

**Our Sisters in Struggle: Non-Alignment, Afro-Asian  
Solidarity and National Identity in the  
Egyptian Women's Press: 1952-1967**

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## Introduction

In 1959, the February issue of the Egyptian women's magazine *Hawa* featured an interview with the head of the Indonesian feminist movement Sukina Kusima . In the spirit of the Bandung conference, author wrote, Kusima was in town to promote solidarity between the women in Africa and Asia. The principles of Bandung—peaceful co-existence, condemnation of war, revolution against colonialism and defense of self determination—“still pour out their blood freely in the forming of the two great continents of Asia and Africa. Conferences are held, hands are joined and delegations meet to decide and then implement. The feminist union of the UAR saw the awakening of its responsibilities in this great effort which the peoples have carried out to meet and become acquainted.”

Speaking on the gains that Indonesian women had made over the previous decade, Kusima declared that:

These advances are counted not only as victory for Indonesian women, but for Eastern women in general....[However] women in the East must exert all of her power in taking up another battle to squash this great prison she has fallen into...the prison of decrepit tradition, which allows men to marry whom they will and divorce when they will.... Western women are, without a doubt, advanced, but she's not more advanced than the educated Eastern woman.[She] is lucky because of industrial advancement...for household appliances give her more time and energy...therefore she enjoys more personal freedom....

Egyptian women, she pointed out, had contributed positively to the building of a modern nation. Kusima concluded the interview with an exhortation of motherhood, “[Children] make us feel that we have a vocation in life, a glorious

vocation by which we are elevated for the sake of the nation...Children today are the engineers of the future.”<sup>1</sup>

The complex ways in which this article invokes multiple notions of community and national belonging, ideas of tradition and modernity and articulates definitions of proper womanhood suggests much about the complicated process of identity formation in Egypt in the 1950's and 60's. It was just one of hundreds which appeared in the mainstream and women's press during a 15 year period which focused on the lives and conditions of non-Egyptian women. Articles on women in China, India, Vietnam, Thailand, America, Algeria, Germany and Russia were just some of those that appeared during this period. This paper will explore the ways in which depictions of non-Egyptian women in the Egyptian women's press<sup>2</sup> were a vehicle for the construction of gendered national identities and visions of a “new society” in the period following the 1952 revolution in Egypt.

The 1952 revolution, which brought Col. Gamal Abdel-Nasser to power, marked the beginnings of Egypt's transition from a monarchy purportedly based on liberal-democratic principles to a republic, which, by the 1960's had adopted Arab Socialism as its official ideology. Central to this project were attempts to re-order gender and class

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<sup>1</sup> “Marriage and Family Planning and Peace,” *Hawa* 21 February 1959.

<sup>2</sup> By “women's press” here I mean not only magazines aimed at women but the women's pages of various magazines aimed at a more general readership written both by men and by women. I do this to get away from the idea that there is an underlying biological or essential cultural distinction which separates “women's writing” from other sorts of writing. What provides the coherence to the term “women's press” instead, is a common politics of address, a common historical genealogy which was part of, yet also distinct from, the development of the press in Egypt as a whole and shared tropes, points of reference and genres of writing. See Margot Badran: Feminists, Islam and Nation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Baron, Beth: The Woman's Awakening in Egypt ( ) Booth, Marilyn: May Her Likes Be Multiplied (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) Ijal Khalifa and xxxx for a general account of the History of the Egyptian women's press For a theoretically sophisticated account of how the historical development of the women's press as a form in Syria and Lebanon both mirrored the formation of and helped to create a gendered public sphere subordinate to masculine nationalist public spheres in the 1920's and 1930's see Thompson, Elizabeth: Colonial Citizens (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

relations by mobilizing previously marginalized groups, such as women, peasants and the urban poor. The status of women, in particular, was held to be a measure of the extent to which Egypt had succeeded in becoming a modern, liberated nation after centuries of foreign occupation. With the 1956 nationalization of the Suez canal, which stripped away the last vestiges of British colonial control, Egypt placed itself at the forefront of global opposition to Western hegemony over the formerly colonized world. Egypt's participation in the Non-Aligned and Afro-Asian Solidarity movements, its increasingly close ties with the former Soviet bloc and its attempts to bring other progressive Arab regimes together under the rubric of Arab nationalism were intimately tied to domestic efforts to envision and create a new society which was both socialist and authentically Egyptian.

It is within this context that we must place the hundreds of articles and profiles of non-Egyptian women which appeared in both the mainstream and women's press during the eighteen years of Nasserist rule. These images were multi-valent and often contradictory; they could be examples to readers of the progressive promises that becoming "modern" held for a recently de-colonized nation and expressions of anxiety about what effects such a process could have on gender roles and on society in general. They could be deployed by Egyptian women journalists to make new claims for rights and also used to assert the liberated status of Egyptian women under socialist rule in comparison to the condition of women in other more "backward" nations. Depictions of other women played a part in the construction of an idea of "global sisterhood" even as they highlighted the tensions inherent to such constructions. Finally, they allowed Egyptian women readers to imagine certain kinds of roles and lives for themselves while

foreclosing others. In short, articles about “other women” were a vehicle through which Egyptian women negotiated and contested the boundaries of the nation, national project and their place within both.

### **From National Family to Global Sisterhood**

Articles about foreign women were not a new feature of the women’s press. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, magazines had featured articles about foreign women. Often these took the form of what Marilyn Booth has termed “prescriptive biographies”—biographical sketches of notable women meant to impart lessons to female readers about proper gender roles.<sup>3</sup> By the period following World War II, however, the prevalence of prescriptive biography in women’s magazines had greatly declined.<sup>4</sup> Articles about foreign women increasingly took the form of interviews, multi-page features with photos or, less frequently, of editorials. Like prescriptive biographies, which purported to tell readers about the lives of real women, articles about non-Egyptian women asserted claims to truth. One way in which they did this was through the format of interviews which often appeared question and answer style, with the interviewees responses being printed ostensibly verbatim. It is impossible to tell just how mediated these interviews are. Since page layouts and available space determined the number of column inches an interview could take up, it is probable that most, if not all of these interviews were edited so they would be a particular size to fit a particular space. There is also the question of language. While interviews with Arab women were presumably carried out in Arabic, it is likely that most of the interviews with non-Arab subjects were conducted either in a second language or with the aid of a translator. In the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Booth hypothesizes that increases in female literacy and the spread of the novel displaced prescriptive biographies in magazines.

case of the former, interviews would then have to be translated into modern standard Arabic, the language that the interviews appeared in. In cases where the interviews had been conducted in a dialect of colloquial Arabic, they would still have to be translated into Modern Standard, or literary Arabic.<sup>5</sup>

The second way in which these articles made truth claims is through the author's assertion of accurate, eye-witness testimony of the condition of women in other countries. Foreign datelines, the rhetoric of witness (I was there and I saw with my own eyes), the author's assertion of having had expectations about a country which were changed through experience, were all ways in which these texts purported to give a real, unmediated picture of other women's lives. While articles about foreign women could be found outside of the sections of magazines designated as "the woman's page," they were most often to be found there or, in the case of women's magazines, in other specific locations.

In the women's magazine *Hawa*<sup>6</sup> articles about foreign women could regularly be found in the section of the magazine called "With *Hawa*." In the weekly news magazine *Akher Sa'a* (The Last Hour) they could be found in the section of the magazine entitled "*Hiyya*" (She) and in its competitor *al-Musawwar* (The Illustrated) in *al-Nifs al-*

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<sup>5</sup> The Arabic language is dyglossic. Colloquial Arabic, which varies greatly according to region, is not, as rule, a written language (although poets in the 1950's achieved great success with writing poetry in colloquial, this was viewed initially as a controversial and dangerous departure from the traditions and conventions of Arabic literary forms). It differs orthologically and grammatically from Modern Standard, which is written (or spoken in formal settings) and is common to all of the Arabic speaking countries.

<sup>6</sup> *Hawa's* main competitor, the magazine *Bint al-Nil*, was closed by the government in 1957, after its founder Doria Shafiq publicly accused the Nasser regime of stifling democracy and perpetuating human rights abuses. See Cynthia Nelson: *Doria Shafiq, Egyptian Feminist* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1996). *Hawa's* editor Aminah Said and her magazine were both pro-Nasser and strongly identified with the regime's stance on gender issues.

*Helwa* (The Charming Half).<sup>7</sup> These sections also featured news on the activities of local women's groups, announcements of visiting women dignitaries and briefs on the participation of Egyptian women in various national and international conferences. With titles like "The Girls of Iran,"<sup>8</sup> "I Saw the Yemeni Woman Without a Veil!"<sup>9</sup> "What do You Know About the Yugoslavian Woman?"<sup>10</sup> and "Thank God You're an Egyptian Woman"<sup>11</sup> the articles seemed to imply the nation-state as primary locus of allegiance and identity. The placement of the articles and their rhetorical strategies, however, suggested that the magazine's readers might envision themselves as belonging to other sorts of communities. The organization of *Hawa*, *Hiyya* and *al-Nifs al-Helwa*, where reports on the international, national and local contexts of women's activism intermingled and overlapped seemingly at random, created a discursive space of "global sisterhood" whose boundaries were shifting and contingent. This sense of the kinship of women across national boundaries was further re-enforced by the text of the articles themselves, which relied frequently on the trope of sisterhood and unity between women of different nationalities.

An article about a meeting of Egyptian and other African women, for example, extolled the unity displayed by the "children of one continent"<sup>12</sup> Another claimed to inform its readers all about the lives of their "Iraqi sisters." An article in *al-Mussawar* about Sudanese women asserted "women are women everywhere."<sup>13</sup> In addition, the

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, the largest weekly news magazine and most serious rival to *Akher Sa'a* and *al-Mussawar*, *Ruz al-Youssef* did not have a woman's page after the very early 1950's although women's pages seemed to be an ubiquitous part of both the weekly and daily press during this period.

<sup>8</sup> Mohammed Rifa'at: *Hawa*, 12 February 1960.

<sup>9</sup> *al-Mussawar*, 18 March, 1958, 14-15.

<sup>10</sup> *Hawa* 12 December, 1958.

<sup>11</sup> Sabri Abu al-Majid: *Hawa*, 27 August 1966.

<sup>12</sup> "African Women Leaders at the Great Conference" *Hawa*, 1 March 1961

<sup>13</sup> "The Sudanese Woman Battles the Veil" *al-Mussawar* March 8 1957, pg. 22-25

prevalence of articles on women in countries undergoing or having recently emerged from wars of national liberation against European powers, such as Vietnam, Algeria and Mozambique, stressed the solidarity of Egyptian women with colonized and formerly colonized women as victims of a common history of oppression and Western domination.

It is a mistake to view the various national and supranational communities invoked by articles on non-Egyptian women as contradictory or mutually exclusive. To do so risks missing the fluid nature of subjectivity and self definition at a time in Egyptian history when the primacy of the nation-state as the locus of identity is largely taken for granted. Instead, representations of foreign women articulated multiple nexuses of identity which were contextually specific and whose boundaries were perpetually shifting and overlapping. An Egyptian woman could be an Arab woman vis a vis non-Arab women, an Eastern woman vis a vis a European woman, a socialist woman vis a vis non-socialist women an African woman vis a vis an Asian woman or a woman vis a vis an Egyptian man.

It is important to note here that the universalizing rhetoric of “sisterhood”, not surprisingly, was class specific; feminist theorizations of sisterhood and community as they appeared in these articles elided the class identity of both writers and subjects by making it into a norm for progressive politics and proper citizenship. Interviews with and representations of the largely middle and upper middle class women from other countries who were most often the focus of these articles depicted them as proto-typical representatives of their respective national womanhoods. For unlike prescriptive biography, which purported to tell the life stories of *exemplary* women, articles about

other women tended to portray the attitudes and experiences of middle class women as those of the “normal” national female subject.

### **Non-Alignment, Afro-Asian Solidarity and Pan-Arabism**

The content of the women’s press during this period owes much to the Nasser regime’s attempts to contribute to the forging of a new world political order under the rubric of non-alignment, socialism and Arab nationalism. The range and types of communities and solidarities invoked by depictions of non-Egyptian women both reflected and gave meaning to this project. The historic Bandung conference of 1955, in which Egypt played a leading role, signaled the intentions of the colonized and formerly colonized world to re-write the post-War global order by uniting under the banner of national liberation, self-determination and anti-imperialism.<sup>14</sup> A number of distinct but overlapping movements, including the Non-Aligned Movement, the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Movement and the African Peoples Summit emerged out of/in tandem with Bandung.

The Non-Aligned movement, officially started in Belgrade in 1961 with 25 member states, was an outgrowth of the alliances/relationships/ links made at Bandung. Founded by Indian President/Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Tito of Yugoslavia, Nkrumah, Indonesian leader Sukarno and Nasser its founding principles were peace and disarmament, independence and right to self-determination of all colonial peoples and

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<sup>14</sup> Egypt’s prominent role at Bandung owes something to the establishment, the year before, of the British sponsored Baghdad Pact which brought into alliance Britain, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Iraq. According to Derek Hopwood, while Britain and her Western allies saw the pact in terms of defense against the Soviet Union, Nasser saw it as a way to undermine his power in the region. Anthony Eden visited Egypt in Feb. 1955 to urge Nasser to join the pact. He refused and relations between the two countries continued to deteriorate, culminating in the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956. Derek Hopwood: Egypt, Politics and Society 1945-84 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985) pp. 43-44.

equality between the races, economic equality, cultural equality and resisting cultural imperialism, universalism and multi-lateralism through support for the UN.

The six year period between Bandung and Belgrade was formative in the shaping of an internationalist politics which took as its *raison d'être* the *national* liberation of the subjugated or formerly subjugated countries of Asia and Africa. It also saw Egypt take an increasingly important leadership role on the international stage. The Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Committee, was founded in 1955 in Stockholm and soon after transferred its headquarters to New Delhi. In spite of its name at its inception it was almost exclusively an Asian solidarity movement (since Egypt was the only member that could be considered African) With the move, in 1956, of the AAPSC headquarters to Egypt and the convening of the AAPSC conference in Cairo in Dec. of 1957, however, the movement assumed a more truly Afro-Asian orientation. The AAPSC's Permanent Secretariat was established under the leadership of Egyptian author Youssef Siba'i, who served as Secretary General for the next seven years. Attending the Cairo conference were 500 delegates representing 45 countries and colonial territories, many of them newly created by the process of de-colonization in Africa. The AAPSC as a movement differed from Bandung (which it grew out of) and Belgrade (which it preceded) in its emphasis on active opposition to colonialism and promotion of national self determination. In his opening statements to the 1957 Conference, then Vice President Anwar Sadat said:

Your gathering today on Egyptian soil portrays one more aspect of its freedom. We have all been partners in one, specific common fate of imperialism and exploitation. Partners in a common struggle and in a future common to us all...The Bandung conference was not a haphazard event, but rather a national, psychological factor which led to the awakening of the peoples of Asia and

Africa and roused them from their slumber...to resume the struggle for the recovery of liberty and freedom.<sup>15</sup>

Thus the language of disarmament and peaceful co-existence common to both Bandung and Belgrade was absent from the rhetoric of the AAPSC conference. In addition, more purely Pan-African conferences, like the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference of independent African Nations, held in Addis Ababa in 1960, played an important role in cementing transnational alliances between Arab and Sub-Saharan Africa, linking them for the first time as combatants in a common struggle for the liberation and development of the African continent.

The increasing co-operation of the African countries and their increasingly vocal participation in the activities of the Non-Aligned Movement as well as Nehru's death in 1964 prompted a shift in the movement's center from Asia to Africa which was marked by the choice of Cairo as the host of the 1964 NAM summit. The political ties formed between Egypt and other African regimes, its willingness to host various African, Afro-Asian and Non-Aligned gatherings like the Cairo Economic Conference of 1962, and its positioning (both geographically and politically) as a cross-roads connecting Asia, Africa and the Arab World made it an ideal venue to reflect this shift. In addition the choice of Cairo owed much to Nasser's status as an international symbol-- through the nationalization of the Suez Canal, his support for the Palestinian cause and espousal of socialism and Arab Nationalism--of the colonized's resistance to Western imperialism:<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Opening Address of Afro-Asian People's Conference held in Cairo, 12-26-57 to 1-1-58 (7-9).

<sup>16</sup> . From: AW Singham, and Shirley Hume: Non-Alignment in an Age of Alignments (London: Zed Press, 1986), 90.

[The unification of Egypt with Syria in 1958 and the creation of the United Arab Republic gave impetus to Pan Arab aspirations in the region.<sup>17</sup> **Expand on**

**history/ideology of Pan-Arabism]**

### **Gendering Internationalisms and Contentious Histories: Egypt's Engagement With International Feminism**

The attention paid in the domestic Egyptian women's press to women in post-colonial Asia and Africa, the Arab world and socialist countries such as Yugoslavia was partly a product of shifts in Egypt's ideological orientation. But it was also produced by the creation of new spaces within the sphere of global politics within which people, ideas and discourses [circulated]. As new alliances were forged in the international arena, groups of women activists, writers, students and politicians circulated within the milieu of international conferences, visiting delegations, summits and committee meetings. The NAM and AAPSC had spawned numerous related conferences such as Afro-Asian Youth Movement and the Afro-Asian Writers Movement and educational exchanges, Cairo Economic Conference of July, 1962. The resulting exchanges and networks were part of what made possible the sorts of imaginings which overflowed the boundaries of the nation-state.

Egyptian women were not new to the arena of international politics. Since the 1920's, members of the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU)<sup>18</sup> had been active members of

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<sup>17</sup> According to Jankowski, Nasser's mid-1950's adoption of an Arab Nationalist orientation was a policy choice rooted in the utility of Arab solidarity for the achievement and maintenance of Egyptian independence. (162) James Jankowski: "Arab Nationalism in "Nasserism" and Egyptian State Policy, 1952-1958" in Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East ed: Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) pp 150-169.

<sup>18</sup> The Egyptian Feminist Union was the first women's organization with an explicitly political program for women's emancipation. It grew out of the participation of elite women in the 1919 revolution against British rule as the women's wing of the nationalist Wafd (Delegation) Party and was led by Hoda

various international organizations and congresses including the International League of Mothers and Educators for Peace, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the International League for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children and, most prominently, the International Alliance of Women for Equal Suffrage and Citizenship (IAW). The EFU had joined the IAW when it changed its name from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in 1923.<sup>19</sup> The change in name signaled the IAW's shift from a narrow focus on suffrage to a multi-tiered platform which encompassed multiple rights and fully enfranchised citizenship. This program dovetailed nicely with the newly expanded agenda of the EFU which, after Egyptian independence in 1922, broke away from the Wafd Party for failing to meet its demands for women's rights under the new constitution. Egyptian women's engagement with international feminism, however, was to be a story of disjuncture between the nationalist feminism<sup>20</sup> of the colonized and the "universalism" of Western-dominated international feminism which masked the movement's imperial genealogy.<sup>21</sup>

The rhetoric of international feminism, as it developed in Britain and the United States, rejected ethnic and national differences between women in favor of a notion of

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Sha'arawi, whose husband Ali was one of the leaders of the Wafd. For an complete and exhaustively researched history of the EFU see Badran

<sup>19</sup> It was returning from the Rome 1923 IAW Congress that EFU president Hoda Sha'arawi and her young colleague Saiza Nabarawi made history by tearing off the light veils which covered their faces in the Cairo train station. The event has long figured in the narrative of nationalism and nationalist historiography as a "founding myth" of Egyptian modernity and liberation. The word "myth" is used here not because the event didn't happen, but because it reflects the complex ways in which the actions of Sha'arawi and Nabarawi have been appropriated and fashioned, told and re-told as part of wider narratives of feminism nationalism and progress in Egypt .

<sup>20</sup> For an overview of the relationship between nationalism and the rise of women's movements in the non-Western world see Kumari Jayawardana: Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World (London: Zed Press, 1986).

<sup>21</sup> See Leila Rupp: Worlds of Women (Princeton, Princeton University press, 1997) for an overview of the history of the IAW and other international feminist groups prior to 1945 esp. chapter three for discussion of European women's relations with non-Western women within these groups. Also see Antoinette Burton's excellent work, Burdens of History: British Feminist, Indian Women and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

solidarity on the basis of biological sex and a shared experience of oppression and disenfranchisement. A song of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance summed it up: "Whatever Our race or country be....we are one nation/Womanhood."<sup>22</sup> Carrie Chapman Catt, the leader of the ISWA, rejected "local" (i.e. nation-specific) patriotism as a male phenomenon. National feeling had to be sacrificed for the sake of female solidarity so the suffrage movement could present a united front to the world. The inclusion of non-Western women within the movement was key if it was to be considered a truly global enterprise. In 1923, for example, along with the EFU, the IAW also admitted the Woman's Indian Association, the Jewish Women's Equal Rights Association from Palestine and a Japanese Women's association, which joined the ranks of women's organizations from countries like Greece and Turkey.

On the other hand, however, the ways in which non-Western women were to be included reveal the colonial assumptions upon which "global sisterhood" was to function within the context of empire. In a letter written to an American magazine about the Egyptian women's movement in 1912, Catt praised the women of Egypt for "daring to refuse marriage" and demanding the right to education. She attributed the beginnings of a women's movement in Egypt to the influence of British colonial control. "Great Britain has created a new Egypt," she declared. "It has awakened a sleeping race and held before it the dazzling achievements of Western progress."<sup>23</sup> Thus, non-Western women were to be absorbed into international feminism in a position of subordination, not as leaders or equal partners with their Western "sisters", but as objects of tutelage. As Antoinette Burton points out: "British feminist---and more specifically, Anglo-American

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>23</sup> as quoted in Ibid, 191.

suffrage—internationalism was predicated on the assumption that Western women would lead the women of the East to freedom and British and American women would spearhead the charge.<sup>24</sup>”

The rejection of nationalism as the antithesis of universalist female solidarity, the absorption of colonized and formerly colonized women into the IAW as objects of Western reform and tutelage remained defining features of international feminism throughout the 1920’s, 1930’s and 1940’s even as the movement challenged colonialism in other ways.<sup>25</sup>

The failure of the IAW to put the national/ist, anti-colonial concerns of colonized and formerly colonized women on its agenda was a source of deep-seated frustration to Egyptian feminists. Throughout the 1920’s EFU members clashed with the IAW over the existence of licensed prostitution<sup>26</sup> in Egypt and the perpetuation of the Capitulations, the extra-territorial agreements which protected European citizens from being tried in Egyptian courts for violations of Egyptian laws.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps more critically, however, Egyptian feminists would come to clash with Western feminists over the issue of Palestine.

The Palestinian Arab Women’s Union, along with Syria, joined the IAW in 1936. The same year events in Palestine **[footnote: Palestinian Revolt--describe]** contributed

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>25</sup> Membership in the IAW was country-based. Although much of Asia and Africa remained under colonial control, the IAW deemed them countries as opposed to colonial territories so they would be eligible for IAW membership. Badran, 108.

<sup>26</sup> Prostitution had been legal in various forms since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. a modern regime of regulation, requiring weekly check-ups for venereal disease, the manual confinement of infected women in venereal wards the licensing of brothels and the outlawing of streetwalking was put in place by British military authorities in 1882. The system of regulation continued to be enforced throughout the period of British rule and after independence in 1922. Legalized prostitution was eventually abolished in 1951. See Badran, Chapter 10.

<sup>27</sup> The Capitulations have their origins in 19<sup>th</sup> century agreements between various foreign powers and the weakening Ottoman Empire, under whose jurisdiction Egypt nominally fell.

to an increasingly volatile situation there. The Egyptian feminist movement to begin to connect with other Arab women in the 1930's and 1940's to deal with the Palestine situation. On July 7, 1938, leaders from women's associations in Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq met in Beirut to discuss the crisis and drafted a letter to EFU President Hoda Sha'arawi delegating her to represent the Palestinian cause at the upcoming IAW meeting in Copenhagen, the League of Nations and a number of other international groups Egypt had affiliated with including the International League of Mothers and Educators for Peace<sup>28</sup> and the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom.

According to Badran, the 1939 meeting of IAW in Copenhagen was to graphically reveal the tensions in international feminism. A discussion of the proposed declaration of principles gave rise to heated debate and revealed a lack of consensus between Western and non-Western women on what constituted feminism and gender solidarity. In its declaration of principles, IAW proposed to observe "absolute neutrality on all questions that were strictly national."<sup>29</sup> Issues of peace and social justice were eschewed by IAW as "national" included Palestine. An outraged Saiza Nabarawi writing in *L'Egyptienne* :

What did we demand? A little sympathy for the unfortunates who suffer in the East from the wrongs of imperialist politics. ....It [the IAW] should have given the Eastern world proof that women are sincere and disinterested when they speak of justice and liberty, that they know how to disavow their governments when they do not apply these principles....by their [the IAW's] refusal to interest themselves in Eastern problems they have proven that their magnificent program addresses itself only to certain people of the West, alone deigned to enjoy liberty.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The Egyptian section counted among its members Aminah Said, who was to become editor and chief of *Hawa* and Soheir Qalamawi, a frequent contributor to both *Hawa* and *al-Mussawar*

<sup>29</sup> As quoted in Badran: 232.

<sup>30</sup> "*L'Egyptienne*" was the organ of the EFU. It had another publication in Arabic "*al-Mar'ah al-Masriyyah*" which ceased publication in the early 1940's. As quoted in Badran: 235

After the Copenhagen conference, the IAW and other international women's organizations largely ceased their activities because of World War II. When the IAW reconvened in the post-War period in 1946, the terrain of transnational women's activism had been re-ordered. The creation of the leftist Women's International Democratic Federation, which wedded gender struggle and class struggle, in 1945 signaled one major split in the international feminism along the East-West axis of the Cold war.<sup>31</sup> The creation of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Movement and the Non-Aligned movement in the 1950's and 1960's, which divided the movement along North-South lines, was the other.

A transnational women's movement encompassing the colonized and formerly colonized world led and driven by the concerns of non-Western women was a direct offspring of Bandung, the NAM and the AAPSC. The first Asian-African Conference on Women held in Colombo in 1958, for example, was confined to women's organizations from the 29 countries of the Asian and African Region which were represented at Bandung<sup>32</sup> The first Afro-Asian Women's Conference, which was convened in Cairo in 1961 under UAR (United Arab Republic) sponsorship grew out of a resolution from the earlier Cairo sponsored AAPSC general conference in 1957.<sup>33</sup> For the first time on a these movements provided colonized and formerly colonized women an alternative political and organizational space to that which had been had been occupied by the imperial feminist, Western dominated pre-war international women's movement. The novelty of the movement's location and the connections which it enabled was not lost on

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<sup>31</sup> The IAW continued to espouse a Western liberal feminist program.

<sup>32</sup> A second conference was convened in X in X

<sup>33</sup> Second conference was held in X in X

those who participated in it. Bahia Karam, secretary of the preparatory committee for the 1961 Cairo Women's Conference wrote in her introduction to the proceedings:

It is for the first time in modern history, feminine history that is, that such a gathering of Afro-Asian women has taken place....represent[ing] over 37 peoples, some of them participating for the first time in an international meeting. It was indeed a great pleasure, an encouragement to meet delegates from countries in Africa which the imperialists had never allowed before to leave the boundaries of their land. Delegates from Basutoland [?], Gambia, for example, had the chance for the first time to meet their sisters from other countries in Africa and Asia.<sup>34</sup>

Lakshmi Menon, leader of the Indian delegation to the Colombo Asian-African Conference of women marveled that women from Mongolia and Ghana would finally be able to meet their "sisters" from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. (293)"<sup>35</sup>

It was not only location which separated transnational women's activism in the context of the NAM and AAPSC from the activism of the IAW and organizations like it in the first part of the century. Despite the imperial assumptions and uneven power relationships which contradicted its founding premise, the IAW consistently asserted biology (and a common experience of exclusion based on that biology) as the basis of women's solidarity and a unified feminist program. While not denying the importance of ties based on the purportedly "natural" division between the sexes, the activism of colonized and formerly colonized women stressed solidarity based on a common experience of subjugation created and perpetuated by Western imperialism, what Chandra Mohanty has called "an imagined community of third world oppositional struggles.... women with divergent histories and social locations woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but

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<sup>34</sup> Bahia Karam: "Introduction" in Proceedings of the First Afro-Asian Women's Conference, Cairo Jan. 14-23, 1961 (Cairo: The Amalgamated Press of Egypt, 1961), 9

<sup>35</sup> Lakshmi Menon: "Closing Remarks" in Report of the Proceedings of The First Asian-African Conference of Women, Held in Colombo, Ceylon 15-24 of February, 1958 (Bombay: Mouj Printing Bureau, 1958).

systematic.”<sup>36</sup> African and Asian women had “suffered from the same disabilities” and were thus “struggling for the same aims.”<sup>37</sup> In her speech at the 1961 Cairo conference, UAR delegate Karimah Sa’id<sup>38</sup> said: “We, Afro-Asian women, meet today representing two-thirds of the world population, tied by the unity of the great past, the struggling present and the glorious future—a unity of pains and aims—a unity of struggle for the rights and for the sake of freedom, peace and humanism.”<sup>39</sup>

It was the explicit purpose of conferences like the Afro-Asian Women’s Solidarity Conference to establish a framework for exchanges and coordination between women of the global south. One of the many outcomes of these exchanges were the articles on foreign women which appeared during this period in the Egyptian women’s press. The UAR delegates to the 1961 women’s conference included Aminah Said, the editor and chief of *Hawa*, Fathia Bahig a journalist whose articles for *Akher Sa’a* included , and Soheir Qalamawi, head of the Egyptian Press Syndicate and occasional contributor to the women’s pages of various publications. An article on Vietnamese women in *Hawa* was based on an interview with Nguyen Ty Binh who visited Cairo as a delegate to the Plenary Committee of the Conference of Afro-Asian solidarity.<sup>40</sup> A series of articles on women in Tanganyika<sup>41</sup> was based on Sa’id’s attendance of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Afro-Asian solidarity conference there.

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<sup>36</sup> Mohanty, Chandra (ed): Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism Introduction: *Cartographies of Struggle* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 4.

<sup>37</sup> “Daw Khin Hla, leader of the Burmese Delegation’s remarks at the Plenary Session,” Proceedings of The First Asian-African Conference of Women, 15.

<sup>38</sup> Karimah Sa’id was the sister of *Hawa* editor Aminah Sa’id and the undersecretary of Education

<sup>39</sup> Karimah Said: “Opening Remarks” in Proceedings of the First Afro-Asian Women’s Conference, Cairo Jan. 14-23, 1961 (Cairo: The Amalgamated Press of Egypt, 1961), 9

<sup>40</sup> “ In South Vietnam, the Groom pays half the Dowry to his Mother-in-Law” *Hawa* 13 March, 1963, 43.

<sup>41</sup> Which joined together with the island of Zanzibar in 1964 to form Tanzania.

The articles on “other women”, in many cases, grew directly out of Egyptian women’s presence at such conferences and the presence of foreign women in Cairo. Content both reflected and re-enforced the context of post-war, women’s activism.

### **Modernity and the Other Woman**

If articles about ‘other women’ can be seen as part of the Nasser regime’s attempts to contribute to the forging of a new world political order and the role of Egyptian women activists in that process, they should also be located within the more “local” project of national (self) definition. In an article about women in West Germany, Aminah Said, the editor and Chief of *Hawa* magazine, wrote: “Whenever I visit a foreign country for the first time...I compare between the status of women in it and the status of our women and then I work from this to extract a comparison...the place of the modern Egyptian woman in the pageant of world civilization.” Compared to advanced societies (*mujtama’aat mutaqadimah*) like Britain, France and America, Egyptian women were still “at the bottom of the ladder.”<sup>42</sup> However, compared to the conditions of most Asian and African women, she argued, Egyptian women were the pinnacle of culture and advancement. In her work on Imperial feminism, Antoinette Burton has demonstrated how British feminist self-images were constructed through reading images of Indian women in the women’s press. “Representing these women and making them topics of debate about femininity, emancipation and progress,” she writes, “[British] feminists objectified women of the East into types of their own making.”<sup>43</sup> I would argue that depictions of non-Egyptian women both subverted and re-inscribed this imperial

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<sup>42</sup> Aminah Said: “The German Wife is Ruled by his Command,” *Hawa*, 4 October, 1958.

<sup>43</sup> Burton, 101

paradigm. Representations in the Egyptian women's press were simultaneously a project of identification and objectification.

On the one hand, the authors of these articles and, indeed the rhetorical strategies of the articles themselves, were the product of a post-colonial, explicitly anti-imperial context which stressed the kinship and common struggles of non-Western women against Western oppression and domination. On the other hand, depictions of other women acted as a foil against which Egyptian women could exhibit their role as agents of civilization and the modernity of Egyptian society, primarily in relation to other colonized or formerly colonized nations of Africa, Asia and the Arab world. "Whenever I go to the region of our Arab brothers and sisters, I find afflicted women," wrote Said. "They fervently desire to follow our example and would benefit greatly if we took them by the hand in their striving to achieve a better life...If we want, truly, to preserve our leadership in our greater nation (the Arab world) it is not right to confine our efforts to ourselves."<sup>44</sup>

Another author wrote, "My impression of the Pakistani woman, from first to last, is that she is a backward woman (*imra'a mutakhalifa*) [but] I excuse her. Because the Pakistani woman is governed by tradition (*taqalid*) passed down for generations and centuries."<sup>45</sup> Among the social practices which marked Pakistani womanhood as backward were prevalence of adolescent marriage, uncontrolled reproduction and the persistence of *purdah*. In other articles (almost universally), practices such as veiling and sex segregation were juxtaposed with the "new" activities women were undertaking in the public sphere such as waged professional work and pursuit of higher education. The

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<sup>44</sup> Aminah Said "We are neglectful in the rights of our Arab sisters" *Hawa* 12 February, 1961.

<sup>45</sup> "The Woman in Pakistan" *Hawa* 9 July, 1960

home as a locus of women's oppression and ossified tradition exemplified by polygamy, arranged marriages and extended kinship networks was posed against the more enlightened model of the nuclear family, companionate marriage and bourgeois domesticity. The extent to which a nation was considered to be "advanced" depended on the extent to which it adhered to (or didn't adhere to) a particular constellation of social, political and economic practices identified as modern. The assumptions behind what constituted modernity (and liberation) were highly gendered. Based on the condition and level of "emancipation" of their women, nations could be located along a linear continuum delineating the stages of social development from "backward" to "modern" or civilized.

The discourse of underdevelopment or backwardness as it appeared in these articles frequently erased complicated histories and relations of power between Egyptian women and between Egyptian women and foreign women. An article entitled "Your Sudanese Sister in her Path to Liberation," (12-12-59) traced early girls education as the beginning of Women's emancipation in Sudan and lauds the role of Egyptians who were among the first to establish girls schools. What it (and every other article on Sudanese women surveyed for this paper) fails to mention is that the presence of Egyptian educators in Sudan was a direct result of its colonial policies there.<sup>46</sup> Other articles

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<sup>46</sup> The Sudan was conquered by Mohammed Ali Pasha's troops, led by his son Isma'el, in 1824. In 1841, the Ottoman Sultan officially recognized the Mohammed Ali dynasty's claims over the area when it was added to the land grant which comprised "South Egypt." Egyptian administration and attempts to centralize control over its Sudanese possession proved unpopular and was complicated by the Egyptian practice of hiring Europeans for Sudanese service. In 1881 resentment over Egyptian rule triggered the Mahdist movement, which aimed at Sudanese independence from Egyptian control. 1882 and the extension of British control over Egypt brought the British empire in direct involvement with Sudan and attempts to withdrawal troops from Khartoum ended with the famous massacre of Gordon by Mahdist troops. In 1899 the British and Egyptians signed the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, outlining the administration of Sudan. Though under Egyptian sovereignty, it was run virtually as a British colony. Sudan did not achieve formal independence until 1956.

provided justification of Egyptian military involvement in a brutal civil war in Yemen on the side of Abdullah al-Sallal, an officer in the Yemeni army brought to power by the military coup which overthrew Yemen's quasi-monarchical leader Imam Ahmed in 1962.<sup>47</sup> An article which appeared in *Hawa* in 1964 at the height of Egyptian involvement in the conflict praised the Sallal government for bringing progress and enlightenment to Yemen's women. The Yemeni woman, the article asserted, was "living the sweetest days of her life. She has begun to see the light and ascend to a vast new awakening of development and progress." Whereas she has suffered mutely under the "iron hand" of the monarchy, the Yemeni woman was now removing her veil and could now take her rightful place in the perpetuation of the revolution and the building of her nation.<sup>48</sup> Another article, which appeared in the women's pages of *Akher Sa'a*, purported to present "the true picture of the life led by women in post-revolutionary Yemeni society." The article's first page featured the heading "The Grip of the Imam has Been Lifted From Around Her Neck."<sup>49</sup> A photo essay, also in *Akher Sa'a*, juxtaposed pictures of a Yemeni woman, her entire body including her face obscured by a black burka, with a picture of two unveiled young women in school uniforms. According to the photo's caption, the two were learning math from one of the Egyptian women teachers who

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<sup>47</sup> Yemen has been described as Egypt's Vietnam. In 1962, Yemen was ruled by Imam Ahmed in the North and the British, who retained their colonial control of Aden in the South. In September, a military coup brought Abdullah al-Sallal to power. Imam Ahmed's heir Mohammed Badr fled to the North where, with the support of affiliated tribesmen and the financial and material backing of Saudi Arabia, he mounted armed resistance to the Sallal government. Sallal requested aid from Egypt which Nasser granted. Over the course of the next two years, Egypt's troop commitment grew from 8,000 to 70,000. Fighting became increasingly brutal as the conflict dragged on. In its final phases, Egypt was accused of dropping poisoned gas on Yemeni villages near the Saudi Arabian border killing hundreds of civilians. Repeated negotiations between Saudi Arabia and Egypt failed to end the conflict until 1967, when agreements were made at the Khartoum conference for the withdrawal of Egyptian and Saudi troops.

<sup>48</sup> "The Yemeni Woman is living the Sweetest Days of her Life" *Hawa* March 11, 1964

<sup>49</sup> Halim Muwaafy "Thus Lives the Woman in Yemen" *Akher Sa'a* 7 June, 1965, 22-24, 37.

provided much of the staff for Yemen's system of female education.<sup>50</sup> Differences between Egyptian women also came to be constituted through articles on foreign women. The same article which accused Pakistani women of backwardness, also repeatedly pointed to the similarities, in culture and situation, to peasant women in the Egyptian Sa'id (the South). Another piece describing the traditional nature of Yemeni rural society, where strict division between the sexes was enforced and girls' education was virtually non-existent declared that "The Yemeni peasant woman is a picture of the Egyptian Peasant women."<sup>51</sup>

Through narratives of progress and (under) development, representations of other women constituted difference not as a product of politics and power but of temporal disjuncture. Taken as part of a wider discourse of modernity, however, such narratives were neither static nor coherent. Far from being a fixed set of norms, attributes and relationships, what is considered to be "modern" in these texts is fluid, indeterminate and subject to multiple reinterpretations, contestation, resistance and negotiation

I suggest that depictions of other women were a site for such negotiations by Egyptian women. What the "new woman" of Nasserist rhetoric was supposed to look like, how to reconcile the demands of development and progress with the preservation of Egyptian cultural authenticity, what constituted appropriate norms of masculinity and femininity were (and remain) contentious issues. Representations of non-Egyptian women, revealed the tensions that the project of making Egypt "modern" was fraught with and anxieties about changing gender roles. They also, however, textually provided

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<sup>50</sup> *Akher Sa'a* 11 August, 1965.

<sup>51</sup> "I Saw the Yemeni Woman Without a Veil!" *al-Mussawar* March 18, 1958

ways for readers to reconcile those tensions and imagine new possibilities for their lives even as they foreclosed other possibilities.

### **Equality and Authenticity**

In an article entitled “Equality, Does it Make Women Happy?”<sup>52</sup> Aminah Said wrote about the life of women in the Soviet Union. Soviet women, she pointed out, have equal status to men in all areas of life. She works in medicine, engineering, law and industry and the law guarantees her equal salary and equal opportunity. At the same time, labor legislation offers her protection as a wife and mother, giving her generous maternity leave and right to socialized day care for her children. Asserting that Soviet women enjoy more rights than women in any other nation in the world she wrote: “I believe that equality, in this depiction, expresses the hope of women among many peoples and I don’t doubt that many deem the Soviet women fortunate in what has come to her. [But] I say equality in this absolute meaning inflicts grave hardships on the Soviet women and make her lose more than she gains.” The picture of Soviet womanhood which Said goes on to present is a grim one. Her duties—to home and to nation—diminish her socially and physically. She is denied the valorization which accrues to women as the pillar of home and family without being exempted from domestic duties. She works eight hours a day and, returning home in the evening, cooks, cleans and cares for her husband and children for another five. She does nothing but work and sleep. She is too tired to care for her physical appearance which, in any case, begins to deteriorate at a young age. “Hard work” wrote Said “crushes her femininity.” In this depiction,

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<sup>52</sup> Aminah Said: “Equality: Does it make women Happy?” *Hawa* 29 November, 1958

“modern” life and women’s emancipation result in a process of de-sexualization and destruction of gender difference.<sup>53</sup>

Other articles which Said wrote on her 1958 trip to the Soviet Union, however, provided an alternative narrative of Soviet womanhood. Of particular interest to Said was the condition of women in the Republics, particularly those, like Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, which had heavily Muslim populations. In an article subtitled “Eastern in Form and Content” she portrays Uzbek women as “fiercely” nationalistic and emphatic in her adherence to Uzbek cultural values. This strong sense of national identity is mirrored by her preference for traditional Uzbek clothing over Western fashion and her modesty in both dress and demeanor. Young Uzbek women, Said wrote, were a picture of “innocent femininity...she is [of all people] most emphatic in defense of her honor and purity.” The preservation of cultural values, however, did not mean that Uzbek women were “backward.” On the contrary, Said argued in a second article, Uzbek women were not only economically and politically liberated like other Soviet women, they were socially liberated as well. At the same time, the Uzbek woman remains distinguished by “her dignity, refinement and modesty.” She considers these a matter of propriety, just as she considers it a matter of propriety (*adab*) (briefly define *adab*) to serve her nation through working for national development.<sup>54</sup>

What is important about these varying depictions of the condition of Soviet women is not that they are contradictory. Rather what they should draw our attention to is the ways in which those contradictions attempted to resolve the tensions within notions of modernity and authenticity within the women’s press and within Egyptian society

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<sup>53</sup> Aminah Said : “The Soviet Muslim Woman Takes a Dowry” *Hawa* 8 November, 1958

<sup>54</sup> Aminah Sa’id: “The Soviet Muslim Woman as I saw Her” *Hawa* 8 November, 1958, 12-13.

generally. In particular, they represent ways in which writers could reconcile anxieties about the effect that changing gender roles would have on the boundaries between masculinity and femininity and the health of the social order, which was predicated on the strict regulation of such boundaries. Through adherence to ostensibly authentic *national* cultural practices of gendered propriety and bodily discipline, the potential dangers of modern life could be averted and women could take their place in the nation as fully enfranchised citizens and national subjects. Representations of other women in the Egyptian women's press during the 1950's and 1960's offered a (textual) resolution to those tensions and anxieties engendered by the Nasserist state building project, which assumed the "emancipation" of Egyptian women to be a precondition of the emancipation and development of Egypt itself.

This binding of the liberation of women with the liberation of the nation, both from colonial control and from backwardness, the equating of *adab* with both women's participation in nation building and gendered norms of modesty and refinement was both emancipatory and disciplinary. It allowed women to make new claims for rights and to envision new sorts of freedoms and gender roles in the name of progress and modernity, however it placed such roles in the context of submission to the national/ist project. New or "non-traditional" roles for women could be justified in terms of service to the nation but only, ultimately, if cultural authenticity was preserved through the policing of other sorts of gendered boundaries.

### **Domesticating Revolution**

Hu Dum was an eighteen year old Vietnamese woman portrayed in the pages of *Hawa* who had left her village and family to fight with the North Vietnamese forces on

the Ho Chi Min Trail. The article describes her as “a symbol of bravery” in her nation’s fight against colonialism. She became so well known and respected as a fighter and patriot that Ho Chi Min himself reportedly gave her a “fatherly kiss” when he met her for the first time. She was also, however, a potentially ambiguous figure who blurred the boundaries between masculinity and femininity. She is pictured in men’s clothing carrying a rifle and is described as fighting alongside men in the field of battle. As a child, the author writes, she played with toy guns and airplanes instead of dolls. The possible conflict between ungendered national duty and the norms of proper female gendered subjectivity is ultimately resolved. With her long, silky black hair, gentle smile and soft spoken manner she is portrayed as the picture of modern Vietnamese womanhood—militant, determined and self-sacrificing in the cause of national liberation, she was also demure, modest and feminine, a dutiful daughter in the service of the Vietnamese national family.

The “domestication” of revolution was a common trope in depictions of fighting women. One of the most chronicled individual women in these articles was the Algerian freedom fighter Jamilah Buhrid. Buhrid’s contribution to the armed resistance against French control that was waged in Algeria throughout the 1960’s, and her arrest by colonial authorities made her a heroine across the Arab world. She was featured on the cover of a number of Egyptian magazines, including *al-Musawwar* and her life story was made into a feature film by the internationally known Egyptian director Youssef Chahine. An article about Bouhrid which appeared in *Hawa* portrays the Algerian revolution as a family affair. Jamilah becomes politicized hearing her female school mates talk about their fathers and brothers fighting in the mountains. At home she is pictured trying to

answer the questions of her younger siblings about the conflict. Her uncle, a mujahid, provided her an example of the worthiness of struggle. A faithful husband and a good father, he never shirked his family duties or towards the nation or the struggle.<sup>55</sup> In another article, Algerian women's participation in armed struggle is presented as a function of her role within the family as the guardian and embodiment of national culture and the boundary marker of communal identity: "The lovely half (of society) has carried half the burden in national struggle and the gentle sex has traveled side by side with the other sex....she knows how to kill and how to meet death." Yet at the same time, it is a "secret" that the same freedom fighter is also conservative in her home and family. The piece's author attributes this to the fact that fathers and grandfathers handed down customs and traditions along with patriotism and love for the *watan* or nation. It was the gender specific duty of Algerian women to retain and protect such customs from "corruption" by French colonialism.<sup>56</sup> Thus, even as she takes up arms at the side of her Algerian "brothers," she remains firmly located within the realm of cultural authenticity represented by ties of kinship.<sup>57</sup>

### **Modernization and (De) Feminization**

In contrast to the women's press, articles in mainstream press, tended not to offer such resolutions to their readers. A comparison between two articles on women in China which appeared within several years of each other in different publications, is instructive here. A article in the more mainstream magazine *Ruz al-Youssef* by Ismail al-xxx

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<sup>55</sup> "Girl Hero Jamila Buhrid 15 March, 196x

<sup>56</sup> "The Algerian Woman" *Hawa* 14 June, 1960.

<sup>57</sup> As Denise Kandiyoti has argued, the identification of the (gendered) private with the inner sanctum of group identity has had serious implications for women's citizenship within the context of secular nationalist projects. Denise Kandiyoti: "Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation" in *Millennium* 20: 3 (1991), 435. See Marnia Lazreg: *The Eloquence of Silence* () for the legacy which the dynamics and outcome of national struggle and the association of women with the inner-sanctum of communal identity has had in Algeria.

stressed the de-feminizing aspects of China's drive to modernize. He begins the piece by declaring that, although he'd run across plenty of Chinese men who looked like women and carried women's names, he hadn't seen even one female, or one female that displayed any of the "distinguishing marks of femininity." In fact, with hair tightly braided or hidden under a cap and in the harsh, navy blue pants and blouse which provided the ubiquitous national uniform in Maoist China, she is indistinguishable from a man, even to the point of possessing *rajula* (masculinity). The article marvels at the numbers of women in the workforce, but also blames production for erasure of gender boundaries. After numerous descriptions of the hard, back-breaking labor undertaken by Chinese women—in factories and fields—the author goes on to present a picture of women in China which is barely human. Chinese women, he wrote, have no notion of love, either for husbands or children. In fact, he asserted, they feel oppressed by their duties as wives and mothers. Despite the presence of daycares at factories and labor regulations that stipulated women had a right to take a break during the day to visit their children there, few women exercised this right. "The madness of production in China is a sickness spread among the ranks of women," the article concluded. Women were also, however, the source of China's development "The Chinese Woman, not the Chinese man is the sinew of the new renaissance and the basis upon which the government is based upon. New China!"<sup>58</sup>

Article in *Hawa* which appeared a few years after the *Ruz al-Youssef* article, by contrast was entitled, "The Chinese Woman has Ended the battle of Construction and has Begun the Battle of Beauty and Elegance." The article begins in a way reminiscent of the *Ruz al-Youssef* article with the author, Said Abdel Majid, recalling a previous visit to

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<sup>58</sup> "The Woman in China" *Ruz al-Youssef* 6 February, 1956

China where he asked his female interpreter about the blurring of gender boundaries he observed there. Her reply is printed in quotes ostensibly verbatim “ Listen. The Chinese woman is like every woman in the world she is concerned about her clothes and elegance. But today we are building the nation. For the sake of this great goal we dedicate all the minutes of our lives.” After the nation has been developed, she said “the Chinese woman will turn your gaze with her charms.” Five years later, the author wrote “Chinese women have returned to the world of femininity....the fashion of Chinese girls will come to rival that of American and European girls” The photo spread which accompanies the article under scores this conclusion. One photo shows a woman shopping for fabric in a chic, western-looking store. Another shows a mother with her fashionably dressed child with the caption :”Elegance extends to the small child in China. And this picture is evidence of the extent to which children here are favored with attention.”<sup>59</sup> According to the *Hawa* article, the potentially destabilizing effects of development on gender boundaries were averted by the re-inscription of those boundaries once the process of modernization was completed. The participation of women in this process was a national duty at the highest level, but it was not a right.

## **Conclusion**

Representations of foreign women in the Egyptian women’s press were intimately tied up with wider discussions about liberation, progress and national subjectivity and self-definition. They also suggest much about how the liberating, emancipatory possibilities of post-colonial/anti-imperialist projects limit their own possibility for realization. The vision of an anti-imperialist global sisterhood in these articles was undermined by Egyptian authors’ recourse to a colonialist discourse of development and

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<sup>59</sup> (Hawa 2-3-62).

progress which objectified non-Egyptian women as locus of debate about gender and modernity in Egypt. Acknowledging the imperial genealogy of such discourses, however, should not prevent us from recognizing that they had other, complicated histories as well. The representations through which Egyptian women authors attempted to make sense of their identities as national subjects and to resolve the gendered tensions which were part of that subjectivity do not conform to an East-West binary. In other words, the debate about women and modernity in Egypt was more ambiguous than an “us against them” dichotomy. When analyzed as part of a wider conversation about what it meant to be a modern citizen in a modern society, depictions of “other women” challenge those who have argued that debates over modernity in the post-colonial world have simplistically entailed the embrace of western knowledges and technologies or their rejection in favor of traditional mores and ways of being.