equality has been put into action so far. In a way, Amal was a perfect microcosm of thoughts expressed by activists when it comes to the clash between new regime’s official policies on women’s rights issues and its implementations:

What has been done so far during El-Sisi’s presidential period to a large extent is the flurry. New constitution has very good articles about women’s rights. However, overemphasized gender perspective of the new constitution has not been implemented so far. Feminist organizations have been calling for these articles to be applied. For example, even though we have been documenting more than 500



cases of mob sexual assaults and gang rapes during the period between June 2012 and June 2014, no one has been held accountable. Yeah, there is political will that they showed. But I do think this is not enough at all.

Moreover, despite gender-specific amendments in the 2014 Constitution, the new constitution failed in how the equality can be constituted without providing specific quota to guarantee women's representation in both legislative and judicial bodies. Nevertheless, even though the majority of the people I interviewed agree that despite a number of provisions incorporated in Article 11 of the 2014 Constitution including those providing combat against both verbal and physical violence against women and equal participation of women in the houses of parliament and judicial bodies have remained words on paper so far, it is still viewed as a big step forward towards amending the 2012 Constitution.

It can thus be said that although the El-Sisi administration expressed its commitment to the advancement of women's rights and gender equality, legal gains contradicted the annulment in the freedom of association and expression. Since the ouster of Morsi, women's demonstrations have been substantially excluded from public space (Pratt 2015). For instance, feminist activist did not organize a rally to celebrate International Women's Day for the first time after Mubarak's withdrawal. It is also interesting to see that many activists did not challenge the fact that the 2014 Constitution empowers the army and there is no mention of fixed parliamentary quotas for women included in it. Unprecedented levels of military tribunals of civilians during both the transitional SCAF period of 2011 and Morsi's presidency did not stop, but have increased in the polarized environment in which the El-Sisi regime attempt to stifle on human rights organizations and civic initiatives (Mcrobie 2014). The majority of people touched upon neither these issues nor provisions allowing the use of military trials for civilians (please see: Amnesty International 2015).

According to the Article 75 of the 2014 Constitution, all citizens are allowed to form NGO. The article provides that "[s]uch associations and foundations shall have the right to practice their activities freely, and administrative agencies may not interfere in their affairs or dissolve them, or dissolve their boards of directors or boards of trustees save by a court judgment"

(the 2014 Constitution). However, by early 2015, the government passed the law which tasked with the ministry to determine the legal status of an association based on the restricted activities of Article 11 (Pratt 2015).

Since the approval of the Constitution, a lot of NGO are still trying to gain the freedom of association, a right given by the Constitution. However, in 2014, the government passed the law requiring that all civil society organizations should register with the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Justice which jeopardizes NGO independence (Ibid.). Following this, El-Sisi issued an amendment to the Penal Code so that individual receiving funding from a foreign country would be sentenced to life imprisonment and a fine no less than LE 500.000 (Hamed 2014). The amendment concerns Article 78 of Penal Code “with the aim of pursuing acts harmful to national interest or destabilizing to general peace or the country’s independence and its unity” (cited in Hamed 2014). Departing from this, it is clear that the new amendments and laws jeopardize the ability to regulate and standardize the feminist initiatives that have emerged since 2011. Pratt (2015) rightly argues that “Even established women’s rights NGOs face challenges when it comes to building upon achievements in women’s legal rights given the new constraints on civil society organizations”. New regulations also seem controversial given the fact that the government’s unwillingness to exercise its commitments on gender equality.

### **5.2.2 Combating Against Sexual Violence**

As of 25 January 2014, more than 100 cases of sexual assault including several cases of rape in Tahrir Square and its vicinity were documented by four Egyptian women’s rights organizations; FIDH, Nazra for Feminist Studies, OpAntiSh and Tahrir Bodyguard (please see: FIDH et. al. 2014). According to the report (FIDH 2014: 3), more than 20 women said that they were sexually attacked by perpetrators affiliated with the Central Security Forces. Nancy explained this institutional and “pervasive violence and structural discrimination against women” as: “*it is not the case to get to the police station. Once I let them know that I was harassed, they harassed me too. The problem is not the law but the masculine mentality within the society*” (see also: FIDH et. al. 2014: 5).

Hafah mentioned that the public outrage over the video of the sexual assault of a woman during El-Sisi’s inauguration for his presidential victory also

paved the way for inclusion of the Article into the Constitution (please see also: Howeidy 2014). Therefore, along with the desire of the aforementioned committee to market itself as the successor of “the dominant narrative of Egypt’s modernity, of which progress on women’s rights is seen as a key marker” (Pratt 2015), as Hafah says, “*the sexual harassment of a woman captured on video in Tahrir Square contributed the announcement of national strategy to prevent the all forms of violence against women*” (see: also Nader 2014). Incorporation of an amendment on anti-sexual harassment law to the Egyptian penal code took place during the same period (Ahramonline 2014). This allowed the prosecution of some cases of sexual assaults and specifically gang rapes in Tahrir Square and its vicinity (Pratt 2015). But as Marian told me, the majority of sexual harassment cases, including gang rapes, are still not investigated. Pratt’s article (2015) and the report on the sexual violence against women in the public space (FIDH et. al. 2014: 17) on this issue also verifies Marian’s statements on investigated cases.

El-Sisi’s visit and apology on his third day in office to the victim of a mob sexual assault that occurred among thousands of people celebrating his election victory is of capital importance to interviewees (see also: Kirkpatrick 2014). Most of the respondents welcome the fact that El-Sisi became the first president to recognize sexual violence in the history of the Egyptian politics. Dalia told me that “*It was a much more vigorous personal commitment to combating sexual violence against women that were ever made by Mohamed Morsi or Mubarak*”.

A lot of interviewed people told me several times that particular phenomena regarding sexual assault against women have not changed after the ousting of Morsi. These are the nature and extent of sexual assault and security forces’ involvement in sexual crimes. However, it seems that even though El-Sisi’ rule has failed to implement the existing laws to prevent violence against women<sup>35</sup>, nor to provide with fair investigation to hold criminals to account, the majority of activists approached El-Sisi’s leadership much more positively. In this sense, it could be maintained that Egyptian secular feminists tend to pay great attention to *de jure* protection of their rights under constitutional guarantees after

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<sup>35</sup> Regarding this, a report by Amnesty International (2015: 17) clarifies that “The approaches of successive Egyptian governments’ to addressing violence against women has mainly consisted of deflecting criticism, without taking real steps to tackle the roots of the problem, to properly address reported incidents or break the cycle of impunity. While the authorities have announced many new initiatives, there is little detail on their implementation”.

having witnessed annulment of their rights during the MB regime.

### **5.2.3 Towards the Reestablishment of the Patriarchal Bargain**

At this point, it should also be recalled that while he was the head of military intelligence in March 2011, El-Sisi attempted to defend the virginity test carried out on 17 women after they were beaten and arrested by military staff during anti-Mubarak protests, allegedly to “protect[ing] girls from rape, and the soldiers and officers from accusations of rape” (BBC 2014). When it comes to women’s rights, similar to the language of the MB (Íkhwanweb 2013) who described a 2013 UN Women Report for Gender Equality as “deceitful”, as well as those political leaderships ruling the country before the revolution, the new regime also ascribed the patriarchal terms of honour and shame to female body. Even though in the statement – which was conflicted with his earlier speech about the virginity test – after visiting several women who had been sexually attacked and hospitalized during his inauguration speech El-Sisi addressed the government’s new agenda to combat to sexual assaults against women, he used the same patriarchal jargon similar to that of the MB albeit less explicitly: “Our honour is being assaulted in the streets. This is unacceptable and we can't allow one more incident like this to happen” (cited in Kingsley 2014). However, although the majority of people gladly mentioned his visit, apology and his commitment to the establishment of a commission assigned with dealing with sexual crime (Ibid.), a few interviewees drew my attention to the fact that similar to the previous Islamist government, the El-Sisi regime also has reduced women’s bodies as symbols of honour or shame.

Underplaying Egyptian women’s role to the country’s reputation and such notions as honor and shame attributed to the female body are also problematic. However, the majority of women did not mention new regulations allowing the El-Sisi’s rule to strictly monitor the establishment or functioning NGOs. Neither did they talk about the regime’s discourse that reduces women’s bodies to the symbols of collective honor which in turn may cause to blame the sexually assaulted women for what they experienced. There are only two people, who addressed the difficulties that women's right initiatives faced during El-Sisi’s presidency. Hafah told me:

NGOs were very active during Mursi's time. I am not saying it was

better because they have the better ideological system of beliefs when it comes to the idea of freedom. It was because they were not able to entirely control over NGO to impose censorship. They [the Brotherhood] did not have ability and time to do that. Now they [the El-Sisi administration] repressed every kind of opposition: Political parties, NGOs, anything that can be critical against them. Now, they control everything. We are even getting behind our abilities. They [the El-Sisi administration] constantly rises the authoritarian oppression by cracking down NGOs, non-affiliated activities such as peaceful demonstrations and rallies. Look at this... They publicly support sexual violation of women, but even we, [anti-sexual harassment movements] cannot get government approval from them to be able to officially work.

Sarah mentioned that there is not much distinction between the Brotherhood and the El-Sisi regime. For her, both governments are very conservative. However, she said that “*it was easier to raise an opposition and to create a public debate, which does not exist now*”. Sarah also underscored the fact that the human rights violations in the country escalated throughout the El-Sisi administration. Sarah’s accounts correspond to the findings included in Human Rights Watch World Report 2015. According to the report (Human Rights Watch 2015) “The government consolidated control through the constriction of basic freedoms and a stifling campaign of arrests targeting political opponents. Security forces and an increasingly politicized judiciary — apparently unnerved by rising armed group attacks — invoked national security to muzzle nearly all dissent”.

#### **5.2.4 Subconclusion**

It appears that the gains made in legal rights of women along with military regime’s commitment to women’s rights have led women activists to reestablish the patriarchal bargain with the state during the El-Sisi rule. Even though new regulations that allows the government to monitor NGOs activities and to restrict freedom of association, the majority of activists preferred to address the regime’s commitment to fight against sexual assault of women and its gender-equality policies which were included in the 2014 Constitution. It is also surprising to detect that only one respondent drew my attention to El-Sisi’s statements which reproduce similar patriarchal jargon that had been used by the Brotherhood

regime serving to identify Egyptian women's role with the country's honor. Despite having some reservations concerning the implementation of laws, interviewed people reveal that secular Egyptian feminists have restored the patriarchal bargain with the political leadership during El-Sisi's presidential term between June 2014 and June 2015 in return for abandoning independent feminist organizing and the reproduction of patriarchal discourse in return for protection of their rights.

## 6 Conclusion

Drawing on the Egyptian case, I demonstrated the reasons why secular feminist women activists did not see negotiating with the Brotherhood regime as a useful tool, whereas they chose to bargain with the military regime. I named the former case as the suspension of the patriarchal bargain while defining the second case as the reemergence of it.

Based on my interviews which were conducted with the activists and domestic and international legal instruments, secondary sources including UN human rights reports and NGO reports, scholarly articles and media report, I found out that the credit given to the El-Sisi regime by the majority of women activists cannot be separated from the disdain of the Muslim Brotherhood. That is not to say that the overthrown Brotherhood regime was not assessed in an objective manner by the activists. Conversely, it appeared throughout the research that the MB regime followed gender-discriminative policies during its executive and legislative period. However, it is also evident that the majority of respondents could not take an unbiased approach to El-Sisi, even though they have had some reservations on some issues, mainly on the implementation of legislation on gender equality. Furthermore, results also show that despite the new regulations of the El-Sisi rule that have allowed the government to monitor NGOs activities and to restrict freedom of association, the majority of activists preferred to uphold the regime's hypothetical commitment to fight against sexual assault of women and its gender-equality policies included in the 2014 Constitution.

However, throughout the analysis, there were some contrarian voices, albeit very few. In this sense, it was also interesting to see that a minority of respondents approached the deposed Morsi regime more positively than the El-Sisi rule in that there was still a room for NGOs to function independently from the regime needs and interests during Morsi's presidency. This also allowed me to see that some secular feminists, albeit a minority, have not translated their ideological disharmony with the Islamic Muslim Brotherhood regime – who are being criticized of taking up women's rights as long as either they are compatible with the Islam or inasmuch as they are serving the interests of 'average' Egyptian women – into the uncritical support of the military rule.

In response to the research question, the conclusion was therefore reached that the majority of activist's antipathy with the Muslim Brotherhood regime whose gender politics are substantially regarded as discriminatory by mainly relying on "established principles of Islam and Islamic ethic" (Ikhwanweb 2013) contributed to secular activists decision to support the military regime and applaud its effort on gender equality without being critical of neither of the patriarchal language which has been reproduced by El-Sisi nor repressive regulations threatening independent feminist organizations most of the time.

To conclude, the majority of activists' strict ideological differentiation from the MB regime along with their support for the new regulations on the protection of women's rights in the 2014 Constitution have made them support military rule with some reservations. Departing from this, it could be argued that four years after the crackdown of Mubarak regime, secular feminists have faced the reemergence of the patriarchal bargain. They are offered to abandon their independent organizational structures at the exchange of protection of previously gained legal rights and advances that have been made during El-Sisi's presidency. The new deal offers state's protection in return for obedience. However, we still need time to see how feminist women respond this in the long term.

This thesis thus presents a work-in-progress. While this study sought to find out why and how Egyptian secular feminist women's coping mechanisms and strategies with the state during the political leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood and the presidential period of El-Sisi — between June 2014 and June 2015 — are divergent from each other, further research is still necessary given that it was not likely to foresee the long-term effects of the current occurrence of the patriarchal bargain to Egyptian secular feminism in this thesis. The hope is therefore that this study can inspire further studies on the situation of the patriarchal bargain between Egyptian women and the state in the future.



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## 8 Appendices

### Appendix 1: List of Interviews

Dalia — born in 1989. A master's student in Cairo, Egypt; and a non-affiliated feminist activist.

Hafah — born in 1985. A member of *Imprint Movement (Basma)*, a full-time employee at *Basma*.

Amal — born in 1983. A member of *Nazra for Feminist Studies*, a full-time employee at *Nazra*.

Nancy — born in 1986. A member of *The Women and Memory Form (the WMF)*, a part-time employee at the *WMF*.

Asra — born in 1989. A master's student in Uppsala, Sweden; and a non-affiliated feminist.

Marian — born in 1987. A member of *New Women Foundation*, a member of *Basma* (voluntary base); a high school teacher.

Sarah — born in 1983. A freelance journalist; and a non-affiliated feminist activist.

## **Appendix 2: Interview Questions**

### **1. Personal Background**

- a) When and where were you born?
- b) Where did you grow up?
- c) How do you define yourself and the way you make feminist activism?
- d) When did you become involved in the feminist struggle? And what are the reasons behind that?
- e) How would you describe your/your organization's major aims?
- f) How do you define the role that your organization play?

### **2. Historical Overview**

- a) How would you portray the Nasser period?
- b) How do you feel about the preservation of Personal Status Law of the 1920s and 1930s during his presidency?
- c) How would you characterize Sadat's presidential term?
- d) What do you generally think about the rise of political Islam? What are the reasons behind this phenomenon? Which presidential period did correspond to this?
- e) How would you characterize Mubarak's period when it comes to women's rights issues?
- f) What do you think about the role of the state on feminist activity in Egypt in general?

### **3. The Brotherhood's Women's Empowerment Policies**

- a) Could you please briefly share your thoughts about the Muslim Brotherhood's policy towards women's rights issues?
  
- b) How do you view women's empowerment policies of the Freedom and Justice Party?
  
- c) To what extent is it important for you to address the poverty and under-development level of Egyptian women?
  
- d) What is the difference between the agenda of Egyptian secular feminists and women's rights policies of the Muslim Brotherhood?

### **4. The Leadership's Attitudes Towards International Agreements on Women's Rights**

- a) To what extent are international law and various UN human rights conventions important for you?
  
- b) What is the most significant international agreement on the protection of women's rights for you?
  
- c) How do you see the Brotherhood's policies towards international agreements? To what extent were they adhering to these conventions and declarations?
  
- d) How do you view the El-Sisi regime's policies towards international agreements? To what extent are they adhering to conventions and declarations?

### **5. Sexual Violence against Women**

- a) What are the differences/similarities between the Mubarak era and post-Mubarak Egypt when it comes to the extent and the nature of systematic violence against women?

b) What can you say about the security force's involvement in sexual crimes?

c) Do you think that the Muslim Brotherhood had have willingness to combat violence against women?

d) Do you think that the El-Sisi rule have clear agenda to address the sexual violence against women?

## **6. Constitutions, Legal Reforms and Religion**

a) What do you think about articles on women's rights included in the Egyptian Constitution of 2012?

b) How do you see religious provisions included in the Egyptian Constitution of 2012?

c) Where would you place yourself if I ask you to put yourself in a religious orientation scale?

d) Do you think that the status of women in Islam undermine women's rights in the countries where the majority of people are Muslim?

e) How do you regard the Egyptian Constitution of 2014?

f) To what extent does the 2014 Constitution have progressive provisions than the 2012 Constitution?

g) What do you think about the implementation of new provisions on women's rights included in the Egyptian Constitution of 2012?

h) Before ending the interview, would you like to add something? Are there any questions left unanswered?