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Utilizing mass media in the political empowerment of Egyptian women

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UTILIZING MASS MEDIA IN THE POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF EGYPTIAN WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Egyptian women's activists are widely regarded as pioneers in calling for women's rights in the Arab world. However, the struggle for women's rights in Egypt is a complex one that has led to many achievements, but has also involved numerous setbacks. The media has been central throughout this struggle and all of this has always taken place in a highly politicized environment, which involved changes in the state's approach to women's rights.

Thus, this study investigates the interplay between women, media and politics in Egypt. It uses theories of authoritarianism that have been used to describe the nature of the incumbent Egyptian regime, as well as notions pertaining to the corporatist tactics it resorts to in order to analyze the manner in which the state deals with women's activists and their access to the media. This involves a particular emphasis on the privately owned media which has flourished in Egypt in recent years. Also, because the Egyptian government is directly and actively involved in 'women's issues', the study uses the notion of state feminism to analyze its efforts in this regard and how they relate to media treatment of women and their rights. In addition, the study draws on theories of post and neo colonialism to analyze how efforts in the area of women's rights by both the government and activists relate to the international framework, which promotes a specific version of women's rights.

This is done by interviewing female members of political parties, NGOs and a governmental women's organization, as well as using archival research to analyze the information available in the publications of these organizations. Other methods employed in this study are critical discourse analysis to analyze media treatment of women's political empowerment, in addition to focus groups to investigate Egyptian female audiences' reception of political drama.

As a result, the study breaks new ground in theorizing the relationship between the state and women's activists and thus explains the activists' media access. It also develops the notion of state feminism and relates it to the media. Finally, the study reveals and theorizes how the privately owned media in Egypt is subtly controlled by the state.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLDGEMNTS

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NOTE ON SOURCES AND CICTATIONS

Two different methods are used in this study to cite sources. Secondary sources - mostly books and journal articles - are cited in brackets using the Harvard system, while primary sources, mostly interviews and newspaper stories and opinion columns, are cited using footnotes.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

On the 15th of February 2009, the talk show *90 Dekika* (90 Minutes) aired on the privately owned Egyptian satellite channel Al Mehwar (see Chapter 6 for details about both the channel and the program) devoted about half of its airtime to discuss amending the personal status law, which regulates marriage, divorce and child custody. The speakers were Seham Nigm the President of the NGO 'Women and Law', Dr. Abdalla Al Naggar, a religious scholar and Tarek Imam Allam, President of the 'Freedom NGO: Friends of Men and the Family'. The following is an excerpt of the discussion:

> **Nigm:** Women's NGOs believe that they should play a role in the much talked about efforts to change this law. Our goal is to create a public debate about … the drawbacks of the existing law not only from women's point of view, but also from that of men and children as well as organizations which are active in changing things to the better for families and those which support equality and justice. We met up with women, men and children all over Egypt who suffer due to the existing law and we also surveyed the views of women's rights organizations, legal experts and media personnel. We organized workshops in order to come up with the drawbacks of the existing law and proposed amendments [to the law] which can protect the Egyptian family and do not favor one side over the other in order to keep Egyptian families intact and ensure that their members respect one another.
>
> **Presenter**: At the end of the day, its called the personal status law and not the women's law.
>
> **Nigm:** Family law … we were surprised that the [new] law was not made public, but was quickly sent to parliament without allowing the public to express their views [on it]. Nor were different institutions in society, such as the religious establishment and human rights organizations given a chance to express their views. It was a top-down decision …
>
> **Al Naggar:** We support any changes that help in … [keeping families intact] and that provide objective and reasonable solutions - and not ones that are based on whims - to any problems. God is the one who set the guidelines for marriage and for the familial institution. Therefore, our point of reference is God, the Prophet … and *Sharia* and not views which may be influenced by

emotions, investigative journalism stories and [people's] diverging opinions
…

Allam: 'Freedom NGO: Friends of Men and the Family' is the first such NGO in Egypt. Some people opposed its establishment, that is why we were sued but we won the court case. Some people falsely claim that they are members of our organization and call it a National Council for Men, we are in the process of suing them. The NGO specializes in issues to do with men, in other words it opposes the unjust laws that feminize society. With all due respect to Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak [the first lady] and the National Council for Women [see Chapter 5 for details about this organization], some people are trying to tailor laws so that they lead to the feminization of society at the expense of men. Our first priority is opposing such laws. We call upon Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak to transform the National Council for Women into a National Council for the Family in order to avoid discrimination on the basis of men, women, children, disabled people …

Presenter: [interrupting] Why don't you establish a National Council for Men?

Allam: The President is the only one that has the right to do so.

Presenter: Why don't you call for this?

Allam: Our NGO is concerned about the family … You pick and chose particular aspects of religion to your [women's] advantage, give us some things to our advantage. But unfortunately laws are being tailored to give women and not men …

Presenter: Do you believe that men are oppressed in [this] society?

Allam: I am against both men who oppress women and women who oppress men … We established this NGO because most of the existing ones are concerned about either women or children, but we would like the National Council for Women to be transformed into a National Council for the Family. We can then join Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak and express our views to the benefit of society as a whole and not that of women only.

Nigm: I would like to stress that religion is indeed the point of reference, just like Dr. Abdulla stated.

Many important issues in this conversation must be highlighted. These include how the speakers framed their arguments and the point of reference that they used while addressing women's rights. Other points that should be noted are how some of them

referred to specific people while they talked about women's rights, their ideas about how laws are changed as well as the calls for men's rights that were expressed. All of these are indications for critical issues to do with women's political empowerment in relation to the media in Egypt, which will be examined in this study.

1.1 <u>Egyptian Women's Political Participation:</u>

Egyptian women's participation in politics is extremely limited. There are currently only three female cabinet ministers and women represent less than 2% of parliament members. Such meagre levels of participation are perplexing given that Egyptian women first demanded political rights as early as 1924. These demands came after the involvement of the women's movement with the nationalist movement, which let women down once nationalist goals were achieved.

In many post-colonial countries, the women's movement was closely intertwined with the nationalist movement. Egypt is no exception. The first instance of women's political activity was in the form of opposing the British occupation of Egypt. They formed the Wafdist Women's Central Committee (WWCC) in 1919 which was a parallel organization to the Wafd or Delegation [see 1.2 for details about the Wafd]. Through it, they organized and engaged in activities such as demonstrations as well as boycotting British goods and banks. At one point, the male leaders of the Wafd were exiled. This led to a greater role for women whereby they took over some of their key roles such as expanding support for the Wafd, managing finances and preserving popular morale. All of this was welcomed by the male leaders of the Wafd, many of whom expressed their gratitude to Wafdist women and described their activities as crucial in the nationalist struggle. Some male leaders even vowed to work on "the liberation of women" (Badran 1986: 112, 118-121, 125-6, 129).

But even before Egypt became nominally independent, there were signs that the male leaders of the Wafd would not live up to their promises. For example, they did not consult and even completely disregarded the views of the WWCC during crucial steps and negotiations towards achieving independence. Sadly, when nominal independence was achieved in 1923, the male leaders of the Wafd produced a constitution which gave suffrage to men only. They also prevented women from attending the inauguration of parliament, except as wives of senior government officials (Badran 1986: 120, 122, 130). In other words, women's contributions were welcomed during times of national crisis - opposing foreign occupation - but after independence was achieved, men expected women to return to their traditional roles. This triggered women to publicly claim suffrage for the first time in 1924, to initiate and organize a

women's movement and establish the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU). However, the EFU decided to focus on struggling for other women's rights such as education and setting a minimum age for marriage by law as well as charity work and postponed actively struggling to attain suffrage for some time (Badran 1988: 26-8, 31).

Things only changed in the 1940s when a new younger and more radical generation of women's activists emerged who believed that it was high time that the women's movement focused on attaining women's political rights. Thus, they transformed this cause from a marginal one into the women's movement's priority. One of their tactics was establishing women's political parties, such as *al-hizb al-nisai al-masri* (The Egyptian Feminist Party). One particular activist, Doria Shafik, adopted militant tactics to achieve this cause. In 1951, she gathered 1500 women's activists and led them in storming the Egyptian Parliament demanding women's political rights. They spent three hours chanting slogans such as 'down with Parliament without women' which prevented legislators from doing their work. They only dispersed after a senior parliamentary figure promised to support their demands. In 1952, Shafik acted as if women were entitled to suffrage and submitted her registration papers to run for parliament. However, her papers were refused, so she filed a law suit to amend the election law to enable women to enjoy suffrage (Nelson 1996: 181). Later that year, a coup d'etat took place leading to a radical transformation of the Egyptian government. Yet in 1954, newspapers reported that the Constitutional Assembly would convene but it did not mention that any women would take part in this. It was then that Shafik resorted to an even more extreme measure in demanding women's political rights. She went on a hunger strike that lasted for eight days during which other women's activists joined her. Shafik's stance also received widespread coverage by both the local and international media. She only ended the hunger strike after the government sent a representative to convey to her that the new Egyptian constitution would entitle women to full political rights. Shafik insisted that he put this message in writing before she ended the hunger strike (Nelson 1996: 193-204).

Two years later, in 1956, Egyptian women finally obtained full political rights and only a year later two women managed to join parliament (NCW nd: 24). Despite this, the number of female MPs remained extremely low. At some points in time, at least in numerical terms, women's level of political participation was much higher than in 2008. In 1979, President Sadat passed a law by Presidential decree that reserved 30 parliamentary seats for women as well as 20% of seats in local People's Councils. This led to women representing 8.93% of parliament. However, ten years later, under President Mubarak, the High Constitutional Court nullified that law on the grounds

that it entailed preferential treatment for women and therefore was not in line with the constitutional principle of equality (Hatem 1992: 240, 242-5). This led to a sharp decrease in female representation in parliament which amounted to 3.2% in 1987 and thereafter it decreased even further so that it ranged from 2.02% to 2.5% (NCW nd: 24, Arab Women's Union c. 2006: 142). In 2008, the government and the ruling party decided to re-introduce a women's parliamentary quota. As will be shown in detail during the course of this study, they decided to add 64 additional seats to parliament which only women will be allowed to run for. However, prior to this, the constitution was amended and a clause was added stipulating that the government had the right to resort to measures to increase women's political representation. The measures in question were not specified in the constitution but were to be regulated by law.

The historical account of Egyptian women's political participation shows that it can not be explained using a linear progression in which women struggled until they attained suffrage, after which their participation in politics increased gradually; far from it. There have been many ups and downs, high hopes that were followed by disappointments and even achievements that were followed by backlashes. Clearly, the issue is extremely complicated and one of the main aims of this study is to dissect, analyze and explain this phenomenon.

1.2 <u>Egyptian Politics:</u>

Women's participation in politics seems to be rather challenging in a country ruled by authoritarianism, such as Egypt. Although Egyptian politics is characterized by multi-partism and Presidential and parliamentary elections, much research has documented that the multiparty system which is in place does not function properly and that all elections are rigged (Kassem 2004: 1, 3, 41, 66-7; Fahmy 2002: 2; Kienle 2001: 29, 31). This study takes these integral issues into consideration while analyzing Egyptian women's meagre political participation.

It is also important to take historical elements pertaining to the Egyptian political system into consideration. From 1923 up until the early 1950s, Egypt was nominally independent and the political system was a multiparty semi-parliamentary monarchy. The party which dominated Egyptian politics throughout this period was the Wafd. Wafd literally means delegation and it was initially established in 1918 as a national delegation and not a political party during the British occupation of Egypt (Abdel Kader 1987: 80-1). It was formed in order to travel to London to meet the British government and present national demands regarding Egypt's independence. However, they were prevented from travelling and so started working on forming a permanent

organization to represent the nation. They also began to demand an end to the British protectorate in addition to other nationalist demands. The Wafd's popularity began to grow and so the British decided to exile its three main leaders. But eventually, the Wafd managed to achieve nominal independence for Egypt in 1923, and it became a political party which dominated Egyptian politics until 1952. It was a secular, moderate and liberal party (Abdel Khader 1987: 79, 85, 87).

In the early 1950s, a socialist regime came to power under the leadership of the late President Gamal Abdel Nasser. It banned all forms of pluralist organizations, including political parties. Thus, Egypt became a one-party state, in which the ruling party - the Arab Socialist Union - was the only party to be found. The situation remained unchanged until late President Sadat introduced a controlled multiparty system. In 1976, he dissolved the Arab Socialist Union and created three political parties, namely the centrist National Democratic Party - which became and remains to date the ruling party, the leftist National Progressive Union, commonly known as Tagammu, and the rightist Socialist Liberal Organization. Since 1977 and to date the regime reserves the right to authorize political parties, which is one of many other measures used to cripple and control opposition parties. This has led to the emergence of a very limited number of largely co-opted opposition parties. In this environment, the Wafd has re-emerged in the form of the Neo Wafd Party (Kienle 2001: 28-31, 68-9; Stacher 2004: 220-1, 224).

1.3 <u>Egyptian Media and Women's Involvement in It:</u>

Egyptian women's activists have always used the media to call for women's rights. That is why an integral element of this study is examining how efforts to politically empower Egyptian women relate to and are treated by the Egyptian media.

Although an active women's movement did not exist in the early 1890s, some women established 'women's journals' in which debates about women's rights took place between different female writers as well as female readers whose contributions were published on a regular basis. The issues debated included women's participation in the pubic sphere in the form of paid work, marriage and divorce as well as veiling and seclusion. But the central demand was women's right to education and most arguments revolved around improving women's status within the family. It is noteworthy that at this phase suffrage was not one of the rights being discussed. One of the reasons behind this may have been that at the time voting was of little if any significance anyway due to the British occupation of Egypt (Baron 1994: 2, 3, 6, 13, 142, 192-3). In later years, such women's journals were largely affiliated to women's

organizations. For example, the 'Egyptian Feminist Union' published *L'Egyptienne* (The Egyptian) and later *Al Masriya* (The Egyptian Female) (Abdel Kader 1987: 96) and Shafik's Bint al-Nil Union (Daughter of the Nile Union) published *Bint el-Nil* (Daughter of the Nile) and *La Femme Nouvelle* (The New Woman). In these two latter publications, demanding women's suffrage was to be found on a regular basis (Nelson 1991: 312). To a lesser extent, some activists also contributed articles to mainstream publications in which they called for women's rights. Malak Hifni Nassef was the first to do so in the early 1900s, when she contributed articles to a newspaper affiliated to a political party (Ahmed 1992: 171-2). Another example was Fatma Nimat Rashid who in the 1940s and 50s, contributed numerous articles in several mainstream publications, largely on suffrage (Khater and Nelson 1988: 468).

Since 2000, Egypt has been experiencing a proliferation of privately owned print and broadcast media. They are widely perceived as a manifestation of an unprecedented level of media freedom in the Egyptian media by the public. Whether or not this is indeed the case and whether or not they provide more space for women's activists to voice their opinions are thoroughly investigated in this study. Prior to doing so, a brief overview of the changes in media ownership over the years is necessary. Privately owned newspapers flourished in Egypt in the period between 1923 and the early 1950s. Things changed drastically after Nasser's socialist government came to power in the 1950s. It brought an end to private media ownership by 'nationalizing' media outlets in 1960. Thereafter, all of the media in Egypt became government owned. This included television which was first introduced in Egypt during the Nasser era. The situation changed slightly under the Sadat regime. He allowed opposition political parties to issue their own newspapers. Other than that, all other media outlets continued to be fully controlled by the government. A more drastic change took place in early 2000s under the Mubarak regime.

This began with the emergence of a limited number of privately owned newspapers, such as *Al Osbou* (A Week) and *Sout Al Ouma* (The Voice of the Nation) and was shortly followed by a small number of privately owned satellite channels, namely *Dream TV* and *Al Mehwar*. But since then, the number of privately owned newspapers and satellite channels has mushroomed. Examples of other privately owned newspapers include *Al Masry Al Youm* (The Egyptian Today), *Nahdet Masr* (Egypt's Development), *Al Dostor* (The Constitution) and *Al Shorouq* (Sun Rise), while examples of the privately owned satellite channels include *Al Hayat* (Life), *O TV, ON TV* and *Melody*. All of these media outlets are largely owned by prominent Egyptian businessman. The privately owned satellite channels have introduced a new form of

programming to Egyptian audiences whose popularity can not be exaggerated; a live talk show aired at night on weekdays. In addition, the reporting and opinion columns of the privately owned newspapers are widely perceived as far more objective and more critical of the government than those of government owned newspapers.

1.4 <u>Constructions of Womanhood in Egypt:</u>

Women's political empowerment in relation to the media can not be studied without taking into consideration constructions of womanhood and perceptions of women's rights and those who call for them. In Egypt the notion of women's rights and those who call for them are largely perceived in a negative manner. This is largely because during the colonial era, colonizers argued that women's status and the manner in which women were treated in Egypt, just like in other colonized countries, was the main reason behind Egypt's backwardness. In addition, because some Egyptians justified women's status at the time in Islamic discourse, the colonizers propagated that Islam oppresses women. They also acted upon these ideas and sought to change Egyptian women's status in order to make it resemble the status of British women. Furthermore, some Egyptians at the time began to criticize Egyptian women's status and call for it to be changed in a manner and using arguments that were very similar to those of the colonizers. This had a lasting negative impact on the idea of women's rights in Egypt because it came to be perceived as a Western colonial invention to undermine Egyptian culture and any one who advocates these ideas because they came to be perceived as agents of the colonizers (Badran 1995: 4, 12, 13, 16, 166; Ahmed 1992: 151-2, 154, 156, 167).

In recent years, different groups of people have addressed women's rights using rather different approaches. Some of them defend women's rights using secular and human rights discourse. Many of them receive funding from Western governments and/or organizations. But it is important to note that Al Ali (2004: 48-9) argues that they are not brainwashed by the West or follow it blindly. Despite this, many Egyptians perceive them as agents of neo-colonialism who are implementing a Western agenda that seeks to undermine Egyptian culture. A second group of people argue that women's role should be confined to the private sphere in which they perform the traditional roles of wives and mothers. They argue that these roles are the only culturally indigenous ones and perceive confining women to these roles as part and parcel of preserving the indigenous culture. This second group perceive the mere idea of women's rights as culturally inappropriate and do not bother to develop their own version of women's rights (Badran 1995: 4, 12, 13, 16, 166; Ahmed 1992: 151-2, 154,

156, 167). A third group of people could be described as Islamic modernists. They defend women's rights but they do so using Islamic discourse. They argue that the Quran and *Sunna* (the Prophet's tradition) should be reinterpreted to suit modern times and they also draw on the lives of prominent women during the Prophet's lifetime and shortly after it to argue that Islam grants women far more rights than currently accorded them in Egypt. But it is important to note that this last group is not a homogenous one (Cooke 2001: 59-60, 62).

1.5 <u>The Study's Objectives:</u>

As stated previously, Egyptian women's activists have always used the media to address, discuss and call for women's rights. In fact, women's empowerment is related to the media for several reasons. One of them is the argument that the media is one of the elements of the apparatus which defines the roles of women and men in society (Sakr 2004a: 4). Another is the proposition that media treatment of women both reflects and reinforces societal views of women (Sakr 2004a: 1). That is why an integral element of this study is to determine whether or not and to what extent women's activists who address women's political empowerment have access to the media. Furthermore, the study will also examine whether or not the media is currently playing an enabling role in women's political empowerment.

Thus, the study's main research question investigates how the Egyptian media's treatment of women's political empowerment reflects and interacts with factors which influence women's political empowerment. In this regard, it is important to note that the Egyptian media is largely controlled by Egypt's authoritarian regime. Sakr (2007: 6-7) has previously argued, its content consequently tends to reflect the agenda of the ruling elite and not the wishes of its viewers or the public at large. She further argues that any calls for change within the media usually come about as a result of divisions within the ruling elite and not due to pressure from below. These observations are relevant to this study because, as will be shown during the course of this study, the state is an integral player in whether or not women obtain rights. That is why the state's role in whether or not measures are taken to politically empower women is examined in this study. In addition, how its role is reflected in the media is also analyzed.

One of the factors which influences women's political empowerment is women's activism in the political party arena. Consequently, this form of activism is examined in this study, in addition to looking into whether or not these women have access to the media. But because there are numerous restrictions on political parties in a country

ruled by authoritarianism, as will be shown during the course of this study, NGOs may perform some of the functions usually accorded to political parties. That is why women's activism in the NGO arena is also examined in relation to the media. In addition, the study analyzes how language is used as a site of struggle in Egyptian talk shows and newspapers when women's political empowerment is addressed. Finally, female audience's reception of drama serials which address women's political participation is also analyzed. This particular form of media content is included due to its popularity among the Egyptian public, especially women.

All of this will enable me to achieve the objectives of the study, which include determining whether or not the ongoing efforts by the various different players are leading to women's empowerment. This is in addition to finding out whether or not the media plays an enabling role in this regard.

Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW &
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since this study is about women's political empowerment in relation to the media, it is important to identify how women's political empowerment can come about prior to examining whether or not and if so how the media is being utilized in this regard. It is the contention of this study that women's political empowerment can only take place in a holistic manner in which numerous structures are transformed. These include power structures, which are related to formal and informal political activity in Egypt. But elements of the international arena also come into play. That is why some elements of the power structure in the international arena may also need to be reconsidered. Another important structure is the cultural one, which includes media treatment of women and their rights as well as cultural perceptions of the role of women in the private and public spheres. Furthermore, an element of the societal structure is a crucial factor, namely whether or not and how members of society are involved in the efforts to empower women. Consequently, various different theoretical elements related to these structures will be examined in this chapter in order to build on them in the rest of the study.

Prior to investigating women's political empowerment, one must understand the nature of the regime in which women's political empowerment is being sought. That is why this chapter begins with an attempt to locate women in Egyptian politics. This entails critically examining the different theories that have been adopted to describe the nature of the Egyptian regime. This is followed by an overview of another area of politics - informal politics – because it is likely to be useful in analyzing the role of the first lady in women's rights and how the state addresses them. Since this study investigates female audience's reception of drama serials' treatment of women's political participation, this is followed by a critical examination of different theories pertaining to the drama serials industry and its audiences.

The Egyptian government has been engaging in 'state feminism' ever since the 1950s. Examining the incumbent Egyptian regime's state feminist approach is an integral part of this study. Consequently, a deconstruction of various scholars' contributions to the area of state feminism is included. Also, since women's NGOs are the main vehicle of women's activism in Egypt, this chapter includes a critical examination of the arguments made by previous researchers regarding whether or not channelling

activism through NGOs can have an impact. Although this study is entirely about Egypt, it is not possible to examine efforts to politically empower Egyptian women without taking elements of the international arena into consideration. This is because the different players in Egypt who are involved in women's political empowerment interact with the United Nations and receive funding from Western governments and organizations. Thus, an overview of the different ways in which this interaction is perceived is provided.

During the British colonization of Egypt, the colonizers adopted far more direct forms of intervention in Egyptian women's status. This had a lasting impact on the nature of the Egyptian feminist movement as well as on Egyptian society's perception of feminism and feminists. It is not advisable to study women's activism and women's political empowerment in contemporary Egypt without obtaining an understanding of all of this. Thus, an overview of all of these issues is provided. Towards the end of the chapter, an initial attempt to define empowerment is included. The chapter ends with an outline of the questions that will be addressed in this study.

2.1 The Challenges of Locating Women in Egyptian Politics:

Since this study is about Egyptian women's political empowerment in relation to the media, the first structure that must be critically examined is the power structure. This includes politics in the formal sense, i.e. the nature of the Egyptian regime and the political environment, as well as power within the informal one, which refers to power related to the familial institution.

2.1.1 Formal Politics:

There is a consensus among researchers who have examined the Egyptian regime: they all describe it as authoritarian. They have developed several theoretical underpinnings to describe the concentration of power within it, the different tactics used by the regime and the extent to which dissent and opposition are tolerated. But it is important to note that none of these studies were primarily about women, which is an important gap that this study aims fill.

Mai Kassem (2004: 1), for example, has described the incumbent Egyptian regime as 'personal authoritarian' in which all branches of government are loyal to the President. Indeed, the incumbent Egyptian President has been in power for nearly three decades and so it is difficult to argue against the idea that he must be extremely powerful and preside over all of the governmental institutions. But Kassem (2004: 4) also argues that the regime resorts to internal patronage to build supporters among

party members by granting them access to state resources. Jason Brownlee (2007: 123, 131) adds another element to this policy by arguing that the regime ensures that the losses to be incurred by breaking away from the party and engaging in political activity elsewhere are far greater than the gains to be made by excelling in the party's ranks. But if all of these tactics are necessary to maintain the support and loyalty of members of the ruling party, then clearly the President is not fully in control, otherwise he would not have had to go to such great lengths to maintain their loyalty and support. If there were no limits whatsoever to his power, then this implies that when it comes to governmental decisions on women's rights, he is the sole decision maker who decides that women shall be granted any particular right at any point in time and any particular fashion, and that all of the other branches of government simply implement the President's decision. However, it is difficult to believe that these decisions are made in such a simplistic fashion. Also, given the aforementioned tactics that are used to maintain loyalty within the ruling party, it seems that its role and power is being downplayed or underestimated by scholars.

Another example is Holger Albrecht's argument that the Egyptian regime is a 'liberalized authoritarian' one. He (2007: 60-61) describes this as a situation in which the regime adopts some measures that are associated with democracy, such as the existence of legal opposition forces and elections taking place at all levels. However, in reality a combination of measures are in place to ensure that those in power maintain their grip on it. One of the main reasons behind this liberal approach to authoritarianism is for the regime to gain a certain level of political legitimacy in the international arena. In fact, several legal opposition parties are to be found in Egypt and elections do take place at all levels. However, all elections are rigged and the same group of people have been in power for a very long time.

Ellen Lust-Okar provides a deeper insight into the political scene in Egypt, which may help to resolve apparent contradictions between the notions of 'personal' and 'liberalized' authoritarianism. She argues (2007: 40-2, 47-8) that the Egyptian regime has created 'a divided structure of contestation' by allowing some opposition forces more freedom than others. Secular politicians - both liberal and leftist - are more tolerated by the regime and are allowed to form political parties, while Islamist forces are far less tolerated and therefore not allowed to do so. She believes that the main reason behind this is that the regime does not perceive the secular opposition as a threat, while the complete opposite is the case when it comes to the Islamist one. However, she adds that the regime weakens the secular opposition by co-opting their political parties and giving them something in return for concessions on their side,

such as giving them some political posts in return for their refraining from calling for regime change. Such deals are said to be made in Egypt, whereby some secular opposition political parties are 'allowed' to win in a very small number of constituencies during parliamentary elections, so that as MPs they pose no threat whatsoever to the regime because those few seats can not allow for any form of impact on voting within parliament. Thus, these legal secular opposition forces are restricted in their activism and prefer to act away from the excluded Islamic opposition. Lust-Okar argues (2007: 40-1) that in contrast, the Islamic opposition is not bound by such implicit agreements with the state and does not have to limit its demands and refrain from calling for regime change. However, it prefers to act at the same time as the secular legal opposition because this makes it less likely that the regime will crack down on them. She further argues (2007:42) that at the beginning of an economic crisis, the legal secular opposition tends to be the one more actively calling for moderate changes. But as the crisis deepens, the illegal Islamic opposition gains momentum and is supported by a larger number of people. Therefore, in the latter stage it is the one more actively seeking changes that are far more radical than the ones which the legal secular opposition would like to come about. Thus, at this stage the secular opposition tends to back off and remains silent.

Meanwhile, Bianchi (1989: 8, 20, 23-4) has argued that the situation in Egypt is one of unruly corporatism in which rather than crushing - or attempting to crush - its opponents all together, the regime has opted for co-existing with its opponents. Thus, both corporatized structures and pluralist ones are to be found among Egyptian political parties and NGOs, but neither of them have achieved hegemony. But at the same time, these pluralist entities are merely a manifestation of fake pluralism in which the entities are weakened and financially dependent while their leaders are co-opted. This make it easy for the regime to manipulate them in a manner that serves its own interests. Bianchi's model, reached in an earlier phase of the Mubarak regime than the other theorizations discussed here, has elements in common with those of both Lust-Okar and Albrecht.

The study will investigate which of the aforementioned theories is more useful in explaining the political scene in Egypt when it comes to women's political participation in the form of political parties and women's NGOs. It will also investigate whether any of these theories can be used to describe the privately owned media that has proliferated in Egypt in recent years. These could be a manifestation of liberalized authoritarianism, whereby it looks as if these media outlets are free from government control, but in reality certain tactics are used to ensure that the

government fully controls them. On the other hand, it could be that 'a divided structure of contestation' is in place whereby some media outlets enjoy more freedom than others. Finally, it could be that unruly corporatism is in place, whereby some of these privately owned media outlets are truly free while others are coopted by the state.

2.1.2 Informal Politics:

Politics is very often narrowly defined to only include presidential authority, legislative bodies, ministerial cabinets, political parties, syndicates, trade unions and NGOs. But Waylen (1996: 8) argues that when it comes to developing countries examining the extent of women's participation in such formal political institutions is insufficient and that a broader definition of politics must be adopted in order to see the complete picture. Although women's meager participation in formal political institutions is indeed problematic, however, some women seem to possess other powers that must be acknowledged. Some scholars have argued that the family is a very important and highly politicized institution in Egypt. They further argue that the family must be included in any definition or examination of politics. Tucker (1993: xiii), for example, argues that in Egypt the distinction between the public and private spheres is not clear cut but is blurred on many fronts. This is likely to have an impact on the role of the Egyptian first lady, Suzanne Mubarak, the president's wife. She actively promotes women's rights and seems to play a significant role in governmental decisions and policy regarding women's rights. It is the intention of this study to analyze her role in some detail.

Scholars have examined the roles played by first ladies in other parts of the world. Joseph (2001: 38), for example, describes their political participation as informal and organized around their husbands. She argues that first ladies enjoy access to considerable resources and they are very often entitled to numerous unwritten powers. Another important role played by first ladies, argues Nelson (1974: 558-9), is that they have considerable influence over the decisions that their husbands make.

But if indeed first ladies operate according to unwritten rules and have access to considerable resources it is possible that their informal political activity can be more far reaching rather than revolving entirely around their husbands. In other words, they may engage in informal political activity that is not directly related to their husbands, especially when it comes to their activities pertaining to women's rights. Also, the extent to which they influence the decisions that their husbands make needs to be problematized. For example, is it limited to offering advice on matters their husbands

are addressing, or can they initiate something, such as suggesting the amendment of a particular law? More importantly, in a country ruled by authoritarianism like Egypt, first ladies may play a greater and more influential role, especially if the regime is indeed personal authoritarian, as argued by Kassem. In that case, the first lady may be entitled to more powers, given that her husband's powers are far less restricted than in a democratic system. The powers that the first lady enjoys are likely to be far more brazen in the area of women's rights, particularly because the Egyptian regime engages in a form of state feminism, as will be shown later.

2.1.3 Media, Authoritarian Politics and Female Audiences:

Egypt has a vibrant entertainment industry which produces tens of drama serials every year. The government tightly controls the industry and key personnel within it seem to believe that drama serials brainwash viewers. That is why female characters within this cultural structure are examined in this study in relation to the issues of political empowerment.

One of the tactics the state uses to control the drama serials industry is similar to one of the observations made by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in another context. They (1994: xii) describe as a process whereby the right-thinking people are appointed and what is acceptable and unacceptable is gradually internalized among personnel working in the industry, so that they come to unconsciously engage in self-censorship. Indeed, the Egyptian government ensures that only those in line gradual internalization with its policies and views are appointed to committees that are responsible for all aspects pertaining to drama serials, such as funding, production and selecting which drama serials are screened during prime time. For example, the Egyptian Radio and Television Union's Board of Trustees (ERTU) consists of thirty people as well as the heads of different sectors in ERTU. In 2001, three of the board members were former ministers, two were deputy ministers, two were former ambassadors, five were high ranking officials in other governmental institutions, five were former general directors of television or radio, four were high ranking faculty members in government owned universities and several were members of the ruling National Democratic Party (ERTU Annual Book 2001-2002: 17). However, in a country ruled by authoritarianism, such as Egypt, it is likely that other more direct forms of intervention are also used. One such tactic is a mechanism to ensure that absolutely nothing deviates from the official line. An official censoring committee views all drama serials before they are screened and cuts out any scenes that happen to deviate from the official line before the drama serials are aired.

As a result, the end products propagate more or less the same ideas in a manner that resembles Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's (1997: 121) argument that cultural products are standardized and mass produced. They appear to change but the same clichés are featured over and over again, and it is not difficult to determine from the opening scenes how the events will unfold, which characters will be rewarded and which ones will be punished towards the end. Even their length is rigid, fixed and must adhere to particular set and predetermined regulations. Indeed, the narratives and plots of Egyptian drama serials as well as the characters that they feature are not very different. The same themes are recurrent and the same values are almost always upheld, more often than not the evil and wicked character is punished towards the end of the drama serial, while the benevolent character is rewarded after being subject to injustice throughout. Also, love almost always prevails so that the male and female protagonists who belong to different socio-economic backgrounds end up living happily ever after, and their parents - who had opposed their union in marriage throughout the drama serial - come to realize that they were totally wrong towards the end of it. Even the length of any drama serial is rigid. Every episode must last for exactly 45 minutes and the series must consist of around 30 episodes. However, an issue that has not been thoroughly investigated is whether or not audiences realize that cultural products are standardized and mass produced and what they make of this.

As previously stated, influential figures within the drama serials industry seem to believe that drama serials have a massive impact on viewers which can be analyzed using John Carey's construct of 'the masses'. For example, former director of ERTU's film and serial production sector, Mamdouh al-Laythi said that drama serials are used to culture the uneducated and uncultured by "educat[ing] them, teach[ing] them the basics of morality and religious duty, … [and] inculat[ing] the spirit of patriotism, morality, religion, courage and enterprise." Furthermore, Al-Laythi goes as far as describing the impact of drama serials on their audiences by saying "it works like magic." In addition, prominent script writer, Usama Anwar 'Ukasha describes the audience of drama serials as "the broadest, most responsive, and most deeply influenced audience" (Abu-Lughod 2005: 11, 232). However, Carey (1992: 21, 23-24, 71) argues that the masses is an imaginary construct of invisible and unknowable people, that the elite reshape to suit their whims. But the crucial argument that never changes is that the alleged masses are not as intelligent, knowledgeable or humane as them - the elite.

Indeed, several researchers have argued that viewers are not passive. According to Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, viewers can arrive at a preferred, negotiated

or oppositional reading of a soap opera (Ruddock 2001:124-126). An additional element that may play an important role in the type of reading viewers arrive at is whether or not they discuss soap operas with other people, who these people are and the nature of the discussions.

In fact, research conducted in the Egyptian context directly challenges the views upheld by those behind drama serials and provides evidence to support the argument that Egyptian viewers are far from brainwashed by drama serials. Research conducted by Leila Abu-Lughod (2005: 235-236, 237, 238) revealed that, for example, the emphasis on women's independence and the glorification of women's education portrayed through the lives of most of the major female characters in 'Ukasha's prominent serial *Hilmya Nights*, did not have an impact on impoverished women. In fact, urban women who worked as servants were attracted by two other female characters in the drama serial who defied "the moral system which keeps good women quiet." In addition, they were only affected by moral messages when they were related to their own lives. They were, for example, affected by how one of the female characters who's mother did not care for as a child ended up leading a miserable and unstable life. Similarly, rural women's discussion of another drama serial, Love in a Diplomatic Pouch, centered around things they could relate to, things that were not far from their own lives. These included divorces, thwarted matches, arguments and absences. However, their conversations were devoid of important women's issues in the drama serial, such as psychological problems, mothers being hurt by their children's unemotional attitude towards them, men freaking out of marriage for fear of losing their freedom and wealthy and well educated drug addicts resorting to psychiatrists. In other words, these women were clearly not brainwashed by the drama serials.

Despite all of this research which discredits the idea that soap operas shape viewers ideas, some women's rights activists in various different parts of the world are concerned about women's representation in soap operas and actively call for positive female characters to be featured in soap operas. This study examines the efforts of three Egyptian women's organizations in this area, paying particular attention to drama serial representation of women's political activity. It is noteworthy that drama serials are rather different from soap operas. They consist of around 30 episodes which are aired on a daily basis until the drama serial comes to an end. After that, another drama serial is aired. Another difference between soap operas and drama serials is that the narratives of the latter tend to be very simple; each drama serial addresses just one dilemma throughout the 30 episodes and it is solved in the last one

or two episodes. Lotz (2006: 11) has looked into the work of a similar organization in the US and she is quite critical of analyzing soap operas treatment of women by using what she calls a 'role model framework'. She argues that this approach emanates from the idea that constantly featuring women in stereotypical roles reinforces in viewers' minds that these are the only roles fit for women. Thus, it entails using content analysis to investigate things like the ratio of female characters to the ratio of male ones in soap operas and determining whether or not and how often the female characters fall under the categories of housewives, sex objects, mothers and love interests. Lotz (2006:11, 172) describes this approach as too simplistic and as one that does not allow for the richness of the plots of soap operas to be taken into consideration. Furthermore, it does not provide any indication for viewers' reception of these characters and dismisses audiences as inactive.

As previously stated, who viewers discuss soap operas with and the nature of these discussions is a factor that can have an impact on viewers' reception of soap operas. In fact, several researchers have argued that soap operas are a much talked about subject among women. Dorothy Hobson (1989: 156, 161) argues that women tend to discuss soap operas with female co-workers and family members, especially daughters and mothers. She also argues that these discussions are used to follow up on episodes some of the women have missed, while Lisbet Van Zoonen (2004: 118-119) argues that these conversations are used to enable women not to lose track of the soap operas' complicated narratives. Meanwhile, Ien Ang (cited in Ruddock 2001: 143) argues that soap operas are used to discuss sensitive personal issues which might otherwise not be discussed. However, these conversations may also serve a variety of other functions, such as passing time, a diversion not to talk about other more important and pressing issues or a pretext to discussing taboos.

Another aspect which will be investigated through the study of female audiences' reception of drama serials is whether or not women perceive their familial roles – especially childrearing – in a politicized manner. For, as previously stated, Tucker has argued (1993: xiii) that the distinction between the public and private spheres is not clear cut. Rather, the relationship between the two is blurred on many fronts. In addition, Singerman (1995: 189) argues that marriage is the institution through which one generation passes its assets to the next. Accordingly, it is central to the extent that many people spend their entire lives saving money in order to afford marrying their children off. In this sense, objections to economic policies that lead to inflation can be perceived as potentially political because they undermine people's ability to save money for this cause and even threaten the entire institution of marriage (Singerman

1994: 178). She (2006: 8) also argues that the role of women in upbringing is greatly valorized by all members of society in various different ways. Nationalists seem to glorify their role in raising the upcoming generation which is trusted with bringing prosperity and development to their country, while Islamists seem to uphold mothers for raising a generation which will preserve indigenous culture, restore Islamic values and guard society against 'Westernization.' Booth (2001: 301) argues that perceiving child rearing in this manner makes it difficult to perceive it as an activity that is confined to the private sphere. This study will explore audience responses to drama serial representations of women as a means of investigating whether Egyptian women themselves perceive their role in upbringing in a politicized manner. In addition, a question that must be asked is whether - if indeed the distinction between the private and public spheres is blurred and the familial roles that women play are politicized - this is leading people to believe that women are fit for playing political roles in the public sphere since they play very similar roles in the private sphere? If for example, women are seen as playing integral roles in resolving disputes within families, does this lead people to believe that they can become MPs and resolve disputes in an electoral constituency? And if that is not the case, then why is that so?

Therefore, this study will investigate Egyptian middle-class female audiences' reception of one drama serial which addressed women's political participation, with a particular emphasis on the female characters featured in them. By doing so, it will test the argument that viewers are not brainwashed by drama serials among a group of women from a different background than the ones who participated in Abu-Lughod's study. Furthermore, it will focus on drama serials' treatment of women's political participation as well as female audiences' reception of it, which was not a focal point in Abu Lughod's study. It will also look into the functions of conversations about drama serials among this particular group of women.

2.2 **Theories of the State and State Feminism:**

The state and women's NGOs seem to play a role in women's political empowerment in Egypt. However, they both co-operate with an international framework consisting of the United Nations and powerful Western countries. This study will investigate the interaction between these different players in relation to the media, while bearing in mind power structures within the international framework and their ramifications. Furthermore, the study will look into whether or not Egyptian society is involved in the efforts to empower women. If that is not the case, the study will explore the problems that arise as a result of excluding the societal structure from these efforts.

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2.2.1 Manifestations of State Feminism in Egypt:

The Egyptian state has been directly involved in what it describes as women's issues ever since colonialism came to an end. The study examines the incumbent regime's approach in this regard in some detail. However, it does so by deconstructing the state and examining the structures, agents and institutions that it consists of and the interplay between them in the area of women's rights in relation to the media.

Philip Abrahams (1988: 77, 79, 81) argues that the state consists of several institutions that are divided, confused and volatile and who only come together and cooperate with one another for very brief periods of time to arrive at a unified stance in order to address a specific pressing issue. Similarly, Shirin Rai (1996: 5) argues that the state is not a totality or a unified and coherent powerful structure, but several institutions which exist within a political economic, cultural and legal framework and the relationship between them is characterized by both cooperation and tension, so that their actions impact one another, they often act with each other but at other times they act against each other. Thus, although laws may be changed granting women rights, these laws may go unimplemented due to the lack of the necessary infrastructural power to do so. In addition, its implementation in any given case is largely dependent on individual agents - one judge or a small group of judges - and not the whole institutional structure or the entire judicial system, and so a lot depends on the judge(s) in question. Furthermore, Johanna Kantola and Hanne Marlene Dahl (2005: 62) argue that any government is not fully capable of implementing its vision in the manner it pleases because it has inherited structures from its predecessors that have been created as a result of struggles and resistance between discourses over a long period of time during which some discourses have dominated and sedimented. But the other discourses are unlikely to have disappeared altogether, some of them may very well be present in some of the state institutions or be upheld by some agents within the state. None of this can be changed overnight to make way for the immediate implementation of the discourse adopted by the incumbent government.

In a country ruled by authoritarianism, things may be slightly different. Things are likely to be more centralized and so it is possible that even though the state is not a unified and coherent entity, the number of people who truly possess decision making power are a handful of people and so there is little space for the other institutions to do much. They simply do as they are told. It also follows that if two institutions act against each other, in an authoritarian context a more powerful institution - or individual for that matter - may impose things on them or force one of them to change

its policies. There is also something missing from Abrams' analysis. If indeed the different institutions only come together and produce a unified stance when the need arises, he does not explain how they reach this unified stance. For example, it could be that some institutions are more powerful than others and so they impose aspects of that unified stance on them. But it could also be that some institutions make some concessions in return for undisclosed benefits.

While analyzing the incumbent regime's approach to women's rights, the study will attempt to arrive at a definition for it. It could be argued that its approach should be described as state feminism, since the state is supposedly enabling women to attain their rights. Mervat Hatem (1992: 231) defines state feminism as the state's use of its institutions and policies to provide a fertile environment for women to join the public arena, in addition to its efforts to bring an end to structural inequalities against women. However, the term does not refer to an ideological or legal commitment on the part of the state to women's rights. Hatem's definition of state feminism is incomplete because the state can engage in other types of activities that can also be described as state feminism. Her definition also places more emphasis on women's rights in the public sphere than the private one. In addition, it does not relate state feminism to the international context; i.e. it does not address whether or not the government cooperates with international organizations and other governments in its state feminist approach. Whether or not the notion of state feminism is applicable in the Egyptian context will be determined during the course of this study.

At the same time, some of the advantages and disadvantages of women's rights being addressed by the Egyptian state will be identified. As previously stated, the Egyptian regime is authoritarian which is a factor that may lead to some complications. In fact, Emma Murphy (2003: 170, 175-6) argues that there are several problems with the practice of state feminism when the state in question is an authoritarian one. She argues that in such cases the women's rights which are addressed are selected by the regime and are addressed in the manner that the regime sees fit. This top-down approach means that women are entirely dependent on the benevolence of the state, so that if the state withdraws its support for women, the rights it has granted them may be nullified or they may simply go unimplemented. She further argues (2003: 176) that this approach merely changes some of the laws pertaining to women and leaves the societal structures that undermine and disadvantage women unchanged. Consequently, these structures may not allow women to enjoy the rights the state has officially granted them.

Also, a potential problem that Murphy does not address is the impact of an authoritarian government's state feminist approach not only on society's perception of women and their rights but also on media treatment of women's rights, especially if that regime is unpopular and more so if its state feminist policy is practised in collaboration with Western governments, including former colonial powers.

One of the important manifestations of the incumbent regime's approach to women's rights has been the creation of a National Council for Women (NCW), which is directly affiliated to the Presidential establishment. Its role in relation to the media will be analyzed in great detail. Murphy (2003: 176) argues that the membership of such an organization may be confined to women belonging to the middle and upper classes who may be rather detached from women who are less privileged and fail to comprehend their problems and aspirations. Thus, the body in question may end up only addressing the problems of middle and upper class women and may not only fall short of addressing the problems of poorer women, but may actually approach them in an erroneous manner and end up making their lives even more difficult. In addition, if the state's policies in any arena have a negative impact on women, she suggests that it is highly unlikely that the governmental women's organization will address these issues.

Melinda Adams has closely examined a women's organization created by an authoritarian regime in Cameroon. She (2007: 1777-8, 181) argues that the authoritarian government of Cameron did not establish a national machinery out of a genuine interest in women's cause, on the contrary it did so due to four reasons that have nothing to do with being interested in women's advancement. The first reason is because doing so is a non-costly method of obtaining international legitimacy whereby the international community, the UN and other governments would perceive the Cameroonian government in a positive manner if it champions women's rights and acts in a manner that is similar to numerous other governments and in the manner promoted by the UN. Secondly, the existence of such a machinery in an era where foreign and international donors are actively funding organizations addressing women's rights, means that a governmental institution can and does attract much of that funding which otherwise would have been granted to non-governmental institutions which the government is not in full control of. The third reason is that such a national machinery can be used by the government to establish patronage networks. Finally, the state can and does use the national machinery to channel activism to the areas it chooses and in order to achieve the goals it pleases. Thus, Adams (2007: 192-3) concludes that the Cameroonian state has used an

internationally valued mechanism to achieve its own interests and not to serve women, stressing that the Cameroonian national machinery does not address the structures that undermine women but rather maintains the existing power relations.

A feature of women's organizations created by the state that has not been addressed by these scholars is that the identity of the person who heads the organization and the level of popularity of the authoritarian regime in power is likely to have an impact on media treatment of women's rights.

Another crucial issue is whether or not the existence of a governmental women's organization like NCW has an impact on the formation or workings of an independent women's movement. Murphy (2003: 176) argues that the existence of such a governmental women's organization and the attainment of women's rights through the state in this top-down manner, does not allow for the formation of a women's movement. This is highly problematic if the state halts its feminist policies because women will lack the skills and knowledge of effective means of attaining their rights. In fact, Karen Beckwith (2007: 321) argues that one of the objectives of the creation of a governmental women's organization maybe to preempt the emergence of an independent and unified feminist movement by confining women's activism to an institution established by the state. As will be shown during the course of this study, a unified and coherent women's movement does not seem to exist in Egypt. Thus, the study will reveal whether or not NCW inhibits the formation of such a movement.

2.2.2 Civil Society Activism in Egypt:

As previously stated, women's NGOs seem to be one of the players in women's rights in Egypt. The nature of their work, their relationship with the state and their effectiveness are all examined in this study in relation to the media.

Maha Abdel Rahman has examined how non-women's NGOs are run in Egypt, the relationship between NGOs as well as the relationship between NGOs and the state. Some of her findings might be applicable to women's NGOs. She (2004: 3-4) argues that non-women's NGOs are not a homogenous entity, they have different interests that sometimes coincide with one another but may also run against the interests of other NGOs working in the same field. At the same time, the interests of some NGOs may be similar to those of the state, while those of other NGOs may be completely different and in opposition to those of the state. In addition, she suggests (2004: 4) that NGOs influence the state and are influenced by the state, but that the state successfully utilizes civil society as a whole in a manner that achieves its own interests. Abdel Rahman (2004: 161-2) contends that in many cases just one of the

NGO's board members is in charge of running it, while the other board members are completely inactive and are merely in place in order to fulfill the criteria of obtaining and maintaining an NGO license, and they simply approve the decisions taken by the board member who is in charge. Significantly, she argues that this phenomenon has not evolved due to authoritarianism within the NGO structure or due to the authoritarian nature of the person who is in charge of the NGO. For many of those solely in charge of NGOs expressed their dissatisfaction with their work load and stated that they assumed responsibility after realizing that the other board members were rather passive.

Therefore, Abdel Rahman argues that non-women's NGOs do not have a unified stance vis-à-vis the state, some are on good terms with the state while others are not. If her observation is applicable to women's NGOs, this is likely to have implications on whether or not various women's NGOs co-operate with the state, the form of such co-operation and its outcome. Abdel Rahman's study also suggests that non-women's NGOs are run like a one man show. If women's NGOs are run in a similar manner, this may have implications on media treatment of the activism of women's NGOs. For example, the media may end up focusing on the Presidents of the women's NGOs and their persona instead of highlighting their activism.

Meanwhile, Islah Jad has examined the effectiveness of women's NGOs work. She (2004: 6-7) argues that the effectiveness of women's NGOs is likely to be severely limited by the very nature of NGO's work. Jad contends (2004: 6-7, 11) that advocating gender equality through NGOs depoliticizes it and addresses women's rights on a one by one basis using short term projects. Furthermore, it addresses them in isolation from social, economic and political problems which they are entangled with. This approach, especially when followed in a country ruled by authoritarianism, does not lead to fundamental changes nor does it address the structures that disempower women. She also argues (2004: 10) that the fragmentation of women's activists into various different NGOs makes it difficult for a women's movement to emerge. This is because these NGOs are on an equal footing and they compete with one another on various fronts, including for funds and media attention. All of this makes collaboration between NGOs extremely difficult. NGOs rely heavily on the media, conferences and lectures to put their message across. These tools are used to educate a particular target audience or to advocate a particular issue for a short period of time, such as, the duration of a particular project. Jad questions (2004: 8) whether such a tactic can have a lasting impact when it comes to women's rights. Furthermore, while doing so, NGOs do not attempt to mobilize women at the grassroots level to

achieve structural change, but merely to improve the skills of a small group of women in a particular area or to provide some women with particular services. In other words, they do not try to create a mass movement at the grassroots level that advocates women's rights. This is very problematic because women are unlikely to be empowered in the absence of such a movement.

But Jad does not take state feminism into consideration in her analysis. Nor does she investigate whether addressing women's rights through political parties is more or less effective than addressing them through women's NGOs. These are gaps that this study will fill.

2.2.3 International Negotiations on Women's Political Rights:

This study closely examines the interplay between the United Nations, the Egyptian government and Egyptian women's NGOs and how this relates to the Egyptian media's treatment of women's political rights. This interaction can be perceived from more than one angle. As will be shown, this is closely associated with theories of post and neo colonialism. In other words, it is one of the components of the cultural structure but it is also intertwined with power structures.

It could be argued that both the UN's promotion of women's rights as well as Western funding of Egyptian women's NGOs are the latest tactic through which powerful Western countries interfere into Egyptian affairs. This phenomenon first emerged during colonialism. Timothy Mitchell (1998: 166, 168) argues that at the time Orientalism was used to perceive Egyptian culture not only as different from British culture but as its inferior. He adds that such discourse was infiltrated into the press, government reports and many other fields and that it was used as a justification to change different aspects of Egyptian culture. More specifically, when it comes to women's rights, Leila Ahmed (1992: 151-152, 154) argues that the colonizers propagated that women's status and the manner in which they were treated in the countries they occupied was the main reason behind the backwardness of those countries. But they did not content themselves with stating this, they engaged in measures to change women's status in the manner they saw fit. In other words, colonizers used women's rights to justify undermining and changing the indigenous cultures of the countries they occupied. In addition, since many of the injustices inflicted on women in the colonized countries at the time were justified by some in Islamic discourse, the colonizers also propagated that Islam oppresses women. Consequently, Ahmed (1992: 167) argues, these colonial measures and the picture they painted of women in the countries they occupied resulted in a long lasting

negative perception of women's activism even after independence. Today, most Egyptian women's NGOs rely heavily on funding from governments or organizations in Europe and North America. Many people perceive these foreign funded NGOs as agents of Western cultural imperialism, whereby they are tools of 'the West' to undermine Egyptian culture and change some of its aspects so that they resemble Western culture. The conclusions of many researchers in this area fuel rather than suppress such arguments and even provide evidence to support the idea that NGOs' dependence on foreign funding works to the detriment of their supposed beneficiaries. Alan Fowler (1992: 9-10), for example, goes as far as arguing that such NGOs are entirely dependent on foreign donors who set their agenda to the extent that the projects that they engage in are completely detached from the local communities they are supposed to be serving. Similarly, Maha Abdel Rahman (2004: 183-5) has conducted research in the Egyptian context and has argued that many NGOs tailor their projects so that they appeal to donors, even though the NGO personnel are fully aware of the fact that these projects are not very beneficial in the Egyptian context and are redundant. At the same time, the UN has produced the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), an international bill of rights which grounds women's rights in human rights discourse that states are then expected to accept. Some people perceive this as an erosion of state sovereignty and as imposing an approach to women's rights that is alien to Egyptian culture.

However, this process can equally be perceived in a very different manner. Women's NGOs from various parts of the world have been networking and lobbying the UN to address women's rights and have also helped shape the UN's stance on women. These included Egyptian NGOs as well as NGOs from the Arab world at large (Karl 1995: 122-5, 131, 140; Hijab 1998: 49-51). The Egyptian government was not entirely removed from all of this networking and lobbying. For example, preparatory conferences were held prior to both the Nairobi 1985 and Beijing 1995 Conferences in which all Arab governments as well as numerous women's NGOs based in various Arab countries were represented. It was largely due to the efforts of these NGOs that the plan of action at the preparatory conferences culminated in grounding women's rights in secular discourse rather than Arab-Islamic heritage, which had been the case in the plan of action that was produced during the preparation for the Nairobi conference ten years earlier. Therefore, according to this line of thought, the UN is not imposing anything on Egypt because both Egyptian women's NGOs as well as the Egyptian government were involved in formulating these conventions. But an

important counter argument to this is that secular women's NGOs in Egypt and the Arab and Muslim world at large were the ones who extensively participated in the international networking efforts of women's NGOs and in lobbying the UN and having an impact on its approach to women. This was largely made possible by Western donors funding of these secular women's NGOs which enabled them to participate in international conferences on women, while denying funding to women with an Islamist orientation. In fact, it could be argued that women with an Islamist orientation have always been at a disadvantage in this regard (Ezzat 2001:246-7).

The Egyptian government's implementation of CEDAW can also be perceived as the consequence of an entirely different process. David Armstrong (1998: 470-1) argues that "a state is a unit in [an] international society" and thus, its actions can only be fully understood in this international context. Indeed, John Meyer et. al (1997: 144-5) observe that different sovereign states with very different cultures contain strikingly similar institutions. In addition, these structures tend to change in a similar manner during the same period of time. Examples of such structures are ministries, the judiciary, the police establishment and educational institutions. It is through sovereign states' membership of institutions like the United Nations, argue Jacqui True and Michael Mintron (2001: 40-1), and the manner in which states become party to international conventions and treaties such as the Beijing Platform for Action that states are socialized into methods of good governance. At the same time, state representatives interact with their counter parts on a regular basis in different venues and are exposed to the internal policies of other states. Thus, they are introduced to successful methods of addressing internal and domestic issues and tend to imitate one another by adopting similar methods and policies in what could be described as a peer effect (Armstrong 1998: 473; True and Mintron 2001: 40). Therefore, the Egyptian government's implementation of UN conventions on women could be perceived as the result of a combination of socialization into methods of good governance and a peer effect.

However, it could also be argued that governments all around the world consist of very similar institutions because powerful Western countries have imposed their system of governance on less powerful ones. It could also be argued that the Egyptian government is implementing UN conventions on women in order to obtain international legitimacy. But it may also be doing so because members of the Egyptian government are very Westernized and believe in the same version of women's rights that are being promoted by the UN. So the question to be addressed by this study is where the balance of power really lies in the interplay between

Egyptian women's NGOs, Western donors, the Egyptian government and the UN regarding women's political advancement in Egypt, and how this balance of power is reflected in media treatment of such advancement.

2.2.4 Responses to Western Intervention:

Margot Badran (1995: 21) argues that one of the factors influencing the manner in which a particular society views feminism is its history. As previously stated, during the British occupation of Egypt, the colonizers proclaimed that they would liberate Egyptian women from the oppressive Egyptian culture that they lived under and they promoted the adoption of aspects of Western culture (Baron 2005: 218). This had a very important and critical impact on the formation of the women's movement, how women's rights were framed and using what discourse. In addition, it had an impact on Egyptian society's perception of women's rights and those who call for them. Although this impact emerged during the colonial period, it has lingered on until today. Scholars seem to perceive five different types of responses to this phenomenon, all of which seem to be present to-date. They can be perceived as manifestations of an ideological structure which addresses women's status and role in society.

The first of these, according to Badran (1995: 12, 166), are secular nationalists who more often than not were members of the elite and were Western educated. According to Ahmed (1992: 156), they deprecated women's status and the manner in which they were treated in their countries describing it as backward and oppressive. In fact, the discourse they adopted to voice these criticisms and the changes they called for were largely similar to those of the colonizers. These arguments were initially voiced by men, but shortly after that most of the pro-women activists who emerged under colonialism, belonged to this group; they were secular nationalists who grounded their feminist discourse in secular terms and more often than not called for the adoption of European laws and ways of life. These female activists, also co-operated with Western feminist organizations (Ahmed 1992: 154, 176-7). Their calls, according to Sarah Graham-Brown (2001: 25-26), were only appealing to a small segment of women and the gains that they made were only enjoyed by that same small segment. Meanwhile, poor and rural women - who represented the majority of women - were largely removed from all of this. In the end, the calls of these female activists coupled with the support that they received from the colonizers tainted feminism and feminists even further in the eyes of many natives of the post-colonial countries, including Egypt. This type of discourse is still advocated by some groups in Egypt. Nadje Al Ali (2004: 48-9) notes that many of the Egyptian women's activists who do so are not

brainwashed by the West or follow it blindly. In fact, many of them are critical of the foreign policy of countries like the United States in the Middle East and they also criticize aspects of Western culture. But at the same time, Hatem argues (1992: 247-248) that these feminists receive funding from Western organizations and countries and some of them also receive disproportionate Western media attention. Thus, these feminists are consistently accused of being agents of the West, according to Badran (1995: 31), and the negative perception of feminism lingers on. It is perhaps not surprising that in this environment, many Egyptian women's activists shy away from being called feminists, while others are unsure about which equivalent Arabic term to use because they all have negative connotations, such as being Westernized and man hating, argues Al Ali (2000: 4-5).

The second type of response is a conservative one that defended the status quo regarding women's status because it was seen as part and parcel of defending the indigenous culture against the colonizers. According to Badran (1995: 13), issues like whether the manner in which women were treated was fair or unjust and whether or not it was in accordance with Islam were not questioned by this particular group, who confined their arguments to declaring that the culturally authentic role of women was that of wife and mother. Badran (1995: 13, 116) argues that proponents of such discourse more often than not came from members of the middle class, and they dismissed feminism as a whole as alien to the indigenous culture and a colonial tool to destruct it. Thus, they made no attempt to offer an alternative. This particular stance regarding the notion of feminism and feminists is very much alive today. According to Minoo Moallem (1999: 320), threats to indigenous cultures and the need to identify oneself as opposed to the 'other' are currently heightened, and therefore many people in post-colonial countries are holding onto what they perceive as indigenous and rejecting what they perceive as a Western infiltration into their culture. According to Farida Shaheed (1995: 80), many customs, practices as well as laws that are unfavorable to women are still justified by some in religious discourse and any calls to changing them are dismissed as being culturally and religiously inappropriate. Furthermore those calling for such changes are dismissed as implementing a Western agenda and undermining the indigenous culture. In fact, such accusations discourage many women from venturing to call for such changes, particularly because countering these accusations is invariably difficult due to the complicated entanglement between religion and custom.

The third response came from a group whom Badran (1995: 4) identifies as Islamic modernists. They call for changes in women's status and treatment, but ground their

arguments in Islamic discourse. They argued that men had abused some of their Islamic rights and they propagated the use of *ijtihad* to reinterpret the Quran and Sunna of the Prophet (his tradition) in a manner that addressed contemporary issues and suited modern times. At present, this discourse is gaining momentum in post-colonial countries. Cooke shows (2001: 60, 62) that many women's rights activists are indeed engaging in *ijtihad*. Another important tactic that they employ is focusing on the lives of the many important and influential women during the Prophet's lifetime to demonstrate that Islam condones women playing a much larger role in the public sphere and enjoying far more rights than presently accorded them. They critique local structures and customs as well as global factors and structures which they perceive as inflicting injustice upon women. By grounding their criticism of the status-quo as well as the solutions that they offer in Islamic discourse, they are far less easily dismissed as undermining the indigenous culture and religion or of falling pray to accusations of being agents of the West. But, according to Miriam Cooke (2001: 59-60) it is important to note that Islamic modernists are not a single, coherent and unified group. Nor do they propagate identical ideas.

Some years after these three responses were voiced, two more responses emerged again, during the colonial occupation. One of these is referred to by some scholars as Islamic fundamentalism. According to Badran (2002: 162, 165-166, 186), it was founded by a woman who broke away from secular women's activism to advocate women's rights within the *Sharia*. Stemming from the belief that *Sharia* regulates all aspects of life, propagators of this discourse saw no need to and thus did not develop a separate and clear cut discourse for women's activism. In addition, they tended to support equity rather than equality between men and women. According to Cooke (2001: 90), they also consistently propagated that women's role should be confined to the private sphere, but they highly valorize the importance of this role. However, both Booth, (2001: 296, 298) and Cooke (2001: 87) argue that Islamic fundamentalists advocate that only some exceptional women should be temporarily active in the public sphere to advocate the Islamic cause, until it is achieved. Again this discourse is alive today, though with some important changes. The first of these is that, according to El-Gawhary (2001: 102), its proponents do not contest women's right to play a role in the public sphere, arguing that women should have the right to chose. At the same time, they advocate a blur between the private and public spheres, arguing that "private is political … in the Islamic sense of solidarity and the importance of social infrastructure and grassroots politics" (El-Gawhary 2001: 101). It is important

to note that the relationship between proponents of this discourse and other Islamic activists is contentious today as it was in the past.

The other response which emerged in Egypt was, according to Badran, (2002: 168) a socialist approach to women's rights. But it was short lived and did not gain many followers, probably because the organization established by its propagators was forcefully closed only one year after its establishment in an effort to curtail communist discourse as a whole. Again such discourse is still propagated today, largely by members of a leftist political party. However, it is not popular and its supporters and sympathizers are few in number.

In recent years, long after colonialism came to an end, what may be regarded as radical women's activism has emerged in Egypt. Its proponents argue that women are oppressed due to the complex interplay of a plethora of factors. According to K. Badran (2002: 281-83), patriarchy and class are at the core of them, but so is capitalism and what they refer to as religion's abuse by fundamentalists. In addition, according to Hatem (1992: 248), they heavily criticize marriage as an institution. Finally, according to Badran, (2002: 187) they focus heavily on what they describe as women's sexual oppression. In the words of its main propagator, Nawal el Saadawi (i, 6), the oppression and exploitation of women, as well as the social pressures they are subjected to "constitute an integral part of the political, economic and cultural system" caused by the historical accumulation of the dominance of the upper class over the poor class and men over women. She further argues that women can only be emancipated if they are free from political, economic, cultural and sexual exploitation (6). This discourse is criticized in various manners. Some criticize it on the grounds that the ideas that it advocates are completely alien to the indigenous culture, while others, argues Badran (2002: 187), accuse it of furthering a Western agenda. Still others go as far as accusing its propagators of apostasy. Although this discourse is unpopular, it is propagated by a small number of people and its supporters and sympathizers are limited, it receives a considerable amount of media attention both in the West as well as in Egypt. In the latter case this is largely due to two factors. The first is the controversy it stirs, some of which culminate in court cases and self-imposed exile by its main propagator. The second is that it provides excellent material for sensationalist media, attracting many audiences and thus advertisers. Meanwhile, the Western media focus on this discourse and its main propagator due to the aforementioned reasons of using Western notions of women's activism to evaluate women's activism in other cultures. Its main propagator, Saadawi , has been granted awards and honorary degrees by several Western institutions and is invited to lecture

in several arenas. In the end, all of this culminates in tainting women's activism in the eyes of many Egyptians.

This study will investigate which of these approaches to women's rights are gaining momentum in Egypt and which ones are losing out. It will also investigate which ones are voiced in various kinds of media outlets and how the current regime's state feminist approach relates to all of this.

2.3 Implications and Summary:

2.3.1 Features of Women's Political Empowerment:

Needless to say a study about the political empowerment of women must include an initial attempt at defining empowerment. Kabeer (1999: 436-7) defines empowerment as a process of structural change in society whereby those who are denied the right to make their own choices are enabled to do so. She also notes that having a choice in particular matters - those that have a profound impact on livelihood - is more important than others. Thus, for example, having a choice in whether or not to own property and who to marry are more crucial than having a choice in less crucial matters. Kabeer (1999: 440-1) also notes that in order to achieve empowerment, not only is it necessary to ensure that such choices are available for women but that the women themselves perceive them as attainable. In fact, Egypt is replete with examples of women's rights enshrined in both laws and religion which are nevertheless off limits for women not only because they are deemed as unacceptable by society, but also because many women themselves do not perceive them as some of their rights. This brings us to one of the important obstacles to women's empowerment. In Egypt, like in many other societies, women are socialized into accepting their subordinate status so that they come to perceive it as the way things should be. Many of these women even end up playing integral roles in preserving the status-quo rather than even attempting to challenge it, by for example, favoring their sons over their daughters. But even if a small number of women make individual efforts to challenge some of the injustices that they face in their own personal lives, this can not lead to the structural change in society that is essential for women's empowerment to occur. Such transformations can only be achieved by activism in the public sphere by a large number of women whose relationship is characterized by solidarity.

Kabeer (1999: 437-8) also argues that in order for women to be empowered, they must have access to resources such as money and employment. But it is important to note that in many societies access to such resources is regulated by laws, customs and

traditions. If any of these impede women's access to resources, then changing the laws, customs and/or traditions in question is an integral pre-requisite to achieve empowerment. Indeed, Egyptian women's access to employment is still rather limited. Women's right to work is far from universally accepted and, even among those who believe in this principle, the idea that some occupations do not suit women's 'nature' is prevalent. Kabeer (1999: 438) further argues that another integral component of empowerment is women's ability to define and pursue their goals in life despite any obstacles or opposition. In many societies conceiving of such goals - let alone attaining them - can be restricted by numerous factors. Thus, if an Egyptian woman decides that her goal is to work in a certain profession, she may not be able to achieve this because that particular profession is deemed as unsuitable for women's 'nature' and women are prevented from joining it by laws and/or customs.

Furthermore, research shows that providing women with basic rights such as education and increasing their income does not lead to their empowerment (Ravi et al 2004: 13, Kiriti et al 2006: 203, Mayoux 2007: 108). Nor does amending or introducing laws that grant women some rights lead to empowerment. All of these measures can alleviate the living standards of women and provide solutions to problems that some women face, but they do not lead to empowerment because structures remain unchanged. For in the first case, for example, the educational institution that propagates women's stereotypical roles remains unchanged, while in the second, the legal institution, as well as societal norms and values remain unchanged, so that women may very well end up not enjoying the rights the law has granted them. A prominent example in Egypt is how the law grants women rights to inheritance, but many women do not receive their fair share of inheritance due to prevalent cultural norms among women as well as men. That is precisely why women's empowerment can not be achieved without transforming numerous aspects of culture. Furthermore, it illustrates that empowerment of women can not take place if men remain unchanged (Hannan 2007: 14).

That is why scholars trying to measure empowerment have taken it to mean drastically changing all of the structures that undermine and disadvantage women in society. Furthermore, women's empowerment can only take place in a holistic manner that transforms several structures including power structures and cultural structures. Thus, formal political structures must be drastically transformed. For all of these structures have been formed and shaped by men over many long years so that male interests have become institutionalized within them (Parpart 2007: 52). The formal political institutions that could be changed are the executive and legislative branches

of government, political parties, the electoral system and structures that have to do with voters. In Egypt, other institutions play a role in the electoral process, namely the police establishment and the judiciary. Therefore, the structures of these two institutions may also need to be transformed. It is important to note that if governments introduce measures that lead to an increase in the number of female members of the existing political institutions (Sharma 2004: 123) this does not lead to the empowerment of women because such a tactic simply allows women to join structures that have been designed, set up and are run by men and does not change the nature of these structures. In addition, these female members of parliament may focus their efforts on furthering their party's agenda and not on promoting women's rights (Graham-Brown 2001: 27). Furthermore, these women are unlikely to have any decision making power because the Egyptian parliament is nothing but a rubber stamp and Egyptian ministers are nothing but subservient bureaucrats (Kassem 2004, p. 168). As for the cultural structures that need to be changed, these are the ones that confine women's activity to the private sphere (Rao and Kellenher 2005: 62) disadvantage women within that sphere and cripple women's activity in the public sphere. Change here would be interlinked with changes in legal and economic structures. Finally, research shows that a top-down approach to women's rights can not lead to women's empowerment. Marilee Karl (1995: 14) states that empowerment is not something that can be granted to people, but change must emanate from within society itself and at the grassroots level. A good example is granting women the right to vote (Graham-Brown 2001: 27), while in practice their votes are abused by political contestants to achieve their own interests. For some political parties consistently buy the votes of women who happen to be registered voters.[1]

The link between media and women's empowerment must also be clarified. One of the reasons why the two are linked is an argument put forward by Naomi Sakr. She suggests (2004a: 4) that the media is one of the components of the apparatus through which gender roles and attributes are defined in any given society. Since women's empowerment includes transforming women's status in society, it would be useful if the media played an enabling role in this regard. Thus, this study will investigate whether or not the Egyptian media plays such a role. The second reason is the idea that media treatment of women reflects and reinforces societal perception of women, as argued by Sakr (2004a: 1). Thus, analyzing media treatment of women and what media audiences make of them can provide an indication of the extent to which

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[1] But it should be noted that this is phenomenon is not exclusive to women, the votes of impoverished men are consistently bought as well.

women are empowered in any given society, as well as prospects for and obstacles to their empowerment. That is why this study includes a section on drama serials' treatment of women's political participation and female audience's reception of it. But it is important to note that in an authoritarian context like Egypt, where the drama serials industry is largely controlled by the government, as will be argued in Chapter 2, it is possible that drama serials reflect governmental perceptions of women and not societal ones. Whether or not this is the case will be explored in Chapter 7. The third reason is that one of the obstacles to women's empowerment is related to the notion that there is a clear-cut distinction between the private and public spheres. In such an environment, discussing the difficulties that women face or their rights within the so-called private sphere in the public one tends to be unacceptable. Sakr argues (2004b :158) that this in itself is an obstacle to women's empowerment. She goes on to argue that in order for empowerment to take place, these problems must be openly discussed, which is a step towards challenging the clear-cut separation between the private and public spheres. The media could be an appropriate arena for such discussions to take place. But this is subject to whether or not such discussions are acceptable in the first place, as well as whether or not the manner in which the media operates allows for serious and meaningful discussions in general and on women in particular to take place. Examples of some other obstacles to the media playing this role in women's empowerment are the media being sensationalist and the tendency by both media producers and audiences to put more emphasis on women's looks than their competence and knowledge (2007: 103, 107). Therefore, one of the issues examined by this study is whether or not the Egyptian media allows for meaningful discussions about women's rights to take place. If that is not the case, the study will determine the reasons behind this.

2.3.2 Questions for Research

Therefore, this study will investigate whether or not female politicians or advocates of women's political rights voice their opinions through various media outlets. It will also examine whether or not the proliferation of privately owned media has provided them with more media access. In addition, it will analyze the interplay and interaction between the state feminist organ NCW, women's NGOs, women's committees within political parties, the international framework and privately owned media in Egypt. It will also examine the ramifications of western intervention in and sponsorship of women's political rights on Egyptian society's perception of women's political rights.

In addition, the study will investigate how middle class Egyptian women perceive both women's political participation and Egyptian drama serials treatment of this issue. Also, given the different perceptions of women's role by different groups in Egyptian society, this study will examine which of these are voiced in various different media outlets. It will also address whether or not a feminist movement exists in Egypt, and if not, the reasons behind this as well as the ramifications of its absence. Finally, the study will examine whether or not all of the efforts and approaches by the different players are actually leading to the political empowerment of Egyptian women.

2.3.2.1 Research Questions:

<u>Main Research Question:</u>

How does the treatment of women's political empowerment in the Egyptian media reflect and interact with other societal factors influencing women's political empowerment?

<u>Sub-Questions:</u>

What are the connections between Egyptian media's treatment of women's political empowerment and:

- the various governmental and non-governmental women's organizations that are to
  be found in Egypt?
- state corporatization of women's rights activists and organizations?
- women's committees in political parties?
- female Egyptian audiences reception of drama serials which address women'
   political participation?
- how language is used to justify and challenge the more politically powerful ideology
  about women's status in Egypt?

Chapter 3
METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study consists of a combination of four different research methods; semi-structured interviews and archival research, which are grouped together under process tracing, as well as group interviews and critical discourse analysis. This chapter will explain why these methods were chosen, how they were used and for what purpose. It will also explain how I slightly adapted some of the research methods to suit the Egyptian context and it will outline some dilemmas that I faced while conducting fieldwork.

3.1 __Process Tracing:__

One of the aims of this study is to dissect the process through which changes regarding Egyptian women, such as amending a law pertaining to women, come about and identifying the roles played by different organizations and individuals in this process. The state seems to be an integral player in this regard and some other institutions also seem to be involved in the process. They are all examined in this study. However, I do not regard the state or any of the other institutions as monolithic and homogenous entities. I perceive each entity as consisting of various structures with multiple agents within it, which allows for numerous struggles to occur (Randall 2002: 123). By interviewing members of these organizations, I will obtain an understanding of the preferences and beliefs of those agents which will help me in understanding the practices of the institutional structures they are a part of. While approaching and examining these agents, I took into consideration that they grew up in societal structures such as culture, traditions and religious beliefs, which have had an impact on them. However, the agents who grow up in the same societal structures may very well have responded to different structures differently, some may have even rejected and refused to abide by some structures, such as some traditions. Indeed if that had not been the case, many of these women would not have become activists who seem to seek to change some of these structures (Bevir and Rhodes 2002: 124, 140).

Furthermore, the structures these agents are now members of as well as other societal structures both enable and constrain agents. For the context in which the agents act and the boundaries which their actions can not surpass and are determined by various structures. In other words, these structures are limiting in some regards. But at the same time, they also enable agents to act in a particular manner. In fact, in many instances, while tracking policies I will intentionally or unintentionally be trying to determine whether and which agents or structures play a greater role in policy making. In addition, the actions of agents may be motivated by a variety of issues and they may have a variety of consequences. Some agents may very well be acting in a particular manner, such as introducing particular changes to laws pertaining to women, in order to achieve their own interests. Through their actions, agents can change structures in the manner they intended, but their actions may also yield unintentional results (McAnnulla 2002:). That is why the stories told by the different agents can help explain how policies come about. They could reveal the intentions of some of the players and they may also shed light on how the issue was framed in order to appeal to certain segments of society in order to obtain their support because it was deemed as crucial (Piven 2004: 85).

I chose to engage in elite interviews because it is the appropriate method to use when the interviewees are experts on the topic (Leech 2002: 63). Most of my interviewees have been actively engaged in the public sphere in the form of political party membership and/or NGO activism for a very long time. They have also been advocating women's rights for a very long time. In addition, interviewing such elites is crucial because they are likely to posses information that is not available elsewhere. For example, they can provide me with information about discussions and negotiations that took place amongst them in order to arrive at a particular decision. Such information is extremely valuable in determining how decisions are made and it is highly unlikely that they would be documented in archives, for example (Tansey 2002: 766-7). The interviewes were semi-structured because as Dexter argues, the interviewees were influential, prominent and/or well informed and so they are the ones who should explain the situation to me (cited in Leech 2002: 63). I more often than not began my interviews by asking the interviewee to tell me about their role in the organization that they represented. This proved to be an effective tactic. Partly because starting off by asking the easy questions, as Leech (2002:

665) argues establishes rapport and breaks the ice but also because it led them to talk about issues like their background, their motivations for joining the organization and as they talked about their particular role in the organization they either touched upon issues that I was going to ask about so that my next question ran very smoothly or they brought up issues that I had not come across while preparing for the interview but that were very relevant and interesting nonetheless. I was very careful about sensitive questions saving them to the middle or the end of an interview and phrasing them in a non-threatening manner and using words that are objective rather than judgmental (Leech 2002: 63, 665, 666). The most sensitive question I had for NGOs was about their receipt of foreign funding. I phrased the question thus "You co-operate with a number of organizations [names of 1 or 2] in a variety of manners including financially. Tell me more about it." That proved to be inoffensive and the interviewees comfortably elaborated on the issue. In fact, they more often than not automatically proceeded to address the skepticism, surrounding foreign funding without my having to directly ask for it. This is because I once posed that question in a direct manner rather than the previously described non-threatening manner and the interviewee was very defensive in her reply. However, I have no reason to believe that this adversely affected her answers to the subsequent questions. "Excellent interviewers are excellent conversationalists. They make interviews seem like a good talk among old friends," Berry (2002: 679) argues. In the Egyptian context, it is unlikely that my interviewees regarded me as a friend because it is not customary to regard someone who is some 20 to 30 years younger than them as their friend, which was the case. In fact, people who are much older are likely to think of themselves as more senior and knowledgeable. However, Egyptians tend to think very highly of education in general and PhDs in particular. Pursuing a PhD in the capital of a developed country like London is even more widely respected. This is likely to have made me - the interviewee - an elite in my own right in the sense that I am receiving highly reputed education and pursuing a widely respected task. Berry (2002: 679) goes on to say that making an interview seem like a conversation involves not having all of the questions written out in a piece of paper in front of you. I believe my interviews were indeed very conversational but I did have all of my questions written down infront of me as backup. I tended to have a look at the paper towards the end of interview to make sure I had not forgotten to ask

any questions. I would also from time to time glance at it quickly while the interviewee was talking about something that I had already figured out would not require a follow up question. I had all of my questions written down in a particular order and knowing my questions well proved to be very useful. I more often than not addressed the questions in the form of follow up questions to issues they had briefly touched upon while they were answering a previous question. This made the interviews run smoothly and it was also as if the interviewees were the ones setting the agenda. Also, tape recording interviews rather than taking notes makes interviews more conversationalist and minimizes the loss of information (Berry 2002: 674). Indeed, I recorded all of the interviews and none of my interviewees objected to this.

Most of my interviewees were willing to answer my questions in great detail. They also tended to - after replying to my question - start talking about issues related to it. This often meant that they brought up unexpected and relevant issues. In such cases, the reading that I had engaged in enabled me to quickly come up with follow up questions. Sometimes, however, they wandered off topic. In such cases, my reaction was almost identical to that described by Leech (2002: 668); I remained silent until they finished and then asked them my next question which brought them back on track.

All of the interviewees seemed at ease about the whole process. Many of them mentioned that they had been interviewed by other researchers conducting research about women's rights. In fact, Rivera et al (2002: 685) argue that during the course of their research, they got the impression that the fact that the research they conducted was in collaboration with a well established institution seemed to assure respondents that it was purely for academic purposes. The fact that I was pursuing my PhD in London boded well with all of my interviewees. Their facial expressions conveyed respect and admiration and they appeared to take me very seriously. In one of my interviews I was faced with a dilemma where one interviewee seemed to exaggerate her role. Berry (2002: 681) says that in such cases one should consider what was left out of the interview and possibly even the credibility of some of the information provided by the interviewee. One of the solutions he suggests for this problem is reading about the interviewee and the organization they represent. In my case, my archival research proved beneficial in addressing this particular dilemma.

My approach to scheduling the elite interviews was rather different than the approach of researchers in other parts of the world. Although Goldestin (2002: 671) explains in great detail the importance of first approaching interviewees by sending them letters, such a tool is generally useless in the Egyptian context. Similarly, Rivera et al (2002: 685) argue that sending an introductory letter to interviewees and then calling them to schedule an appointment is unproductive in developing countries. They also pointed out that directories listing the phone numbers of interviewees simply do not exist. In the Egyptian context, secretaries of important people sift through their post and are very likely to disregard such a letter all together. Nor is it the norm to approach interviewees in such a manner. Although Goldestin (2002: 671) goes on to describe how using connections may lead to access to valuable interviewees, in the Egyptian context using connections is the only manner through which a researcher can obtain access to any and all interviewees. The person putting the researcher through to the interviewee should preferably be more powerful then or hold a post that more prestigious than that held by the interviewees. Therefore, that was the main tactic I used to obtain access to most of my interviewees. One of my interviewees even went as far as asking me before the interview began to remind her of the person who had put me in touch with her. At the very end of the interview, she actually said to me that she only went out of her way to allow me to interview her for the sake of so and so - the person who had put me in touch with her – because she likes her. However, my research provides ample evidence to allow me to safely conclude that the person who put me through to her works in more or less the same field as hers and holds a more senior position. Goldestin (2002: 671) also advises interviewers not to be shy about asking some of those they have interviewed, especially if they have established rapport with them, to put them through to other people on their interview list. I resorted to this tactic on many occasions, particularly when I was finding it difficult to get through to particular interviewees. The interviewee would then give me the mobile phone number of the person I requested. When I called them up in many cases they did not pick up so I would send them a text message explaining that I am a PhD student conducting research about empowering women, that I wanted to interview them for the purpose of my PhD and I would always state the name of the person who provided me with their phone number at the very beginning of the message. After that they would

more often than not call me back and in some cases I would redial the number an hour or so later and they would pick up.

Woliver (2002: 678) argues that it is important to ask interviewees whether or not you can contact them again if you have more questions, since from her experience, she often developed questions based on important issues raised by other interviewees which she had not been aware of when she started her fieldwork. In my experience, I initially got in touch with many of my interviewees at a very early stage in my research while I conducted some pilot research. These pilot interviews revolved around their motivations for engaging in politics and their experience thereafter. Although in most cases the data I obtained through these interviews was not very useful in terms of findings, it helped me to focus my study, decide on my research questions, and it provided me with useful insight into the political situation in Egypt which proved to be beneficial while I engaged in theoretical reading. More importantly, it was very useful in getting to know many of my interviewees, and this helped me in formulating my questions for my future interviews with them.

3.1.1 Sampling for Elite Interviews:

Tansey (2002: 765) argues that using a probability sample when conducting process tracing is actually harmful because the aim of the study is not to utilize a representative sample in order to arrive at findings that can be generalized, but to ensure that the sample includes the key players in the process the researcher is trying to identify. If a probability sample is used, some of the key players may very well be excluded from the sample. Indeed, my sample is by and large a purposive one, in which I identified the key actors in decisions pertaining to women and then interviewed them. In some cases, I also decided to interview particular people when their names were brought up in an interview in a context that was relevant to my study. This comes as no surprise because Rivera et. al (2002: 683) argue that non-probability samples tend to rely more on snowballing using personal contacts and referrals. Thus, my sample consists of female members of four political parties, three different women's NGOs, members of the National Council for Women (NCW) and media personnel who work in Egyptian newspapers and talk shows.

3.1.2 Archival Research:

I used archival research to obtain information about the work of the political parties, NGOs and NCW that I examined in my study. This proved to be very challenging. For as Robert Fisk (2008) and Tansey (2002: 767) note, in the Arab world - including Egypt - the public are denied access to government archives forever. I have been unable to obtain access to the archive of the ruling NDP. I was told by one of the female members of the party that I should get through to Ahmed Ezz [4] in order to obtain access to the party's library, which was simply impossible. The situation is no different when it comes to other non-governmental institutions and in some cases archives do not even exist. I was only allowed access to some of the publications of the Wafd and Tagammu Parties after having met and interviewed one of their female members - mostly a high ranking one. They provided me with some publications themselves and then personally requested from employees in the party to provide me with other publications. Similarly, after having met the then President of the Democratic Front Party, he provided me with the party program and the female member of the party that I interviewed provided me with documents pertaining to a committee that she heads. In all three cases a proper library and/or archive containing all of the party's documents did not seem to exist.

On the other hand, out of the three NGOs examined in my study, I only faced problems in obtaining access to the library of one of them. In the case of both New Woman Foundation and the Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women, I was admitted to their libraries without any difficulty whatsoever and was allowed to freely go through their contents. I was also allowed to photocopy as much of their holdings as I pleased. They also willingly gave me some of their publications, provided that spare copies were available. In cases where there they had run out of spare copies, I was allowed to photocopy their publications. However, the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights was rather different. They had several publications - mostly booklets - on display and they provided me with copies of some of them and I photocopied others because they had run out of spare copies, but I was not allowed into their library. I also had to register

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[4] The best friend of the Egyptian President's son, one of the most senior ranking members of the ruling party and a business tycoon.

by writing my name, contact information and the reason behind my visit to the NGO in a booklet. Similarly, prior to being admitted to NCW's library, I had to fill in my name, reason behind my visit to the library, the name of my school, the topic of my PhD and the keywords of the publications I would search for prior to being admitted to the library. I was allowed to have a look at all of the library's contents but was only allowed to photocopy a maximum of 10% of any publication. The library was very extensive and contained a very large number of very useful publications about NCW. Some of the NCW members I met also provided me with some of their publications, many of which were not available in the library.

I went through all of my archival material before my interviews. This helped in formulating my questions. It also helped me to identify the gaps in the archival material, so that I did not end up wasting precious interviewing time to ask questions that were already answered in their publications (Leech 2002: 666).

3.2 <u>Interpretive Communities:</u>

The audience section of this study uses group interviews with female members of the audience of Egyptian drama serials. I chose to interview the women in groups rather than on an individual basis because, as Ruddock notes, in ethnographic audience research audiences are selected as groups and not as individuals because communication is a collective process and identities are defined through affiliations to social groups. In addition, while selecting my sampling procedures, I took into consideration that in order to come as close as possible to emulating real life situations, these groups should be selected so that one research subject is identified and is asked to invite his/her friends and family to their households. Such groups are referred to as 'interpretive communities' because their members naturally gather together to consume media and converse about it (Ruddock 2001, p.131-133, 136-137). Indeed, van Zoonen cites several studies whose results revealed various interesting issues related to women and drama serial viewing that back up and further justify the use of such interpretative communities. Research among working women revealed that drama serials were a subject of daily conversation. Many women were introduced to drama serials by their friends or mothers, who also helped them not to lose track of the soaps' complicated narratives. Another finding was that

women use drama serials to talk about their own lives, and it can sometimes even act as a pretext for discussing sensitive personal issues which might otherwise have not been discussed (Zoonen 2004, p. 118-119).

I also took into consideration that researchers have come to utilize more creative approaches to audience research. For example, Gauntlett argues that focus groups and interviews rely on using language and require participants to express their ideas and views on the spot using words, which is something that not everyone is good at. Some people are more comfortable about expressing themselves using other means, such as blogging, painting, writing, poetry, photography, clothing, designing webpages and arranging mementoes and artifacts on a desk or wall. That is why in his study he asked participants to build metaphors of their identities using Lego Serious Play. This allowed the participants to take their time, think and reflect while building something using their own hands and to think about factors they regard as important before being asked to talk about them (Gauntlett 2007 p. 2-3, 128-130, 182-183). I also took into consideration that it is preferable to begin by allowing participants to express what ever it is they would like to convey about the text that was screened prior to asking them questions that relate to the study's research questions. By doing so, the researcher tests whether or not the issue under study was relevant to the audiences' reading of the text (Ruddock 2001, p.134-135).

3.2.1 Adapting the Methodological Approach to the Egyptian Context:

At the same time, I also took some cultural issues into consideration while designing my methodology, so that I ended up adapting some of the aforementioned research methods to the Egyptian context. My second supervisor suggested that I conduct focus groups consisting of people belonging to the same age group and occupations. While considering how to go about selecting my participants and forming the groups, I took into consideration that people might not feel very comfortable about expressing their views in front of strangers. Had I insisted on complying with the typical standard definition of focus groups, i.e. using groups of eight people in addition to ensuring that all of them belong to a particular age group and engage in the same occupation, I believe that I would not have ended up with interpretive communities. Perhaps the following example

illustrates my point. A 23 year-old woman who tends to discuss drama serials with three of her co-workers one of whom happens to be in her late 20s, another in her early 30s and the last one is in her mid 20s. This would constitute a typical interpretive community in the Egyptian context, whose members would to a great extent feel comfortable expressing their views in front of one another (since they already do so), but it obviously does not fit into the standard definition of a focus group, nor do its members belong to the same age group. However, I believe that they would yield more valid results. For the 23 year-old woman may very well discuss drama serials with three of her former classmates who are likely to belong to her age group, but if she brings them together along with her co-workers, the two groups of women are unlikely to have met before and so it would be an awkward gathering of people who are unfamiliar with each other and far from an interpretive community. Consequently, I decided that the interpretive communities used in my study would be constructed by asking any given woman to gather the women she discusses drama serials with, regardless of their age groups, occupations and how many people they might be.

Secondly, in order to adopt a creative approach, my second supervisor suggested that I ask each interpretive community to come up with three brief one sentence plots for three different drama serials, each consisting of four female and two male characters. He also asked me to provide them with props and ask them to use them to describe what the characters would look like and how they would dress. I believed that doing so would be rather problematic in Egypt due to several reasons. So again, I slightly adapted this in a manner that fits with Egyptian society. Firstly, Egyptians do not study drama at school and are not used to coming up with plots, stories and narratives and so asking them to come up with plots for drama serials is an unconventional task. In fact, I had a casual conversation with a female family member of mine, she seemed dumbfounded at asking Egyptians to come up with drama serial plots and said "if somebody asked me to do so, I would simply state I can not come up with one, I am not a novelist or a screenwriter." However, when I told her about the approach that I came up with, she was quite excited about it and clearly stated that she would be capable of coming up with something to that effect. Secondly, Egyptians are very critical about drama serial narratives and the characters that they feature and they constantly critique them amongst themselves. Also,

Egyptians are not accustomed to being asked to provide short and concise answers. So asking them to state their opinion in one or two sentences is simply unrealistic. In fact, researchers conducting focus groups with women in the UAE concluded that this research technique "fit[s] well in the oral tradition of Arab society" (Wislow 2002: 569). Therefore, I believed that the participants would be very comfortable expressing themselves using spoken words and there was no need to use props, which are very unconventional and participants would have perceived them as both weird and funny.

The approach that I came up with is to ask the group members to describe a female character that they would like to see featured in a drama serial. Depending on the input that they provide me with I would then ask them about other aspects of the character's life. So for example, if they told me about a 40 year old housewife who is a wonderful mother, I would then inquire about her relationship to her husband and about her husband's character. Then I could inquire about her siblings, neighbors, friends and her career. I would of course vary the type and order of questions depending on their input, but I would ensure that the account would cover all of the aforementioned aspects of her life. In the end I would obtain a drama serial plot consisting of several male and female characters, but I would do so in a manner that suits rather than alienates Egyptians.

After that I screened a clip from a drama serial which directly addresses women's participation in formal politics. The clip is described Chapter 7.

I initially relied on snowballing to recruit participants. I asked some of my friends/family members/acquaintances to gather people they discussed drama serials with on any given day and allow me to join them. By doing so I obtained around 20 participants. But I decided that by relying on that method alone, it would be almost impossible to obtain a total of 80 participants. Therefore, I decided to go to a club and walk up to groups of women sitting together, introduce myself and my research and ask them if they were willing to be interviewed. The club I chose is a private one in which various sports and recreational facilities are available along with restaurants and an area for children to play. Members are largely middle class, and it is a gathering place for families and friends. It is not gender segregated, but it is customary for groups of female friends to sit together and chat. I am a member of that club and so I had prior access to it. This tactic proved to be very effective and I ended up interviewing a sufficient number of women that were

actually more diverse in terms of age groups and occupations than those I recruited using snowballing. It is noteworthy that not a single group of women turned me down and only one group - consisting of two women - refused to be voice recorded. Similarly, researchers conducting focus groups with women in the UAE were surprised that the participants did not object to tape recording (Wislow 2002: 569).

I also sometimes ended up interviewing just two people or even just one person. For example, I sometimes went up to three people sitting together at the club to find that only two of them watched drama serials. At other times, it was only one of them who did so and she would have some very interesting things to say. Sometimes all three of them said that they watch drama serials but when I started interviewing them one of them would not utter a single word and so I ended up interviewing just two people. However, I do not think this is very problematic because I noticed that in most cases when I interviewed a group of 3, 4 or 5 people, we would go around in a circle every time I asked a question and each of them would say something. In other words, it was not really a discussion and they did not seem interested in commenting on what the other group members had to say. Although I must admit that this was not always the case, but since it took place quite frequently I decided that interviewing one or two people was alright because interviewing more people at the same point in time did not lead to discussions often enough.

Also, some participants were unable to come up with characters of their own. In order to deal with this without doing away with the creative approach, I asked them to describe female characters that they had seen in drama serials and liked and explain what they liked about them, as well as describing characters that they had disliked and explaining what they disliked them. This was almost always fruitful. In some cases, the result was a combination of characters that they came up with and characters that they had seen in drama serials. However, in a few cases it was almost impossible to get anything out of the participants and their responses were not very useful. After two or three attempts I decided to cut that part of the interview short and go on to screening the clip, because I felt that insisting on that part of the interview would be unfruitful and might alienate the interviewees. By doing so, I obtained their views on women's political participation, although I hardly obtained any information regarding the type of female characters they would like to see in drama serials.

In some cases group interviews involved a fair amount of discussion, sometimes even heated debate. But most of the time, it was merely going around in a circle whereby each participant would express her opinion regarding the issue at stake. In some cases this might have been caused by the other group members engaging in side talks and therefore not paying sufficient attention to what other people had to say and so they ended up not commenting on it. But I do not think that this was the case, because they tended to do so some ten minutes or so after the group interview had started. I was unfortunately unable to effectively ask them to refrain from side talks. In fact, previous researchers who conducted focus groups with women in the UAE faced a similar dilemma. Sometimes some of the participants engaged in side talks while others were contributing to the actual discussion. One of their recommendations was that smaller groups were more effective, partly because a smaller number of participants decreased the potential for side talks (Wislow 2002: 569, 573). It is also important to note that, this going around in a circle also occurred in many other group interviews in which the participants did not engage in side talks and in many cases paid attention to what the other participants had to say. In some cases I tried to promote and encourage discussion, but I more often that not got brief replies like "yes, I agree with her." At other times I have to admit that I did not exert enough effort to promote discussion, but given the fact that it did not yield much results when I tried to do so, there is little reason to believe that it would have led to a magnificent discussion. A reason behind this lack of discussion could be that in the Egyptian educational system, class discussion is completely unheard of. In both schools and universities, it is the teacher/professor who lectures while students listen. From time to time, he/she could ask a question and one or two students would answer it but a discussion does not take place.

3.2.2 Dilemmas:

While I conducted my fieldwork, I encountered some unexpected dilemmas and did my best to address them. Firstly, trying to get people to describe their interpretive community and ask them to gather them at any given date or time and allow me to join them, proved to be too problematic. Very few people were capable of defining their interpretive community, nor was gathering people feasible because some of the interpretive

community members were unable to show up due to various reasons. The groups that I interviewed consisted of women who are familiar with one another and who do discuss drama serials amongst them but some of them may very well discuss drama serials with other women as well.

Sometimes someone who did not participate in the discussion was around while the interview took place. For example, I sometimes went up to three women sitting together at the club to interview them and only two of them turned out to be drama serials viewers. So I ended up interviewing only those two, but the third person was sitting there and watching throughout the interview. In such cases the third person was always a friend/family member of the participants, but whether or not her presence had an impact on the participants' responses is something that I am unable to determine. At other times, when I asked people to help me out in recruiting participants and that particular person did not participate in the discussion, she was nevertheless present while the group interview took place. For example, my cousin introduced me to some of the teaching assistants in the university she studies in as an undergraduate and I interviewed them, but my cousin was around during the interview. In another occasion, one of my friends was around while I interviewed her younger sister and friend. I should note that the friend in question visits them at home frequently and is acquainted with my friend's family. In both cases, it would have been very rude of me to ask my cousin or friend to leave as I conducted the interview and so I did not venture doing so. Again, I am unable to determine the impact of their presence on the interviewees' responses, if any. Similarly, researchers conducting focus groups with women in the UAE faced a similar dilemma. Three staff members who were not going to participate in the study were present when the focus group was about to start and asking them to leave would have been rude, and so they ended up not doing so (Wislow 2002: 569).

Sometimes participants did not pay enough attention to the clip that I screened. I could tell from their facial expressions that they were bored or uninterested and tended to end up watching passers by, for example, rather than watching the clip. In all such cases, I would ask the participants whether they wanted me to go over the events that took place in the clip before engaging in a discussion about it. Sometimes they asked me to do so and so I would briefly go over it, describing what took place in a nut shell and did my

best to refrain from adding or omitting events. At other times they would say that the clip was basically about women's participation in politics, and would proceed to express their views on that particular issue. In all such cases, the subsequent discussion tended to reveal that those participants were against women's political participation. Therefore, I believe that this was the reason why they were not interested in the clip.

Sometimes people started talking as they watched the clip. In most cases they would be trying to recall the name of the drama serial, the different characters that it featured, when it was aired or when they happened to have watched it, how the events would unfold etc. In such cases I would step in and mention the name of the drama serial or try to cut their conversation short by politely asking them to pay attention to the clip now and postpone commenting on it till after it was finished. Sometimes that worked, but again sometimes it did not.

Sometimes people were overly concerned about the fact that they had not watched the drama serial and insisted on stating that, as I played the clip, in the belief that they would thus be unable to answer my subsequent questions. I would then have to clarify that it was perfectly alright, that I would only ask questions related to that particular clip and ask them to pay attention to it. But by then they would have obviously missed part of the clip and distracted the other participants, although often more than one of the participants would be expressing such views.

Sometimes the participants would be distracted by other issues. This was particularly the case when I interviewed women who had young children at the club. Sometimes their children would come up to them in the middle of the discussion or clip to ask their mothers for money, food, drink, taking them to the toilet etc. Sometimes this would take place briefly during the clip so that one of the participants would miss part of it. At other times this would take place during the actual interview, and is another reason why interviews tended to go around in circles rather than a discussion, more so when the mother in question went off to take the child to the toilet and returned a few minutes later. In such cases I would continue the interview with the other participant(s) and then upon her return address the same questions to her. So this was a combination of a group interview and a one-on-one interview. In fact, researchers who conducted focus groups with women in the UAE faced a similar problem. When the participants in the focus

group were accompanied by their children, preventing them from misbehaving was impossible and the children ran in and out of the room (Wislow 2002: 570).

A factor that could help explain many of these dilemmas is unfamiliarity with research. It simply does not take place very often in Egypt and so people are not familiar with a researchers' expectations such as getting their undivided attention.

3.3 <u>Critical Discourse Analysis:</u>

The final part of my study consists of an analysis of Egyptian newspapers and talk shows' treatment of women and politics. The talk shows sample consists of three Egyptian talk shows. The first is *Al Beit Beitak* (Make Yourself at Home) which is aired on the government owned Egyptian Satellite Channel as well as the government owned terrestrial Channel Two. The second is *Al Ashera Masan* (10 PM) which is aired on the satellite channel *Dream TV* which is owned by an Egyptian businessman called Ahmed Bahgat. The final talk show is *90 Dekika* (90 Minutes) and it is aired on *Al Mehwar* satellite channel which is owned by the Egyptian businessman Hassan Rateb. All of the programs are aired daily from Saturday to Wednesday in the evening. The newspapers sample consists of two newspapers, the government owned *Al Ahram* (The Pyramids) and the privately owned *Al Masry Al Youm* (The Egyptian Today). The relevant stories and opinion columns from these two newspapers were accessed from their respective websites. Since the state plays an important role in women's rights, examining government owned media treatment of women's rights is necessary. That is why *Al Beti Betak* was examined, because it is the only talk show aired on government owned channels. *Al Ahram* was included because it is widely regarded as the most prestigious and formal government owned newspaper. Meanwhile, *Al Ashera Masan* and *90 Dekika* are the oldest and most well established talk shows aired on privately owned channels. No accurate figures are available regarding the viewership of talk shows, but it is likely that these two are more widely viewed than others. Finally, *Al Masry Al Youm* was chosen because it is the most successful privately owned newspaper and it is estimated that it has the highest circulation among privately owned newspapers. The segments of talk show episodes as well as the newspapers stories and columns which were analyzed were those which addressed two specific changes pertaining to women and politics,

namely the adoption of a parliamentary quota for women and how the newly appointed provincial governors[5] did not include a single woman. They were analyzed using critical discourse analysis.

The primary aim of this section of my study is to investigate Egyptian media's treatment of women's political empowerment. As stated in Chapter 1, very few women engage in politics in Egypt. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is the appropriate method to use because the text being analyzed pertains to a disadvantaged group in society (Siegfried 2002: 36). I will analyze how the discussions that took place in these talk shows are a manifestation of using language as a site of struggle over dominance and power through expressing ideology. This is because language is very often used to justify the status quo by arguing that it is normal and common sense, when in reality the more politically powerful group in society is actually imposing the ideology it pleases onto society as a whole to its own benefit (Thompson 1990: 7,8). Meanwhile, the disadvantaged groups may be trying to struggle against such ideological domination and trying to express and further their own ideology (Fairclough 1989: 14, 15, 84, 86, 88). Therefore, I will examine whether men express arguments such as 'women should not attain this particular political post because it is inappropriate for women', while women argue that women are perfectly capable of attaining that post. However, manifestations of such dominance are not only found in such explicit statements. In fact, they are more likely to be found in subtle use of language such as intonation (Siegfried 2002: 261). That is why I looked at not only what people said, but also at how they said it in the talk shows.

Since the study thoroughly investigates the various societal factors that relate to the meagre levels of women's participation in politics, I would not be able to study media's treatment of this issue without taking these societal factors into consideration. Indeed, context is an integral element in CDA (Meyer 2002:15; van Dijk 2002: 97). The most important elements of context in this study are history, culture and politics. For it is impossible to understand Egyptian women's contemporary status and the dilemmas that they face without taking Egypt's colonial history into consideration. In addition, some of the statements made by the participants in the text that will be analyzed can only be understood properly if they are placed in the context of aspects of Egyptian culture.

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[5] Being a provincial governor is equivalent to being a minister

However, context must also include several important issues about the media outlets themselves, such as who owns them and whether or not - and if so how - the government has any form of control over the privately owned media outlets. (van Dijk nd: 31). In addition, since this is a study about women and politics, the political environment in Egypt must be taken into consideration at all times.

As stated in Chapter 2, different groups in Egyptian society have very different views regarding women's status and the role that they ought to play in society. I will closely examine whether or not different groups have different degrees of access to the different talk shows and newspapers, i.e. whether some groups are more readily represented than others in the different talk shows and interviewed more often or provided with more space in opinion columns in the two newspapers. However, I will also take into consideration that if a member of any given group is featured on a talk show, this does not necessarily mean that the person in question will have been able to express their opinion freely. This is because the presenter and the other crew of the talk show have considerable control over its agenda. For example, they are the ones who choose the topic of the discussion and the questions to be posed (van Dijk nd: 21, 22). Also, the presenter is the one who administers the discussion, allocates turn taking and decides on who gets to speak first - and possibly - the most frequently or for longer periods of time. Therefore, members of powerful groups may be favoured and receive preferential treatment or they may have an edge over the others by simply being more articulate, so that they end up dominating the conversation, setting its tone, initiating a sub-topic that is then addressed and thus, diverting the discussion to a sub-topic that suits them (Siegfried 2002: 260; van Dijk nd: 22, 28, 31-2). Similarly, in a news story some people may be quoted more than others and it is up to the reporter to chose which parts of the interview will go into the news story and which ones will be disregarded. So for example, if members of opposition groups are quoted in government owned newspapers, the parts of their statement which were the least critical of government policy may be the only ones to be included in the story. In addition, I will examine how several external and internal power structures relate to the text being analyzed. The first external power structure is the government because no media outlet is totally free of government control. In fact, as previously stated, one of the talk shows examined in this study, *Al Beit Beitak*, is aired on two

government owned channels. Therefore, clearly the segments of that program that will be analyzed can not possibly be analyzed without taking aspects of the government's power over the program into consideration. The same applies to the news stories and opinion columns of the government owned newspapers. I will also examine whether or not and how the government exercises control over *Al Ashera Masan* and *90 Dekika* as well as *Al Masry Al Youm*, and how this relates to the segments of these media outlets that will be analyzed. In addition, the owners of *Dream TV*, *Al Mehwar* and *Al Masry Al Youm* may very well have a say in how they operate, and they may also be allied with or have business interests with different powerful groups in Egypt. I will examine how all of this relates to the text that I will analyze.

Chapter 4

WOMEN IN EGYPTIAN PARTY POLITICS

IN RELATION TO THE MEDIA

This chapter examines political party dynamics in Egypt, with an emphasis on their stance on women's rights, women's status and women's role within these political parties in relation to the media. Although many scholars including Bianchi (1989), Albrecht (2009) and Lust-Okar (2009) have previously examined Egyptian political parties and the environment in which they function, the central focus of their studies was not women, nor did they take the media into consideration. While doing so, the chapter also looks into the powers of and roles played by the President and first lady, in light of Kassem's (2004) argument that the Egyptian President is not only extremely powerful, but power is also personalized around him, as well as Joseph's (2001) argument that first ladies tend to play informal political roles that revolve around their husbands. It looks into media treatment of their roles and how their roles relate to media treatment of women's rights. The chapter also builds on Adam's (2007) argument that governmental women's institutions are used to establish patronage networks, by examining whether or not this is the case when it comes to female members of opposition political parties.

The chapter examines five different political parties/forces. The first party is the ruling party. Three other parties were carefully chosen because they reflect the diversity of opposition political parties in Egypt. One of them is a liberal party whose history dates back to the early 1900s, another is a liberal party which was formed very recently and the last party is a leftist one. In addition, the Muslim Brotherhood is examined even though it is not a political party in the legal sense, although it more or less functions as one. It is included because it is widely regarded as the strongest opposition force in Egypt.

The creation of political parties is regulated by Law No. 40 of 1977 and any new party must be authorized by the Committee for the Affairs of Political parties. The Committee is affiliated to the Shoura Council and its members include the Minister of Interior, three

other ministers and three senior retired judges. Also, the application to establish a political party must be signed by 50 people, half of who must be peasants and labourers. In order to be authorized, any party must accept that the main source of legislation is *Sharia* and it must be willing to defend social peace, democratic socialism and the interests of peasants and laborers. Also, parties are not allowed to be formed on the basis of class, religion, social category, geography, sex, origins or dogmas. In addition, the party program is required to be different from those of existing parties. Therefore, those who decide on whether or not opposition parties are formed are members of the regime using vague criteria that enables them to systematically reject authorization of parties. Not surprisingly, out of 52 applications to establish political parties received by the Committee over 26 years, only one party was authorized. Indeed almost all of the opposition political parties which have been established since 1977 and to date came about thanks to court rulings by Cairo's Appeals Court after long legal battles (Kienle 2001: 28-31, 68-9; Stacher 2004: 220-1, 224).

The chapter is divided into five sections, one about each of the different political parties/forces. Each section is then sub-divided into sub-sections which provide background information about the party and the party's stance on women. Other sub-sections are about the women's unit within each party/force and the party's media strategy and interaction with the media. In some, but not all cases, some additional sections are included. In the case of the NDP, this includes a sub-section about how decisions pertaining to women are made. Other sub-sections included within some of the sections about various other parties address the experience of female members of the party who ran for parliament, co-operation between the female members of the party and the National Council for Women as well as the activism of female members of the party in the NGO arena.

4.1 <u>National Democratic Party:</u>

4.1.1 Background Information about the Party:

The National Democratic Party (NDP) is the ruling party in Egypt. As stated in Chapter 1, it was formed by President Sadat in the late 1970s when he dismantled the Arab Socialist Union and introduced controlled multi-partism. According to its publications, it is a popular party which seeks to develop and organize Egyptian society and ensure that the Egyptian people are free and privileged. It also aims to maintain social security and order, national unity, social justice and the rule of law (NDP nd: 5). However, given all of the literature that was cited in Chapter 2 about the nature of the Egyptian regime, it is safe to conclude that the NDP does not implement any of this.

4.1.2 Background Information about Nehal Shoukry:

Nehal Shourky is a journalist in and a deputy editor in chief of *Al Ahram*. She is also a member of the NDP's Women's Secretariat and NCW's Political Participation Committee. She has always been interested in politics but she joined the NDP by coincidence after the journalist who use to cover the NDP in *Al Ahram* fell out with President Sadat. After that, Sadat insisted that the journalist in question quit both the NDP and *Al Ahram*, and so Shourky temporarily replaced him. "That is how women's participation is always perceived, as something temporary," Shoukry said. Yet she was allowed to stay on because she did a good job. She continues to cover the NDP's activities, especially those of its senior members, to date as well as covering women's issues[6].

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[6] Interview with Nehal Shoukry, member of the NDP Women's Committee, Cairo, 15 January, 2009

4.1.3 The Party's Stance on Women's Rights:

The NDP's vision regarding women revolves around increasing women's participation in all walks of life and protecting women's rights (NDP c. 2003: 43). It strives to empower women economically, socially and politically as well as ensuring that women play a role in development. This entails overcoming several challenges including decreasing female illiteracy rates, bringing an end to school drop out rates among girls as well as maternity death rates and improving the nutrition of young girls in impoverished areas. The NDP also aims to attain equality between men and women in general and in high ranking positions in particular (NDP c. 2003: 5).

Some of the measures used to achieve this are calling upon Islamic scholars to combat discrimination against women, placing challenging discrimination against women at the top of the Ministry of Information's agenda and establishing a database about violence against women and using it to decide upon means to combat it, in addition to making small loans programs more readily available, especially for female headed households (NDP c. 2003: 7). Also, in order to achieve women's political empowerment, the NDP encourages women to join syndicates[7] and supports them so that they attain decision making positions in them and it also calls upon women's NGOs and syndicates to allow for higher rates of female participation in politics (NDP c. 2003: 5, 7). It is also noteworthy that women represent a total of 13% of NDP members (NDP 2004: 16).

However, the NDP has been in power for more than three decades and the number of women in decision making positions remains extremely limited. For example, as stated in Chapter 1, there are only three female ministers. Also, the media is full of stereotypical images of women (see Chapter 7), violence against women is widespread (see Chapters 5 and 8 for information about sexual harassment and assault) and the number of female members of the NDP is extremely limited. All of this implies that the NDP is not truly trying to implement the vision that is to be found in its publications.

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[7] An organization whose membership is restricted to people who work in a specific profession, e.g. engineers, accountants and doctors. The organization provides services for its members and defends their rights. It is noteworthy that syndicates are not allowed to play a role in politics.

4.1.4 Women's Secretariat:

The women's unit within the NDP is called the Women's Secretariat. It develops plans to implement the party's vision regarding women. Its activities within the area of politics include encouraging women to register as voters and participating in politics, (NDP c. 2003: 43) recruiting women to join the party, drawing people's attention to the importance of women's political participation as well as helping women out in obtaining national ID cards and in registering as voters (NDP nd: 2). Other activities in this arena are supporting NDP candidates in elections and supporting female NDP members in all walks of life. Also, the members of the Women's Secretariat support female NDP members who contest elections by organizing conferences for them, distributing leaflets about them, talking to women in the constituency about them and helping them out in publicity[8].

The Women's Secretariat is also involved in other activities such as combating illiteracy, organizing trips by medical staff to remote areas in which health care facilities are unavailable and supporting the government's efforts in family planning, (NDP nd: 2) vaccination, combating diseases, child nutrition, various issues pertaining to the family, combating FGM and addressing problems related to education among girls[9].

Therefore, the Women's Secretariat is largely active in providing women with services. Also, it does not participate in formulating the Party's vision on women, but simply implements it.

4.1.5 Elections:

According to Shoukry, the NDP nominated her for the Local Municipal Elections in 2008 even though she was reluctant to run for an elected body. She won the elections and believes that it was thanks to the Party's tremendous support. They put up numerous banners in the constituency she was running in and mobilized people but they did not

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[8] *Ibid*
[9] *Ibid*

organize any conferences. It is noteworthy that she was the only woman running in that constituency and the party stressed the importance of voting for a woman. She got 13,000 votes "which shows how hard the party worked." She faced no problems whatsoever and that is why she is considering running for the People's Assembly or the Shoura Council[10].

 Shoukry's statements show that the NDP has the means to provide ample support for its candidates during elections. But much previous research has documented that Egyptian elections are rigged[11]. The minimal effort exerted by Shoukry seems to provide further evidence to support this.

4.1.6 Media:

The NDP aims is to develop a media strategy to change the negative ideas and perceptions of women in society. The first step towards achieving this is deciding on the most important women's issues and gender issues that need to be addressed and then developing objectives to achieve them and then developing media content that incorporates all of this. Another step is forming a committee consisting of representatives of various media institutions, as well as the ministries of education, culture and health, in addition to religious institutions and NGOs in order to develop a vision regarding media's treatment of gender. Other measures include ensuring that the media refrains from discrimination on the basis of gender and promotes equal opportunities, ensuring that one of the criteria used by the procedures of televised programs in selecting interviewees is ensuring that the interviewees are aware of gender issues and the rights of both men and women. Other measures are paying special attention to programs targeting children, particularly when it comes to treatment of gender roles as well as ensuring that one of the criteria for selecting high ranking media personnel is their belief in using the media to initiate societal change regarding women (NDP 2004: 6).

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[10] *Ibid*

[11] See for example Maye Kassem, 2004, Egyptian Politics: The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule, Eberhard, Kienle, 2001, A Grand Delusion: Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt and Ninette Fahmy, 2002, The Politics of Egypt: State-Society Relationship.

The NDP also has a vision regarding drama serials that emanates from the idea that drama serials are extremely popular and influential when it comes to societal values and people's mentality. Thus, the NDP advocates analyzing the content of drama serials to investigate the information and values that they advocate and then engaging in dialogue with those behind drama serials to achieve common ground regarding gender issues (NDP 2004: 6). This indicates that the NDP believes that drama serials have an immense impact on viewers. Also, given that drama serials are full of stereotypical images of women (see Chapter 7), it is safe to conclude that the NDP does not actually implement the strategy that is found it its publications on drama serials. This also leads one to doubt that it implements any of the other strategies mentioned in their publications on women and media.

4.1.7 Relationship with NCW:

According to Shoukry,

> there is no cooperation between NCW and the NDP's Women's Secretariat. NCW is a national organization but NDP is a political party and its members are loyal to it and so the line has to be drawn. However, you could say that a form of indirect cooperation takes place because many people are members of both NCW and the [NDP's] Women's Secretariat … so that some things which are not achieved by the party can be achieved through NCW and vice versa[12].

Perhaps such cooperation is unnecessary because the Women's Secretariat is largely active in providing women with services and does not have any decision making power.

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[12] *Ibid*

4.1.8 How Decisions Regarding Women's Rights are Made:

Some of the changes that have been made pertaining to women in recent years during the reign of the NDP are the introduction of the *khula* law, appointing women as judges and amending the nationality law[13]. Another change is the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota, which is examined at length in this study. How these decisions were reached and the role played by various individuals and units within the NDP is an important issue that must be examined.

According to Shoukry, for many years the Women's Secretariat produced several reports about the need to introduce something along the lines of what later became the *khula* law. The reports were then passed on to the Secretary General of the NDP. But the leaders of the party were embarrassed and were reluctant to make that decision until Suzanne Mubarak supported this cause and after that it was implemented[14]. Similarly, the Women's Secretariat sought to change the nationality law for many long years but the NDP refused to even consider it.

> Things only changed after Safwat al Sherif became Secretary General of the NDP and the Policies Committee was formed in 2002 headed by Gamal Mubarak i.e. young people with a new vision joined the Party. They sponsored changing the nationality law. We also owe the first lady because she exerted a lot of effort in this regard and at the end of the day, we owe the President for responding to the demands of Egyptian mothers[15].

Shoukry went on to say that "appointing women as judges was the result of efforts by the first lady … the Women's Secretariat … did not play any role whatsoever in this issue and the NDP as a whole had nothing to do it"[16].

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[13] The Egyptian nationality law used to allow for the children of an Egyptian man and a non-Egyptian woman to obtain the Egyptian nationality. The children's mother was also entitled to it two years after the marriage took place. However, the children of an Egyptian woman married to a non-Egyptian man, as well as the children's father, were not allowed to obtain the Egyptian nationality. In 2003, the law was amended to allow those children – but not their father – to obtain the Egyptian nationality.
[14] *Ibid*
[15] *Ibid*
[16] *Ibid*

All of this shows that the Women's Secretariat and the NDP as a whole have no decision making power whatsoever and that changing laws pertaining to women are at the discretion of the President, first lady and Gamal.

In addition, Shoukry said that when it came to the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota,

> NCW's political participation committee wanted the quota system to be adopted using some of the existing parliamentary seats. However, the NDP has rejected this and has come up with a different idea, whereby new electoral constituencies would be created and only women will be allowed to run for these additional parliamentary seats so that we do not take away anything from men and their parliamentary seats in order to avoid upsetting them. We are pleased but we have argued that this will lead to an insufficient number of women joining parliament. A debate is currently ongoing within the Party; some people argue that the number of additional seats for each governorate should be proportional to its population. We are awaiting their decision. Women are still entitled to run for the existing parliamentary seats, we do not know whether or not this will change, it depends on their decision. … The NDP Policies Committee which is headed by Gamal Mubarak formed a working group to address all of this[17].

The role played by the Women's Secretariat in the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota was that Aisha Abdel Hadi, the head of the Secretariat, asked the head of each of its branches whether they would like that governorate to be represented with 2 or 3 seats in parliament. She then wrote a report based on their requests and submitted it to Safwat al Sherif, the Secretary General of the NDP and he passed this information onto the Policies Committee and the working group[18].

This is further evidence to prove that the Women's Secretariat has no decision making power. It also shows that NCW is not a very powerful institution and suggests that the NDP is considerably powerful and plays a role in how a women's right is addressed if the interests and privileges of its members are at stake. Furthermore, Shoukry's statements

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[17] *Ibid*
[18] *Ibid*

indicate that the male members of the NDP perceived the women's parliamentary quota as taking away some of their power and privileges and giving them to women.

4.2 <u>The Neo Wafd Party:</u>

4.2.1 Background Information about the Party:

As stated in Chapter 1, Al Wafd Al Gadid or The Neo Delegation Party is a party whose roots date back to 1919. It was the ruling party in Egypt from 1923 to the early 1950s. But it was dissolved by Nasser along with all other political parties. A new version of the party, hence the word new in its name, was formed in the late 1970s when late President Sadat re-introduced the multi-party system.

The Wafd is a party that seeks to establish a democratic system in which the rulers would be chosen by the Egyptian people, there would be a clear separation between the branches of government and parliament would have the right to hold the executive accountable for its policies. Elections would also be free and fair and the judiciary would be independent. It would also be a system characterized by multi-partism in which human rights would be respected and there would be no constraints on establishing political parties and launching newspapers (Wafd Party nd: 6-10, 13).

The Wafd's party program is largely a response to the current political system in Egypt, in which elections are rigged and the separation between the powers of the different branches of the state is extremely blurred.

4.2.2 Background Information about Mona Korashi:

Mona Korashi is a member of the Wafd Party's High Council and Women's Committee. She comes from a privileged background; both of her parents come from wealthy land owning families which were rather powerful in pre 1952 Egypt. They were also both

Wafdist families. Korashi only became active in the political party and NGO arenas after she was widowed and her children had moved out[19].

4.2.3 The Party's Stance on Women's Rights:

The section on women in the party program states that "women represent 50% of Egyptian society and have an integral role to play in both the family and nation as a whole" and therefore, the party's objectives are augmenting family planning efforts, building a larger number of child care centers throughout the country and ensuring that large factories build such child care centers. In addition, the Party believes that women should be entitled to two years of maternity leave the first time they deliver, during which they should be paid half of their salaries among other rights, such as being promoted on time (Al Wafd Party nd: 62).

Therefore, the Wafd has a very traditional and rather stereotypical perception of women and their role in society. But it is concerned with providing working women with some support to assist them in juggling families and careers.

Indeed, Korashi, said that she believes that the Wafd is not doing enough for women. A program is in place but it is not being implemented, there is nothing tangible regarding women's issues. She added that female members of the Wafd call for the adoption of a women's parliamentary quota but the Party itself has not made a clear statement regarding an electoral system that is favorable to women. Also, women are under represented in the Party's high ranks. Out of 60 decision makers, i.e. the members of the Party's High Council, only three are women, one of whom is Korashi. Several women contested these internal elections "but elections are all about personal interests and not democracy, the male members of the Party did not want four women to join the High Council because that would mean that one of them would no longer be a member of the High Council.[20]"

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[19] Interview with Mona Korashi, member of the Wafd Pary, Cairo, 9 September 2008
[20] *Ibid*

Therefore, some female members of the Wafd are agents who are truly interested in women's rights, but the Party as a whole is not. Her statements also indicate that male members of the Wafd – like the male members of the NDP – perceive women's rights as diminishing men's power in order to make women more powerful.

4.2.4 Women's Committee:

According to Korashi,

> the Women's Committee of the Wafd is not very active, just like all of the other committees. We need experts and researchers to help us decide on the agenda of each committee and that has not taken place yet. … The Women's Committee used to be active in issues like charity and community service, but these are not women's issues. Its members were incapable of addressing women's issues and they lack an expert who could guide them in a scientific and cultured manner[21].

Therefore, most of the Wafd's committees – and not just the women's committee – are largely inactive. Also, the Women's Committee – like the NDP's Women's Secretariat – is largely active in providing women with services and does not address women's rights.

4.2.5 Elections:

Korashi ran for parliament twice in 2000 and 2005 in the Kasr El Nile constituency. The party was desperate for some of its members to run for parliament because very few people are willing to do so[22].

Based on her experience, voters could not care less about the electoral program. Their main concern is the services the candidate has to offer them such as addressing social

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[21] *Ibid*
[22] *Ibid*

problems. "But first and foremost, voters perceive it as an opportunity to make money. They vote for the most powerful candidate, i.e. the NDP because they are more capable of providing them with services. … Women in rural areas are assembled and told by a man to vote for a particular person. They do not choose who to vote for or compare electoral programs." She did not address women's issues in her electoral campaign because these are not the issues that concern laymen and women in Egypt, "people would walk away in the middle of the conversation if I did so." People are concerned with issues like the economy, housing and education. Meanwhile, "intellectuals who reside in Garden City and Zamalek are not registered voters. This leads to our loss because these are the kind of people who may vote for somebody like me. But those who are impoverished are after money and services. Intellectuals argue that going out of their way to vote is pointless because the election results are predetermined, but people are being passive."

The Party provided her with L.E. 2000 to fund her campaign, "which is peanuts" so she had to resort to connections and ask people for favors. For example, some people provided her with material upon which to print her photographs, others stuck up her promotional material on walls for free. It is noteworthy none of the women's NGOs or NCW provided her with any form of assistance.[23]

Korashi's statements indicate that the Wafd Party is not very active, has limited resources and does not play a significant role in Egyptian politics. They also indicate that many illegal methods are employed in Egyptian elections and that party programs and political ideologies are not in the least important. It is not surprising that it is extremely difficult for women's rights to be addressed in this environment. Her statements also indicate that there is not much cooperation between women's activists in the arena of political parties and those who are active in the NGO arena.

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[23] *Ibid*

4.2.6 Media:

According to Korashi, in the Wafd's newspaper outstanding female figures receive coverage but that is not the case when it comes to women's issues. Journalists in the Wafd newspaper do not go out of their way to conduct investigative reporting about women's issues and the female members of the party have not put pressure on the newspapers' editor in chief regarding this issue[24].

Korashi is given room to address any issue that that she pleases in the form of an opinion column in the newspaper. But she believes that television has a much greater role to play due to the very high illiteracy rates[25].

The Wafd Party's newspaper covered Korashi's experience in running for parliament as part and parcel of the coverage of the 400 members of the Party who were running for parliament. Meanwhile, other media outlets, including privately owned ones did not cover any of her activities[26].

Korashi's statements indicate that it is the female members of the Wafd who are concerned about not only women's rights, but also media treatment of them. They also indicate that the existence of the privately owned media has not made much of a difference in terms of the coverage of the activities of female members of political parties.

4.2.7 Relationship with NCW:

Korashi often attends meetings organized by NCW for female members of political parties. But sometimes they only get in touch with her a day before the meeting is due to take place and in that case she does not attend the meeting. In the meeting NCW's Secretary General Farakhonda Hassan asks each of them to express their views, "but she

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[24] *Ibid*
[25] *Ibid*
[26] *Ibid*

would do not take a leftist party's opinion very seriously, she might give the Wafd's ideas some thought because we are a liberal party and so that suits her more[27]."

4.2.8 NGO Activism:

The NGO that Korashi heads is a member of the International Feminist Union (IFU). She presents the Arab world's problems in the IFU. Also, she ensures that every single woman who walks into the NGO that she runs issues a national ID and registers as a voter. "They do not comprehend the importance of all of this and how those who orchestrate the elections abuse their right to vote. But at least I have taken a step forward."

4.3 <u>Democratic Front Party:</u>

4.3.1 Background Information about the Party:

The Democratic Front Party (DFP) is a party that is still under construction, i.e. it has not received authorization just yet. It seeks to establish a liberal democracy in Egypt in which there would be a clear separation between religion and the state, but at the same time citizens would be free to practice their faith. The DFP seeks to ensure that nobody is above the law, including those who are in power. It believes that laws should emanate from the principles of freedom and human rights. It is against favoring any group of citizens over the others such as peasants and laborers. It also seeks to prohibit any interference on the part of the military and police establishment in the state, and perceives them as tools at the discretion of the state to serve citizens and not as political players or tools to serve the interests of one political force or the other. It also believes in a disciplined free market economy which operates under state supervision. At the same time, the government should be the one to decide on general economic policies, provide

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[27] *Ibid*

basic public services, make development possible and preserve social justice (DFP 2007: 14, 15, 19, 20).

Some of the elements of the DFP's program – like that of the Wafd – is a response to the political situation in Egypt, such as the lack of separation of powers between the different branches of the state. But by and large the DFP is a party which upholds values associated with Western liberal democracies, such as separation between religion and the state and the centrality of human rights.

4.3.2 Background Information about Magda Saed:

Magda Saed is one of the founders of the Democratic Front Party. She comes from a middle class background and works as a journalist and writer. She had been active in the NGO arena for several years before she decided to become active in the political party arena[28].

4.3.3 The Party's Stance on Women's Rights:

The DFP aims to fully empower women and ensure that women are entitled to the same opportunities as men. The party vows to abide by this within its internal structure and activities as well as ensuring that this is one of the corner stones of its program and policies. It believes that women have made some achievements in particular fields but women's status as a whole is still in need of a lot of continuous and serious efforts because women's status, according to all of the human development indices, falls behind that of men in terms of literacy rates, income, health and political participation (DFP 2007: 38).

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[28] Interview with Magda Saeed, Cairo, 18 December, 2007

The DFP's stance on women reflects its liberal ideology and conveys that it is interested in empowering women. But whether that is truly the case or whether the DFP simply pays lip service to women's empowerment remains to be seen.

According to Magda Saed, one of the founding members of the DFP:

> The problems that women face must be perceived as part and parcel of societal problems. That is why we established a women's committee and not a secretariat within the party in order to avoid isolating the problems that women face from those of society as a whole. Women must play a role within political parties and stand up for societal problems and not only those that concern women. But female members of political parties confine their membership to women's committees. Women must fight for their rights, no one will grant them their rights and their male colleagues in the political parties will treat them in the same manner that men treat women in society as a whole.

Saed comes across as having a clear understanding of women's rights and how to attain them. Yet Saed's statements also imply that male members of the DFP are not that keen on women's rights and their empowerment after all, otherwise she would not have said that "women must fight for their rights and that their male colleagues in the political parties will treat them in the same manner that men treat women in society as a whole."

4.3.4 Saed's Experience:

I first met Saeed in December 2007. She came across as a strong and enthusiastic woman with a clear vision and she considered running for parliament in El Manial constituency but decided not to do so because she realized that voters would be skeptical of a female candidate after having voted for a woman, Shahinaz al Naggar, who let them down and resigned from parliament when she got married[29].

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[29] *Ibid*

I met Saed again in September 2008. She was no longer an active member of the party and said:

> Democracy is non-existent. The political environment does not allow for democracy [or] political activity. Political parties do not function properly, syndicates do not function properly, unions do not function properly, they are all fake. The NDP, not the NDP - but its high-ranking members for the party itself does not exist as such - do not give anybody the opportunity to do anything. … What kind of political activity [can we talk about] when people are not even allowed to voice their opinions? There has to be a legal channel through which people can express their opinion [such as] a union, syndicate, political party but all of them are harassed … which creates a corrupt political environment … the political empowerment of women is part and parcel of politically empowering men and citizens in general … you can not achieve political empowerment in a corrupt political environment. … The government cripples political parties by prohibiting them from interacting with people and more importantly, the corrupt electoral system has transformed the elections into a meaningless process. For the electoral program of parties is not in the least important and the same applies to voters' political views. The NDP abuses the poor and hungry and degrades them by buying their votes. This is coupled with rigging elections. Although many fine women are members of political parties, the parties do not risk nominating women during elections because they have to spend a lot of money to secure a parliamentary seat for any candidate. Nominating a woman in this environment is risky because her chances of winning are perceived as less than those of a man because people may not vote for her because of her gender. … The electoral process has been transformed into a process of buying a parliamentary seat and later abusing your authority as a member of parliament - not only to make up for the money that you spent in order to buy the seat - but to make ten times as much money. But we should not postpone seeking to politically empower women, we should all work together to change the status quo. … one feels like withdrawing completely from life as a whole, for all one can see is blatant corruption … [last

time] I was enthusiastic but I now I feel very depressed after my experience in the party. We did our best to try to establish a decent party … which implements the principles it came up with but we were harassed in the same manner the NDP adopts: the decent members of the party were harassed through buying votes, those who gave in to this no longer abide by the party's principles and those who still believe in them have mostly quit the party … I will not participate in formal politics again unless things change drastically. … I wish women could realize that political reform is a pre-requisite for economic reform. Women say that they do not have time for politics because they are preoccupied with struggling to feed their children, but that problem will never be solved as long as politics is all wrong[30].

Saed's statements show that the DFP has been coopted and transformed into yet another party which exists to maintain the fake liberal authoritarian system described by Albrecht (2007) and is not a strong party that can play a significant role in the political arena. She also shed light on the tactics used by the regime to control opposition parties. In addition, she elaborated on how difficult it is for a woman to play a role in politics in such an environment. Her own personal experience further illustrates this. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the DFP's party program and stance on women merely pay lip service to liberal principles and women's empowerment.

4.3.5 NGO Activism:

As stated previously, Saed had been active in the NGO arena before joining the DFP. After her experience in the party, she has shifted back to participating in NGOs. She decided to establish an NGO that will offer youth training sessions to help them find jobs and it will also aim to empower women[31].

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[30] Interview with Magda Saeed, Cairo, 13 September, 2008
[31] *Ibid*

This indicates that the regime allows NGOs slightly more freedom in their activities than political parties, probably because it perceives NGOs as far less of a threat to its power. Saed's experience illustrates that the regime seems to be indirectly forcing activists to channel their activism to the NGO arena and not the political party one.

4.4 <u>Tagammu Party:</u>

4.4.1 Background Information about the Party:

Al Hizb Al Watani Al Takadomi Al Wahdawi or the National Progressive Unionist Party, commonly referred to as Al Tagammu or the Union Party, was established in 1976 when late President Sadat reintroduced controlled multi-partism, as stated in Chapter 1. Tagammu is a leftist party which supports democracy and all of the principles of the 23 July Revolution and seeks to build on its achievements. Its ultimate goal is to transform Egyptian society into a socialist one which is free of all forms of abuse, to implement independent national development and fulfill the Egyptian people's basic needs. It also supports national unity, struggling to free all occupied Arab land and enabling the Palestinians to reclaim their rights. It believes in forcefully opposing Zionism and imperialism and allying with third world countries and their peoples in an effective manner (Tagammu 2006: 25-7). Therefore, Tagammu is a leftist party.

According to Bahiga Hussein[32],

> Both men and women are barred from political activity by laws that cripple them. We are confined to the headquarters of political parties and we are also denied access to the media. ... The regime's agents infiltrate into opposition parties and weaken them from within and create problems within the parties which prevent them from focusing on their limited activities[33].

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[32] Interview with Bahiga Hussein, 7 January 2008
[33] *Ibid*

Hussein's statements shed light on some of the tactics used by the regime to control opposition parties.

4.4.2 Background Information about Bahiga Hussein:

Bahiga Hussein comes from a rural background. She first became politically active while she was an undergraduate student. This was during the Nasser era and her family supported her political activity. She was imprisoned during the Sadat era for her political views. Hussein is a journalist in *Al Ahaly* newspaper, which is affiliated to Tagammu and is also a member of the Feminist Progressive Union. She is also active in the NGO arena. In addition, she is the editor in chief of the magazine *Al Mara' Al Gadida* (The New Woman magazine), which is issued by the women's NGO New Woman Foundation[34] (see Chapter 5 for details about New Woman Foundation).

4.4.3 The Party's Stance on Women's Rights:

One of Tagammu's priorities is fully empowering women. The party's principles when it comes to women are liberating women, respecting their rights and achieving equality between men and women (Abdel Radi 2008: 3). It also believes that women's liberation emanates from the nation's liberation, which in turn emanates from the liberation of the people (FPU 2003: 2). The party also encourages and supports the proliferation of women's movements as well as co-operation among such movements (FPU 2006: 63) and it strives to form a movement at the grassroots level while ensuring that women are at the forefront of this movement (FPU 1992: 1).

Thus, Tagammu supports:

- a new family law that preserves the family and women's rights

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[34] *Ibid*

- a new nationality law that automatically grants the offspring of an Egyptian woman and a non-Egyptian man as well as the children's father the Egyptian nationality

- a new law that does not discriminate between men and women in employment opportunities and attaining high-ranking positions

- establishing the largest number of child care centers, playgrounds and gardens all of which can be utilized free of charge

- making electrical appliances readily available so that working women find it easier to do household chores (FPU 2006: 109, 110)

Much of Tagammu's stance on women is a reflection of its leftist ideology. It also seems to be concerned with helping women out in juggling careers and families.

4.4.4 Feminist Progressive Union:

The women's unit of Tagammu is called the Feminist Progressive Union (FPU). It "does not advocate working against men", on the contrary, its members believe that cooperating with men is necessary in order to achieve national development (FPU 2003: 4). They aspire for the Feminist Progressive Union to become an umbrella organization that encompasses those who believe in women's rights from all ideological backgrounds. Thus, being a member of the Tagammu Party is not a pre-requisite for being a member of the Union, but the pre-requisites are believing in women's rights as citizens and believing in women's issues[35].The FPU has branches in 22 different Egyptian governorates. The Union has a say in selecting female nominees for all types of elections.

Some of the activities the FPU engages in are:

- combating illiteracy among women belonging to various age groups
- organizing exhibitions for clothing and hand made products in various villages and governorates

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[35] *Ibid*

- organizing seminars about:
    - the impact of globalization on women
    - Iqbal Baraka's book: A Modern Perception of the Veil
    - the economic impact of the Iraq war
    - how the nationality law discriminates against women
- organizing an event on the 8th of March to commemorate International Women's Day on an annual basis
- visiting elderly homes on mother's day, orphanages on different occasions pertaining to children as well as visiting cancer patients (FPU 2003: 5-7)
- activities to call for the adoption of a women's parliamentary quota, (FPU 2003: 34) such as conferences, seminars in collaboration with other political parties and a demonstration in front of the People's Assembly[36]

The FPU is also concerned about female workers and it aims to:

- help female workers in organizing themselves
- raising the minimum wage of female workers
- ensuring that factories abide by working hours so that female workers work for 8 hours a day
- ensuring that female workers are not forced to work over time but have the right to do so if they please
- providing female workers with safe transportation facilities
- brining an end to discrimination against female workers on the basis of gender (Abdel Radi 2008: 20)

Therefore, much of the FPU's activities are providing women with services – just like the women's units of the NDP and the Wafd. But some of its activities are slightly different because of its leftist ideology, namely the ones which target female workers. Also, the fact that FPU felt the need to state in its program that they do no advocate working against men reflects the misperception of women's rights in society.

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[36] Interview with Leila Al Shal, Head of the Tagammu Party's Feminist Progressive Union, Cairo, 14 September, 2008

However, the FPU faces some problems. Many of the Party's members do not take feminist activities very seriously and some male members of the party do not co-operate with it. In fact, one of the party's female members went as far as describing the manner in which the male members of the party perceive the FPU as "an illegitimate child" of the Party (FPU 1992: 8-9, 34). Furthermore, the head of the FPU believes that it is completely detached from women at the grassroots level because the government cripples its activities. For example, they once organized a rally and the number of policemen surrounding them outnumbered the number of protestors. She added that they are allowed to say anything they like within the party's headquarters where nobody can hear them[37].

Therefore, it seems that Tagammu's publications give an exaggerated impression of the Party's support for and belief in women's rights. Apparently, many of its male members do not support women's rights after all. Also, the fact that the FPU is detached from women at the grassroots level makes it very unlikely that it will achieve the goals stated in its publications.

4.4.5 Elections:

According to Hussein, Tagammu adopts a quota system, whereby 6% of its nominees for any elections are women[38]. Al Shal added that in the 2005 parliamentary elections, it was the only party - other than the NDP - which nominated two women and they both lost the elections. The Party and the FPU supported the female candidates financially, morally and by producing leaflets and banners, as well as organizing rallies and seminars in the streets and coffee shops. "The candidate who ran against Amina Shafik is a drug dealer who spent LE 6 million on his electoral campaign. He hired female thugs to beat those who were backing her up and some of us got wounded"[39]. They also nominated 19 women for municipal elections, and 6 or 7 of them won. She argued that some of the reasons behind their victory is that the constituencies are small and that those who run for

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[37] *Ibid*
[38] Interview with Bahiga Hussein, 7 January, 2008
[39] Interview with Leila Al Shal, 14 September, 2008

municipal elections are different from those who run for parliament: "the People's Assembly elections are contested by tycoons who spend millions of pounds to make it, it is a fierce battle"[40].

Al Shal's statements are yet another indication for how that party programs and ideologies are not in the least important in parliamentary elections. Even though Tagammu is the only party which adopts a women's quota, this has not lead it to nominate a significant number of women. One of the reasons behind this is probably that the Party does not nominate a significant number of candidates during any form of elections anyway.

4.4.6 Media:

Tagammu releases the weekly newspaper *Al Ahaly* while the FPU issues a magazine entitled *Al Mara' Al Masreya* (The Egyptian Woman) every three months, as well as issuing a special issue on International Women's Day. The magazine is distributed for free to female members of the People's Assembly and Shoura Council and NCW members as well as NGOs and the Tagammu Party's branches in provincial governorates[41]. The FPU also issues leaflets about women's struggles in various fields, such as working women's conditions in the era of globalization (FPU 2003: 7).

According to Al Shal, "the government owned media did not cover any of our activities regarding the women's parliamentary quota or the nationality law because they completely disregard the existence of opposition political parties." But sometimes, the six o'clock news bulletin aired on the government owned stations covers some of their other activities, such as exhibitions. Meanwhile, "the privately owned television station *Dream TV* covered the demonstrations that we organized, such as the one calling for the adoption

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[40] *Ibid*
[41] *Ibid*

of a women's parliamentary quota which was held in front of parliament, and *Al Masry Al Youm* covers our major events"[42].

This indicates that the proliferation of privately owned media has allowed for minimal coverage of some of the activities of the women's units of opposition parties.

Hussein is featured in the program *Sabahak Sokar Zeyada* (Extra Sweet Good Morning) on the privately owned satellite channel *O TV* once a month. The program's editors select articles from newspapers and magazines about a variety of issues including women and she comments on them[43].

Hussein argued that:

> Members of opposition parties are featured in the media to discuss specific issues with particular people, but not to promote political participation. ... These privately owned satellite channels have provided greater opportunity for freedom of expression and for featuring women, largely due to competition between the different privately owned channels in addressing day to day problems and featuring unfamiliar speakers. However, all of this does not aim to change perceptions regarding women's political participation. ... I believe that these channels have provided viewers with more information but they have not led to raising their awareness in a manner that leads to taking action. I believe that the latter is the role of political parties had they not been crippled by laws. These channels allow the Egyptian people to voice their anger at the government which has reached unprecedented levels and only leads to spontaneous reactions with limited demands, such as the strike wave[44].

This indicates that the proliferation of privately owned media has provided female members of opposition parties with some media access.

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[42] *Ibid*
[43] Interview with Bahiga Hussein, Cairo, 7 September, 2008
[44] *Ibid*

4.4.7 Relationship with NCW:

The FPU co-operates with NCW on various fronts. In the words of Al Shal, "We are in disagreement with the government regarding economic policies but not when it comes to women's issues. Women's status is deteriorating, violence against women takes place, women are deprived of many of their rights, even the governmental women's organizations believe in all of this[45]". One of the forms of co-operation is that young female members of the FPU attend NCW training sessions, such as a one month training course about the quota system and other women's rights[46]. Also, some of the members of the FPU participate in conferences and attend seminars organized by NCW. The FPU also invites NCW to their events, and the Secretary General of NCW does indeed attend many of their events, such as an event to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Union's establishment. However, "NCW does not participate in our activities which involve interaction with people at the grassroots level, they only attend seminars which are held in offices". Al Shal also said "because Mrs. Mubarak is the President of NCW, its activities receive media coverage, which is beneficial. However, she added that NCW did not support Al Tagammu female members who contested the elections and they criticized them in this regard.

Yet another member of Tagmmu expressed some very different views of NCW. Hussein said:

> NCW is an elitist organization that adopts a top down approach. It was established by those who oppress the Egyptian people and waste money that belongs to the Egyptian people. Its activities have nothing to do with [Egyptian] women's real problems. NCW has not achieved anything because it is a governmental institution. ... There is a huge gap between the wonderful slogans about women's empowerment and women's status. Many of the activities conducted to empower women are done merely for social prestige and are not researched properly, so

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[45] *Ibid*
[46] *Ibid*

that a lot of money has been wasted. … Many women register as voters but are abused by the NDP[47].

Her views clearly contradict with those of Al Shal. This conveys that members of the same party can have very different views and there may be profound disagreements between them.

4.5 <u>The Muslim Brotherhood:</u>

4.5.1 Background Information about the Muslim Brotherhood:

The Muslim Brotherhood is an Islamic movement that was established by Hassan El Bana in 1928 (Shehaden 2003: 10). The current Egyptian regime describes it as an 'outlawed group' and forbids it from forming a political party on the grounds that Article 5 of the Egyptian constitution states that "no political activity shall be exercised nor political party established on a religious referential authority." Despite this, it is widely regarded as the strongest political opposition to the Egyptian regime. Its members are constantly harassed by the state and many of them are tried in military courts and sentenced to several years in prison. Since it is outlawed, no accurate figures are available regarding its membership. However, Diaa Rashwan, a scholar who specializes in Islamic movements estimates that anywhere between 50, 000 and 60, 000 people are members of the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters/sympathizers amount to between 400, 000 and 500, 000 people (Rashwan 2008a).

4.5.2 Would-Be Party Program:

In late 2007, the Muslim Brotherhood made public a program of its would be political party. It stipulated that the Muslim Brotherhood seeks to establish a democratic system in which rotation of power would take place and there would be clear divisions between the

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[47] *Ibid*

three branches of the state. It would also be a state in which government officials are elected by the Egyptian people, nobody would be above the law and all citizens would be equal. Other features of the state would be that Islamic *Sharia* would be the primary source of legislation, the judiciary would be independent from the government, the Islamic principle of *shoura* would be adopted and people would have the right to establish political parties and NGOs (Mohamed 10/8/2007).

Much of this program – like those of many of the secular political parties - is a response to the political system in Egypt in which the same people have been in power for many long years and there is no significant separation of powers between the different branches of the state. The would be party program also reflects the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamist orientation.

4.5.3 Stance on Women:

In general, Islamists perceive the family as the basic institution of society, state and civilization as a whole. In each institution, men and women perform their roles in accordance with their capabilities and merits. Although women have the right to play roles in both institutions and both are respected, their role within the family is perceived as taking precedence over their role in the state (Kausar 2008: 40-42). Also, most Islamists uphold male leadership of both the family and the state but they are totally against male dominance of these institutions in the patriarchal sense. Instead, they envision men's leadership of these institutions as one of "responsibility and governing the governed" by taking care of them and "discharging functions with benevolence and not with domination and oppression" (Kausar 2008: 42-43).

The Muslim Brotherhood's would be party program included a section entitled 'Family and Women' which stipulated that it believes in implementing a media campaign to change the negative societal perception of women and promote equality. It also included taking all of the necessary steps to empower women and ensure that they enjoy all of their rights, as well as enabling women to juggle careers and families by protecting

women's rights to maternity leave and enabling working women to go on leave during school examination periods. In addition, the would-be party program advocated organizing conferences in which all political forces and NGOs would participate in order to arrive at solutions for women's problems as well as supporting women's NGOs and directing their activism to solving women's problems. Furthermore, it included criminalizing all forms of violence against women both verbal and physical, as well as criminalizing forced marriages and creating laws that allow for punishing those who commit these crimes (na 14/8/2007).

Therefore, much of the Muslim Brotherhood's stance on women focuses on enabling women to juggle careers and families and protecting women from various forms of abuse. Even though the would-be party program states that steps would be taken to empower women, it does not elaborate or provide a definition for empowerment.

4.5.4 The Muslim Sisters:

Omayma Abdel Latif use to be a research and program associate at the Carnegie Endowment. She (2008) conducted a thorough analysis of the Muslim Sisters which provides deep insight into its position within the Muslim Brotherhood as well as its role.

The structure of the Muslim Brotherhood must be explained in order to understand where the women's division is located within its hierarchical structure. The Muslim Brotherhood consists of four hierarchical bodies. The highest authority is the Supreme Guide. After that comes Maktab al-Irshad (The Guidance Bureau) which is an executive body that consists of 16 members who are elected by the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council) which is a body that outlines general policies. It consists of 75 to 90 members who represent the 22 provincial governorates in Egypt. The last body is al-Makatib al-Idariyya (The Administrative Bureaus) which are executive bodies at the provincial governorate level and are responsible for outlining the Muslim Brotherhood's plan of action for the provincial governorate and they communicate with Maktab al-Irshad (Abdel Latif 2008: 10).

The women's division of the Muslim Brotherhood is called the Muslim Sisters. It was first established in 1932 and its members largely consisted of the female relatives, especially the wives and daughters, of the male members of the Muslim Brotherhood. This is still the case today. At the beginning, it did not have a female head but a deputy who communicated its underpinnings to the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood which oversaw it. Later a male member of the Muslim Brotherhood was appointed to oversee the Muslim Sisters. Its activities largely revolved around charity, social activities, religious issues and medical services. A male member of each of the Makatib Idariyya is "in charge of women's activities … and acts as a liason between the Sisters' division in each governorate" (Abdel Latif 2008: 3). Today, the activities of the Muslim Sisters largely revolve around charity and religious education. They also organize seminars addressing political, social and religious issues. However, during elections they played crucial roles as organizers and in mobilizing voters. Also, during a recent crack down on the movement by the state in the form of imprisoning large numbers of senior members of the Muslim Brotherhood and confiscating their property, Muslim Sisters organized street demonstrations, ran media campaigns, secured funds to support the families of the detainees and pay their lawyers and organized visits to the detainees (Abdel Latif 2008: 3, 7).

Some of the Muslim Sisters along with some of the male members of the Muslim Brotherhood are actively seeking a larger role for women within the structure of the Muslim Brotherhood and in society as a whole. These male members are largely middle ranking ones who come from an urban background. In addition, many young members of the movement - both male and female - are also in favour of this. They, for example, call for women to be represented in all decision-making bodies and for the Muslim Sisters to be integrated into the main structure of the Muslim Brotherhood. They also opposed the clause in the party platform that stipulated that women should not attain the post of head of state. However, most members of the Muslim Brotherhood - both male and female - have conservative views regarding women's participation in the public sphere (Abdel Latif 2008: 10, 13). Some of the male members are also apprehensive of women's participation in the Muslim Brotherhood's high-ranking bodies because members of these

bodies are constantly harassed by the state and periodically imprisoned. Imprisonment of its female members is a red line for the Muslim Brotherhood that it will not allow to be crossed at any cost. An example that illustrates this is the Muslim Brotherhood's reaction when some of its female members who have been more openly active in recent years were arrested. Muslim Brotherhood members demonstrated for three days non-stop demanding their release. Indeed, there seems to be an implicit agreement with the authorities that women shall not be subject to such treatment as long as their activism is minimal. An example to that effect is that the Muslim Brotherhood received several warnings that women would "no longer be beyond the reach of the police if they continued to be conspicuous in the streets." Abdel Latif (2008: 14) argues that the Muslim Brotherhood's strategy of minimizing women's activism is also a survival tactic which ensures the survival of the Muslim Brotherhood because its female members are active away from the gaze of state security. Furthermore, the fact that women are not subject to harassment ensures the Muslim Brotherhood's survival during crisis in which the state cracks down on the movement.

If indeed most members of the Muslim Brotherhood – both male and female – have conservative views regarding women's participation in the public sphere, then this leads one to question whether the would-be party program gives an exaggerated impression of the Muslim Brotherhood's interest in women's empowerment. Also, it is difficult to come up with a conclusion regarding whether or not the limited activity and decision making power of the Muslim Sisters is truly caused by constant state harassment of the Muslim Brotherhood, or whether it reflects its stance on women and the role that they ought to play. In any case, the Muslim Sisters are not very different from the women's units of the secular political parties, they are largely active in services and not women's rights. Nor are the Muslim Sisters very different from the female members of the secular political parties in another regard; they all have very limited or no decision making power. It seems that overall the Muslim Brotherhood has a rather conservative stance on women, while a small number of agents – consisting of both male and female members – are truly interested in women's empowerment, which again is not very different from the secular

parties. The only difference is that in the Muslim Brotherhood's case the agents include men as well as women, while in the case of secular parties, the agents are all women.

4.5.5 Media:

The Muslim Brotherhood's would-be party program included a section on media. the policies it included were providing incentives to enable the cinema industry to flourish and encouraging the production of patriotic and religious songs and gearing the music industry to abide by morals and ethics. The Muslim Brotherhood believes that the media should play a role in development, promote democracy, human rights and women's rights. It also seeks to replace the existing press law with one that ensures freedom of the press, prohibits imprisoning journalists and makes it easier for journalists to access information (14/8/2007).

This reflects the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamic orientation, since it would like to encourage the proliferation of religious songs, for example. But it is noteworthy that it would also like to use the media to promote democracy, human rights and women's rights.

4.5.6 Elections:

The Muslim Brotherhood has been contesting the parliamentary elections ever since 1990. At the beginning, it use to do so through coalitions with political parties but in recent years, its members have contested elections as independents, i.e. individuals who are not nominated by any political party. It nominated a woman for the first time in the 2000 parliamentary elections and has since then nominated small numbers of women in all of the legislative elections it has contested (Abdel Latif 2008: 7).

Therefore, the Muslim Brotherhood – just like many of the secular political parties – nominates a small number of women during elections.

4.6 <u>Conclusion</u>

Most of the political parties in Egypt, such as the Wafd, are not truly concerned about women, women's rights or women's empowerment. Others, like Tagammu and DFP merely pay lip service to women's rights. However, this is not specific to women, these parties either have no vision at all on all matters or pay lip service to various other issues as well. For example, the Wafd Party's various other committees are just as inactive as the Women's Committee, as Korashi mentioned, while the DFP pays lip service to issues like human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It is therefore not surprising that the media hardly ever mentions these political forces, their activities or stances on women, because there are hardly any activities or stances to begin with. Whether or not all of these opposition parties have access to the media, the extent of any such access and whether or not there is a discrepancy between the media access of secular and Islamist forces is all examined in Chapter 5.

Some individual female members of almost all of the political forces are interested in women's rights and women's political empowerment. However, in most cases, they are unable to achieve much within the political parties. They are largely confined to the women's units in which they are at best active in apolitical arenas, such as community service. Even within the ruling party, the Women's Secretariat is clearly a very weak unit because it does not play any role whatsoever or have any kind of impact on any decision pertaining to women's rights. These women also find it very difficult to excel within the party's ranks, largely because male members of the political forces perceive any gains by women within the party, such as women joining the party's higher ranks, as women taking something that belongs to men and thus diminishing their power. For example, as stated previously, the male members of the Wafd wanted only three and not four of the female members of the party to join the party's decision making body because if four women joined it, one of them - the men - would no longer be a member of the decision making body. Whether or not and to what extent these women's voices are to be found in the media is investigated in Chapter 6. It is perhaps not surprising that many of these women also channel their activism in the NGO arena. For many of them are members or heads of women's NGOs. This form of women's activism is thoroughly investigated in

Chapter 5. Also, whether or not any from of co-operation takes place between female members of the various political forces to further women's cause is investigated in Chapter 8.

This chapter has also shown that the NDP believes that drama serials have an immense impact on viewers that resembles a brainwashing effect. Therefore, it extends a similar argument made by Abu Lughod (2005) about those in control of the dramas serials industry to the NDP.

The evidence in this chapter shows that decisions pertaining to women's empowerment are made by the President and/or first lady and to a lesser extent their son Gamal. For example, the first lady played an integral role in the introduction of the *khula* law and women's appointment as judges. This signifies that she is involved in formal and not informal politics, as suggested by Joseph (2001). It also implies that Kassem's (2004) notion of personal authoritarianism also extends to the first lady especially when it comes to women's rights. Her role and how it is reflected and relates to media treatment of women's rights are further investigated in Chapters 5 and 6. Gamal is also clearly active in formal politics and has an official title - the Secretary of the NDP's Policies Committee. His activities vis a vis women's political empowerment and media treatment of women in politics is investigated in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Findings presented in this chapter suggest that the NDP is a rather powerful institution which intervenes on some occasions in some key decisions pertaining to women's political empowerment. This power seems to have been underestimated in theories like Kassem's (2004) account of personal authoritarianism in Egypt's political system. At the same time, and in a contrast that seems paradoxical, the NCW seems to be a rather weak institution. For example, it advocated increasing women's parliamentary representation by allowing only women to run for some of the existing parliamentary seats but this idea was rejected by the NDP who came up with the idea of adding extra seats to parliament and allowing only women to run for them. The reasoning behind the NDP's idea was to avoid taking away any parliamentary seats from men. Clearly, the NDP is trying to keep its interests intact. But the idea that it came up with is also additional evidence to support

the argument made previously about how male politicians perceive the idea of women obtaining rights as a process in which rights are taken away from men and given to women. In other words, they perceived it as a zero-sum game in which either men or women - but not both - can be powerful. Whether or not and to what extent the NDP is truly a powerful institution while NCW is a weak one and how this is reflected in media treatment of decisions pertaining to women is investigated in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5

ACTIVIST WOMEN, WOMEN'S ACTIVISM

AND THE MEDIA

The previous chapter has shown that political parties are not concerned about women's political empowerment, and that many female members of political parties are also active in the NGO arena. This signified the need to examine women's NGOs in order to determine whether or not, and if so to what extent, they fill the gap left by political parties. Thus, three different women's NGOs are examined in this chapter. They were carefully chosen because they seem to demonstrate the various different relations between NGOs and the state that are to be found in Egypt. Previous scholars like Bianchi (1989) and Abdel Rahman (2004) have examined relations between NGOs and the state, but they have not looked specifically at women's NGOs. More importantly, the chapter will focus on how the relations between women's NGOs and the state relate to the media access these NGOs enjoy and how these relations are reflected in media treatment of these NGOs and of women's rights as a whole. This is done with particular emphasis on the privately owned media in order to determine whether or not the proliferation of privately owned media has meant that women's NGOs have more media access and whether their treatment of women's NGOs and women's rights differ from that of the government owned media in any way. Furthermore, it looks into the effectiveness of women's NGOs in light of Jad's (2004) arguments about how addressing women's rights using NGOs depoliticizes them and fragments women's activists into leading institutions that compete with one another. The chapter also analyzes how this relates to media treatment of women's rights.

In addition, a governmental women's organization called the National Council for Women is examined because, as argued in 2.2.2, the Egyptian government is active in what it describes as women's issues. This chapter analyzes the role of the first lady in this regard and how this relates to the role that she plays in politics while taking into consideration Joseph's (2001) argument that first ladies tend to play a role in informal politics, as well as examining how her role relates to media treatment of NCW. In

addition, this chapter looks into the interaction between NCW and women's NGOs and builds on the arguments put forward by Adams (2007) who examined a similar governmental institution in another authoritarian country. But it also investigates an additional element, namely how this interaction relates to the media access and treatment of all of these organizations. It also examines the government's approach to women's rights, its effectiveness and shortcomings, such as the ones suggested by Murphy (2003). The findings in this particular area are built on in the next chapter.

The last organization examined in this chapter is the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Cairo office, largely because it seems to be interlinked with NCW. The chapter looks into whether or not and if so how this relates to ideas that a particular version of women's rights is being imposed onto Egypt, as stated in 2.2.1.

An overview of the law pertaining to NGOs in Egypt is necessary because it provides some important background information about the relationship between NGOs and the state. Although the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) is the one responsible for ensuring that NGOs abide by Law 84/2002, a state security office is located in the Ministry's headquarters and it plays a direct and integral role in this regard. According to the law, all NGOs are required to register with the state and MOSA must approve the founders and board of directors of any given NGO. The law allows for direct interference in the NGOs work. For example, a MOSA representative can attend meetings held by the board of directors of NGOs. All NGOs are also required to provide MOSA with minutes of such meetings and with a detailed report of their expenditure and revenue. Furthermore, the law prohibits NGOs from engaging in political activity and activities that threaten national unity or violate morals and public order. These categories are vague and not clearly defined in order to allow the state to interpret them as it pleases whenever it deems necessary. Also, NGOs are required to notify MOSA of their activities 60 days in advance, and they are allowed to go ahead with them, provided that they do not receive written notice of MOSA's rejection of the activity in question. This makes it very difficult for NGOs to react swiftly to current events. Furthermore, MOSA must approve any NGOs' receipt of foreign funding, which tends to be the main source of income for the vast majority of NGOs. Thus, one of the tactics utilized to control and cripple NGOs is delaying such approvals (Agita 2007: 6-8).

The chapter is divided into six sections, one about each of the organizations that were previously mentioned. Each of these sections is then sub-divided into several subsections about how that organization is run, its sources of funding, its relation to the state apparatus, its relation to other women's organizations, the discourse it uses to address women's rights as well as a section about how the organization interacts with the media and media treatment of the organization.

5.1 Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women:

The Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women (ADEW) is an NGO that primarily works with female headed households living in shanty towns. The objectives of ADEW include empowering women who head their households economically, legally, socially, culturally and in the area of health, establishing communication channels between females who head their households and decision makers and drawing the latter's attention to the difficulties these women face (ADEW nd: 6).

5.1.1 NGO Management:

ADEW's Board of Directors consists of seven people, six women and one man. One of them, Iman Baibers, is the President of the Board of Trustees (ADEW nd: 32). Some of ADEW's publications are written by Baibers [47], the vast majority of ADEW's publications are forwarded by Baibers and a photo of her is featured in that forward[48]. Numerous pictures of her are also always to be found in ADEW's newsletter 'Our News' (ADEW 2004: 1, 3-7). It is noteworthy that none of the other board members are ever mentioned in any publication. In addition, when ADEW trains journalists, most of the time it is Baibers who selects the training material and conducts the training herself[49]. Also, Baibers is the only ADEW member interviewed by the media or mentioned as part and parcel of the media's coverage of ADEW's activities. All of this indicates that ADEW is run like a one (wo)man show. But it is

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[47] See for example: Baibers nd: 1; c. 2006: 1 and nd: 1
[48] See for example: ADEW nd: 1; c. 2004: 1; c. 2007: 4-5
[49] Interview with Iman Baibers, President of ADEW, Cairo, 16 January, 2009

noteworthy that Baibers stated that she always get deeply offended when she is interviewed on television and the interviewee refers to ADEW as "my NGO"[50].

5.1.2 Funding:

ADEW receives funding from a very large number of foreign donors, a local donor, a few individuals as well as from an organization affiliated to the Egyptian government.

Its foreign donors include the Union Bank of Switzerland, Optimumus Foundation, German Technical Corporation, UNDP, Ford Foundation, the Embassy of Finland, the Italian Fund Debt Swap program, International Children's Fund, the World Bank, GEF, Virginia Foundation, the European Union, the Arab Gulf Program for United Nations Development Organizations, the German Embassy, EED, the Japanese Embassy, the Australian Embassy, Vodafone, Flora Foundation, the Body Shop, Dorsis Foundation, OSI, the Swiss Fund, UNIFEM, AECI/CONEMUND (ADEW 2006), the British Council and the Egyptian Swiss Fund and Global Fund for Women (ADEW 2002: 28). Its local donor is Sawiris Foundation for Development and the individuals it receives funding from are Akef Al Maghrabi, Ashraf Al Shafky, Faith Galetshoge and Paul Herman. Meanwhile, the organization affiliated to the Egyptian government it receives funding from is the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (ADEW 2006). It is noteworthy that ADEW refuses to accept funding from the American government because Baibers believes that the American government seeks to shape society in a manner that she dislikes[51].

The fact that ADEW receives funding from such a large number of foreign donors indicates that it is fully integrated into the international framework and works by its rules. In addition, its receipt of funding from organizations affiliated to the Egyptian government suggests that it is on good terms with the state.

Baibers commented on their receipt of funding from a very large number of donors by saying:

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[50] *Ibid*
[51] *Ibid*

We are competent, we write good proposals, we produce publications, we deliver, we are very open. Maya Morsi [UNIFEM Coordinator in Cairo] asked us to collect signatures objecting to violence against women, we collected 3500 signature in just three days, more than any other NGO. That's why they [donors] like us. When I organize a conference, I secure coverage from all media outlets and the most important people in the country [attend it]. As an employee in a donor organization all of this enables you to write an outstanding report. Both the donor and I benefit. Another important issue is quality. If the donor's boss wants to inspect our work any time they are most welcome[52].

On the contentious issue of donors setting agendas, Baibers said:

I do not accept taking orders from donors or changing things in order to please donors. We submit a proposal and if a donor likes it the way it is we accept his/her money. But nowadays there are NGOs which accept being told to change things by donors[53].

Therefore, even though Baibers denied that donors set the agenda for ADEW's activities, she admitted that the whole idea of donors setting agendas is not a fantasy.

5.1.3 Relationship with State Apparatus:

ADEW seems to be on good terms with the state because state security does not give them a hard time, many of their events are sponsored by high ranking government officials, many of whom are also speakers in those events and some of their publications include praise for the government.

Baibers described their relationship with state security by saying:

We have to take permission from MOSA and it sends our papers to state security for approval as well. I go directly to state security. They do not know anything about NGOs and perceive them as vehicles for making money or evil people who are in touch with foreigners. … We do not face any problems [with them] and when we do face minor problems it is usually because we did not follow up on the

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[52] *Ibid*
[53] *Ibid*

paper work properly or because one of the employees dislikes us. We are not one of the NGOs that they pick one because we are not perceived as anti-government and we do not [engage in activities such as] monitoring elections[54].

Baibers statement suggests that state security is far more powerful than MOSA and has the upper hand when it comes to decisions on allowing NGOs to function.

In addition, many of ADEW's events are sponsored by high ranking government officials including the first lady and several ministers[55]. In addition, speakers in their events include important members of the ruling party (ADEW 2001: 19) and members of the People's Assembly and Shoura Council (ADEW 2006: 13, 19, 46, 50, 51).

Also, ADEW's publications are not only void of criticism of the government at any and all levels, but they even include praise for the Egyptian first lady. For example, in an introduction to one of ADEW's publications, Baibers wrote "the Egyptian feminist movement under the auspices of the honorable Mrs. Suzane Mubarak" (ADEW Sept. 2002-Feb. 2003: 5). The same publication also includes the following sentence: "women's issues receive more and better coverage by the media due to … Mrs. Suzane Mubarak's patronage" (ADEW Sept. 2002-Feb. 2003: 7).

All of this indicates that ADEW is on good terms with the state and even raises the question of whether it is truly an NGO or simply a GONGO.
In the words of Baibers:

> We are apolitical. In order to change the nationality law, we turned to everyone the NDP, NCW. Who is the one who is going to change the law? Hosni Mubarak. If you do not like him, go ahead and establish a political party and change him. But until he is changed, I will beseech him to change the nationality law. And when the law was changed, millions of people benefited from it. … On Orbit [television] I said Mr. President these are your children, please do not let them down. Who stood up on the 18th of September 2003 and said we will change the nationality law? Hosni Mubarak. You have to utilize the tactics that will result in achieving your goals. Didn't this bring an end to the suffering of many children?

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[54] *Ibid*
[55] See for example: ADEW 2001: 6,9; ADEW 2006: 13; ADEW 2007: 8

> Am I a traitor? Do I like Hosni Mubarak? … Suzanne, Gamal and Hosni [Mubarak] are the ones who change things regardless of whether or not you work on the media. You have to get your message across to them and be persistent[56].

The agitation and defensiveness of Baibers implies that she has been criticized for her approach. Her statement also indicates that changing laws to grant women rights is a decision that can only be made by the President, first lady and/or their son Gamal.

5.1.4 Relationship with NCW:

ADEW co-operates with NCW on various fronts, NCW members attend and/or speak in events organized by them and some of ADEW's projects are in collaboration with NCW. ADEW was also one of the NGOs which were invited by NCW to participate in discussing the joint CEDAW report[57]. In addition, the Secretary General of NCW, Farakhonda Hassan, attends many of their events and speaks highly of ADEW's activities[58] (ADEW 2001: 6).

This is another indication that ADEW is on good terms with the state and suggests that it could be a GONGO.

Baibers described ADEW's relationship with NCW by saying:

> Much of the data and footage aired by NCW on television and the photos they use originally belong to us. I am not concerned about whether or not I am given any credit for all of this. If the government thinks highly of my studies and uses them to change laws, this is good, regardless of whether or not I am given any credit. I lobby these people. It is very easy for Suzanne Mubarak to change a law. If her employees take our work and claim that it is their own and end up being promoted, it does not matter. What matters is whether or not they read our work and whether or not it ends up becoming government policy[59].

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[56] Interview with Iman Baibers, 16 January, 2009
[57] Since Egypt is signatory to CEDAW, the government is required to submit periodical reports about the steps taken to implement it. NGOs simultaneously produce a shadow report. According to Nehad Abu El Komsan, the government was displeased with the shadow report the NGOs submitted to the last CEDAW Committee. This time around, the government has decided to submit a joint report.
[58] Interview with Rasha, Raslan, member of ADEW, Cairo, 11 September, 2008
[59] Interview with Iman Baibers, 16 January, 2009

Baibers' statement indicates that the first lady has some considerable powers at her disposal – she can change laws. It also suggests that NCW takes the work of women's NGOs and attributes it to itself.

Baibers also said:

> Many Egyptians argue that women have attained all of their rights because in conferences they state that the number of women in this field or post exceeds the number of men and we have established these institutions and organizations, but none of them address women's issues ... They all talk about their activities, their own achievements. I remember in 2002, we started talking about how female headed households still exist because … [after NCW was established, people] started saying things like we have solved [all] of women's problems [but] the laws have not changed ever since we started working in this field in 1975. Do you want women's issues to be resolved or do you want to prove that you are great? Very few women are after resolving women's issues[60].

If Baibers' statements about NCW are compared and contrasted to those in ADEW's publications one gets the impression that statements in the publications gloss over any tensions between ADEW and NCW and instead emphasise their good relations. Clearly, Baibers has her differences with NCW and its approach.

5.1.5 Discourse:

The discourse ADEW used in its campaign to amend the nationality law to allow Egyptian women married to non-Egyptian men to pass on the Egyptian nationality to their children must be analyzed very carefully. At the beginning the discourse they used was based on equality between men and women regarding passing on the Egyptian nationality to their children. But they realized that using the discourse of '*alhimaya wa al bakaa*' or 'protection and survival' coupled with allowing these women and their children to tell their own stories was far more effective (ADEW 2001: 3). This entailed arguing that these children will end up dropping out of school because their mothers can not afford to pay for their school tuition in dollars, as required by law from foreigners and

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[60] *Ibid*

stressing that most of these children have grown up in Egypt and have never even visited their fathers' home countries. They also countered the argument that allowing these children to obtain the Egyptian nationality would threaten Egypt's national security because they would be dual citizens, by arguing that these children would indeed threaten Egyptian national security if they identified themselves as Egyptians but were treated as foreigners and would therefore suffer in issues like education and employment. They also used statistics to convey that this is a widespread problem[61].

In Baiber's words:

> In 2000, the People's Assembly addressed the nationality law. Six female MPs said things like "our children are having a hard time finding jobs, so will children of [Egyptian] women married to Saudis find jobs?" We organized a conference [entitled Women and Law: Women's Legal and Constitutional Rights which was sponsored by Suzanne Mubarak] and there was a lot of media work, we invited those female MPs and others and used live testimonies. At the beginning, people made fun of us and of that tactic. But when those female MPs listened to those live testimonies, they cried and decided to help them out. The media went crazy over the live testimonies of the women and children. We used the discourse of survival and protection. Nobody has rights [in Egypt], men are oppressed. So women's rights discourse does not work. But when you use the discourse of survival and protection, we are an emotional people. Why not make use of this and bring children to tell their own stories and say my blood is Egyptian and you treat me as a foreigner, it makes your heart ache. Getting them to tell their own stories is far more effective than me sitting there and talking about women's rights. ... If someone opposed changing the law, they would look bad because they would be perceived as cruel[62].

This implies that women's rights discourse does not bode well in Egyptian society and utilizing it is largely ineffective. In fact, the approach ADEW used was of focusing on the suffering of the children of an Egyptian mother and non-Egyptian father to argue for the need to amend the nationality law. This completely sidelined not only women's rights but

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[61] Interview with Rasha Raslan, 11 September, 2008
[62] Interview with Iman Baibers, 16 January, 2009

even women from the whole argument. Baibers' statements indicate that this approach was successful. But it is also important to note that the conference she is referring to was sponsored by the first lady. It is inconceivable that the first lady would have sponsored the conference if she did not approve of changing the law, which is something at her discretion given Baibers' statements which were cited in 5.1.3 and 5.1.4. So it is likely that the female MPs in question and the media were cooperative because they were aware that the first lady approved amending the nationality law.

5.1.6 Media Exposure and Interaction:

One of the tactics ADEW utilizes to secure media coverage of their events is asking a group of media professionals to help them out in designing a media campaign, deciding on a strategy for media coverage of that event and ensuring that its message is clearly conveyed in the media. All of this is done before the event takes place. They include journalists who work for government and privately owned newspapers, as well as radio and television stations[63] (ADEW 2001: 13).

ADEW also interacts with the media and engages in dialogue with media personnel. For example, they organized a roundtable discussion about media treatment of NGOs and the extent to which it resembles reality (ADEW 2006: 49). As previously stated, ADEW also trains journalists. Baibers is the one who does the training herself.

> I call it opening up people's minds. We first talk about a specific topic in general and I then present them with a case study and examples of how they reported on a specific problem, our critique of their coverage and the facts. The case study I present is usually about gender or important issues such as changing the nationality law. I shock the trainees I tell them that women are in the same position as men- we are deprived of our rights and have to live up to the same obligations as men[64].

All of this indicates that ADEW takes the media very seriously, reaches out to the media and tries to change media treatment of women's rights.

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[63] Interview with Rasha Raslan, 11 September, 2008
[64] Interview with Iman Baibers, 16 January, 2009

ADEW also provides some media outlets with data about women's issues. For example, they provided two televised programs with background information about and the legal justifications for amending the nationality law (ADEW 2001: 8). "We also provide the media with women to interview when the need arises on the spot and in no time even if the program will be aired shortly and the journalists are desperate, as long as it is a reputable program[65]".

Providing the media with such information and people to interview could be a tactic to establish, maintain and sustain good relations with media personnel. This might then be reflected in media treatment of ADEW. This way of doing things is referred to in Egypt using the proverb 'shayelni we ashayelak' i.e. you do me a favor, and I do you one.

Baibers writes opinion columns in *Al Ahram* on a regular basis[66] which indicates that she - and not just ADEW - is on good terms with the government. She is also frequently featured on television and quoted in stories in newspapers about women's issues[67]. In her words, "journalists like to interview me on television because I speak well, I express moderate views and I do not quarrel with the other speakers[68]".

As previously stated, high-ranking government officials sponsor, attend and speak in ADEW events, Baibers related this to the media by saying:

> Their attendance changes journalists' perception [of our activities] because their attendance means that they believe in the cause you are advocating, that we are changing things along with the government. When government officials and ministers attend the conference it shows that the government approves of your work. … Their attendance gives us credibility and proves that we are in line with government policy. I do not have a problem with the government's policy, I disagree with the government's policy of torturing people but I agree with its policy if it furthers my cause. … these are two separate issues. And do we change laws or not? Yes, we do[69].

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[65] Interview with Iman Baibers, 16 January, 2009
[66] See for example Iman Baibers 'A Difficult Question: How Can We Support Arab Women in the Public Sphere?' 21. Feb. 2008. *Al Ahram Online.*
[67] Interview with Rasha Raslan, 11 September, 2008
[68] Interview with Iman Baibers, 16 January, 2009
[69] *Ibid*

This provides evidence to support several arguments that were made in previous sections; that ADEW is on good terms with the state. Also, it is possible that the widespread media coverage of ADEW's campaign to amend the nationality law is likely to have been caused by the state's intention to amend the law anyway. Again, Baibers' defensiveness implies that she is criticized for being on good terms with the state.

I analyzed media treatment of ADEW and found that *Al Ahram* often covers ADEW's activities in the form of very brief news stories that mention that a particular event has taken or will take place, without going into the details of the event or mentioning the views that were expressed in that event[70]. *Al Masry Al Youm* use to cover ADEW's activities in greater detail[71] and on some occasions it would also include some light criticism of government policies[72]. As for the broadcast media, on the 6th of June 2009, *90 Dekika* aired on *Al Mehwar* channel featured three different women to discuss Egyptian women's status and views regarding the women's parliamentary quota (see Chapter 6 for details). One of them was a journalist, another was a French teacher and the last one was a woman who sells bread in the street. Baibers contributed to the episode with a phone call and her contribution was confined to calling upon the woman who sells bread to turn to ADEW for assistance because she happened to live and work in the area in which ADEW is active.

Therefore, the privately owned print media seems to have allowed for more detailed coverage of the activities of women's NGOs, but that does not seem to be the case when it comes to talk shows aired on privately owned satellite channels.

5.2 Egyptian Center for Women's Rights:

The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) describes itself as an independent organization that is not affiliated to the government or to a political party. Its main concern is supporting Egyptian women in their struggle to obtain all of their rights and in

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[70] See for example: Gamal Nafe 'The Closing Ceremony of the Media Competition.' 21 Jan. 2008. *Al Masry Al Youm Online*.

[71] According to an anonymous interviewee, Baibers fell out with the journalist in *Al Masry Al Youm* who use to cover ADEW and no longer deals with the newspaper as a whole.

[72] See for example: Hoda Rashwan 'Calls for Allocating 10% of Housing Provided by the Government to 'Homeless Women'. 16 March 2007. *Al Masry Al Youm* Online.

order to achieve equality. ECWR opposes all forms of discrimination against women and encourages the legislative authority to reconsider all of the laws that are not in line with the constitution and international conventions about women, (ECWR nd: 38) especially CEDAW. ECWR actively seeks to empower women politically and legally. Its aims include disseminating awareness of women's rights as part of human rights and political empowerment of women (ECWR nd: 97). Therefore, ECWR is integrated in the international framework.

5.2.1 NGO Management:

The President of ECWR is Nehad Abu El-Komsan and she also chairs its Board of Directors. No information is available about the other board members on ECWR's website or in their publications. In addition, almost all of ECWR's publications have Abu El-Komsan's name on them[73], and she is the only ECWR member featured on television and in the print media. Furthermore, when ECWR trains women who will contest elections, Abu El Komsan is the one who does most of the training herself[74]. All of this indicates that ECWR is run like a one (wo)man show.

5.2.2 Funding:

ECWR receives funding from various foreign organizations including the British Council[75], the Embassy of the Netherlands, (ECWR nd: 2) the National Democratic Institute based in Washington (ECWR nd: 1) the EU, (ECWR nd: 3) UNDP, Global Fund for Women, the European Initiative to Support Democracy and Human Rights, Embassy of Finland, the Swiss Fund for Development, Konrad Adenaur Foundation, Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund, Italian Association for Women in Development (AIDOS), Open

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[73] See for example: Abu El Komsan 2002; Al Monofi 2007: 1; Abu El Komsan and Saeed c.2005
[74] Interview with Nehad Abu El Komsan, President of the ECWR, Cairo, 14 January, 2009
[75] See for example: ECWR nd: 47; ECWR nd: 1; ECWR nd: 6

Society Institute, Middle East Partnership Initiative, Netherlands Development Cooperation Section and the African Women's Development Fund (ECWR website).

ECWR's receipt of funding from a large number of donors could be taken as another indication of how it is integrated into the international framework.

On the contentious issues of foreign funding and donors setting agendas, Abu El Komsan argued that there are numerous donors and so if one donor tries to impose an agenda, one can easily turn to another donor. She also argued that the donors themselves are not that powerful anyway, because they need state security permission to operate in Egypt[76].

Abu El Komsan's statement is rather contradictory. She indirectly acknowledges that some donors set agendas but then goes on to say that donors are not strong enough to set agendas.

5.2.3 Relationship with the State Apparatus:

There are some indications that ECWR is not on good terms with the state. One such indication is that ECWR experiences problems in dealing with state security, especially when their activities are political in nature. Another indication is that one of their employees spoke bitterly of how fifteen governmental organizations, including state security and MOSA, scrutinize any funding before they receive it, and it takes them four months to get back to ECWR about whether or not they can receive any funding. "All of this wastes our time," she added[77].

ECWR also criticizes some governmental institutions. For example, as part of their anti-sexual harassment campaign, they criticized the Ministry of Interior by saying that the main concern of policemen is cracking down on the regime's political opponents and safe guarding government officials while citizens' well being is at the bottom of the list[78].

However, a report released by ECWR about the 2005 parliamentary elections seems to portray a rather different impression of ECWR's relationship with the state. The report

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[76] Interview with Nehad Abu El Komsan, 14 January, 2009
[77] Interview with Marwa, Mokhtar, member of ECWR, Cairo, 10 September, 2008
[78] Interview with Nehad Abu El Komsan, 14 January, 2009

calls upon the President to fulfill one of the elements of his electoral program which entailed adopting a women's parliamentary quota (ECWR 2005: 48).

In the words of Abu El Komsan:

> state security always takes forever to approve our receipt of any funding and they cancel some of our events. [But] cracking down on and shutting down an NGO is a political decision that is made at a much higher level, it is not made by state security personnel. But they would not get into that when it comes to a reputable NGO with which they have no political problems. … ECWR is very critical in some issues but we do not adopt a particular ideology, I am not in a battle with the government, I am not a member of the NDP or an opposition party, if the government achieves something regarding women I speak highly of it, if they falter, I harshly criticize them. Our stances are objective[79].

All of this indicates that ECWR experiences some problems and has some differences with the state. Abu El Komsan's statement is another indication of how state security tightly controls the activities of women's NGOs. But it also conveys that state security's powers are not unlimited and that cracking down on an NGO is a decision made by more senior government officials.

5.2.4 Relationship with NCW:

ECWR cooperates with NCW on various fronts and its publications include both praise for and criticism of NCW (ECWR nd: 45). One publication is actually dedicated to NCW. The dedication states "to NCW which placed women's political participation at the very top of the list" (ECWR nd: 1). In addition, according to its publications, ECWR believes that NCW should focus on pressuring political parties to nominate large numbers of women and bringing the feminist movement together and cooperating with it. However, the same report includes criticism of NCW. In it NCW is criticized for failing to stand up for women who were sexually harassed by state security while they were on strike against the referendum at the Journalists' Syndicate on the grounds that they were not demonstrating for women's cause (ECWR 2005: 4). In addition, in the report NCW is

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[79] Interview with Nehad Abu El Komsan, 14 January, 2009

described as one of the tools of the NDP and it is accused of crippling NGOs and imitating their activities, such as training women on contesting elections. NCW is also criticized for providing the NDP with thousands of female voters, which are basically the women NCW helped out in obtaining national ID cards (ECWR 2005: 9-10). All of this indicates that ECWR's relationship with NCW is characterized by both cooperation and tension.

Abu El Komsan described their relationship with NCW by saying:

> ECWR cooperates with NCW, not as much as we would like to. Some NGOs refuse to cooperate with NCW because it is a governmental organization, but we cooperate with anyone provided that such cooperation serves the causes we advocate, even if we are not going to receive any credit for it. Obviously, when you cooperate with NCW, all of the credit goes to NCW because the media will focus on it because the first lady is NCW's President, but that is alright. Our only concern is the outcome [of such cooperation]. The current form of cooperation with NCW is one-way: we either send them information and never find out how it was used or they invite us to attend some meetings and we never find out what these meetings have led to. [For example,] we have come up with a draft law criminalizing sexual harassment [and] NCW has come up with another draft law. We want to discuss things with them so that only one draft law is around. But we are not decision makers, they are the ones who have the upper hand and decide whether or not to invite us. We send them the information and wait and see. NCW will meet up with female leaders and MPs to discuss the draft law, but we are not part of this process. … NCW has achieved a lot in a short period of time. … NCW is the one who changed the nationality law, NGOs worked on it for 10 years but it was NCW that managed to change it, but not in the manner we were calling for. … NCW is skeptical about cooperating with some NGOs because of the discourse that they adopt. NCW wants things to work out, they want the policies they are working on to go through. That is why NCW personnel have told

us that they like us even though we are critical because we know when to be critical, while addressing which topics[80].

In addition, NCW decided to submit a joint report for the next CEDAW committee. They wrote a report and sent it to NGOs and asked them to provide them with their comments. ECWR wrote a twelve page report with their comments and will not participate in writing a shadow report. This is another example of the one way communication; the NGOs will not get to see the final report nor do they have any idea about whether or not it includes their comments. It is noteworthy that donors refused to fund efforts to write a shadow report on the grounds that a joint report will be submitted[81].

Abu El Komsan's statements indicate that NCW takes the work conducted by NGOs and attributes it to itself and in the end the first lady is the one who takes credit for it in the media. They also indicate that NCW – i.e. the first lady – and not women's NGOs is the one which posses decision making power when it comes to changing laws pertaining to women. In addition, her statements reveal that NCW is used to control the information about Egyptian women's status that is submitted to the CEDAW Committee.

5.2.5 Co-operating with Other NGOs:

Abu El Komsan said

> if another NGO engages in a particular task such as organizing meetings between various NGOs, ECWR does not approach this task, even if we believe that we can do a better job or if that particular NGO will not engage in that activity that year. We are very sensitive in this regard and never engage in any activity that can lead to any problems between ECWR and any other NGO, such as another NGO perceiving ECWR as infringing on their work. We refrain from engaging in any such activity, even if doing so harms us[82].

This indirectly sheds light on some of the tensions and problems between women's NGOs. It gives the impression that each NGO engages in particular tasks which other NGOs are not allowed to approach. According to Abu El Komsan, this actually has a

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[80] Interview with Nehad Abu El Komsan, 14 January, 2009
[81] *Ibid*
[82] *Ibid*

negative impact on the work of ECWR, which could mean that it has a more profound negative impact on the women's movement as a whole.

5.2.6 Discourse:

The discourse, ECWR uses to address women's rights must be analyzed carefully. Abu El Komsan said that:

> Some NGOs adopt radical feminist discourse. I believe that such discourse poses a threat to Arab societies. Some [members of society] promote ideas that are backward and they are gaining momentum. Radical feminist discourse indirectly feeds these backward ideas because it allows for arguments such as cultural imperialism and undermining our culture. That is why strategic thinking is important and friendly discourse must be used to address women's issues. If you analyze the discourse we use, you are bound to find that it is not radical, especially in the anti-sexual harassment campaign. The point I am trying to make is not that men are bad and mistreating women. We suffer from many social problems and this leads men to take it out on women. We can not adopt the same radical discourse that is used in America because the situation is different and the issues we address are different in nature. In the anti-sexual harassment campaign, we are not arguing that men are bad, for they are sexually harassing women but we are talking about society in a very friendly manner. We have acknowledged that a problem exists and have called upon all members of society to participate in solving it. We transformed the issue into an argument about safety; if sexual harassment is a widespread phenomenon then men will fear for their wives, sisters and daughters. This tactic proved to be very effective. For example, some young men have volunteered to take part in our campaign and a middle aged man who works for a very reputable institution called us up to suggest some ideas for the campaign[83].

In other words, Abu El Komsan was arguing against using women's rights discourse and arguing that using it actually backfires. She also explained in great detail another

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[83] Interview with Nehad Abu El Komsan, 14 January, 2009

discourse all together that was used by ECWR to campaign for a specific women's right. She elaborated on how successful this tactic was.

5.2.7 Media Exposure and Interaction:

ECWR is particularly concerned with providing the media with information about women's performance during parliamentary elections. For example:

> In the 2000 parliamentary elections we were largely the only source of information for the media. We provided them with documented information such as the press briefings made by leaders of political parties [prior to the elections] about how many women they are going to nominate and how they are going to support them along with how many women they actually nominated and the extent to which they supported them[84].

Another example is how during the 2005 parliamentary elections, ECWR monitored women's performance in the elections and used to issue three press releases everyday and send them to newspapers. Those who published the press releases the most accurately were some of the privately owned newspapers and some of the newspapers affiliated to political parties[85].

Also, at the beginning of their anti-sexual harassment campaign, government owned television and radio stations did not cover their activities as often as they would have liked them to. They only started doing so after privately owned newspapers covered the issue[86].

This indicates that ECWR exerts a lot of effort to have an impact on media treatment of women's political participation. It also shows that the privately owned media has allowed for more accurate coverage of women's political participation, as well as breaking taboos pertaining to women.

Abu El Komsan described their relationship with all kinds of media - print and broadcast, government and privately owned - by saying:

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[84] *Ibid*
[85] Interview with Nahed Abu Serie, Head of ECWR's Media Unit, 16 September, 2008
[86] *Ibid*

Some NGOs create a media committee for every project or hire media personnel as consultants in order to ensure that [their activities] receive extensive media coverage. We do not resort to this tactic. I look at it from the following perspective: I have information that benefits and interests viewers and journalists need such information to fill up space. Therefore, we cooperate with each other. In some cases, the relationship has even evolved into friendship. Sometimes I call journalists to notify them that I will hold a press conference on a particular day and they advise me to change the date because an important event will take place that day and so media coverage of my press conference will be minimal. It is in any journalist's interest to have access to a well-respected and trustworthy source. Many [print] journalists hold key positions in talk shows and other televised programs on satellite channels. Sometimes when I am featured as a speaker in any program, I chat with these journalists before the program begins. They often tell me about other topics that will be addressed in the program in other episodes, and these topics happen to be ones that I can help out with. So I ask them to turn to me for background information about it but they do not have to feature me in the program [in return]. Sometimes they call me up to ask for the contact information of someone they would like to feature in the program and I provide them with it, such as a woman who ran for parliament but did not win the elections. At other times, they call me up to interview me … about a particular topic which ECWR does not address so I refuse to be interviewed and recommend someone else. It is all about mutual respect rather than bribing people. … One of the producers of a program aired on terrestrial Channel Two said that he can not ask for permission to run an episode about sexual harassment so he asked for permission for an episode about misbehaving in public and in the episode itself I got to talk about sexual harassment. He did so because he believed in the cause not because I bribed him. …We appreciate journalists for covering our events regardless of the length of the story, especially when it comes to a government owned newspaper. I really appreciate it if a journalist in *Al Ahram* writes a very small piece about us

because their criteria, the issues that they have to take into consideration and the pressures that they experience are very different[87].

Abu El Komsan was probably referring to Baibers when she said that some NGOs create a media committee or hire journalists as consultants, which implies that they are not on good terms or at least are in disagreement regarding the approaches and tactics that they utilize. Her statements indicate that ECWR's relationship with the media can largely be described as one of cooperation and mutual respect. They also imply that the existence of privately owned media allowed for more detailed coverage of ECWR's activities, and probably those of women's NGO in general.

I analyzed media treatment of ECWR and found that *Al Ahram* hardly ever covers ECWR's activities and the minimal coverage that it does receive consists of very brief news stories that mention that a particular event has taken or will take place, without going into the details of the event or mentioning the views that were expressed in that event. Meanwhile, *Al Masry Al Youm* covers such events in greater detail and the stories include the critical views that were expressed about the government or specific laws, none of which is to be found in *Al Ahram*'s coverage of ECWR's activities. For example, *Al Ahram* covered a particular event in the following manner:

> The law regulating how often, when and where the parent who is not entitled to custody gets to see their child, the custody law and the interests of children of divorce is the title of a seminar organized by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights in collaboration with the High Islamic Council at 11 am at Pyramisa [Hotel]. Nehad Abu El Komsan, President of ECWR, said that this is the first of a series of round table discussions that the center will organize about the Personal Status Law as part of its efforts in brining an end to familial violence, looking after the interests of all members of the family as well as their efforts to propose a new law regulating child custody in addition to how often, when and where the parent who is not entitled to custody gets to see their child and whether or not the child actually spends days, weeks or months with that parent.

This was followed by the names of some of the attendees (El Sa'ati 27/1/2009).

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[87] Interview with Nehad Abu El Komsan, 14 January, 2009

While *Al Masry Al Youm* covered the same event in the following manner:

> During a seminar about the law regulating how often, when and where the parent who is not entitled to custody gets to see their child and the child custody law which was co-organized by the ECWR and the High Islamic Council, divorced couples quarreled and men accused women of being unjust, while women accused men of being kidnappers. These quarrels escalated into shouting matches and each side cheered and clapped - just like people cheering in a football match - when a participant [from the same gender] talked about his/her experience and views. … Dr. Mohamed Al Shahat, the Secretary General of the High Islamic Council, criticized the law which extends mother's rights to child custody from the age of 15 till girls get married and to the age of 21 in the case of boys [and argued that this], deprives fathers from overseeing their children's … upbringing and education (Rashwan 30/1/2009c).

Also, *Al Masry Al Youm* reports on ECWR reports that address more sensitive issues and include harsh criticism of the government and laws among other issues. It also reports on them in greater detail. Even when *Al Ahram* runs a story about a sensitive issue, it seems to be selective and only mentions the less critical aspects of that issue. It is also noteworthy that the stories are much shorter than those of *Al Masry Al Youm*.

For example, *Al Masry Al Youm* ran a very long piece about a report produced by ECWR entitled 'An Absentee Government and Devastated Women'. The story stated that the report included the following statement: "According to the report, the Egyptian Personnel Status Law is not favorable to women and the vehicles through which the law is implemented are complicated and costly" (na 8/3/2009). On the other hand, a story in *Al Ahram* about a report produced by ECWR about sexual harassment stated ECWR "released a booklet entitled 'How to Deal with Sexual Harassment' … The booklet includes advice addressed to women who are sexually harassed, such as: "do not blame yourself, [if the harasser is a co-worker] talk to trustworthy colleagues about it and try to find out how you can file a complaint and try to avoid taking a taxi on your own. If you have no choice, take note of the car number and sit in the back seat and prevent the driver from changing the route" (El Mahdy 8/3/2009a).

As for the broadcast media, *90 Dekika* featured Abu El Komsan once on the 15th of November 2008 while discussing how a teacher sexually assaulted one of his female students who was under the age of 10. It is noteworthy that in Egypt this is perceived as sexual assault and not child abuse. In addition, Abu El-Komsan was featured on *Dream TV's* talkshow *Al Ashera Masan* to talk about the study it conducted about sexual harassment. She was also featured in *90 Dekika* by a phone call on 6 October 2008 (see Chapter 6 for details about both *90 Dekika* and *Al Ashera Masan*).

5.3 <u>New Woman Foundation:</u>

New Woman Foundation (NWF) describes itself as a feminist NGO that was established in 1984 which strives to transform Egyptian society into a democratic one that is devoid of all forms of discrimination against all citizens in general and women in particular. Its aims include mainstreaming women's rights on political and social agendas, creating lobbying groups and supporting marginalized women and empowering them (NWF nd). NWF's points of reference are CEDAW and human rights in general but with an emphasis on those human rights which address social issues. According to Nawla Darwish, the President of NWF, they support fully equality between men and women and they focus on marginalized groups because they believe that poor women are the ones who suffer the most[88].

5.3.1 NGO Management:

There are several indications that NWF is not run by just one of its board members. Firstly, among NWF board members, there are disagreements regarding whether or not they should accept governmental funding. Darwish is totally against receiving funding from any and all governments but she describes her stance as more extreme than those of other NWF board members. They are similarly divided on abortion, and that is why they recently organized a seminar to discuss this particular topic amongst themselves[89].

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[88] Interview with Nawla Darwish, President of NWF, Cairo, 17 September, 2008
[89] *Ibid*

Secondly, the names of different NWF members are cited in their publications[90]. In addition, different NWF members are interviewed by the media. For example, Nawla Darwish was quoted in stories about celebrating the anniversary of NWF's establishment, Amal Abdel Hadi was quoted in a story about a seminar about women's rights organized by NWF, while Lamia Lotfy was quoted in a story about the rights of children of *urfi* [secret and undocumented] marriage [91].

All of this indicates that unlike ADEW and ECWR, NWF is not run like a one (wo)man show but is run in a manner that involves of cooperation between its members. Therefore, Darwish's title of President means something very different than in the cases of both Baibers and Abu El Komsan.

5.3.2 Funding:

NWF's main funder ever since 1994 is Oxfam. Darwish described their relationship as one of cooperation and stated that they do not impose an agenda on them. She also added that they contribute to NWF's core expenses, such as rent, lighting and the salaries of NWF's administrative staff rather than simply providing them with funding on a project basis. In addition, McArthur Foundation funds their website. They also receive funding from other donors on a project basis. For example, they use to receive funding from a magazine called Reproductive Health Issues so that they issued an Arabic version of it and at one point Ford Foundation funded one of their projects. Darwish stressed that they refuse to accept funding from the American government including USAID as well as the World Bank because their policies have led to a rise in poverty rates[92].

Darwish also said that some NGOs - both women's NGOs and other types of NGOs - tailor their work to the agenda of donors. "Suddenly, an NGO that has never addressed

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[90] See for example: Hamad nd; Darwish and Shukrala c. 2006; Kamel and Darwish c. 2004
[91] See for example Hoda Rashwan 'Feminists the Judiciary's Decision to Issue Birth Certificates to Children who Emanate from *urfi* Marriage'. 17 Feb. 2007 *Al Masry Al Youm* Online.
[92] Interview with Nawla Darwish, 17 September, 2008

violence against women starts doing so, simply because funding for projects addressing this issue is available."[93]

NWF's sources and nature of funding is very different from those of NWF and ECWR. This is likely to be related to the ideological background of its members. But like Baibers and Abu El Komsan, Darwish acknowledged that the whole notion of donors setting agendas does exist. Also, she seemed to be referring to ECWR when she said that suddenly an NGO that has never addressed violence against women does so due to the availability of funding. This is another indication of the antagonism between the women's activists.

5.3.3 Relationship with Status Apparatus:

NWF faced a lot of problems in order to register as an NGO and different governmental institutions give them a very hard time. According to Darwish, at the beginning they were registered as a non-commercial civil company in order to avoid MOSA's interference in their work and also because the law at the time did not allow for human rights NGOs to exist. In 2002, they applied for registration as an NGO after the new NGO law was introduced. They received a letter stating that their registration was rejected after the registration period ended. They filed a court case and a court ruling allowed NWF to temporarily register as an NGO[94].

In addition, NWF's headquarters are subject to periodical searches by governmental agencies and state security refuses to grant them permission for their activities, often at the very last minute[95]. They are also subject to regular inspections by various governmental agencies such as CAPMAS and MOSA. State security also pressures the owners/directors of premises in which NWF organizes seminars to disallow them from using their premises. Lofty described these as means the government uses to distract them from their work[96].

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[93] *Ibid*

[94] *Ibid*

[95] *Ibid*

[96] Interview with Lamia Lotfy, member of NWF, Cairo, 17 September, 2008

Clearly, NWF's relationship with the state apparatus is extremely strained and the state uses a variety of coercive measures to give them a hard time.

5.3.4 Relationship with NCW:

Darwish described the relationship between NWF and NCW by saying "we are neither on good nor bad terms with NCW," but she also stated that "they [NCW] do not like us[97]". Also, Lotfy said that NWF was not among the NGOs NCW invited for a meeting to discuss the joint CEDAW report, adding that they only invite NGOs which are in line with the government or those which will cause them trouble if they are not invited[98]. NWF members also criticize NCW on a regular basis. For example, Darwish stated that NCW receives very large amounts of funding from donors and it is not held accountable for it[99]. She added that

> NCW was established in 2000 and it attributes things that NGOs have been working on for a long time to itself. We have been working on changing the nationality law for a long time, other people have been working on the *khula* law. Some demands were even made by Huda Sharawi[100] … but because we are Pharaohs[101], of course things change when the first lady steps in[102].

Similarly, NWF's reports are very critical of NCW. This is an example of the language used in one of NWF's reports:

> Ever since NCW refrained from defending the Egyptian women who were [sexually] assaulted on the 25th of May 2005 on the grounds that they were not calling for women's rights, more evidence has emerged proving that this entity is fake. … this entity is an additional form of censorship on the freedom of feminist organizations who are truly concerned about the issues of women and the nation, and which are active in the most difficult conditions. This indication necessitates

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[97] Interview with Nawla Darwish, 17 September, 2008
[98] *Ibid*
[99] *Ibid*
[100] The historic figure, widely perceived as the pioneer of feminism in Egypt.
[101] A saying in Egypt which refers to the idea that Pharaohs worship their rulers and would not dare to disobey them.
[102] *Ibid*

that civil society take a swift and firm stance against this council and similar ones which were established to bring an end to their [civil society] movement, smear their work and convey a fake civilized and modern impression to world public opinion (Darwish and Shukrala 2005: 14).

Furthermore, NWF members believe that NCW is backfiring. Darwish said that

NCW leads women to hate women's issues because its discourse is meaningless … and some male politicians are now calling for the establishment of a National Council for Men. Some people say things like 'what rights are women calling for? They have the National Council for Women and they have obtained all of their rights[103].

Similarly, the report referred to earlier by NWF included the following statement:

the extensive coverage by the government owned media of this Council's [NCW] marvelous achievements under the leadership of Egypt's first lady, as well as this Council's message which is devoid of any truly empowering discourse to Egyptian women … has backfired among Egyptian laymen and women and has led to an increase in opposition for women's rights, not to mention making fun of women's rights (Darwish and Shukrala 2006: 16).

There is clearly no cooperation whatsoever between NWF and NCW. NWF is highly critical of NCW's existence, its approach, its activities, its leadership and the discourse it adopts. They believe that all of this is backfiring and turning the Egyptian people against women and their rights. They also believe that NCW is not truly interested in women's rights or their empowerment.

5.3.5 Media Exposure and Interaction:

Several private Egyptian satellite channels cover NWF's activities and interview them such as *O TV*, *Al Hayat* and *Al Mehwar.* In addition, the government owned Nile News Channels, and sometimes even terrestrial Channels *One* and *Two* cover their activities[104].

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[103] *Ibid*
[104] *Ibid*

Also, Darwish used to write an opinion column in the privately owned newspaper *Al Badil* (The Alternative)[105]. She use to send opinion columns to *Al Masry Al Youm* but not all of them would get published.[106]

Nehad Saleh is a journalist in *Al Ahram* newspaper who covers NWF's activities on a regular basis. Saleh said:

> I do not write everything NWF members say, if I did, I would get fired. So I try to write in an objective manner without changing their statements, but there are things which I have to omit. For example, NWF issued a press release about a network that they have established to support women who press charges against men who sexually harass them. ... The head of the women's page would have refused to publish the press release as it is. So I went around it and wrote a story in which I stated that lately, more attention is being paid to women issues, [and gave the example of] how the man who harassed Noha Roshdy was sentenced to prison [see Chapter 8 for details about this incident] …so I called upon women to overcome their fear and press charges if they are sexually harassed and then included the information in the press release. But I omitted a part about the government and police stations[107].

In contrast, Hoda Rashwan, a journalist in *Al Masry Al Youm* who covers NWF's activities, said that she does not edit or downplay news about NWF or the views of its members, but clearly attributes any views to the specific people who express them and includes the other side of the argument[108].

All of this indicates that there is some room in the government owned media for agents to cover some of the activities of an NGO which has a strained relationship with the state, although some of their views need to be omitted or downplayed in order to allow for this. In contrast, the privately owned media has allowed for coverage of activities which are not on good terms with the state without any alteration.

I analyzed media treatment of NWF and found that *Al Masry Al Youm* covers some of NWF's activities which break taboos and address sensitive issues. These are not be found

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[105] *Al Badil* newspaper has been defunct for some time.
[106] *Ibid*
[107] Interview with Nehad Saleh, journalist in *Al Ahram* newspaper, Cairo, 11 January, 2009
[108] Interview with Hoda Rashwan, journalist in *Al Masry Al Youm*, Cairo, 14 January, 2009

in *Al Ahram*'s coverage of NWF's activities. For example, *Al Masry Al Youm* ran a story which stated that New Woman Foundation organized a roundtable discussion entitled 'Is Abortion a [Woman's] Right or is it Murder?' According to the story, the participants recommended allowing women who were impregnated as a result of rape to be entitled to abortion," (Rashwan 24/4/2008h) while the story about the same event in *Al Ahram* read "Female police officers should be the ones dealing with rape victims. This is what New Woman Foundation called for in a roundtable discussion which discussed the proposed law that would entitle women who are impregnated through rape to abortion (10/5/2008). Also, in *Al Masry Al Youm*, a letter to the editor by Darwish was published, (Darwish 27/4/2007) which is something that is never to be found in *Al Ahram*.

As for the broadcast media, during the last episode of the week, *90 Dekika* features a group of speakers, to discuss various events that have taken place that week. On the 20th of June 2008, the program featured a journalist, a religious scholar and Amal Abdel Hadi, a member of NWF. One of the issues they addressed was sexual harassment. Abdel Hadi argued that sexual harassment has always taken place but in the past it was a taboo, women could not tell their families that they had been sexually harassed, nor did the media address the issue, let alone use the term sexual harassment (10/5/2008).

5.4 National Council for Women:

The National Council for Women (NCW) was established in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action which stipulated that states should establish national women's machineries affiliated to "the highest possible level in government." Its main aim is to "support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas."

In addition, Article 18 of CEDAW stipulates that states party to CEDAW should submit periodical reports to the CEDAW Committee stipulating the steps that they have taken to implement CEDAW.

Therefore, the National Council for Women (NCW) was established by a Presidential decree in the year 2000 and it is affiliated to the President of the Republic. It consists of 30 members whose membership lasts for three years and is renewable thereafter. The

criteria that they must meet are being public figures who specialize in women's issues and are socially active (NCW 2006: 1). The members of NCW largely consist of members of the regime; members of the ruling party – some of whom are also MPs – as well as former ministers. Examples are Moushira Khatab, Amina Al-Gendi, Georgette Killini, Zeinab Radwan, Amal Othman and Ahmed Kamal Abo El Magd. NCW members also include a small number of judges, such as Judge Mahmoud Ghoneim, a judge in the High Constitutional Court. A very small number of NCW's members are members of opposition political parties. For example, Amina Shafik is a member of Tagammu Party and is a journalist in *Al Ahram*[109]. NCW's composition reflects that it is a governmental organization, and it is not in any way surprising that most of its members are affiliated to the regime. But the affiliation of a small number of its members suggests that NCW is used to coopt members of opposition parties who are interested in women's rights.

According to its mandate, NCW's role includes suggesting general policies to society and its institutions pertaining to women's issues and means of empowering them economically and socially and integrating women's issues in development, following up on and evaluating general policies pertaining to women, expressing its opinion on proposed laws and decisions about women before they are approved, proposing laws and decisions that enhance women's status, expressing its views on all of the conventions about women and representing women in all international organizations and events to do with women. In addition, the mandate states that all governmental institutions must provide NCW and its Secretary General with all of the data and statistics that relate to the Council's work (NCW 2006: 1-2, 4).

5.4.1 NCW Management:

The following is the organizational chart of NCW[110]:

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┌──────────────────┐
│ The President of  │
│  the Council      │
└──────────────────┘
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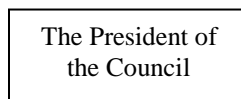
[109] NCW's website: http://www.ncwegypt.com/english/council.jsp
[110] NCW's website: http://www.ncwegypt.com/english/coun_mem.jsp

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                                    │
          ┌─────────────────────────┼─────────────────────────┐
          │                 ┌────────────────┐                 │
          │                 │ The Secretary  │                 │
          │                 │   General      │                 │
          │                 └────────────────┘                 │
  ┌──────────────┐                  │              ┌────────────────────┐
  │   Members    │                  │              │   The Standing     │
  │              │                  │              │   Committees       │
  └──────────────┘                  │              └────────────────────┘
          ┌────────────────┬────────┴────────┬────────────────┐
  ┌────────────────┐  ┌────────────────┐  ┌────────────────┐
  │ The Executive  │  │ The Committee of│  │   Branches     │
  │  Committee     │  │  Coordinators   │  │                │
  └────────────────┘  └────────────────┘  └────────────────┘
      ┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
      │              Other Committees                 │
      └──────────────────────────────────────────────┘
      ┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
      │            The General Secretariat            │
      └──────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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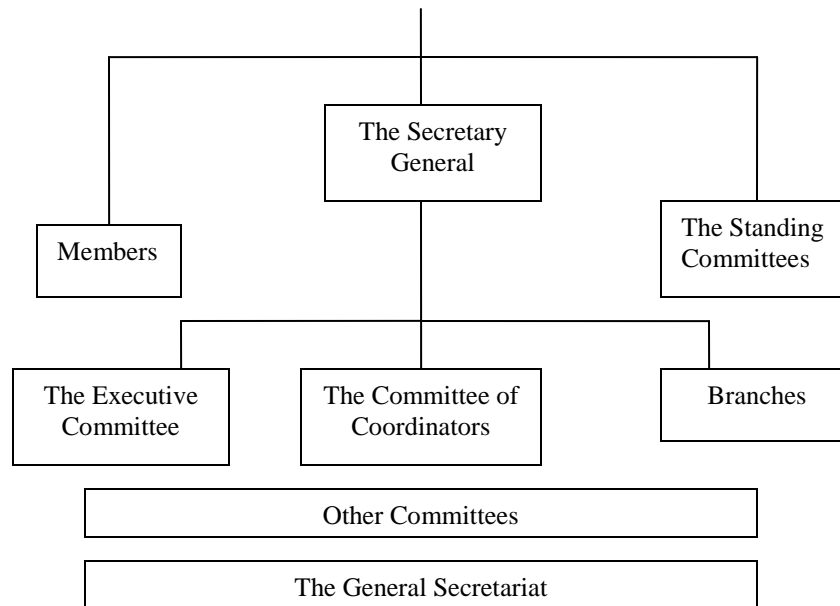
The first lady is the President of NCW. She is an acting President and follows the Council's work almost on a daily basis[111]. Her role includes

> nominat[ing] the Secretary General of the Council, approv[ing] the composition of the Standing Committees of the Council and nominat[ing] the coordinator and the alternate coordinator for each committee after the approval of the Board of the Council, supervise[ing] the … [council's] work with the assistance of the Secretary General [and any other member of her choosing], invit[ing] the Council to hold regular or exceptional meetings [and] … invite[ing] any of the Committees to meet [at a date and time of her choosing], … approv[ing] the composition of the Council's delegations abroad, … approv[ing] the proposed general budget and the final financial statement of the Council after approval by the Board of the Council, delegate[ing] anyone she chooses for conducting research … [related to] the objectives and mandate of the Council, … approv[ing] the composition of the Branches of the Council [and] approv[ing] the composition of the Ad-hoc Committees of the Council[112].

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[111] Interview with Samiha Abo Steit, retired Ambassador and NCW Secretary General's Advisor, Cairo, 18 September, 2008
[112] NCW's website: http://www.ncwegypt.com/english/coun_pre.jsp

Therefore, the first lady is almost fully in control of NCW and is involved in the intrinsic details of its work. Also, NCW is run like a one (wo)man show, just like ADEW and ECWR.

In contrast, the Secretary General's role is rather limited. It includes

> representing the Council in its contacts with external parties and before the judiciary system, … monitor[ing] the implementation of the general policy adopted by the Council …, follow[ing]-up on the activities and recommendations of the Standing Committees, … [the] Executive Committee [and] the Branches of the Council[113].

In fact, much of her work consists of implementing the first lady's decisions. For example, she

> invite[s] the Council to convene at the times and dates decided by the President of the Council, issue[s] the decrees for the composition of the Council's delegations abroad after approval by the President of the Council .... implement[s] all activities assigned by the Board of the Council and its President, issu[es] the decrees for the composition of the Council's Standing Committees, after approval by the President of the Council, issu[es] the decrees for the composition of the Council's Branches after approval by the President of the Council [and] issu[es] the decrees for the composition of the Council's Ad-hoc Committees after approval by the President of the Council[114].

NCW contains 10 Standing Committees. These include a Non-Governmental Organizations Committee which aims to propose policies and programs which activate NGOs' role and to follow-up on and assess the efforts and activities of women's NGOs and submit recommendations on means of supporting them[115]. This provides further evidence to support the argument made earlier that NCW is used to coopt women's NGOs. Another committee is the Political Participation Committee which aims to recommend policies that enhance women's political empowerment and propose programs

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[113] NCW's website: http://www.ncwegypt.com/english/coun_sec.jsp
[114] NCW's website: http://www.ncwegypt.com/english/coun_sec.jsp
[115] NCW's website: http://www.ncwegypt.com/english/comm_ngos.jsp

that promote women's political participation on all levels[116]. Also, the Legislative Committee aims

> to examine the laws, regulations and decrees related to women and propose any amendments deemed necessary, to express opinions on draft laws, regulations and decrees related to the objectives of NCW [and] to follow up on the enforcement of laws, regulations and decrees to ensure that [they live up to the principle of] gender equality, as stipulated in the Egyptian Constitution[117].

This substantiates the statements made earlier by Baibers and Abu El Komsan about how the first lady and/or NCW are the ones who change laws pertaining to women. These are powers accorded to NCW by virtue of its mandate. Since NCW is run like a one (wo)man show, then the first lady is entitled to change and amend laws.

In addition, the Executive Committee reviews the final reports of the Standing Committees, reports on NCW conferences and reports produced by NCW's branches. It also provides the Secretary General with its views on grants and donations offered to NCW. The members of the Executive Committee include Amal Othman[118]. Meanwhile, the Committee of Coordinators' main function is coordination between the NCW's Standing Committees. Thus, its members are the Coordinators of the Standing Committees and it is chaired by the Secretary General[119]. Also, NCW has a branch in every single provincial governorate[120].

5.4.2 NCW Activities:

Some of the laws NCW was involved in changing or introducing are the reintroduction of a law that stipulates that a man can be sentenced to prison if he does not pay his ex-wife the *nafaka[121]* (NCW 2004 nd: 24), canceling the law that stated that women need

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[116] NCW's website: http://www.ncwegypt.com/english/comm_political.jsp
[117] NCW's website: http://www.ncwegypt.com/english/comm_legal.jsp
[118] NCW's website: http://www.ncwegypt.com/english/coun_exe.jsp
[119] NCW's website: http://www.ncwegypt.com/english/coun_coo.jsp
[120] NCW's website: http://www.ncwegypt.com/english/coun_bra.jsp
[121] A monthly allowance a man is obliged to pay to his ex-wife under *Sharia*

their husband's permission in order to travel, amending the nationality law to grant Egyptian women the right to pass on the Egyptian nationality to their children (Kandil 2006: 47) and amending the pension law to allow men to receive the pension of their deceased wives[122].

NCW also plays a role in changing laws on the basis of the complaints it receives through its Ombudsman Office. An example is how the Ombudsman Office received complaints from women stating that they can not afford to pay the registration fees to sue their ex-husbands for not paying the *nafaka*, so NCW's Legislative Committee played a role in canceling those fees[123]. Another example is how the office received a lot of complaints about how male members of the family steal women's share of inheritance. "We provided the Secretary General with a report about this and she passed it over to the legislative committee who then worked on a law to punish those who steal other people's fair share of inheritance, regardless of whether they are men or women"[124].

5.4.3 Funding:

NCW receives funding from and or its projects are in collaboration with the Government of the Netherlands (NCW nd: 3) USAID, (NCW 2003 nd: 10) UNDP, OUDA, the EU, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNFPA, UNESCO, (NCW nd: 76) UNFPA and Ford Foundation (NCW nd). NCW's sources of funding indicate that it is embedded in the international framework which promotes a specific version of women's rights. It also clearly extensively collaborates with many UN bodies. Also, NCW's receipt of funding from the American government - as opposed to ADEW and NWF's refusal of such funding – is perhaps not surprising because NCW is a governmental organization and the Egyptian government receives aid from the American government on annual basis.

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[122] Interview with Nagwa El Fawal, Head of the National Council for Women's Ombudsman Office, Cairo, 12 January, 2009
[123] Interview with Mahmoud Ghoneim, Judge in High Constitutional Court and Member of NCW's Legislative Committee, Cairo, 10 September, 2008
[124] Interview with Nagwa El Fawal, 12 January, 2009

5.4.4 Relationship with NGOs:

NCW perceives NGOs as important vehicles for achieving its goals and believes that getting through to women at the grassroots level is not possible without resorting to NGOs who are active at this level. Consequently, some of NCW's projects are implemented by NGOs and some NGOs are centers to activate NCW's activities. In addition, NGO activists and representatives participate in NCW conferences, seminars and workshops. Some NGO activists have also been appointed as NCW members while some NGOs in different governorates have been asked to function as NCW branches (Kandil nd: 2). NCW clearly perceives NGOs as GONGOs and as vehicles for implementing its vision, policies and activities. This implies that the statements made by Baibers and Abu El Komsan which indicated that NCW took some of the work conducted by ECWR and attributed it to itself, are merely examples of a self-professed NCW policy.

5.4.5 Discourse:

Some members of NCW or members of units affiliated to NCW talked at length about NCW's discourse and people's take on it. For example, one of the male members of NCW's Legislative Committee said:

> NCW believe me does not work for women's interest … but for that of the entire family … I always say that NCW stands up for the weaker party even if it is not a woman … [when the] nationality law [was changed] those who benefited were children. Even with the *khula* law, if my sister marries a terrible man … and she [uses the *khula* law to obtain a divorce] I - her brother - have benefited too. … Some people are now calling for a national council for men. … every time I switch on the TV set it's all about women, women, women. That's not the way it should be. Such direct discourse is wrong, this media policy is incorrect, one should use indirect discourse … the media policy has backfired, and the extensive pressure for women's rights in an inappropriate timing has truly lead to negative consequences. … I told the first lady frankly, the entire society is against us, [NCW][125].

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[125] Interview with Mahmoud Ghoneim, 10 September, 2008

Therefore, even senior members of NCW are aware that its existence, its approach and the extensive media coverage of its activities are backfiring and turning Egyptian society against women's rights.

Similarly, the head – a woman - of one of the Equal Opportunity Units established by NCW within all of Egypt's ministries said that at the beginning, the objective of the Unit was

> to serve women. But we realized that if we serve only one member of the Egyptian family we will not achieve everything that can be achieved. So we serve those who require special attention - regardless of whether they are men or women - in order to attain equal opportunities. Indeed, we are more successful now that we are concerned about both sides. At first the unit was called women's unit and we received a lot of criticism on the grounds that we were concerned about one side and not the other. At first male employees in the Ministry harshly criticized us and called for the establishment of a national council for men and argued that women enjoy all of their rights while men do not. We organized workshops in which we asked men to list all of the tasks that they and their wives perform. This lead them to realize that we are not talking nonsense and that women truly engage in multi-tasking, are under a lot of pressure and are even victims of violence. As a result, they no longer criticize us. In fact, many of them are now eager to attend the events we organize and have started helping their wives out with household chores and child rearing. We are trying to change society to the better but it will take time[126].

In other words, they had to adopt an indirect approach and avoid using women's rights discourse. Yet it is very significant that their revised approach has led some men to help their wives out in household chores and childrearing.

Also, the repeated reference to calls for the establishment of a national council for men, which was also expressed by one of the speakers in an episode of *90 Dekika* quoted in Chapter 1, are a vivid indication of how NCW is backfiring.

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[126] Interview with Ragaa Mansour, Head of Equal Opportunity Unit in the Ministry of Finance, Cairo, 12 January, 2009

5.4.6 Media Exposure and Interaction:

News about NCW is published in the government's page and not the women's page of *Al Ahram* based on the first lady's request because she does not want her name to appear next to stories about make-up and fashion, but next to stories about ministries. This is the status she wants NCW to have[127]. Since stories about NCW are published next to stories about ministries, this is likely to lead readers to associate women's rights with government policy. Since much of government policy is deeply unpopular and unsuccessful, this is likely to lead an association between women's rights and all of these negative issues. In addition, publishing stories about NCW in this particular page is likely to strengthen the already existing sentiments that the government is biased for women and against men.

The main role of NCW's Media Committee is to train media personnel on addressing women's issues in the media from various perspectives, such as political, human rights, humanitarian and gender perspectives. They place special emphasis on women and politics. They train journalists who work for government and privately owned media as well as newspapers affiliated to political parties. The Committee also plays a role in state owned media's treatment of women's issues by asking ERTU's media unit to feature women more often in mainstream programs, such as featuring qualified women in programs about economics, medicine and law[128].

In addition, NCW also plays a role in drama serials treatment of women. The head of the Ombudsman Office writes reports about some of the complaints that they receive and submits them to the Secretary General who in turn asks the President of ERTU to produce drama serials to be aired on both radio and television addressing these complaints. Examples are men stealing women's fair share of inheritance and the problems that result from failing to document marriage. In the words of the Head of the Ombudsman Office – a woman - "this leads to societal discussions about it, people realize that that particular problem exists, what its causes are and how to go about solving it, such as whether or not it requires a legislative solution and can the media play a role in solving it." They engage in these measures if they believe that drawing people's attention

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[127] Interview with Nehad Saleh, a journalist in *Al Ahram* newspaper, Cairo, 11 January, 2009
[128] Interview with Amina Shafik, Head of NCW's Media Committee, Cairo, 4 September, 2008

to a particular problem is important or if they believe that it is important to ensure that public opinion is on their side[129]. Therefore, NCW personnel seem to believe that drama serials have an immense impact on viewers and can actually shape public opinion. Her statement also indicates that there is some room for people's complaints to shape some of NCW's policies rather than it being entirely a top-down institution.

I analyzed media treatment of NCW and found that *Al Ahram* and to a lesser extent *Al Masry Al Youm* extensively cover NCW's activities. When the first lady attends and heads an NCW activity, it more often than not receives first page coverage. *Al Ahram* covers NCW more often than *Al Masry Al Youm* and in greater detail and the stories about NCW in *Al Ahram* are extremely long[130]. *Al Ahram*'s coverage of NCW focuses primarily on the meetings Suzane Mubarak heads, the activities she attends and the reports she receives. This is followed by high level meetings and press briefings by NCW's Secretary General Farakhonda Hassan[131]. *Al Masry Al Youm* covers NCW's activities and issues related to it that are not covered by *Al Ahram*, such as rumors about NCW, slight differences between NCW and governmental institutions and NCW's meetings with women's NGOs[132]. Also, *Al Masry Al Youm* covers NCW activities that many readers can relate to more often than *Al Ahram*. An example is a story about the Ombudsman Office's annual report and a categorization of the different types of complaints it has received throughout the year (Rashwan 27/3/2009). Also, *Al Ahram*

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[129] Interview with Nagwa El Fawal, 12 January, 2009

[130] See for example: Wafaa El Baradie 'Only 22% of the Workforce are Women and their Participation is Expected to Decline: The Global Economic Crisis had an Immense Impact on Egyptian Women'. 21 Feb. 2009. *Al Ahram* Online.

[131] See for example: Gihan Mostafa 'Suzanne Mubarak Heads the International Conference on Women in High Ranking Posts'. 6 Feb. 2009 *Al Ahram* Online.
Gihan Mostafa 'Farakhonda Hassan: A Fair Representation for Women in Parliament is An Important Achievement in Women's Struggle to Obtain Their Rights.' 10 Feb. 2009. *Al Ahram* Online.
Gihan Mostafa 'Under the Auspices of Suzanne Mubarak: The Conference on Women in Decision Making Posts Commences Tomorrow'. 14 March 2009. *Al Ahram* Online.
Gihan Mostafa 'NCW Considers Holding the First Chinese-African Forum'. 9 April 2009. *Al Ahram* Online.

[132] See for example: Hoda Rashwan 'NCW Calls Upon the Ministry of Justice to Finalize the Paper Work Regarding the Appointment of Amal Soliman as the First Marriage Register in Egypt'. 7 Sept. 2008. *Al Masry Al Youm* Online.
Hoda Rashwan Attempts to Criminalize Sexual Harassment After The Events that took Place in Mohandesin. 16 Oct. 2008. *Al Masry Al Youm* Online.
Hoda Rashwan and Shaymaa Adel 'Farakhonda Hassan: NCW is An Independent Institution and The Idea that it will Merge with the Ministry of Family Affairs is A Rumor'. 13 March 2009. *Al Masry Al Youm* Online.

extensively covers NCW's cooperation with international organizations such as the UN as well as foreigners praising NCW and/or the first lady, while *Al Masry Al Youm* does not cover such issues. An example is a story about a roundtable discussion co-organized by NCW, the Helsinki Institute and the Finish Ministry of Foreign Affairs about how to increase women's role in developing the national economy (El Baradi 21/2/2009)[133]. Thus, *Al Masry Al Youm*'s treatment of NCW gives the reader the impression that NCW is involved in a variety of activities and exposes the reader to different personnel within NCW. Meanwhile, *Al Ahram*'s treatment of NCW gives the reader the impression that it is all about the first lady, high level meetings and conferences.

5.5 United Nations Development Fund for Women:

Maya Morsi, UNIFEM's coordinator in Cairo described UNFIEM's role by saying: "UNIFEM's global plan and in the Arab world is to empower women economically, linking CEDAW with the laws of any given country and gender budgeting[134]. These are different forms of contribution but … [our activities] are driven by NCW, the government or NGOs. We do not impose things, our plan is very flexible"[135]. Morsi's statements show the centrality of CEDAW in the international framework.

5.5.1 Activities:

Morsi described UNIFEM's activities by saying "during the last ten years, UNIFEM has been working on women's political empowerment because the laws that were in place did not allow for women's political empowerment," Morsi said. They have been working on

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[133] Other examples include: Wafaa El Baradie (30 Dec. 2008), Benefiting from Finland's Experience in Disseminating The Idea of Self-Employment and Using Up to Date Educational and Training Skills to Develop Women's Economic Skills. 30 Dec. 2008. *Al Ahram* Online.
Gihan Mostafa 'An American Association Speaks Highly of Egyptian Women Attaining High-Ranking Posts'. 19 May 2009. *Al Ahram* Online.
Giahn Mostafa Enhancing Co-operation Between NCW and the UN. 12 May 2009. *Al Ahram* Online.
[134] UNFIEM defines gender budgeting as: "government planning, programming and budgeting that contributes to the advancement of gender equality and the fulfillment of women's rights. It entails identifying and reflecting needed interventions to address gender gaps in sector and local government policies, plans and budgets. GRB also aims to analyze the gender-differentiated impact of revenue-raising policies and the allocation of domestic resources and Official Development Assistance". http://www.gender-budgets.org/
[135] Interview with Maya Morsi, UNIFEM Coordinator in Cairo, Cairo, 11 January, 2009

the policy level, updating laws and linking general social, economic and developmental policies to women's empowerment. However, UNIFEM does not work on changing laws but it plays a role in the logistical support to do so, such as providing NCW with research on how another Arab country changed a particular law and funding NCW studies on issues like the family law in Egypt. UNIFEM also played a role in the logistical support to changing the nationality law and the family code in addition to establishing family courts[136].

Morsi argued that this approach is not a top-down one because women's NGOs had already been calling for changing many of the laws that they played a role in changing, such as the nationality law, adding that NGOs convey the voices of the people at the grassroots level. However, she acknowledged that some of their activities, such as incorporating the notion of gender in the government's budget[137], could be described as a top-down approach, because no NGO had been calling for something along those lines. UNIFEM is also playing a role in the efforts to combat sexual harassment.

> We are working on a model to provide women with the tools to press charges if they are sexually harassed. … A 'safe city model' was implemented in Latin America. We will tailor it to the Egyptian context, introduce NCW and the government to it and if they are interested, they can take it. … UNIFEM creates the model and we give it to an organization along with the technical tools to implement it. Such a project requires partnership from the Ministry of Interior, NCW and NGOs which function in that geographic area[138].

Morsi's statements indicate that UNFIEM seems to be involved in almost all of the activities undertaken by most of the women's organizations examined in this chapter. Also, the 'safe city model' indicates that UNIFEM promotes an agenda despite all of her statements about how its work is driven by NCW, the government or NGOs.

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[136] *Ibid*

[137] *Ibid*

[138] *Ibid*

5.5.2 Relationship with NCW:

Morsi described UNIFEM's relationship with NCW by saying that UNIFEM perceives NCW as its counterpart. The UNIFEM office in Egypt is based inside NCW's headquarters. UNFIEM played a role in creating the different NCW units and in interviewing those who later became NCW employees. "UNIFEM implements the government's needs and not the other way around. The UN does not interfere in NCW's agenda. They make decisions like this year we will work on the nationality law, next year we will work on amending the electoral law and then UNIFEM supports them[139]," Morsi said.

This implies that NCW is enmeshed within UNIFEM and indicates that UNIFEM plays an integral role in - not only how NCW addresses women's rights - but also in how NCW functions.

5.6 <u>Conclusion:</u>

In contrast to the findings about Egypt's political parties presented in Chapter 4, this chapter has shown that most of the selected women's NGOs directly address women's political participation and, in doing so, they take the media very seriously and exert a lot of effort to secure media coverage of their activities. Based on evidence from this chapter, the explanation for this discrepancy between the activism of women's NGOs and political parties seems to lie in the much wider margin of freedom the government allows NGOs as compared to political parties. This in turn can be explained by reference to government perceptions of NGOs as being far less of a threat to its power. The activities of women's NGOs are political and in other contexts they would have been performed by political parties. For example, their activities include engaging in advocacy work and calling for changes to laws pertaining to women rather than things like promoting breast cancer research or establishing mother and toddler drop in clubs. Furthermore, as part of their campaigns to change laws they negotiate with the state using various methods, such as beseeching and/or calling upon the President to engage in particular policies, inviting high-ranking government officials to their events and cooperating with NCW . However,

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[139] *Ibid*

in the Egyptian context NGO activities are carried out in a manner that makes them seem apolitical because, as previously stated, law 84/2002 prohibits NGOs from engaging in political activity. But this freedom should not in any way be exaggerated. It is still extremely limited and coercion is used to crack down on NGOs that cross the red line. In light of this it can be said that NGOs like ADEW and ECWR, are a manifestation of what Bianchi (1989) has described as "fake pluralism". That is to say: they are weak entities whose leaders are co-opted by the state and therefore do not pose any kind of threat to the regime. In this regard, only NWF stands out as different. It is a non-coopted NGO which conveys that Bianchi's (1989) notion of unruly corporatism is still valid. For there is some room for pluralistic entities to exist, albeit with a lot of difficulties. Moreover, the co-opted NGOs do not threaten the state in any way because they, as well as NCW, are embedded in the same international framework.

But is important to note that a close analysis of the activities and discourses of all of the women's organizations examined in this chapter has revealed that they actually have rather different approaches to women's rights. Both ADEW and ECWR largely seek to improve women's lives by playing it safe and not even attempting to challenge the structures that disadvantage women. For they largely campaign to change, amend or introduce laws pertaining to women. But as argued by Murphy (2003), merely changing laws leaves the societal structures that disadvantage women unchanged. In fact, only NWF's approach is a transformatory one that seeks to challenge the structures that disadvantage Egyptian women. Meanwhile, NCW's approach is one of equity and not equality. For example, the amendment of the nationality law and the introduction of the *khula* law gave women more rights but did not grant them equal status to men.

The evidence in this chapter shows that the manner in which the vast majority of women's organizations are run as well as the nature of the relationship between them is reflected in the way they are treated in the media. The vast majority of women's NGOs, such as ADEW and ECWR, are run like a one (wo)man show, as Abdel Rahman (2004) has previously noted in her study about non-women's NGOs. But NWF, as previously argued by Al Ali (2000: 186) is run in a rather democratic fashion in the sense that it is run in a manner that involves of cooperation between its members. As for NCW, as this chapter has shown, the first lady is an acting President of NCW who oversees its work

almost on a daily basis, by virtue of which she has an official title and is entitled to written powers - those stipulated in NCW's mandate. Drawing simultaneously on Joseph's (2001: 38) differentiation between formal and informal politics as an arena for first ladies, and on the working of NCW, we can conclude that Suzanne Mubarak is active in formal politics, and not informal politics. All of this is reflected in the media treatment of these organizations. Much of the stories about most women's NGOs in the print media consist of stories covering their activities, which include quotes from the President of that NGO, while reference to other members of the NGO is almost never to be found in the media. These stories are almost always to be found in the women's page of the government owned newspaper. Meanwhile, the government owned media focuses on NCW activities that are headed or events attended by the first lady. Such stories are almost always to be found in a page entitled 'The State' along with news about various governmental institutions.

Furthermore, the nature of the relationship between NCW and the vast majority of women's organizations is that NCW tries to co-opt the women's NGOs. This is similar to an argument previously put forward by Adams (2007) when she examined a national machinery in another country which is also ruled by an authoritarian regime. This chapter adds to that finding by showing that NCW also uses the work done by women's NGOs and attributes it to itself and to the first lady. This attribution is reflected via the media but is intertwined with how decisions regarding laws pertaining to women are changed. This must be examined first before delving into the media treatment of this aspect of NCW's relationship with women's NGOs.

For as Abdel Rahman (2004) has previously noted, in some cases, the interests of some NGOs which are co-opted to some extent are rather similar to those of the state. Building on Abdel Rahman's argument, these interests tend to be similar but not identical. Examples include amending the nationality law in the case of ADEW and introducing a law penalizing sexual harassment in the case of ECWR. Not surprisingly, these NGOs co-operate with the state in this regard, but they play no role whatsoever in the decision making process. This is a critical point which will be elaborated on in Chapter 6. However, evidence in this chapter that supports this argument includes Baibers' arguments that the President, first lady and their son Gamal are the ones who change

laws. This is in addition to how she found it necessary to beseech the President on television to change the nationality law. Similarly, while Abu El Komsan addressed the efforts to introduce a law penalizing sexual harassment, she stated that ECWR provides NCW with information and their work and simply wait and see.

This interaction then appears in the media in the form of a campaign by one of the women's NGOs to change, amend or introduce a law, but it is likely this 'campaign' so to speak only received extensive media coverage because the state has allowed this to take place because it has already decided to change, amend or introduce the law in question anyway. For example, if the government had not decided to amend the nationality law, the first lady would not have sponsored ADEW's conference which addressed this issue and received extensive media coverage. When the law is changed, it is framed in the media as a decision by the President and/or first lady, who take full credit for all of this, which supports the argument made earlier about how the first lady uses the work done by women's NGOs and attributes it to herself. Meanwhile, the heads of the women's NGOs are merely quoted as thanking them for doing so and/or speaking highly of this move.

Analysis of media coverage of NGOs shows that the heads of women's NGOs may often criticize some aspects of the law which came about. For example, in the case of amendments to the nationality law, they pointed out that it was amended to grant Egyptian nationality to the children of an Egyptian woman and her non—Egyptian husband but not to the children's father. That such criticism was ignored is further evidence to support my argument that women's NGOs are not decision makers, because laws are not introduced, changed or amended in the manner that they see fit. It can be concluded from this that NGOs are permitted to make minimal criticism via the media in order to maintain a system of fake pluralism.

Based on Jad's analysis (2004) of the way NGOs are obliged to compete with each other for foreign funding and media coverage, the evidence in this chapter can be taken to show that these women's NGOs which are co-opted to various degrees by the state machinery do indeed compete with each other. But in this case, the prizes they are seen to compete for, besides funding and media exposure, is to be on more or less good terms with the state. It is natural that different NGOs should have different views on important issues. However, all of them - including the non-co-opted women's NGOs - constantly criticize

one another and work in a very individualistic manner. In other words, women's activists are fragmented and far from a unified women's movement. As was shown in this chapter, each NGO works on short-term projects to achieve short term goals, such as women being appointed in a particular profession previously denied to them.

Media treatment of women's activism reflects this fragmentation and short-termism. It largely consists of separate stories covering the activities of individual women's NGOs, such as seminars and round table discussions that address a particular right as if it were divorced from those addressed by other women's NGOs. Fragmentation in coverage and thus in the representation of the struggle for gender equality undermines the quantitative increase in media attention to women's activism. Good media treatment of women's activism would entail more solidarity among the women's NGOs and less fragmentation. Having said this, it must also be noted that the privately owned newspapers have allowed all women's NGOs more detailed coverage of their activities. They have also allowed coverage of their events or statements which break taboos, address sensitive issues and harshly criticize the government and specific laws. Talk shows aired on privately owned channels have likewise given women's NGOs limited access to the broadcast media. But because of the way this access is split between competing organizations, the structural nature of activists' goals in the field of women's right is obscured.

This finding can also be seen in the way almost all of the women's organizations, when engaging with the media, avoid using the phrase "women's rights" and avoid framing their arguments in terms of women's rights discourse. Many heads and members of NGOs forcefully argued against using women's rights discourse, adding that doing so either gets them nowhere or backfires. In fact, much of the discourse that they utilize instead is paternalistic. An example is the discourse used by ECWR in its anti-sexual harassment campaign, which defined women in relation to their male relatives. It can also be seen in the argument put forward by an NCW member that the *khula* law benefits not only women but also men and the family as a whole on the grounds that a women's male family members usually bear the burden of helping her out in obtaining a divorce, rather than arguing that women should be entitled to swift unilateral divorce. Using paternalistic discourse is problematic is because it not only gives into but reinforces the idea that women are not independent human beings but are defined in relation to their male

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relatives. Another type of discourse used instead of women's rights discourse was de-gendered discourse, where the argument is presented as being totally unrelated to the way rights and responsibilities are assigned between women and men. An example is how ADEW focused on the suffering of the children of an Egyptian mother and a non-Egyptian father in its campaign to amend the nationality law. Using de-gendered discourse is problematic because it gives into rather than challenges the way rights and responsibilities are assigned between women and men.

The reasons behind this framing, as well as the resulting media treatment are investigated in Chapters 6 and 7. An important observation that must be made here is that these women's activists end up addressing women's rights on a one-by-one basis, as previously argued by Jad (2004) in isolation from the web of social, economic and political problems they are entangled with. Crucially, for the purposes of media treatment, it also means that activists campaigning for women's rights do not address the fact that there is a gender equality problem in Egypt, even though this is precisely the main reason why women do not have all of the different rights that they address on a one by one basis. Furthermore, this builds on Al Ali's (2000: 4-5) argument that some women's activists shy away from being called feminists, while others are unable to determine which Arabic equivalent to use because of their negative connotations. This chapter has built on her arguments by revealing that the media reinforces these negative connotations in addition to showing that the problem is not which feminist or women's rights discourse to use, but that none of them can be used.

Chapter 6

CASE STUDIES: MEDIA TREATMENT OF PARLIAMENTARY QUOTA AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR APPOINTMENTS IN TALK SHOWS AND THE PRESS

Chapters 4 and 5 examined the aims and activities of political parties and women's organizations in the area of women's political empowerment. Although some light was shed on how these organizations try to reach out to the media, especially in the case of women's NGOs, there are several gaps in these two chapters regarding media treatment of these organizations and their media access. The current chapter will fill all of these gaps by using critical discourse analysis to examine Egyptian media's treatment of two recent events in Egypt that are emblematic of women's political empowerment. The first is the adoption of a women's parliamentary quota which took place in 2009, whereby an extra 64 seats were added to the 444 seats of the People's Assembly and only women are allowed to run for those additional seats. This secures a minimum female representation of 12.6% in parliament. The second is the appointment of new provincial governors in 2008 who did not include a single woman. In fact, it is a post which no woman has ever attained in Egypt.

The analysis will be conducted using a sample of print and broadcast media outlets, some of which are owned by the government, while others are privately owned. In the case of the print media, this includes the government owned *Al Ahram* (The Pyramids) newspaper and the privately owned *Al Masry Al Youm* (The Egyptian Today) newspaper, while in the case of the broadcast media the sample consists of three talk shows *Al Beit Beitak* (Make Yourself at Home) which is aired on two government owned channels, namely terrestrial Channel 2 and the Egyptian Satellite Channel, *Al Ashera Masan* (10 PM) which is aired on the privately owned channel *Dream TV* and *90 Dekika* (90 Minutes) which is aired on the privately owned channel *Al Mehwar*.

Also, some other programming is included for slightly different reasons. The first is that a particular political force, the Muslim Brotherhood, was never represented in any of the talk shows while they addressed women's political empowerment. Yet it was represented

once in another program called *48 Sa'a* (48 Hours) which is aired on *Al Mehwar* during weekends. Therefore, this particular episode is included. In addition, a seminar organized by an NGO to discuss the women's parliamentary quota, in which all of the political forces were represented is examined. The seminar was not aired on any Egyptian channel, nor did it receive any coverage whatsoever in the Egyptian print media. However, it was aired on one of *Al Jazeera's* channels, *Al Jazeera Mobashera* (Al Jazeera Live) which is how I obtained access to it. It is included in this chapter in order to investigate whether or not the views expressed by the various political forces vary in any way when expressed away from the Egyptian media.

Studying the privately owned media is particularly significant because the privately owned media has only been re-introduced in Egypt in recent years. As stated in Chapter 1, privately owned media use to exist in Egypt up until the early 1950s, when Nasser's socialist government came to power and nationalized all media outlets. Things only changed in 1977 when President Sadat reintroduced the multi-party system and allowed opposition parties to issue their own newspapers. However, privately owned newspapers, i.e. those owned by people other than political parties or the government, only emerged in the late 1990s and they were shortly followed by privately owned satellite television stations. Thus, it is important to examine whether or not these privately owned media outlets are free from government control and to what extent that is the case. That is why the chapter considers whether or not Albrecht's (2007) notion of liberalized authoritarianism, used to describe the political system in Egypt, can be used to explain the privately owned media environment in Egypt. It follows that the chapter also examines whether or not and to what extent opposition forces have access to the privately owned media and looks into whether or not Lust-Okar's (2007) notion of a divided level of contestation, whereby some opposition forces enjoy more freedom than others, is reflected in their access to the privately owned media.

This chapter will also fill some of the other gaps in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4, for example, showed that all those who support women's rights avoid framing their arguments in women's rights discourse. This chapter will look into whether or not and how this is reflected in the media. Also, Chapter 4 focused on the female members of various political forces in Egypt. Whether or not and to what extent their voices are to be

found in the media is a gap that will be filled by the current chapter. In addition, Chapters 4 and 5 examined the roles of the first lady and Gamal Mubarak in women's rights. Their roles will be explored even further in this chapter, and it will also look into how they relate to media treatment of women's rights. This will in turn lead to refining the arguments made in Chapters 4 and 5 about how decisions pertaining to women's rights are made in Egypt.

The chapter is divided into two main sections. One is about media treatment of the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota and the other is about media treatment of how the newly appointed provincial governors did not include a single woman. Each section is then sub-divided into two main sub-sections one for the talk shows and one for the newspapers included in this study. These in-turn contain separate sections for each talk show and newspaper respectively. However, two additional sections are included prior to all of this. One provides some background information that is necessary to understand aspects of the main sections, and the other section looks into the relationship between the privately owned media and the state apparatus.

6.1 <u>Background Information to Parliamentary Quotas:</u>

Some background information is necessary prior to the analysis. This includes an overview of various types of parliamentary quotas that were implemented in different points in time in Egypt because some of those who commented on the women's parliamentary quota referred to these other types of quotas in their commentary. Also, the discussion about the women's parliamentary quota largely took place in two phases and the manner in which it was adopted was slightly changed during the course of this process. An overview of all of this is necessary because it was reflected in media treatment of the women's parliamentary quota. Finally, some of the commentators also referred to how the implementation of the women's parliamentary quota was in partial fulfilment of President Mubarak's electoral program, in addition to commentary on how he announced that a women's parliamentary quota would adopted. That is why I will go over both of these matters.

The first time a parliamentary quota was adopted in Egypt was in the 1950s during the reign of the late President Gamal Abdel Nasser's socialist government. It adopted a

parliamentary quota for peasants and labourers, whereby 50% of parliament members had to fit into this category. This was incorporated into the constitution at the time and has not been changed to date, not because the Egyptian people or the government still believe in it, but due to the difficulties of changing the constitution. However, the system has become redundant because those who run for and win the seats for peasants and labourers nowadays are very privileged people who are completely detached from peasants and labourers and do not truly represent them.

Many years later, in 1979, a women's parliamentary quota was adopted when late President Sadat introduced it using a Presidential decree. It entailed allowing only women to run for 30 seats in the People's Assembly and 20% of the seats in Local People Councils. This brought women's representation in parliament up to 8.93%. However, as soon as President Sadat was assassinated and the regime changed, the law was nullified on the grounds that setting aside seats for women favours women over men, while the Egyptian constitution equates both sexes (Hatem 1992: 234, 240-5).

The women's parliamentary quota which is examined in this study was first brought to the for when the NDP started to discuss it in its annual conference in November 2008. Initially, the idea was to add 56 extra seats to the 444 existing parliamentary seats and to allow only women to run for those extra seats. The reasoning behind the number 56 was that there are 28 provincial governorates in Egypt and each one would be represented by two parliamentary seats. Later on the figure was changed to 64 seats in order to allow more densely populated governorates to be represented with a larger number of seats. That is why, as will be shown, on some occasions commentators in the media referred to 56 seats, while others referred to 64 seats while commenting on the women's parliamentary quota.

As will be shown during the course of this chapter, some people argued that adopting a women's parliamentary quota was in fulfilment of President Mubarak's electoral program. The first Presidential elections took place in Egypt in 2005. As the NDP candidate, Mubarak's electoral program included taking the necessary measures to increase women's parliamentary representation. In fact, it was the President himself who announced that a women's parliamentary quota would be considered in order to increase women's parliamentary representation during a joint session of the People's Assembly

and Shoura Council. As he read that part of the speech, he looked up and said to the members of both houses "do not you worry, we will not take anything away from you" before he made this announcement.

6.2 **Privately Owned Media and its Relationship with the State Apparatus:**

All of the privately owned satellite channels operate in studios based in Media Production City and they broadcast using the satellite Nilesat. The Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) owns 50% of Media Production City and 40% of Nilesat. ERTU is a consortium of television and radio stations that are accountable to the Minister of Information. Officially, it is a public enterprise. But in practice, the Minister of Information heads its board of trustees and it is a mouthpiece for the government. The other shareholders in Media Production City and Nilesat are largely banks and investment companies that are owned or controlled by the state. In addition, a state-owned enterprises - more often than not ERTU - owns a minority share in the channels themselves. Also, the channels must obtain a license from the state and those licenses may very well be withdrawn if these channels speak too freely on domestic politics (Sakr 2008: 267, 270-3, 275). In addition, such licenses are only granted to people, mostly businessmen, who are closely affiliated to the regime. Some of them, such as Ahmed Bahgat the owner of *Dream TV*, are direct business partners of the President's son, Gamal Mubarak.

Also, Bashir Hassan, the program editor of *90 Dekika*, said that state security often calls them a few hours before the program is aired and orders them to drop one of the topics that they had intended to tackle in the program that day. He added that they abide by such orders, which clearly indicates that such programs only tackle topics that have obtained prior   approval   from   state   security [140]. Furthermore, the producer of a talk show aired on another channel once told me in an informal conversation that a member of state security often calls them up while the program is being aired live and orders them to tell the presenter to tone down. The director then passes the message on to the presenter through the ear piece.

Hassan also said:

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[140] Interview with Bashir Hassan, the program editor of *90 Dekika*, Cairo, 12 September, 2008

Egyptian talk shows have a very hard time getting government officials to appear on the shows because they are still not accustomed to the idea of responding to any criticism or concerns. … That is why we treat those who agree to appear on the show nicely. They are seated in the best spot, are the first to be given the floor and are given the longest time to express their views.

Furthermore, in an informal conversation with a journalist in *Al Masry Al Youm*, she said that the newspaper is not in the least independent from government control. When asked how the government interferes in the newspaper's work, her reply was "using all of the means" in the world. She also said that when the newspaper launches a campaign against a particular problem or uncovers governmental wrong doings in a particular area, it is because the government has allowed them to address this particular topic but not others. She added that the owners of the newspaper have a say in the newspapers' editorial policies. The example she gave was that when *Al Masry Al Youm* uncovers allegations of corruption against a particular businessman, he is more often than not a rival of one of the newspaper's shareholders and even though the information that they report is indeed correct, it is published at a specific point in time in order to serve the business interests of that shareholder[141].

All of this shows that the privately owned print and broadcast media are controlled by the government in a subtle manner using several tactics that may not be apparent at first glance. It is also important to note Hassan's statement about government officials receiving rather preferential treatment on talk shows. If that is indeed the case, then this may mean that the government not only subtly controls the privately owned media, but also government officials and those affiliated to the regime dominate discussions on these talks shows. The analysis of several episodes of these talk shows will make it easier to determine whether or not this is the case.

6.3 <u>Women's Parliamentary Quota:</u>

6.3.1 Al Beit Beitak:

Al Beit Beitak addressed the women's parliamentary quota four times in four different episodes.

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[141] This informal conversation took place in Alexandria in December 2009.

The NDP's annual conference was held in early November 2008. During the conference, one of the topics that the NDP members discussed was implementing a women's parliamentary quota by adding 56 extra seats to parliament and allowing only women to run for them. On the 4th of November 2008, Mohamed Kamal, member of the General Secretariat of the NDP, was featured on *Al Beit Beitak* to talk about the NDP conference as a whole and he briefly touched upon the women's parliamentary quota. The interview was largely explanatory in which the presenter asked Kamal several questions about how the women's parliamentary quota would be implemented. There was hardly any questioning of why the women's parliamentary quota should be adopted in the first place. Kamal framed the reasoning behind adopting the women's parliamentary quota in the following manner:

> In order to address questions by people even within the party who are against positive discrimination, you have to take into consideration the history of Egyptian women's membership in parliament ... Only five women won the [2005] parliamentary elections … which does not live to up to the status of Egyptian women or Egypt's status. … in 1979 30 [parliamentary] seats were reserved for women and in 1984, 31 seats were reserved for women. Therefore, there were 35 female MPs in 1979 and only 5 female MPs in 2005 … [also] when the International Parliamentary Union ranks different countries according to women's representation in parliament, Egypt is ranked at the bottom of the list. It is disappointing that some Arab countries who only established parliaments in recent years are ahead of us in this regard, [especially] when the Egyptian parliament dates back to 1866.

Therefore, while the women's parliamentary quota was being discussed during the NDP's annual conference, *Al Beit Beitak* did not feel the need to devote a whole episode to address it, it was merely briefly touched upon in an episode about the conference as a whole. It was one of the male members of the party who addressed it, probably because all of the senior members of the party are men and it only made sense that a senior member would be the one to represent the party and answer questions regarding its annual conference. No opposition force was represented in that episode and the presenter did not ask him any challenging questions. It is important to note that Kamal phrased his

arguments about the need for a women's parliamentary quota in discourse that was completely unrelated to women's rights. Furthermore, one of the arguments he used in this regard was about Egypt's standing in the international arena.

On the 4th of May 2009, *Al Beit Beitak* featured Georgette Killini, member of the NDP and NCW and an appointed MP[142], and Amani Al Tawil, head of the Women's Studies Program in *Al Ahram* Studies Center, i.e. a research center that is affiliated to the government.

Al Tawil backed up her support for having a larger number of female MPs using several arguments. One was that women must be represented in parliament while laws pertaining to the family are being made because only women are capable of representing women's familial roles and the suffering of some women within the familial institution. She added that not having female MPs while familial issues are being discussed is a great loss. Another argument she used was that women's parliamentary representation should be equal to women's participation in the workforce, which currently amounts to 20%. She also stated that both developed and underdeveloped countries adopt some form of quota system, "are we any different from all of the other countries in the world?" she questioned.

Equality between men and women was mentioned very briefly by both participants. Killini said "let us pretend that I am not interested in equality or justice", while Al Tawil said "the idea of equality between men and women only emerged in the entire world two centuries ago."

The only criticism expressed was the following statement made by Al Tawil: "NCW, the NDP and the government are seeking to adopt a specific type of quota that I do not support but I am not against the quota system in principle. This quota system is a 'legal quota' we have bitter previous experience with this system." She was referring to the 50% quota for peasants and laborers.

In addition, the presenter, Tamer Amin, made several sarcastic comments such as "in ten years time, there will be calls for a [parliamentary] quota for men." Also, at one point the

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[142] The President reserves the right to appoint 10 people to parliament.

speakers kept interrupting one another and talking at the same time and Amin said "Do you see why women do not obtain their rights."

Another examples of Amin's sarcastic comments is:

> **Presenter:** This way we would be lucky if the Speaker is male.
>
> [All of them laughed.]
>
> **Killini:** Why not? As long as she is competent.
>
> **Presenter:** Oh, they are ambitious, they even want the Speaker to be a woman.
>
> **Al Tawil:** Men play a role in the workforce but women are engaged in multi-tasking; women play a role in the workforce, within the marital institution, they replace services such as schools and hospitals …
>
> **Killini:** [interrupting] and they perform the functions of drivers and servants
>
> **Presenter:** You can not generalize and state that women play a greater role than men, men tafhan el kota [a proverb used to describe someone who is overworked]

Killini and Al Tawil mostly laughed at Amin's sarcastic comments and did not challenge them. However, at the very end of the discussion he said that he is neither for nor against the women's parliamentary quota.

Therefore, the second time *Al Beit Beitak* addressed the women's parliamentary quota, the interviewees were either direct members of or people affiliated to the regime. Again, no opposition force was represented. This time there was minimal criticism of the type of quota which would be adopted but there was no criticism of the principle itself. Unlike the first time around, this time both speakers were women. Again the speakers completely avoided using women's rights discourse to support the need to adopt a women's parliamentary quota. Also, it is ironic that the presenter of a talk show which is supposed to promote government policy made several sarcastic and sexist comments. In fact, one of his comments – the one about how there will be a need for a parliamentary quota for men in the future – seemed to directly contradict with government policy. One of his sexist comments was fueled by the use of the English term quota. He associated it with an Arabic term pronounced in a similar manner.

The third time *Al Beit Beitak* addressed this topic was on the 1st of June 2009. The speakers were Mohamed Kamal, member of the NDP's General Secretariat and Dr.

Mahmod Al Sharif, head of the Political Participation Committee in NCW and former governor and minister. The latter replaced Farakhonda Hassan, Secretary General of NCW, because she could not make it.

While justifying the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota, Kamal talked about how elections are administered using violence and spending large sums of money on electoral campaigns, cultural aspects that pose obstacles for women and the fact that very few women won the 2005 parliamentary elections. He also said that adopting the women's parliamentary quota was part of President Mubarak's electoral program. Meanwhile, Al Sharif argued that women constitute 50% of society and women's voices, opinions and knowledge must be represented in parliament.

Some of the questions and comments made by the presenter of that episode, Khairy Ramadan, were hostile to women. Examples include:

"Is [Egyptian] society not sensible and does not realize the importance of women's political participation so that we have to impose it onto society?"

"Did the former female MPs play a positive role?"

"How will NCW … convince voters that women will be capable of opening an office to meet up with people, go to police stations to release people from jail and be available [to attend to people's needs] in the middle of the night?"

Also, a male caller-in to the program argued that in some countries quotas for men have been introduced to protect men from women. The presenter said to him don't you worry, similar measures will eventually be necessary in Egypt.

In this episode the speakers were both men. Again women's rights discourse was not used while expressing support for the women's parliamentary quota. It is important to note one of the arguments used by Kamal in this regard. He justified the need to adopt the women's parliamentary quota on the grounds that it was part of the President's electoral program. This implies the importance of the President's approval of this move. This time, the presenter's sexist comments were even more hostile to women. His comments – and even the manner in which he phrased his questions – revolved around the idea that women are not capable of doing much which is an idea that stems from the sexist belief that women are less competent than men. In addition, one of his questions conveyed the sense that women's parliamentary representation is being imposed onto

society. This implies that the state's top-down approach to women's rights does not seem to be boding well among the Egyptian people.

The fourth and last time *Al Beit Beitak* addressed women's parliamentary quota was on the 15th of June 2009. The speakers were Farakhonda Hassan, Secretary General of NCW, Mona Abu Senna, Professor of English Literature at the government owned Cairo University and Georgette Killini, member of the NDP, NCW and an appointed MP.

The arguments Hassan used to back up adopting the women's parliamentary quota were

> this system has been implemented all over the world … it is implemented in other Arab countries, such as Morocco and Iraq. … Women have not made it to parliament without the quota system because Egyptian society does not accept being represented by women. This is true of most other societies as well.

Abu Sena initiated two sub-topics which the other speakers then addressed. She argued that Egyptian "women are not ready to join parliament because they are crippled by qualities society has instilled in them, such as not being brave and being scared of men." In response Killini argued that

> similar arguments were made when it came to appointing women as judges but last month the Minister of Justice announced that female judges are doing very well. [Also,] … women have excelled in a variety of fields which proves that they are competent and qualified.

Hassan responded by saying that not all "Egyptian women are ready to join parliament, but just like women received all of the necessary training that enabled them to become university professors, they can be trained on political activity."

The second sub-topic initiated by Abu Sena was her argument that "the current approach [to women's issues] is superficial. Figures mean absolutely nothing. Having 64 female MPs means nothing because Egyptian women are by and large experiencing a regression and we need to liberate women's minds." Killini responded by saying "there is indeed an enlightenment problem but its among both women and men. Even if the problem is more serious among women, it could not possibly amount to 99% of men being enlightened and only 1% of women being enlightened, which is the ratio of male to female MPs."

Meanwhile, Hassan responded by questioning "should we post-pone having female MPs until enlightenment takes place?"

During the discussion, Killini raised the idea that people argue that wanting women to join the judiciary and parliament is an American agenda that they are implementing. She denied all of this. Also, towards the end of the program she called upon men to support their qualified wives or sisters to run for parliament.

In addition, Abu Sena criticized the Muslim Brotherhood without naming them and described them as being hostile to women.

Again the presenter Amin made several sarcastic comments. An example is how while arguing that women can be trained on political activity, Hassan used the word tetahel or become qualified. Amin laughed and said tetahel is commonly used to refer to women getting married. In response, Hassan laughed and said "nowadays eta'helt means something completely different." Another example is how towards the end of the program Abu Sena said to Killini and Hassan "fine, go ahead and solve our overpopulation problems", Amin said "when 64 women join parliament … they will not have children," implying that when women join parliament, they will not have time for families and so will end up being childless which will bring the total population down. Another example of his sarcastic comments is that when Hassan argued that the women's parliamentary quota which will be adopted will lead to women representing around 12% of MPs which does not fulfill women's aspirations, Amin interrupted her and asked "Do you still want more?!" Hassan then went on to say that international conventions, i.e. CEDAW, stipulate that women should represent 30% of MPs.

Therefore, this time all of the speakers were women who were either direct members of or affiliated to the regime and no opposition force was represented. Again women's rights discourse was not used to frame arguments supporting the women's parliamentary quota. This was the very first time that opposition to the principle of quota and to the government's approach to women's empowerment was expressed on *Al Beit Beitak*. But this criticism was very mild. Also, some references to the international framework were made as a reason or an alleged one behind the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota. Finally, the presenter made several sarcastic and sexist comments, just like the ones he made in other episodes.

Overall *Al Beit Beitak*'s treatment of the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota consisted of promoting it. The interviewees consisted of direct members of or people affiliated to the regime. Also, no opposition force of any kind – secular or Islamic – was represented. In addition, women's rights discourse was never used to frame arguments supporting the women's parliamentary quota. A reason behind this is likely to be the arguments made by women's activists in Chapter 5 that using women's rights discourse is ineffective or backfires. It must also be noted that in 3 out of 4 episodes the presenters made some very sarcastic comments and in one episode the presenter made some sexist comments. Sometimes their comments even ran against government policy. All of this is an indication for how the state's approach to women's rights is backfiring and turning many men – including some of those affiliated to the regime – against women and their rights.

6.3.2 90 Dekika:

Before analyzing the episodes of *90 Dekika* which addressed the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota, a statement made by its program editor must be taken into consideration.

Hassan said:

> We are always very careful in selecting our speakers so that none of the episodes are entirely patriarchal or feminine - regardless of the topic being addressed - the speakers must consist of both men and women. We ensure that women are represented in the talk show because we believe in the importance of women's role in society, they must be represented across the board. … We do not face any difficulties in getting women on the show, there are many [competent] women out there. But …the political decision makers have appointed only men in decision making posts, that is why many of our speakers end up being men. All of the members of the People's Assembly, Shoura Council, executive and the legislative are men. This is reflected in our program and all of the other talk shows[143].

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[143] Interview with Bashir Hassan, Cairo, 12 September, 2008

Hassan's statement implies that *90 Dekika* is supportive of women's rights and their participation in the public sphere at large, including the political arena. The analysis of some of the program's episodes will reveal whether or not this is reflected on the show.

90 Dekika addressed women's parliamentary quotas in four different episodes. However, on some occasions an entire segment of the episode was devoted to discussing this topic, while on other occasions, the discussion was primarily about another topic and the speakers very briefly touched upon the women's parliamentary quota.

On the 3rd of November 2008, *90 Dekika* dedicated part of its episode to discussing the women's parliamentary quota. The speakers were Judge Samia Al Motayam and Georgette Killini, member of the People's Assembly and NCW. Both of them are also members of the NDP but they were not introduced as such. Nor was the fact that Killini is an appointed MP mentioned. Nahed Soliman, the head of the Women's Committee of the Egyptian Arab Socialist Party, i.e. an opposition party, was very briefly interviewed over the phone. The presenter of this segment was Motaz El Demerdash.

The presenter asked Killini what she thinks are the reasons behind women's low level of political participation. Killini argued that:

> women have excelled in all fields that require doing well in studies, that are based on competence or that require appointment by the political decision makers including areas like Ambassadors, Ministers, deans and university professors. The only area in which women's participation is extremely low and does not live up to Egyptian women's history or level of participation in neighboring countries is politics because it is entirely dependent on cultural values upheld by society. These have been fuelled by the educational system which advocates that it is ok for a woman to head a household - 25% of Egyptian households are headed by women - it is ok for a woman to struggle to catch the bus to take her children to school and then go to work in a middle ranking profession and provide for her children but a woman should not even consider participating in politics. The educational system has instilled in people the idea that mom cooks whiled dad goes to work, a little girl helps mom out with housework, while a little boy helps dad out in reading the paper …

Presenter: [interrupting] when dad gets back from work, mom sits in the living room and does not utter a single word.

Killini: Those [women] who run for parliament are similar to the characters of mom or the little girl and voters have been brought up to envision them in the kitchen.

Presenter: Therefore, it is time [to adopt] the idea of [a women's parliamentary] quota.

Al Motayam: The only solution to this problem is the one suggested by the NDP and the President himself: a women's parliamentary quota.

The fact that both Killini and Al Motayam are NDP members was only mentioned by the presenter when he was about to introduce and interview Soliman over the phone "Let's hear from the opposition since both of you are NDP members," he said.

Soliman said "we are pleased with the quota and we would like to thank his Excellency the President but the type of quota which was adopted focuses on quantity not quality … female members of the NDP will end up wining all of the 56 seats."

Soliman spoke for no more than three minutes, while the other two speakers spoke for a total of around 25 minutes.

While arguing for the need to adopt a women's parliamentary quota, Al Motayam argued

> this system will not benefit women per se but society as a whole because women are represented in society but not in parliament ... a female MP does not only stand up for women in parliament but for society as a whole, for human beings, for Egyptians, men, women, youth, children - both male and female - parliament addresses issues that pertain to society as a whole.

Similarly, Killini argued "adopting the quota is not being done for the sake of women, democracy nor because there are larger numbers of female MPs in other countries. We need a system which will allow Egyptian citizens to benefit from all competent women in society, given that the electoral system prevents them from joining parliament."

In this episode the two main speakers were direct members of the regime. Opposition forces received minimal representation consisting of a very brief telephone interview which lasted for a few minutes, which is nothing compared to the amount of time members of the regime spoke for. Also, the interviewee in question was a member of the

secular opposition and not the Islamic one. Therefore, the Islamic opposition was not represented. In addition, the presenter came across as rather supportive of the women's parliamentary quota. In stark contrast to the presenters of *Al Beit Beitak*, he did not make a single sexist or sarcastic comment. This provides further evidence to support the statements made by Hassan. Again, women's rights discourse was not used to frame arguments supporting the women's parliamentary quota. It is noteworthy that several references to the President were made by both those affiliated to the regime and the member of the opposition. This implies that he played an integral role in the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota.

On the 4th of November 2008, a segment of *90 Dekika* featured two female members of the NDP who delivered speeches during the NDP's annual conference. The presenter of this segment was Reham El Sahly. The interview was largely about these two women, why they decided to become politically active, why they joined the NDP, their role within the party, the speeches that they delivered at the conference and what it felt like to shake hands with the President and first lady after delivering their speeches. The presenter greatly admired them and their efforts. The women's parliamentary quota was mentioned very briefly by one of the interviewees. She said that she will run for parliament by virtue of the women's parliamentary quota "my only dream was that the President would grant us this opportunity" of adopting a women's parliamentary quota.

This episode provides further evidence to support the information provided by Hassan about *90 Dekika*'s policy on women. It was the only talk show to devote some of its air time to shed light on female members of the ruling party while it covered the NDP's annual conference. Not even *Al Beit Beitak* – a program which is supposed to promote government policy which allegedly includes seeking women's political empowerment – did so.

On the 6th of June 2009, *90 Dekika* featured three women from various different backgrounds to address a variety of issues and they briefly touched upon the women's parliamentary quota. The presenter of this segment was Motaz El Demerdash. The main speaker was the writer and journalist Sahar Al Gaara who writes an opinion column in *Al*

Masry Al Youm. The other speakers were a French teacher, Nema Mahmod Ahmed and Mona Hussein, a woman who sells bread in the street. Iman Biabers, President of ADEW (see Chapter 5 for details about ADEW) and Moushira Khatab, Minister of Family and Population, were very briefly interviewed over the phone.

Hussein did not even know what the term empowering women meant and she had not heard of the ongoing efforts to adopt a women's parliamentary quota. Baibers' asked Hussein to turn to ADEW for assistance because she happened to live in an area in which ADEW is active.

Al Gaara argued that

> female MPs are not the issue but the political environment and the way elections are administered. If a woman wants to run for parliament, how will she finance her campaign? How will she deal with the violence that is in place during elections? How will she face the Muslim Brotherhood? How will she face her family? We need women who believe in change and democracy not those who are pro-regime. The aim behind the adoption of a women's parliamentary quota should not be representing women's issues only because they [female MPs] have to address all kinds of issues. We need an environment which supports women. Why are we starting off by changing and introducing laws? We have to change some societal issues … Having quotas for peasants, laborers and women fragments the movement to the advantage of the NDP and its media arsenal so that it [the NDP] ends up controlling every constituency.

Ahmed said that she supports the women's parliamentary quota and added that she believes that women are the only ones who can represent women in parliament. She agreed with Al Gaara on the point that we need women who support change and not those who support the government. Ahmed also said:

> We have to address women's empowerment, positive discrimination is necessary and is not unfair for men because women are deprived of many of their rights due to social and practical reasons. If I consider running for parliament, my family may find that unacceptable. I support temporarily adopting a women's parliamentary quota until society finds it acceptable for women to attain decision making posts. Having only 13 female MPs is unacceptable.

Al Garaa also raised the issues of calls for women to return to the home and men taking precedence in job allocation because they provide for the family. She said that she is totally against both ideas.

Khatab argued that "women constitute 50% of society and they are not represented in parliament. We introduced a women's parliamentary quota because political parties are reluctant to nominate women and voters are reluctant to vote for them."

This episode provided some women who usually have no media access whatsoever with an opportunity to express their views on a talk show. These included women who are not members of any political party or force who are not intellectuals, academics or journalists, who are largely the kind of people interviewed on Egyptian talk shows. This episode also included the harshest criticism of the women's parliamentary quota, the regime and state policies expressed on any of the talk shows. Most of it was expressed by Al Gaara, a writer who writes an opinion column in *Al Masry Al Youm* and not a member of an opposition force. In fact, opposition forces were not represented in this episode. Yet the grounds on which she criticized the women's parliamentary quota were not very different from those used by Soliman, although they were expressed in far more detail and in a harsher manner. Also, the presenter did not make any sexist or sarcastic comments.

On the 17th of June 2009, *90 Dekika* featured two journalists to discuss various issues that had taken place in Egypt that week, one of which was adopting the women's parliamentary quota. The journalists were Jihan Al Gharabawi, a journalist in *Al Ahram* newspaper, and Mohamed Helmi, the editor in chief of Caricature magazine and a writer in the government owned *Al Akhbar* newspaper. The presenter of this segment was Motaz El Demerdash.

> **Presenter:** I will ask you [Gharabawi] to speak first because this is an issue that concerns you and believe me it also concerns me because I would like to see women in my country enjoy all of their rights, just like in developed countries.
>
> **Gharabawi:** Women do not trust or believe in other women, they resort to male doctors and lawyers and not female ones, they do not vote for women, and of course men vote for men and do not trust women. Women argue that female

candidates are not totally devoted to their careers because they are busy with their familial duties, and if a woman is totally devoted to her career they [other women] perceive her as unsuccessful, ugly and not very feminine. [i.e. she must be divorced or never married].

Helmi: Several women have previously won the parliamentary elections in a manner that I greatly admire, such as Shaniaz El Naggar … [Men do vote for women, for example] male journalists voted for the female ones who ran for the journalists' syndicate.

Gharabawi: [interrupting] Shahinaz El Naggar is a perfect example of how women give up, she resigned as soon as she got married.

Presenter: What do you think of the women's parliamentary quota?

Helmi: I may disagree with the issue of quota, women metfahina el kota [men are overworked because of women]. I do not think women can play a role in politics. They can play a role in other fields such as services, civil society, women metfahina el kota [men are overworked because of women], as if that were not enough. What do women want from parliament anyway?

Presenter: Do you support an all male parliament?

Helmi: No, I don't but I am against the women's parliamentary quota.

In this episode, the presenter explicitly stated his support for women's rights. Yet it was the only episode of *90 Dekika* to contain sexist comments, which largely revolved around the idea that women are less competent than men, as well as anti-women's discourse. Helmi's statements indicate that the state's approach to women's rights is backfiring and leading some men who believe that women should play a role in the public sphere to make sexist comments that suggest otherwise. But most of the anti-women's discourse was expressed by a woman. Given Hassan's statements about how the program's crew is fully aware of the stances of the interviewees prior to selecting them, it is ironic that this should take place in a program whose program editor clearly stated that the program supports women and there was ample evidence to support his statement in the other episodes. A possible explanation is that due to the hostility against women's rights in Egyptian society, the program's crew felt the need to give some air time to those who oppose women's rights in order to avoid alienating their views. Also, given that this

particular episode was not entirely about the women's parliamentary quota but was a recap of the main events that took place in Egypt that week, other criteria are likely to have been taken into consideration while selecting the interviewees. Another possible explanation is that this particular speaker was featured in order to abide by the journalistic principle of allowing dissenting voices to be heard.

Therefore, overall *90 Dekika* was rather supportive of women's rights and their empowerment. Its presenters did not make any sexist or sarcastic comments and were not in any way hostile to women. Despite this, it featured one speaker who was hostile to women's rights and another who was alienated by the state's approach to women's rights. Perhaps allowing such arguments to be voiced on the program was unavoidable and simply reflected the reality; not all women support women's rights and the state's approach to women's empowerment is backfiring and turning even those who do not oppose women's participation in the public sphere against such participation. But it is also possible that these speakers were featured in the program for the purposes of objectivity.

Also, *90 Dekika* provided some women who usually have no or hardly any access to the media with an opportunity to express their views on a talk show. These included a teacher and a woman who sells bread, in addition to low ranking female members of the NDP. No other talk show did anything like that. It is important to note that even though government officials did not dominate the discussions on *90 Dekika* like in *Al Beit Beitak*, they were still readily represented. Furthermore, opposition forces have hardly any access to *90 Dekika*. For out of 12 interviewees featured in 4 episodes only one was a member of an opposition force. Furthermore, she was interviewed on the phone very briefly and only spoke for around 5 minutes. Therefore, opposition forces received minimal representation. Also, she was a member of a secular opposition party and so the Islamic opposition was completely marginalized.

6.3.3 Al Ashera Masan:
This program did not devote any of its time to discussing the women's parliamentary quota. In one episode, the manner in which it was approved very quickly by parliament

was mentioned as one of the reasons behind the rumor that the President would call for parliamentary elections a year early. The reasoning was that the women's parliamentary quota had to be approved quickly in order to be implemented in the alleged early parliamentary elections.

This is the only talk show which did not devote any of its time to addressing women's political participation. A possible explanation for this is a statement made by its presenter. She once said that she thinks that Egypt is one of those countries where citizens should obtain the most basic of rights before rights of specific groups in society – such as women's rights – can be addressed.

6.3.4 48 Sa'a:

The Muslim Brotherhood was not represented in any of the talk shows included in this study while they addressed the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota. However, they were represented on *48 Sa'a* or 48 Hours, a program aired on *Al Mehwar* during weekends. Although *48 Sa'a* is not included in this study, that particular discussion will be analyzed to shed light on the views of a group whose voice was not heard in the talk shows included in this study.

On the 26th of June 2009, *48 Sa'a* featured Ibtissam Abo Rihab an NDP member and an elected member of the Shoura Council and Asmaa Abdel Ati a member of the Muslim Sisters. She was also one of their unsuccessful candidates for the Local People's Councils. Abo Rihab spoke first and for a longer period of time and she very often cut Abdel Ati short and expressed her views. Abdel Ati's voice was rather low, she was not very eloquent and struggled to express her views clearly. Overall, Abo Rihab dominated the discussion. This segment of the episode also included brief telephone interviews with Hamdi Hassan, a Muslim Brotherhood MP and Judge Mahmoud Amer, an NDP MP and head of the parliamentary human rights committee.

Abo Rihab said

> the current number of female MPs is inappropriate given the status of Egyptian women, and even that of men because Egyptian men are wonderful and they have produced wonderful women - wives, daughters and sisters. I would like to thank the President for supporting women throughout and for adopting the women's

parliamentary quota … these seats are not for a specific party, [i.e. the NDP]. The women's parliamentary quota will lead to an increase in women's political participation. This is necessary and it must be similar to women's participation in other fields such as the media, the ministry of foreign affairs, governmental institutions and the public sphere at large.

Abdel Ati said that the women's parliamentary quota is unconstitutional but since it has been approved by parliament, the Muslim Brotherhood respects it and its female members will run for parliament by virtue of it. She argued that only NDP members will be able to sustain electoral campaigns in an entire governorate and she brought up the issue of rigged elections and thus initiated a sub-topic which was largely addressed in the telephone interviews with the male members of the NDP and Muslim Brotherhood.

The views expressed by the member of the Muslim Brotherhood – the voice which was completely marginalized in all of the talk shows included in the study – were not very different from the views expressed by Soliman - a member of the secular opposition – and Al Gaara – who was not a member of any opposition force but clearly opposed the regime.

In the episode, the member of the regime did not use women's rights discourse to frame the arguments she used to support the women's parliamentary quota. She also went out of her way to thank the President for supporting women's rights in general and for the women's parliamentary quota in particular. This is an indication that the President's approval is necessary for any women's right to be addressed by the government.

6.3.5 Al Ahram:

Al Ahram's coverage of the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota largely consisted of promoting it. Much of it focused on the President's role in the process. Thus, there were several stories reporting on how the President held meetings with senior members of the regime to discuss various matters related to the necessary steps to adopt the women's parliamentary quota.

An example is a news story entitled 'Mubarak Reviews the proposed Law to Empower Women and [Ensure that they are] Represented in the People's Assembly: The Proposed [Law] Reflects the President's Concern for Women's Political and Economic Rights'. It

was about a meeting between President Mubarak, Fathi Soror Speaker of the People's Assembly, and Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif. In it they discussed a draft law to increase women's representation in parliament. The story included long quotes from Ambassador Soliman Awad, the Presidential Spokesman (El Masry 1/6/2009).

In addition, there were countless opinion columns which contained praise of the President. An example is an opinion column entitled 'Egyptian Women's Parliamentary Representation' in which the writer argued "women remained underrepresented in parliament until President Mubarak placed increasing their representation at the top of his priorities" (Abo Imara 24/3/2009). In another opinion column entitled 'Political Affairs' the writer described the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota "as a victory for Egyptian women which came about due to the will of the political leadership in fulfillment of its promise" (Shoukry 14/6/2009).

Only one of the opinion columns which addressed the President's role in the matter contained some mild criticism. It was by Amina Shafik, member of the Tagammu Party and Head of NCW's Media Committee and it was entitled 'Egyptian Women: Integration or Political Marginalization?' In it, she heavily criticized the idea that extra parliamentary seats had to be added in order to incorporate women into parliament. She added that she was surprised that as the President addressed the women's parliamentary quota in his speech to members of the People's Assembly and the Shoura Council, he said to them "don't you worry, we will not take away anything from you." She described this approach as "extremely patriarchal and discriminatory" and accused male members of the NDP of perceiving any right that women obtain as been extracted from men's rights. She also criticized how apparently the NDP's approval of the women's parliamentary quota was conditional on them retaining 'their' parliamentary seats. She also argued that the approach of both NCW and women's NGOs to women's rights revolves around integration while this kind of quota is not inline with all of this because it creates separate political spaces for men and women (Shafik 7/12/2008). But by focusing on the President it still conveys that the women's parliamentary quota would not have been adopted if it were not for him. This column also provides further evidence to support the argument made in Chapter 4 about how male politicians perceive women's rights as taking away some of their privileges and diminishing their power and giving them to women.

Also, it is noteworthy that women's rights discourse was not used in most of these opinion columns.

Some of the coverage focused on the role played by Gamal Mubarak in the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota. An example is a news story entitled 'In A Meeting of the NDP's Higher Policies Committee Al Sherif: Increasing Women's Parliamentary Representation is A Step Towards Political Reform and Fulfills the President's Promise'. It was about an NDP Policies Committee meeting in which they discussed details pertaining to the women's parliamentary quota, such as how many seats would be allocated for women. The story included an extremely long quote from Gamal Mubarak, who was referred to as the Secretary of the NDP Policies Committee, as well as a much smaller one from Fathi Soror, the Speaker of Parlimanet (Shoukry 2/6/2009).

On the very few occasions in which members of secular opposition parties were quoted in *Al Ahram*, they were overwhelmingly quoted as speaking highly of the women's parliamentary quota. This is very ironic given that members of the same parties were quoted in *Al Masry Al Youm* as criticizing the women's parliamentary quota. A possible explanation for this is that in *Al Ahram* the segments of their statements which were favorable to the women's parliamentary quota were the ones which were included in the story, while those which contained any form of criticism were completely disregarded.

An example is a news story entitled 'By Increasing Women's Representation in Parliament: Women's Dream of Being Politically Empowered Comes True.' It included long quotes from members of the regime, which were followed by quotes from members of opposition parties. The President of the Wafd Party, Mahmod Abaza who said "I totally agree with positive discrimination, parliament had to do something to increase women's parliamentary representation." The Wafd Party has not yet decided on whether or not it will nominate women in the upcoming elections, he added. Another example is Mohamed Anwar Esmat Al Sadat, one of the founders of the Reform and Development Party which is still under construction. He was quoted describing the idea of increasing women's political participation as 'good,' adding "I support it … it will provide Egyptian women with training in the field of politics" (Shoukry et. al 11/6/2009).

Yet a very small number of stories contained quotes from members of opposition parties in which they expressed some criticism of the women's parliamentary quota. An example

is a story entitled 'The People's Assembly Approves Adding an Extra 64 Seats for Women for the Next Parliamentary Elections'. It included numerous quotes from members of the regime. Towards the very end of the story, Mahmoud Abaza, head of the Wafd Parliament members, was quoted as saying "I opposed the [women's parliamentary] quota because I believe that it is unconstitutional because it is not inline with the principles of citizenship and equality … the proposed law was secretly put together in no time and opposition parties and civil society did not get to see the proposed law or comment on it." A member of the Tagammu Party was also quoted as opposing the law and calling for a public debate about it (Ali et. al 15/6/2009).

It is noteworthy that the Islamic opposition was completely marginalized, its members were never quoted in any story in *Al Ahram*.

6.3.6 Al Masry Al Youm:

Opposition forces were quoted more often in *Al Masry Al Youm* than *Al Ahram*. Also, the Islamic opposition was sometimes quoted in *Al Masry Al Youm*, as opposed to being completely disregarded by *Al Ahram*. But the secular opposition was quoted in *Al Masry Al Youm* more often than the Islamic one; there were several stories in which various members of secular opposition parties were quoted but members of the Islamic opposition were not. An example is a story entitled 'Politicians Differ Over the Amendments to the Electoral Law and Fear that the NDP will Take Over the Women's Seats'. In it, members of the following secular opposition parties were quoted: the Democratic Front Party, Tagammu and Al Ghad, while no member of the Muslim Brotherhood was quoted. An example of the views expressed by the members of these parties in that story is the following statement by Farida Al Naqqash, editor in chief of *Al Ahaly* newspaper, which is affiliated to the Tagammu Party. She said "adopting the [women's parliamentary] quota is a step forward but an incomplete one because the electoral system has not been revised" (Gharib et. al 7/6/2009). Therefore, in such stories members of secular opposition parties were more critical of the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota and government policy as a whole than they were in *Al Ahram*.

But in other stories, members of the opposition expressed much harsher criticism. An example are the statements made in a story about voting within the People's Assembly on

the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota. It was entitled 'The Women's Seats are Approved by Parliament Thanks to the [Parliamentary] Majority while the Muslim Brotherhood, the Opposition and Independent [MPs] Object to the Law'. The NDP members voted in favor of it while members of opposition parties, the Muslim Brotherhood and independent MPs all voted against it. The story included statements made by various people during the parliamentary session. This included a quote from a member of the Free Constitutional Party in which he stated "that the [women's parliamentary] quota is unconstitutional and it emanated from the American terminology of 'empowering women' which is adopted by American funded organizations such as NGOs and NCW" (Mosalam and Fouad 15/6/2009). This was one of the few stories in which the voice of the Islamic opposition was heard. A Muslim Brotherhood MP was quoted as saying that "the women's [parliamentary] quota is not in line with the principle of citizenship and he argued that the current political environment is hostile to women" (Mosalam and Fouad 15/6/2009). The story also included quotes from members of the regime, some of which were responses to points raised by members of the opposition. For example, Amal Othman, a former minister, NDP MP and NCW member stated that NCW does not receive foreign funding (Mosalam and Fouad 15/6/2009). Given that Othman is not only a member of NCW but a member of the Executive Committee which formulates views on grants and donations offered to NCW, as stated in Chapter 4, it is simply inconceivable that she could possibly be unaware that NCW receives foreign funding. The fact that she denied this shows how contentious the receipt of foreign funding is in general, but more so when it is related to women's rights.

There was some emphasis on the first lady's role in the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota, which was not addressed in any other media outlet. For example, in opinion column entitled 'A Women's Society', the writer argued

> 'positive discrimination' is a meaningless and contradictory term … Egyptian women are not in the least interested in politics and they are the reason why Egyptian men are apolitical because they constantly tell their sons as they bring them up to have nothing to do with politics. What kind of rights is it that women have not got and how come people claim that women do not play a role in the decision making process when every single government official has to be very

hypocritical when it comes to women and has to speak very highly of women and their role all the time. … having a vision is very different form adopting policies to please important local figures or as a response to pressure from powerful groups in the international arena (Khalil 21/6/2009).

Another example is an interview with Mohamed El Omda, member of the Free Constitutional Party. The story was entitled 'El Omda: 'Soror' is Going Against the Constitution and Misleading MPs and Public Opinion to Achieve the Interests of the NDP.' In the story he argued:

the NDP will benefit greatly from the manner in which the constituencies for women were divided whereby an entire governorate amounts to just one constituency, for the larger a constituency is, the easier it is for the NDP to be in control and announce the results it pleases. … I support women's political participation in principle and I believe that it could be achieved by adopting electoral lists, however, the NDP refuses to do so because the current system allows NDP candidates to run as independents and then rejoin the party after they win the parliamentary elections. … NCW and the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood and the 16,000 [women's] NGOs which are foreign funded implement a foreign agenda under the banner of empowering women. … I will sue the law on the grounds that it is unconstitutional because … women now rule the country … through NCW, the Ministry of Family and Population and they now have [these] parliamentary seats … they incur illegal benefits from these posts while inflicting a lot of harm on society (El Deramali 16/6/2009).

In both examples the first lady was not explicitly named but was referred to in a subtle and indirect manner. In the first example, the writer refers to how government officials tend to purport that they support women's rights as part and parcel of expressing praise of the first lady. Even though the writer is clearly not in the least supportive of women's rights, it can still be argued that if it were not for the state's approach to women's rights which is backfiring, he would not have expressed such hostile comments to women. But in the second example, the speaker was not against women's participation in the public sphere or their political participation, yet he ended up making several comments that were hostile to women. This is another example of how the state's approach to women's

rights is backfiring and leading those who do not oppose women's rights to express views that are critical of and even hostile to women. Also, in both cases, associations were made between women's rights and some sort of foreign interference into Egyptian affairs, which was perceived in a negative manner.

Furthermore, views expressed in other opinion columns conveyed that the state's approach to women's rights is leading to an association between women's rights and failed government policies as well as abusive government measures. For example, in an opinion column entitled 'The Real Reasons Are Kept Secret', the writer argued:

> The women's [parliamentary] quota will not solve the problem of women's low representation in parliament. I am concerned that this may end up being similar to the 50% quota for peasants and laborers and that is why I call for it to be implemented for a limited period of time only … an increase in women's representation in parliament should come as a result of [societal progression] .. and not abusive governmental measures … and without favoring one sex over the other [or] using a top-down decision (Goda 19/3/2009b).

Also, many of the views expressed in *Al Masry Al Youm* were rather similar to those expressed on *90 Dekika*. They largely revolved around how adopting a women's parliamentary quota would not truly enhance women's representation in parliament, that the female members of the NDP would end up winning all of these seats and that the main problem was the manner in which elections are administered. For example, in an opinion column entitled 'When will Egyptian Women Mature', the writer argued

> when it comes to political participation, the NDP presents an argument emanating from the idea that only women are denied their lawful rights of freedom, political participation, working and voting when in reality all Egyptians - both male and female - do not participate in politics because of the fake democratic system which is in place and because they are fully aware that the NDP will implement everything it pleases. Both men and women are victims of elections with pre-determined results, specific people staying in power their entire lives, useless political parties, arresting candidates and their supporters, rigging elections, using thugs during elections, the law going unimplemented and other depressing factors (Abbas 15/8/2009).

Similarly, in an opinion column entitled 'Women's Political Participation' – which was the only opinion column written by an Islamist – the writer argued

> it is not questionable that the main reason behind the low level of political participation among both women and men in Egypt is the political environment which includes the failure of the political party system and the lack of democracy within political parties and decision makers' support of hegemony by one party. All of this has led people to believe that participating in politics is pointless (Al Zayat 5/8/2009).

The fact that only one opinion column was written by an Islamist is further evidence to support the argument made previously that Islamist views were represented far less frequently than those of seculars *Al Masry Al Youm*.

Finally, *Al Masry Al Youm* allowed some women's activists to express their views on the women's parliamentary quota. Even though this only took place in just one story, it is significant because their views were not voiced in any other media outlet. They were quoted in a story entitled 'Leading Female Figures Praise the Government's Decision to Increase Women's Parliamentary Representation and are Concerned that Money and Violence Could Determine [the Election's Results].' It included quotes from Nehad Abu El Komsan, the President of the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) [see Chapter 5 for details about Abu El Komsan and ECWR] and Hoda Badran, President of the Arab Women's Alliance. Abu El Komsan was quoted as saying "the women's parliamentary quota should have been adopted 20 years ago" and she called for adopting electoral lists.

> The individual system is the worst type of quota because it allows for using violence during elections and buying votes. She added that the NDP only approved the [women's parliamentary] quota because it was part of the President's electoral campaign. … the form of quota which was adopted will isolate women from society (Rashwan 13/6/2009b).

Her statement indicates that the President's approval was a crucial pre-requisite for the women's parliamentary quota to be approved.

6.3.7 Seminar:

The NGO Sawaseya Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Center organized an event entitled 'A Seminar About a Quota for Women: Is it a Lawful Right or a Discriminatory Measure?' As previously stated, it did not receive any coverage whatsoever by the Egyptian media, but it was aired live on *Al Jazeera Mobasher*, which is how I obtained access to it. It is included because some of the speakers in the seminar represent opposition forces that were not represented in the talk shows. But the main reason why this section is included is in order to determine whether the views expressed away from the Egyptian media differ in any way from those expressed in the Egyptian print and broadcast media.

 The speakers in the seminar were Amina Al Naqqash, vice-President of the Tagammu Party, Karima Al Hifnawi, an activist in the Kefaya (Enough) Movement, Manal Abo El Hassan, Professor of Media in 6th of October University and Ahmed Abo Baraka, Muslim Brotherhood MP. One of the seminar's organizers said that they tried to secure an NDP member to participate in the seminar but failed.

Kefaya is movement that seeks to bring an end to Mubarak's rule of Egypt and halt efforts to pass on power to Gamal in a hereditary manner. It is an informal movement that has no legal status and is categorized by scholars as street politics. It first came to the fore in 2004 and has staged several demonstrations in key locations and venues, such as Tahrir Square and the book fair. The members of Kefaya include leftist politicians, liberal human right activists, Islamists – some of whom are members of the Muslim Brotherhood - and intellectuals who are not affiliated to any political party or force. However, it has failed to appeal to or mobilize people at the grassroots level (Albrecht 2007:66-7).

In the seminar, Al Naqqash argued that

> the NDP is the only one which will benefit from adopting the [women's parliamentary] quota because it is merely a measure to help it to continue to monopolize Egyptian politics. The idea that [the women's parliamentary] quota will be implemented temporarily in order to enable women to obtain experience and then will no longer be necessary is incorrect, because when the quota [that was adopted under President Sadat] was cancelled, women did not excel in parliament. … having a [parliamentary] quota for women will lead to calls for

quotas for other segments of society on social or religious basis, such as a quota for Christians. The 50% quota for peasants and laborers is still in place in theory only because those who represent them in parliament are former police and military officers … both men and women are denied their right to participate in politics in Egypt.

Al Hifnawi argued that

adopting a quota and empowering women is not the issue, for ever since the NDP and organizations which claim that they stand up for women's rights have emerged, Egyptian women's status has been deteriorating: violence against women and rape are on the rise, female illiteracy is rising and there are many female headed households. Adopting a [parliamentary] quota for women will not solve any of these problems. The electoral system is not free, democratic or transparent and does not allow Egyptians - men and women - to chose those who represent them in parliament. People do not believe in the electoral system. The constitution was amended to allow the President's son to succeed him. The NDP is empowering itself and its female members and not women who will benefit society, the poor or call for educating women. The NDP is trying to secure another 64 parliamentary seats and is presenting them in the form of empowering women. The entire Egyptian society is in dire need of a quota ... What is taking place are changes that will make things look better but it is a big lie."

Abo El Hassan argued that the women's parliamentary quota will be implemented in theory only in order to please 'the women's committee in the UN', i.e. the CEDAW Committee. "They are interested in quantity not quality and changing laws and implementing them in theory only and then sending an annual report to the women's committee in the UN [CEDAW] so that it gives them a round of applause."

Abo Baraka argued that the idea of a women's parliamentary quota emanates from the incorrect premise that women are incapable of contesting elections because they are weak and do not possess certain qualities, all of which is nonsense. He gave the example of the two female Muslim Brotherhood candidates, Makarem El Deyari and Jihan Al Halafawi who ran for parliament and argued that one of them actually won the elections but the regime rigged the results, while the other was given a very hard time by the regime. He

also argued that the regime is denying all Egyptian citizens the right to contest elections or vote.

> There are 20,000 court cases by people who were denied their right to contest elections. These are the main reasons behind low levels of women's representation in parliament, and indeed the representation of all Egyptians in all elected bodies. … an entire governorate constitutes one or two constituencies for women by virtue of the [women's parliamentary] quota, and the same geographic area is divided up into 16 different constituencies for men. This burdens women and does not empower them, it even contradicts with the principle of empowerment. All of this is being done to achieve an illegal end … to strengthen dictatorship.

This seminar shows that the views expressed by opposition forces away from the media revolve around more or less the same ideas as the ones expressed in media outlets. But here they have expressed them in far more detail, in a much harsher manner and using stronger terms. It also shows that the views of the various opposition forces - the leftist Tagammu, the Islamic Muslim Brotherhood and the Kefaya movement which is a coalition of people with various different ideological backgrounds – are very similar.

6.4 <u>Provincial Governor:</u>

Egypt is divided into 28 provincial governorates each of which is run by a provincial governor who is appointed by the President. In April of 2008, two additional provincial governorates were created and several new provincial governors were appointed. They did not include a single woman and it is noteworthy that no woman has ever been appointed as provincial governor. Only the privately owned media - both print and broadcast - addressed this issue, while the government owned media completely disregarded it.

6.4.1 90 Dekika:

90 Dekika is the only talk show that ran a discussion about all of this as part of its episode aired on the 20th of April 2008. The presenter of this segment was Motaz El Demerdash.

The speakers included Hoda Badran, President of the Arab Women's Alliance and Farida Al Naqqash, who was introduced as the editor in chief of *Al Ahaly* newspaper. *Al Ahaly* is affiliated to the Tagammu Party and Al Naqqash is deputy president of that party, but none of this was mentioned. The final speaker was Jihan Al Gharabawi, a journalist in *Al Ahram* newspaper.

Before looking into the details of that episode, some of the statements made by the program editor of *90 Dekika*, must be taken into consideration. Hassan said:

> We selected the speakers [of that episode] on the following grounds: Farida Al Naqqash is a well known writer and the editor in chief of Al Ahaly newspaper and so she represented a particular perspective. Hoda Badran is the President of the Arab Women's Alliance, a former head of NCW and she has been active in women's issues and women's rights for a very long time. Jihan Al Gharabawi is young and represents views that are different from the leftist views Al Naqqash represents and the slightly pro-government views that Badran represents. They were a good combination; Al Gharabawi was rather sarcastic, Al Naqqash was rather pessimistic and Badran was rather optimistic. … We addressed this topic because we would like women to be represented in all fields. We addressed it by featuring speakers who represent diverse perspectives and discussed the issue from all of the various angles. … Each speaker expressed a particular line of thought. Hoda Badran talked about why women ought to attain the post of governor from a governmental perspective, Farida Al Naqqash talked about women who were around in the past and others who are around now and are qualified for this post, while Jihan Al Gharabawi represents the dilemmas women face and why they should not attain the post of governor, in addition to some of the sarcasm she expressed. Each one of them knew exactly what they were here to do and we [the program's crew] are fully aware of the stance of each speaker and we take this into consideration while selecting them. … The most important speaker is seated in the best spot. The most important speaker in this case was Hoda Badran and so she was seated in the best spot and she spoke first. Partly because she was the eldest, followed by Farida Al Naqqash and then Jihan Al Gharabwi. If the speakers consist of two men and one woman, the woman speaks

first. Badran was the most important speaker because she used to hold a governmental post, she is involved in women's issues [more than the other speakers], since she is the President of the Arab Women's Alliance, she has conducted a lot of research in this area and can talk about successful female figures more than the other speakers.

In the discussion, Badran used three arguments to back up women's appointment as governor. The first argument was that women are qualified to attain the post of governor because many women are well educated, experienced and strong. The second argument was that women have attained this post in other Arab countries such as Sudan. She added that other Arab women are not any better than Egyptian women. The third argument was that refraining from appointing women as governors is harmful to Egyptian society on the grounds that exceptional and qualified women are not even being considered for this post. The fourth argument was that the Omda[144] of a village in Upper Egypt is a woman, which should have been a far greater challenge than being appointed as governor because a Omda presides over a rural area and represents the minister of interior. Also, at one point the presenter asked Badran the following question:

Presenter: What if the female governor is pregnant or breastfeeding or is in her husband's arms?

Badran: A male governor could also be in his wife's arms. … Any governor is usually around 50 years-old. A woman who is aspiring to become governor is likely to be one that is well educated and well read. Such women tend to have a small number of children. Therefore, by the time she is 50 - and can be appointed governor - her children will have grown-up and she will be beyond this phase.

Some of the speakers beseeched high ranking government officials to appoint women to this post. Badran said that she is disappointed that President Mubarak did not appoint a single woman among the newly appointed governors. She also said "Many women work closely with Mrs. Mubarak, she chose them carefully and they are exceptional and experienced women who have been working in civil society. Why not appoint one of

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[144] A government representative to every Egyptian village who is appointed by the Minister of Interior. His/her main role is to solve problems, disputes and quarrels that arise between the villagers. He/she also heads a group of lightly armed men who safeguard the village and coordinates with the policemen in security matters.

them as governor?" Also, Al Naqqash said "the ruling elite must realize that we are in dire need for it to take steps to empower women and to allow them to attain such posts."

Al Naqqash argued that

> the current approach to appointing women in decision making posts is a symbolic one, such as appointing two female ministers out of 40 ministers, appointing one female marriage registrar and appointing 30 female judges out of 6,000 judges, rather than opening the door for women to join the judicial establishment as juniors and make their way through the system just like men. A significant number of women must be appointed to such posts.

Al Naqqash also argued

> Egyptian society's perception of women's status is rapidly deteriorating due to two reasons. The first is the economic problems caused by the economic and social approach the government has adopted which has led to a rise in poverty and unemployment. In such an environment there is less support for women's liberation at the grassroots level. The second is that the rise in poverty has led to the emergence of 'political Islamic groups' which are hostile to women. They managed to impose these ideas onto Egyptian society and culture.

She was referring to the Muslim Brotherhood but she did not name them. Badran and Gharabawi agreed with her on this point.

There were several references to the idea that having female governors would reflect positively on Egypt's image in the international arena. In his introduction to the segment the presenter said "having women in decision making positions would make us look really good abroad." He also said that appointing female governors will market a good image of Egypt abroad. Gharabawi also argued that having female governors would reflect a much better image of Egypt in the international arena.

In addition, Gharabawi argued

> many laywomen mistrust women. For example, a woman told me that her female gynecologist did a very good job through out her pregnancy, but she let her down when she went into labour at 3 o'clock in the morning. That is why women are skeptical about having a female governor because she may not be able to attend to people's needs if there is an emergency in the middle of the night.

Thus, Gharabawi initiated a sub-topic which the other two speakers addressed and argued against. Badran said that several women are in decision-making positions in various governorates and villages and are trusted by women. She gave the example of a female deputy president of a specific local council and described how women resort to her to solve their problems at any time and she goes to all of the villages she is responsible for and attends to their needs. Meanwhile, Al Naqqash said that female doctors and nurses spend the whole night working in hospitals and so a female governor attending to people's needs in the middle of the night is not a problem. She also said that women's mistrust of women is fueled by many long years of socializing women into believing that they are incapable of doing much which does away with their self-esteem and leads them to mistrust other women.

Gharabawi also initiated another sub-topic. She said that there is a lot of talk about "women, women's rights, women's role and women's representation" but, she then said in a sarcastic tone: "I use to interview feminists who would say this society is classist, patriarchal and rotten." She then laughed. This was followed by the presenter insisting on writing down all of these terms so that she had to repeat them over and over again to enable him to do so, while Badran interrupted her and asked her who that particular feminist. All of this took place with several intervals of laughter and this lasted for quite some time.

In this episode, two of the speakers were affiliated to the regime. The one which was closest to the regime spoke first and for the longest period of time. Yet a member of an opposition force was given far more time to express her views than on any other occasion on *90 Dekika*. But she was a member of a tame and co-opted opposition party. Therefore, the voices of the strong secular as well as the Islamic opposition were marginalized. This is further evidence to support the argument made previously about how members of the regime are readily represented but do not dominate the discussion on *90 Dekika*. In addition, there was a lot of emphasis on the President and first lady in a manner that indicated that they have the upper hand in deciding whether or not women are appointed as provincial governors.

This episode included sexist comments, anti-women's discourse and hostility towards women's rights more than any other episode of *90 Dekika* which addressed women's political participation, largely thanks to Gharabawi – the same woman who expressed anti-women discourse the fourth time *90 Dekika* addressed the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota. Again, the sexist comments largely revolved around the idea that women are not very competent due to their sex. Repeatedly featuring her as an interviewee to address topics pertaining to women cannot be mistaken as a coincidence and could be taken to mean that despite supporting women's rights, the program's crew feels the need to allow for such discourse to be expressed on *90 Dekika*. Again a possible explanation is to avoid alienating viewers who are likely to include people who are hostile to women's rights and/or people who have turned against them due to the state's approach to women's rights. But an alternative explanation is that she was featured for the purposes of objectivity.

6.4.2 Al Masry Al Youm:

Al Masry Al Youm covered the lack of female governors using one story entitled 'Leading Female Figures: The Newly Appointed Provincial Governors did not Include Women because They [the provincial governors] were Appointed to Crack Down on People After the Government's Failure.' The story's lead read as follows: "not a single woman was appointed as female provincial governor despite the promises by [government] officials and the decisions pertaining to women's political empowerment," the latest of which were expressed during the 8th NCW conference. This was followed by a long quote from Farakhonda Hassan in which she said "I am extremely upset that the newly appointed provincial governors do not include a single woman, this the only political post that women have not attained despite attaining posts like ministers, ambassadors and MPs." All of the other quotes in the story were much shorter. The first of these was from Nehad Abu El Komsan, President of ECWR [see Chapter 5 for details about Abu El Komsan and ECWR] in which she argued "the newly appointed provincial governors were selected primarily on the basis of their ability to crack down on people because of the direct impact of the failure of government policies on people. Women have no place in such an environment." This was followed by a quote from Amira Abdel Fatah from

Friedrich Naumann Foundation[145], who argued "people perceive provincial governors as equivalent to head of state and therefore, women will never attain this post as long as they have not attained the post of head of state." The next quote was from Hoda Badran in which she said "the governor of Khartoum is a woman but in Egypt people are selected to hold decision making posts using criteria such as gender and patriarchal ideas and not based on competence or qualifications, … female deputy provincial governors have proven that women are up to it." The final quote was from Mofid Shehab and it was longer than the ones preceding it. He said "during the last 10 years women have attained many unprecedented posts. We should look at the bigger picture and not perceive women attaining the post of provincial governor as an outstanding achievement but what matters is that the entire society works towards women's empowerment so that competence becomes the criteria for choosing between people" (Rashwan 20/4/2008b).

The criticism expressed in *Al Masry Al Youm* was harsher than that expressed on *90 Dekika*. The interviewees also included people who were slightly more distant from the regime; Nehad Abu El Komsan heads a semi-coopted women's NGO, as argued in Chapter 5, as opposed to Hoda Badran who heads a semi-official one. They also included a representative of a Western organization, a group which was never represented in any other media outlet.

6.5 <u>Conclusion:</u>

It is clear from the evidence in this chapter that the privately owned media in Egypt is fully controlled by the government through a combination of co-optation and coercion. For all of the privately owned media outlets are owned by businessmen affiliated to the regime and state security directly interferes in their work and approves the topics that they address and how they address them. Therefore, Albrecht's (2007) notion of liberalized authoritarianism is not only useful in explaining the political scene in Egypt but it is relevant to the media environment as well. For these privately owned media outlets give the impression that media that is free from government control is to be found in Egypt. Also, because they contain more criticism of the government than the

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[145] A German organization founded by the first President of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1958. It promotes liberalism and individual freedom. It has been represented in Egypt since the 1970s and its projects include training journalists.

government owned media, it looks as if these outlets are a manifestation of an unprecedented level of freedom of expression in the Egyptian media. But in reality, they are merely yet another manifestation of what Bianchi (1989: 8, 20, 23-4) has described as fake pluralistic entities. Any criticism expressed in them has been approved by the government in order to maintain this fake pluralistic media system.

The evidence gathered here shows that one must delve in deeper and examine the matter far more closely to obtain a thorough understanding of the media scene in Egypt. All opposition forces have more access to the privately owned media than they do to the government owned media. However, this access is extremely limited and should not in any way be exaggerated. For example, out of the eleven speakers who addressed subjects related to women and politics on *90 Dekika*, three were representatives of the regime, three worked for government owned institutions or semi-official organizations and only two were members of opposition political parties. At the same time, opposition forces are allowed far more access to the privately owned print media than the privately owned broadcast media. It follows that criticism of the government is expressed more frequently in the privately owned print media than the privately owned broadcast media, and the criticism expressed in the former is harsher than that expressed in the latter. However, it is still rather mild compared to the criticism that is expressed in non-media outlets, as shown during the course of this chapter.

Furthermore, the secular opposition has more access to the privately owned media than is the case for the Islamic opposition. For example, members of various secular opposition parties were among the interviewees in two episodes of *90 Dekika* which addressed women and politics, while not a single member of the Muslim Brotherhood was ever featured on *90 Dekika*. But even within the secular opposition there is a discrepancy in media access. The weaker and more co-opted secular opposition parties have more access to the privately owned media as a whole, and more access to the privately owned broadcast media in particular than the stronger and less co-opted secular opposition parties. For example, the only member of an opposition party who was one of the main speakers in an episode of *90 Dekika* which addressed women and politics was a member of the co-opted opposition party Tagammu, while in *Al Masry Al Youm* the voices of stronger and less co-opted opposition parties such as Al Ghad are occasionally to be

found. This discrepancy in the privately owned media scene seems to bear out Lust-Okar's (2007) theory of a divided level of contestation because there is a differential in the level of criticism that is permissible in different types of media outlets. Opposition forces are allowed different levels of access to the different types of privately owned media as a whole and some opposition forces are allowed more access to the privately owned media than others. State security is largely - although not solely - in control of all of this.

This chapter builds on many of the findings arrived at in Chapter 4 and fills many of the gaps in it. Chapter 4 revealed the minimal role played by female members of political parties and the difficulties that they face within those parties. But it did not address whether or not these women have access to the media. The evidence in this chapter shows that the privately owned media gave female members of all political forces - the ruling party and the secular opposition parties and even female members of the Muslim Brotherhood - an opportunity to express their views in the media. The government owned media largely interviews leading members of the ruling party and presidents of opposition parties, all of whom are men even when the issue at stake is one to do with women. On the other hand, the privately owned media interviewed female members of the various political parties while addressing topics pertaining to women and politics, in addition to interviewing leading male members of the various parties.

The evidence in this chapter reinforces the finding in Chapter 4 that the government only addresses women's rights when the President and/or first lady approve of such a move and are more often than not are directly involved in the matter. For adopting the women's parliamentary quota was part of the President's electoral program and he was the one who announced in person that it would be adopted. This personalization of the President's power, which was identified by Kassem (2004), was reflected in the media on various fronts. Several members of the ruling party while being interviewed by the media justified the need to adopt the women's parliamentary quota on the grounds that it was part of the President's electoral program. Even some members of opposition political parties ended up thanking the President for the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota while being interviewed by the privately owned media. In addition, the government owned print media's treatment of the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota

largely consisted of glorifying the President, dwelling on how he has always supported women's rights and it included statements about the President making Egyptian women's dream of being politically empowered come true.

Close analysis of the media treatment of initiatives affecting women's political empowerment helps to clarify the argument made in Chapter 4 that NCW is a rather weak institution while the NDP is a rather powerful one. It was the NDP's vision of how to go about implementing the women's parliamentary quota that was implemented and not that of NCW, so that the NDP's interests were safeguarded. This adds an additional element to Abrahams' (1988: 77, 79, 81) analysis of how the divided institutions that constitute the state come together to come up with a unified stance to address a specific pressing issue. This chapter has pinpointed that when such a need arises the more powerful institution in that particular situation ensures that the final decision which is reached does not infringe upon its interests and privileges, while other weaker institutions do not have much of a say in the matter. This dichotomy is reflected in the print media through several stories about the meetings held and decisions reached by the NDP Policies' Committee, while there are not that many stories about NCW.

Another important finding is that the President's power is not unlimited. For he found it necessary to deviate from his prepared speech and reassure the NDP members by saying "don't you worry, we will not take anything away from you," while announcing the adoption of a women's parliamentary quota. Therefore, it seems that Kassem (2004) has underestimated the power of the NDP and exaggerated the power of the President. A very small number of commentators criticized Presidnet Mubarak's statement as part and parcel of criticizing the idea that the women's parliamentary quota was implemented by adding extra seats to parliament. These commentators then went on to criticize how any rights granted to women are perceived as rights that are taken away from men.

Additional evidence was provided in this chapter to support the argument made in Chapter 4 that Gamal is involved in formal politics. He clearly played a crucial role in the decision to adopt the women's parliamentary quota because the idea of implementing it using extra parliamentary seats emanated from the NDP Policies Committee which he heads. Media treatment of his involvement largely consisted of news stories in the print media about meetings held by the NDP Secretariat to decide on the women's

parliamentary quota. Some of these stories, especially those in the government owned newspaper, included quotes from Gamal.

The evidence in this chapter shows that the Egyptian government's approach to women's rights is one of making cosmetic changes that make things look better and in theory grant women rights but in practice women do not truly benefit from any of this. For example, although the number of female MPs will indeed increase by virtue of the women's parliamentary quota, given the way elections are administered in Egypt, they will overwhelmingly be occupied by female members of the NDP. This was reflected in the privately owned media by numerous columnists and several members of opposition political parties who argued that female members of the NDP would end up winning all of the women's seats created by virtue of the women's parliamentary quota. Some of them also added that the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota would not truly lead to a better representation for women in parliament.

The chapter builds on Hatem's (1992) argument that when an authoritarian regime addresses women's rights, this leads to an association between women's rights and authoritarianism by showing that it also leads to an association between women's rights and many of the authoritarian regime's policies which have failed miserably. Furthermore, it is fueling the idea that women's rights are being imposed on society using abusive measures. For example, several columnists in *Al Masry Al Youm* drew comparisons between the women's parliamentary quota and the failed parliamentary quotas for peasants and laborers. Many others argued that women's parliamentary representation should increase as a result of a natural progression in women's status and role in society and should not be imposed from above using abusive measures.

More importantly, the cosmetic changes approach is backfiring against women within Egyptian society by fueling negative sentiments towards and turning people against women's rights and women per se. This is reflected in the privately owned print and broadcast media and even in the government owned broadcast media through comments such as women *metafhina el kota*, how the women who will join parliament by virtue of the women's parliamentary quota will not have time to have families and so will be childless and therefore will contribute to solving Egypt's overpopulation problem and how quotas for men will be necessary in the near future to protect men from women.

Thus, not only does the state's approach leave the societal structures that disadvantage women unchanged, as argued by Murphy (2003), it is strengthening the structures that disadvantage women by fueling support for the idea that women's activity should be confined to the private sphere.

This chapter also provides additional evidence to support the argument made in Chapter 5 that those who support women's rights avoid framing their arguments in women's rights discourse or gender equality discourse. Again paternalistic discourse was used, such as the argument that women should be represented in parliament while discussions that lead to laws pertaining to the family take place. This is problematic because it reinforces the idea that women's realm is the private sphere. It also builds on Tucker's (1993: xiii) argument of the blurring between the distinction between the private and public spheres and their implications for women. In this case, the implication is that that women should play minimal roles in the public sphere, namely ones which are an extension to or similar to their roles in the private sphere. In addition, de-gendered discourse was used in a similar manner to the one highlighted in Chapter 5. For example, some speakers argued that adopting the women's parliamentary quota was necessary because it is a system which will enable society as a whole to benefit from competent and qualified citizens by enabling them to join parliament. Using such discourse is problematic because, drawing on Sakr's (2004a: 1) argument that the media reflects and reinforces societal perceptions of women, if women's rights are justified using de-gendered discourse, this reflects and reinforces the societal view that the notion of women's rights is unacceptable. Yet in this chapter another type of discourse was used, other than the ones used in Chapter 5, namely pan-Arabism. For example, some people argued that other Arab countries have adopted women's parliamentary quotas. This particular discourse must be interpreted in light of post-colonialism and the association between women's rights and the efforts of the colonizers to undermine Egyptian culture, noted in Chapter 2. by referring to other Arab countries the speakers were attempting to indirectly negate the idea that the women's parliamentary quota is an alien measure which has emanated from the neocolonizers.

Chapter 7

FEMALE RECEPTION OF POLITICAL DRAMA

Chapters 4 and 5 have examined whether or not various NGOs and political parties are interested in women's political empowerment, and if so how they seek to achieve it, while Chapter 6 examined media treatment of these various institutions and their activities. However, these three chapters did not investigate the views of non-activists about women's political empowerment. This chapter seeks to fill this gap. It also adds a new dimension to this study by focusing on drama serials, whereas the previous chapters focused on other types of media content, namely newspapers and talk shows. This chapter provides the results of discussion groups consisting of a total of 88 middle class Egyptian women from various different age groups and occupational backgrounds. As stated in Chapter 3, most of the participants were recruited by walking up to groups of women sitting in a club, introducing myself and my research and asking them whether they were willing to participate in my study. I then asked those who agreed to participate in the study to describe a female character that they would like to see featured in a drama serial. After that I showed them a clip from a drama serial in which a female character was active in formal politics, after which I inquired about their views regarding women's participation in formal politics.

This chapter will investigate whether or not Egyptian middle class women perceive the roles that they play in the private sphere, especially childrearing, in a politicized manner and whether or not they use criteria emanating from the private sphere to support the views that they express about women's role in the public sphere. Thus, it will build on Singerman's (2004) argument that Islamists and modernists perceive women's familial roles in a politicized manner and Tucker's (1993) argument that the distinction between the public and private spheres is blurred in Egypt. While investigating Egyptian middle class women's reception of drama serials, the chapter will extend Abu-Lughod's (2005) findings that drama serials do not have an immense impact on unprivileged Egyptian women by examining whether or not that is the case among middle-class women. This will also reveal whether or not Egyptian middle class women's reception of drama serials can be explained using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model (Ruddock 2001). This will in-turn help identify whether or not Carey's (1992) construct of the masses can be used to explain the manner in

which those who control the drama serials' industry perceive its impact on viewers. In addition, the chapter looks into middle class women's reception of the constant portrayal of women in stereotypical roles in drama serials, which will test Lotz' (2006) observation that the constant portrayal of women in stereotypical roles does not lead viewers to perceive these roles as the only ones fit for women in the Egyptian context. Finally, the chapter is likely to reveal another function of discussions of drama serials among female viewers that has not been revealed by Hobson (1989). It may also reveal that some of the functions revealed by and Van Zoonen (2004) are not applicable in the Egyptian context.

The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first one provides some background information. It includes a description of the clip used in the study and an overview of the characteristics of the sample. The second section is about the female characters the participants came up with and would like to see featured in drama serials. This section is sub-divided into numerous sub-sections for clarity purposes. The third main section provides an overview of a variety of comments and views expressed by the participants about some very important topics initiated by them. These include criticizing the political environment in Egypt, feminist discourse, state feminism and female judges among others. The last section is about the participants views on women's participation in formal politics in the form of voting, running for parliament and attaining the post of head of state, which is President in the case of Egypt.

7.1 Background Information:

7.1.1 The Clip:

The clip used in this study is from a drama serial which directly addresses women's participation in formal politics. It was a small part of a drama serial called *Mobara Zawgeya* (Marital Match) in which a married woman in her mid forties is featured as an active member of a political party. In the first scene her husband drives her to a university in an Egyptian provincial governorate in which she will deliver a lecture. Their discussion conveys that she has given similar lectures in various other places because she is trying to get women to realize how important it is for them to participate in formal politics. She urges women to vote during the upcoming parliamentary elections for people who will truly represent them in parliament. She

also asks her husband to attend the lecture but he says that he has a pre-scheduled meeting with the secretary general of the political party they are both members of.

In the second scene, the same woman walks out of a lecture hall accompanied by several women, mostly the organizers of the event. One of them expresses her admiration of the lecture and encourages her to run for parliament. On her way out of the university, she runs into a woman who tells her that rumor has it that the party has nominated her for the upcoming parliamentary elections. She replies by saying that high-ranking members of the party have promised her that this will be the case, but she has not been officially notified of anything to that effect just yet.

In the very last scene, her husband is sitting in the living room at their home and she walks in holding a tray containing a plate full of sandwiches and two glasses of juice. She puts the tray down on a table in front of him, sits next to him, gives him a sandwich and takes one. She then tells him that she was under the impression that the secretary general of the party would talk to her about the elections. He replies by saying that the whole issue is rather complicated and that they have to take their time and choose their candidate very carefully, adding that the party will finance the electoral campaign of the candidate they nominate. He goes on to say that they must take into consideration the candidates other parties will nominate in the same constituency, particularly because they are an opposition party and must not take any risks because opposition party candidates have very little chances of winning any elections. She seems unconvinced and says that she knows the people of the constituency very well, is fully aware of their problems and has served them in so many ways, more than any other member of the party. He then gives her one of the glasses of juice and asks her to calm down, for the elections are still quite sometime ahead, he adds. The scene ends with her looking at him very suspiciously.

Viewers of the entire drama serial would later learn that when her husband dropped her off to deliver the lecture and met the secretary general of the party, he was told that the party had nominated him - and not his wife - to run for parliament. However, this piece of information is not explicitly stated in the clip that I used in my study.

7.1.2 Characteristics of the Sample:

The sample consisted of 88 participants. Eleven of them were teenagers all of whom were university students. Their ages ranged between 18 and 19. Ten of them were single and one of them was engaged. Twenty-eight participants were in their twenties.

Twelve of them were single, three of them are engaged and eight were married. Their occupations included doctors, pharmacists, an academic, business professionals, housewives, a teacher, a TV presenter, an undergraduate student, a UN employee and fresh graduates. Fourteen of the participants were in their thirties. Their occupations included housewives, an accountant, a teacher, an administrator, an academic, an engineer, an employee in the Social Fund for Development and a journalist on maternity leave. One of them was single, one was widowed and the rest were married. Three of the participants were in their forties. All of them were married, two of them were housewives and one of them was an academic. Eight of the participants were in their fifties. Four of them were married, one of them was divorced and three of them were widowed. Their occupations included housewives, teachers, and some of them worked in marketing and interior design. Thirteen participants were in their sixties. Eight of them were married, three were widowed and one was divorced. Their occupations included housewives, a doctor, a teacher, accountants, a deputy minister, a general manager, a pharmacist and a sociologist. A final participant was in her seventies. She was a married retired bank manager.

7.2 <u>Characters Participants Came Up With:</u>

This section outlines fictional female characters the participants came up with and would like to see featured in drama serials. These can be divided into five different categories which are female rulers, influential women, strong women, mothers and women who strike a balance between their careers and familial obligations. Also, a very large number of participants heavily criticized what they described as the unrealistic female characters portrayed in drama serials. Therefore, there is also a section addressing this. In addition, a large number of participants commented on the female characters in two particular drama serials. Their views are presented in the last sub-section.

7.2.1 Female Rulers:

A total of five participants came up with characters of female rulers; i.e. President or Queen. One group consisting of three women came up with a fictional character of a female President. The other two were ladies who were interviewed on a one-on-one basis. Both of them said that they would like to see women who actually ruled Egypt at one point in time, so the drama serials they came up with would be historical ones.

One of them chose Shagaret El Dor while the other participant chose both Nefertiti and Shagaret El Dor. Nefertiti (1330 BC – 1370 BC) was the wife of Akhenaten, one of the rulers of Egypt during the Pharonic era. Some historians believe that she ruled Egypt for a brief period of time after her husband passed away and before Tutankhamon came to power. Meanwhile, Shagaret El Dor ruled Egypt for 80 days in 1250 after her husband, El Sultan El Saleh Nagm El Din Ayoubi, passed away. She then remarried El Moez Aybak and he became the ruler of Egypt. Due to the significance and importance of choosing these characters, I will describe their input in detail.

The first group consisted of three single women in their mid twenties who worked in media, banking and the UN. They came up with a fictional character of a female Egyptian President. Two of the participants saw her married to a businessman, while one argued that she should be married to a diplomat. The same participant argued that her husband should be very open minded and supportive, while the other two participants argued that although this is the way it should be, it is simply unrealistic and unlikely to be the case. Thus, they argued that her husband would not be supportive and would feel uncomfortable about her being President because she would be superior to him. All three participants agreed that she would have children, both male and female, though they disagreed over the number of children and their occupations. It is noteworthy that when asked if any of her children would be active in politics, only one of the participants said that her daughter could be active in community service.

They all proposed that only her mother would still be alive and that she would be supportive and proud of her daughter, while her mother-in-law would be dead because had she been around she would have impeded her and would have turned her son against his wife (the female President). Yet her father-in law would be alive and supportive. Two of them argued that she would be an only child while one participant argued that she would have a successful brother who would also be supportive. Prior to becoming President two participants argued that she would have started off as a lawyer and would have latter become a minister, while one argued that she would be the founder of a new political party. Also, they agreed that the drama serial would revolve around her struggle to become President.

The participant who chose the character of Shagaret El Dor said "I want to know more about this strong woman who was the first female ruler of Egypt, even though

she was evil and engaged in a lot of mischievous activity, such as murdering her husband. I would like the drama serial to [inform me] about her life in great detail."

Meanwhile, the participant who chose the characters of both Nefertiti and Shagaret El Dor said she would like to watch serials about them because they played a significant role in Egypt's history. "One of them, Shagaret El Dor, was featured very briefly in a movie, but I would like to see drama serials about their everyday lives, such as their relationships with their husbands and how they went about solving the problems that they faced."

7.2.2 Influential Women:

Eleven participants came up with female characters that would play influential roles in society or their extended families. They included participants from all age groups except teenagers. Most of them came up with characters that would play influential roles in society while a few of them were unable to come up with characters of their own but they expressed their admiration for female characters in drama serials who played influential roles in their extended families.

For example, a group consisting of a 25 year-old married doctor, a 70 year-old married retired bank manager and a 45 year-old married housewife came up with the character of a moderate female Islamic preacher. She would be in her mid forties and would be popular and influential among both men and women of all age groups, but more so among women. The drama serial would revolve around the dilemmas and problems she faces and how she goes about solving them in a manner that indirectly informs viewers about Islam. She would be married and a mother of an unspecified number of children. The other characters featured in the drama serial would include people who like her and others who dislike her. The later group would include men, women, seculars as well as religious extremists.

Another example is a 38 year-old married music teacher who came up with a female character who would be the President of the body responsible for administering the affairs of the building she lives in or is responsible for its finances. Alternatively, she could head one of the committees at the club, such as the cultural or religious affairs committee. She would be sociable and popular. She would also be a mother, maintain a good relationship with her mother-in-law and dress modestly and elegantly. However, she added that because you can not please everybody, some of her co-workers - male and female - may dislike her and give her a hard time at work.

A final example is a 36 year-old married accountant who came up with the character of a painter. The drama serial's plot would revolve around how she started off, her family's support and she would eventually make it and become famous and popular. But at the same time some members of society would dislike her and perceive her occupation as trivial. So she would seek to change that prevalent societal perception.

7.2.3 Strong Women:

Two participants in their fifties who were both married, one of whom was as an interior designer and the other was a housewife, argued that they would like to see strong women who are independent and not oppressed by their husbands. For example, one of them said "I like to watch [drama serials about] strong women who are in control of their own lives, who are not broken if they face a crisis. I do not like watching [drama serials] about weak women who are always overruled by men, I like to watch [ones about] women who are up to it, who can have it their way … they [those who produce drama serials] should produce [characters of] working women who are not dependent on men."

7.2.4 Women Who Strike a Balance:

Thirteen participants said that they would like to see women who are capable of striking a balance between their careers and their familial duties. These participants were teenagers and participants in their twenties, thirties and forties. Their occupations included an academic, housewives, students and business professionals.

For example, four business professionals between the ages of 23 and 24 came up with the character of a woman in her early twenties who has a career, is starting off in a serious relationship, has a social life and plays sports. Another example is a 36 year-old married housewife and former lawyer who said that she would like to see a successful working woman who also successfully fulfills her household duties. She added that she believes that many Egyptian women do just that. She also argued that her husband should be portrayed as very demanding because that is the way things are. But a 29 year-old married former accountant who was a member of the same interview group disagreed saying that she would prefer that the drama serial portray a role model of a husband who is co-operative, feels for his wife, is understanding when it comes to her responsibilities and valorizes her success at work and perceives it as beneficial to their family. A 26 year-old single doctor said that she would like to see

"a successful female doctor who is … also a good mother. In drama serials successful women are ones who never married [and if they are married,] their children always do drugs."

7.2.5 Mothers:

Five participants chose the character of a mother. They included women in their thirties, fifties and sixties. Their occupations included housewives, a retired general manager and a journalist. For example, one group came up with the character of a mother who plays an integral and influential role in her children's lives, who guides them and raises them in a manner that ensures that they turn out to be strong. For example, a 39 year-old widowed housewife said that she would like to watch a drama serial about "a mother who has an impact on her children's lives and brings them up properly." Another group came up with the role of a mother and stressed that they would like her husband to be directly involved in parenting and criticized how drama serials overwhelmingly portray fathers as playing minimal roles in their children's lives. For example, a 59 year-old housewife said: "men are always portrayed as having nothing to do with their children, but teenagers need their fathers' to provide them with advice."

7.2.6 Realistic Characters:

Fourteen people criticized drama serials for portraying what they deemed as unrealistic female characters. These included participants from every single age group, and a variety of occupations. Many of them heavily criticized the constant portrayal of young women as immoral. For example, a 22 year-old fresh graduate said "I am dying to seeing a normal young woman, not an immoral one that has nothing to do with her parents. [I would like to see] a woman from a well-to-do family who obeys her parents and goes out and has a good time." A much smaller number of participants' criticized how religious women are hardly ever featured and on the few occasions in which they are featured they are always portrayed as brainwashed extremists, anti-social, close-minded or even abnormal. Some of the older participants in their fifties and sixties criticized how female villagers, beggars and servants are featured wearing full make-up, with polished nails and colored hair when in reality

such women are impoverished. Also, a 54 year-old married housewife also criticized the extensive portrayal of belly dancers.

7.2.7 Recurrent Serials:

Two drama serials were mentioned quite frequently by several participants. The serials are *Kadeyet Rai Am* (An Issue that Gripped the Public) and *Hamada Ezo*, which is the name of the leading male character in the serial. Thirteen participants mentioned *Kadeyet Rai Am* and ten participants mentioned *Hamada Ezo*. In both cases, the participants belonged to all age groups except teenagers and they were engaged in a variety of occupations. I will provide a brief overview of the plots of the two drama serials prior to analyzing the participants' comments about them.

Kadayet Rai Am was about three female characters of different ages, marital statuses and socio-economic backgrounds who came from different geographical areas in Egypt with rather different traditions. Two of them were doctors and one of them was a nurse and they all worked together at the same hospital in Cairo. One day, on their way home from work late at night all three of them get raped by three young men. The leading character - played by the superstar Yousra - was a doctor in her mid forties who was married, a mother of two and came from a privileged socio-economic background. She decided to defy social norms and press charges. The rest of the drama serial portrayed the obstacles she faced in trying to get the three rapists to be put on trial and the societal reaction to her decision. This was the character that drew the most attention and was most frequently mentioned by those who referred to this particular serial. The serial ends with the three rapists being sentenced to death.

The serial *Hamada Ezo* was about a 50 year-old man who came from an extremely wealthy family and was extremely spoiled by his mother, Mama Nuna. He was extremely careless, irresponsible, could not be bothered to work and spent his time sleeping, eating and relaxing. He had also been married several times and had a large number of children from his ex-wives and had nothing to do with any of his children. Mama Nuna was portrayed as a very caring and loving mother. Another leading female character in the drama serial was his cousin, Dr. Nawal, who worked as a nuclear scientist and had lived in Germany for a long time. She was a widow and a mother of three boys. She was very disciplined, organized and a hard worker. She also brought her children up in a manner that conformed with her character.

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Most of the participants who mentioned the serial *Kadeyet Rai Am* greatly admired the leading character's insistence on pressing charges and fighting till the end in order to get the rapists to pay for their crime. For example, a 23 year-old single accountant said "The role played by Yousra was good because [she insisted on bringing the rapists to justice] … even though her children were embarrassed and her husband let her down. It was a good drama serial." A small number of participants used the drama serial to criticize the societal perception of rape. These included a group consisting of three married women in their 60s all of whom were retired teachers. One of them said "I would like men to stop perceiving women who have been raped in a negative manner because they are victims and should not spend their entire lives paying for a crime that they never committed." On the other hand, one participant had a rather negative view of the drama serial as a whole. A 65 year-old married retired principle said:

> Several women are raped every single day and rapists are not sentenced to death. … The role played by Yousra was very powerful, but insulted the viewers' intelligence. Yousra - a raped woman - sits with the chief detective and the investigator and discusses the matter with them and they take her views into consideration?! All of this is nonsense. This insults the viewers intelligence. A few days ago a woman was raped. Was the rapist sentenced to death? No.

Also, two participants, a 50 year-old widow and interior designer as well as a 60 year-old married assistant minister, were rather disturbed by the drama serial and the issue that it tackled. This actually led one of them to dislike the drama serial while the other participant said that it was a good drama serial nevertheless.

As for the other serial, *Hamada Ezo*, both the characters of Mama Nuna and Dr. Nawal were frequently commented upon. Most participants had mixed feelings about Mama Nuna's character. For example, a 29 year-old engaged assistant professor said

> She was loved and respected by everyone, she was always there for her son, she played a pivotal role in the drama serial. But what I disliked about her was that all of the viewers did not realize that she was the reason why her son [turned out the way he did]. She spoiled him. She use to treat him - a 60 year-old man - like a baby. .. She could have been a bit more tough on him. I liked how she was a strong [woman], all of the extended family members turned to her when they faced any problems."

Another participant, a 50 year-old married engineer who works as a teacher said that Mama Nuna's character "was entertaining but unrealistic." One participant really liked her character, describing her as "loving and caring", while another participant disliked her. She was a 41 year-old housewife who said that Mama Nuna "spoiled her son so that he turned out to be irresponsible and caused his children several problems and even psychological disturbances." Participants were less divided on Dr. Nawal's character. Many of the participants belonging to various age groups, most of whom were married, working women greatly admired her and described her as a strong, ambitious, disciplined and organized woman who brought her children up in a progressive manner. However, a small number participants with similar characteristics had mixed feelings about her. They described her as somebody with good qualities such as being strong, ambitious, organized and expressed admiration for the manner in which she brought her children up but they also said that she had a bad temper, was stiff and too hard on her children. A small number of participants disliked her altogether.

7.3 <u>Topics Initiated by the Participants:</u>

7.3.1 Criticism of the Political Environment in Egypt:

Around 30% of the participants heavily criticized the political environment in Egypt. These included people from all age groups. Their occupations included housewives, students, doctors, bankers, engineers, pharmacists, accountants, deputy ministers and retired school principals.

Many of the participants criticized confining the discussion to female political participation because men do not participate in politics either. For example, a 19 year-old single undergraduate student said that "in the clip the actress calls for women to participate in parliamentary elections, but men do not participate [in politics] either." Many people also criticized the manner in which elections are administered in Egypt such as hiring thugs to beat up voters who are expected to vote for opposition candidates, buying votes, how elections are rigged, how election results are pre-determined by the government and they argued that these are the reasons why people do not vote. For example, a 45 year-old housewife said "election results are predetermined before the elections take place that is why people are depressed and do not bother to vote." Similarly, a 57 year-old divorced woman who works in marketing

said "the government is the one which chooses the MPs. We are depressed and that is why we do not participate."

Other participants argued that in principle, women's political participation is fine but they argued that it is inconceivable to expect Egyptian women to participate in politics when they suffer from so many problems such as illiteracy and poverty and are deprived of the most basic of human rights. For example, a 27 year-old single doctor said that "talking about women's political participation when most women do not have access to basic rights such as education and health care is ridiculous. They are talking to the wrong people about important issues at an inappropriate point in time," she argued. Similarly, a 54 year-old housewife and widow said "I support women's political participation but it is impossible to ask illiterate women to participate in politics."

Some participants criticized members of parliament arguing that they are after power and achieving personal interests and not serving their constituencies. For example, a 50 year-old married engineer who works as a teacher said "MPs are after power and do not serve people." Similarly, an 18 year-old single undergraduate student said "the MP who represents our neighborhood in parliament did not fulfill any of his promises, nor did the MP who preceded him."

In addition, some participants went as far as arguing against women's political participation due to the status quo. For example, an 18 year-old single undergraduate student argued that "the problem is that violence is used during elections. This does not suit women."

7.3.2 Feminist Discourse:

Four participants criticized the direct feminist discourse in the clip. They were teenagers and women in their twenties and thirties. They were mostly single and their occupations included journalists, pharmacists, students and a management consultant. Some of them argued that it is preferable to put these arguments forward in an indirect manner otherwise it tends to backfire. One participant in her twenties argued "such discourse is exaggerated and no longer needed because women have come a long way in achieving equality with men."

Five participants brought up the issue of state feminism. They included both young and old women. They were more or less equally divided on the matter.

Three of them criticized state feminism. They were a 25 year-old married doctor, a 24 year-old single TV reporter and a 54 year-old housewife.

For example, a 25 year-old married doctor said that:

> those calling for women's rights are not concerned about women but are men-hating idiots. I am not questioning that oppression is in place as well as other problems but they perceive it as a challenge, their approach is extremely annoying. [When asked who they refers to she said] Suzane Mubarak and the National Council for Women, they are just a bunch of divorced women. ... they live in a completely different world, women, women's rights ... and they disregard the miserable life people are leading [such as] poverty and unemployment. Why is it that girls do not go to school? Is it because their fathers want to harm them? No, it's because they can't afford it. ... They disregard all of this and [insist that] women should be appointed as judges. When men have enough to live on, women can be appointed as judges. ... We are not the ones who should be addressing these issues, we must bring an end to our problems first, other countries can address such issues ... men abandon their wives because they can't afford to feed them and then the women go out to work and drop their children out of school so that they can work too because they do not have enough to live on. Therefore, appointing women as judges [in this environment] is obviously not important. ... It's not about women only, men are oppressed as well.

Similarly, a 24 year-old single TV reporter said:

> To start with, the percentage [of women] is less than what it is supposed to be in parliament ... what's happening now in society, I'm totally against empowering women, empowering women, empowering women, we have to do this, we have to do that, it's being imposed, they are forcing women, it's not something coming from within, do you see the difference? They want us to be perceived as a free and democratic country where women are empowered ... do we need more women? Yes, more women should be in parliament ... they want to go back to the quota system, ... if people want to vote entirely for men, that's up to them, if they only trust men, that's up to them, but imposing a

few female MPs on people so that we look good, as if we are the cherry to decorate the cake, just so that when [the] American[s] or anybody else criticize us we can say, who told you we do not have female MPs?

Yet two people spoke highly of state feminism. They were a 60 year-old married deputy minister and a 70 year-old retired bank manager. For example, the 70 year-old married retired bank manager spoke highly of Suzanne Mubarak's efforts in addressing women's issues, stating that "she has secured several rights for women such as the *khula* law, the nationality law and women being appointed as judges and deputy governor of the central bank. She fought for these rights." Suzanne Mubarak's role in this regard is an example of state feminism because she is the first lady of Egypt and President of NCW [see Chapters 5 and 6 for more details on the first lady's role in addressing women's rights].

7.3.4 Calls for Women to Return to the Home:

In Egypt, the only acceptable form of relationship between men and women is marriage. That is why marriage is integral in Egyptian society. Ironically, marriage is also very expensive. A man can only consider getting married if he owns a flat which is an integral pre-requisite for any marriage. He and/or his parents must also be capable of covering around one third of the expenses of fully furnishing a flat and half of the wedding expenses as well as buying an expensive gold or diamond gift for the bride-to-be. Meanwhile, the bride-to-be's father must be capable of bearing around two-thirds of the expenses required to fully furnish a flat and to pay half of the wedding expenses. It is also important to note that Egyptians tend to attach utmost importance to wedding parties and a phenomenon that is heavily criticized is spending extravagant amounts of money on wedding parties. In recent years, Egypt has been experiencing some serious economic problems which have led to an estimated unemployment rate of 20%, lower incomes as well as inflation. This has made it increasingly difficult for people to get married and around 9 million Egyptian men and women are now well into their mid thirties with no prospects of getting married. In addition, around 17% of women of marriageable age are single. Many younger men and women are also very anxious of the same fate befalling them.
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Some notable commentators from time to time address this issue in Egyptian television and newspapers. Some of them argue that the solution to this large scale societal problem is for women to return to the home, unemployed men would then take over the employment opportunities that these women "use to occupy," they would thus have the means to get married and everybody would live happily ever after. However, they completely disregard that many Egyptian families can not survive on just one income, that a significant number of Egyptian households are headed by women and that many fathers can not afford to marry their daughters off and so these young women end up using the income that they earn to contribute to their eventual marriage expenses.

This issue was raised in two interview groups.

Three 18 year-old single undergraduate students said that they are pro women working but believe that because of the economic crises which is making it increasingly difficult for people to get married, men should be given priority when it comes to job allocation . Another said:

> Women are entitled to everything men are entitled to, but men take precedence over women under difficult circumstances because they are the ones who have to provide for their families. Nowadays, most women have jobs while men can't find jobs and sit at home doing nothing. I know a male doctor who is paid 30 L.E [per month, the equivalent of £0.30] while his sister is a banker and is paid a large sum of money. ... I want women to work but not in all fields. Many men work in accounting and engineering, if women compete with them in these two fields as well, then men will not find any jobs at all. ... I will not work upon graduating so that a man can be allocated the job opportunity I would have taken. If every woman does the same, or else the government should provide more job opportunities. ... Some men are now in their early thirties and can not afford to buy a flat or buy a bride-to-be a gift.

Another interview group was far more divided regarding this issue.

> 45 year-old housewife: Maybe we should try this.

> 25 year-old married doctor: This is unrealistic because of female headed households.

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[146] A single 30 year-old Egyptian woman called Ghada Abdel Al has a blog called ayza atgawez (Wanna be a Bride) in which she describes the difficulties of being a single woman at that age in Egypt as well as the difficulties of searching for Mr. Right. An estimated one million people visit her blog and its content has been published as a book which has become a best seller.

45 year-old housewife: Women who are unmarried or divorced can work. I was referring to women who are married to well to do men, they should stay at home so to that men can take over their places at work.

70 year-old retired bank manager: Women work in order to realize their dreams. They should not be servants.

7.3.5 Female Judges:

While addressing the question of female President, 7 participants voluntarily brought up the issue of female judges. They included participants in their twenties, thirties, forties and sixties and came from various occupational backgrounds. They tended to be the ones arguing against women attaining the post of President on the grounds that women are 'emotional'. The most common argument that they made regarding female judges was that women should not be judges because they are 'emotional'. Two participants were particularly against female judges addressing issues like divorce and child custody "because they are likely to be biased towards women." Only one of the participants who brought up the issue was in favor of having female judges. A 69 year-old widow and retired principle said "I hope that we get to see women playing reputable roles. In newspapers they always question why women should be judges. They belittle women's role and political standing, as if they are fighting against women playing any significant role in society, and not just in politics."

7.3.6 Hillary Clinton:

I happened to conduct the interviews just after Hillary Clinton lost the elections for the Democratic Party Presidential candidate in America. This seems to have drawn some people's attention because ten of the participants referred to her loss. They included teenagers, participants in their twenties, thirties and sixties who came from various occupational backgrounds. It is noteworthy that they referred to her using her first name and not her last name, which is the norm when referring to both men and women of any age in Egypt. The most common argument was something along the lines of 'even Hillary did not make it'. For example, a 25 year-old single teaching assistant said "even Hillary lost the elections in America, where men and women are said to be equal."

7.3.7 Contradictory Discourse:

Six participants seemed to contradict themselves while answering my questions. Some did so entirely of their own accord, others did so after discussing the issue with their discussion group. They included teenagers and women in their twenties, thirties and one participant in her sixties. Their occupations included students, accountants, academics and housewives.

An example is how a participant said that she is against women becoming MPs and then said "women are very caring so they should run for parliament in impoverished constituencies because they would be capable of serving people." Another example is how a 19 year-old single undergraduate student said "I am against having a female President because a woman maybe weak and irresponsible," yet a few minutes earlier she had argued "Benazir Butoo was a much better Prime Minister than several men who attained the same post." Another example is some of the statements made by the previously mentioned 25 year-old married doctor. She had argued that poverty, unemployment and ensuring that people have enough to live on are crucial issues that should be addressed and resolved before women's issues are addressed. However, she also said that the *khula* law was good and spoke highly of the change in the nationality law and the new marriage contract. Her statements were even more contradictory when I asked her whether she believed it would have been better to postpone introducing these laws until we had brought an end to poverty and unemployment. Her reply was "No, but women who faced such problems would have continued to suffer, no it's not in our interest to postpone addressing these issues."

7.4 **Women and Politics:**

7.4.1 Women's Political Participation:

In some cases, I inquired about the participants' views on women's political participation in general prior to inquiring about their opinions regarding female MPs and a female President. I did not do so with all of the participants because I sometimes felt that I need to ask a general question to introduce them to the issue before asking them specific questions about women and politics. That is why the number of respondents to this particular question does not add up to the total number of participants.

Seven participants were in favor of women's political participation. They were teenagers and women in their thirties, forties and sixties. Their occupations included students, engineers, pharmacists general managers and accountants. For example, an 18 year-old single undergraduate student said "women must express their opinions and participate in choosing the ruler of their countries. Their opinions should not be disregarded because they are the ones who raise future generations." Also, a 48 year-old married housewife said "women must participate in politics and those who are strong and successful must be role models, we should not focus on the weak ones and claim that they represent women." In addition, a 62 year-old married general manager said "women must participate in politics and have a vision, overcome any obstacles that they face and indeed several women do make it. They are strong, have an impact on others and have some interesting points of view."

However, six participants were against women's participation in politics. They included teenagers as well as participants in their thirties, forties and sixties. Their occupations included students, accountants, academics and housewives. For example, an 18 year-old single undergraduate student said "politics is not an arena for women, the Egyptian population needs a tough person to run them." Another example is a 61 year-old widowed housewife who said that women are too busy with familial obligations.

7.4.2 Female Members of Parliament:

Almost all of the participants from every single age group and various occupations were in favor of having female MPs.

The reasons they used to support their arguments included:

- that participating in politics is just like any other occupation and women should participate in it
- that female MPs are necessary because parliament should represent society which consists of both men and women
- that female MPs are necessary in order to represent women and their issues
- that as long as the woman in question is qualified and wants to make a difference then they do not see why not
- women are better and more competent than men and therefore would make better MPs

For example, a 54 year-old married housewife said "I would like to see more female MPs. We need women to represent us in parliament. How come women's voices are not represented in parliament when laws are being discussed, especially laws regarding children, child custody and teenagers." Also, a 29 year-old engaged associate professor said "as long as they want to make a difference and are not merely after power, if they are capable of grasping the problems people in their constituencies face and can serve them, then why not?" In addition, a 59 year-old housewife said "I believe that any occupation has nothing to do with sex but with competence. MPs are suppose to serve their constituency and women are giving by nature and if a woman is in charge of a particular neighborhood she will do her best. ... having female MPs is important because parliament should represent society, so women must be represented in it." Also, a 25 year-old single teaching assistant argued "women achieve more at work because they have a choice and chose to work in areas that they are passionate about, while men have to work in order to make money to provide for their families."

Only four out of the 88 participants in this study were against having female MPs. They were a teenager, a woman in her twenties, another in her thirties and another in her forties. Two of them were academics, one was a student and one was a housewife. For example a 45 year-old married associate professor said that "I dislike women's participation in politics and I believe that women who participate in politics and end up destroying their personal lives and losing their families." Another example, was a 26 year-old married teaching assistant who said:

> I dislike it when women attain high-ranking posts. I believe that a woman should work in occupations that are not demanding in order to have some pocket money to buy clothes but should not have high aspirations so that if her husband insists that she quits her job and becomes a housewife she would have no regrets. I also believe that women should not work in occupations that can have a negative impact on their families or that involve being controlling or tough because they would eventually act in the same manner in their households. I am also concerned that a woman who makes marvelous achievements in her career is likely to end up getting divorced which will lead to her being miserable no matter what.

7.4.3 Willingness to Vote for a Female Candidate:

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Almost all of the participants were willing to vote for a woman who runs for parliament, with the exception of the ones quoted above. Many of them said they are keen on voting for a woman because she would represent them and their issues better in parliament. Many others argued that in principle they do not mind voting for a woman but they would vote based on competence and not gender.

For example, an 18 year-old single undergraduate student said "I am willing to vote for a woman if she is competent and will deliver what other people will be unable to deliver, there is no difference between men and women." Another example is a 33 year-old married employee in the Social Fund who said that if a competent woman runs for parliament "we would definitely support her and vote for her because she would represent us better than men. There are so many issues that concern us. It's only men who always express themselves. It's men who make laws, we work too - just like men - and nobody talks about us." Another example is a 50 year-old married engineer who works as a teacher who said "It does not matter if it is a man or a woman, I am not biased. If I believe that a female candidate would serve people and make a difference, that would be better, I have no problem in women attaining any post. I would not vote based on sex but I would vote for the candidate I believe in."

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Also, two participants said that they believe that women's performance in their households is an appropriate criterion to use when it comes to evaluating their political competence, while one thought otherwise. A 45 year-old housewife said that "one of the criteria I would use in evaluating a female candidate in parliamentary elections is whether or not she is a good wife and mother because I want to vote for somebody who is successful on all fronts." Similarly, a 31 year-old married journalist on maternity leave said "a woman who has failed as a housewife and mother should not be appointed as a minister or a manager in any field because if she was incapable of running her own household then she could not possibly be capable of running a country." On the other hand, a 27 year-old married doctor said "a female candidate's personal life would have nothing to do with my decision, if she is competent I would vote for her even if she were divorced."

7.4.4 Representing Women's Issues:

The vast majority of the participants from all age groups said that they strongly believe that women are better at representing women's issues. They came from all age groups and their occupations included accountants, administrators, financial

investigators, students, doctors and a UN employee. Many backed up their argument by saying that women can relate to women's issues and problems much better than men. For example, a 25 year-old single banker said

> A woman has gone through all of the processes of life that another woman has gone through: the problems, double role in society, the working woman, a mother and a wife and ofcourse she understands better. Who's better to talk about a woman than a woman? Definitely. Who's better to talk about a local community than a person from that community? It's the same thing, a group representative should be from the same group.

Some even argued that men are totally incapable of understanding women's issues or could not care less about them. For example, a 36 year-old married engineer said "women relate to women's issues while men are only concerned about their careers and have nothing to do with what goes on at home and do not appreciate women's efforts in the home and their fulfillment of social obligations." One argued that women are better at representing societal problems. A 54 year-old widow and housewife said "women are better at representing women's issues and economical issues such as inflation because women are the ones who buy food and cook for their families but men are just served their meals. Women must join parliament and address societal problems."

Also, a 61 year-old widow who works as an accountant said: "Of course, women feel more for women's issues because even if they have not experienced a particular problem themselves, they have heard about it from their sisters and their friends because if a woman faces a problem she will not tell a man about it, but will talk to a female friend or relative. The problems that divorce leads to and problems related to child rearing, women are more capable of representing these issues."

Only a tiny minority of the participants argued that women are not necessarily better at representing women's issues, adding that some men are also capable of representing women's issues. They included teenagers, women in their twenties, thirties, fifties and sixties. Their occupations included housewives, students, pharmacists, researchers and engineers. Three participants argued that whether or not the person in question believes in women's cause is what leads them to represent women's issues properly and not gender. Also, a 36 year-old woman said "men can feel for women's issues because they have sisters and daughters."

In addition, three participants argued that although women can feel more for women's issues, they should not represent them in parliament because this could lead them to be biased. Another reasoning used to support this argument was that women are emotional. One of them, a 55 year-old married engineer said "Women can feel for these issues [more than men] but women are emotional and can be biased. Therefore, they should not be involved in formulating the Personal Status law", which regulates marriage, divorce and child custody.

7.4.5 Female President:

The participants were rather divided when it came to women attaining the post of President. Over 27% of the participants were in favour of it, around 20% of the participants did not mind it in principle but believed it would be rather problematic in Egypt, 4% of the participants found it difficult to make their minds up and around 50% of the participants were against it.

Over 27% of the participants were in favor of women attaining the post of President. They came from all age groups and their occupations included housewives, academics, doctors, engineers, deputy ministers, teachers, interior designers, students, pharmacists and accountants. They backed up their views using arguments such as "many women are far better than men." Others related the Presidential post to the household and based their argument on how women are capable of leading countries because they are capable of leading households.

Others argued that it has nothing to do with gender but competence. For example, a 25 year-old married doctor said that she supports having a female President as long as she is competent, while a 60 year-old married and retired teacher said "I see no difference between men and women. Many women are far more outstanding than men." Also, an 18 year-old single undergraduate student said "women are the one's in charge of the household budget and they ensure that the meager sum of money their husbands give them at the beginning of the month gets the family through till the end of the month. Since women are capable of doing so, they may be capable of running a government."

Around 20% of the participants argued that women are capable of and qualified to become President, however, they said it would be unacceptable in Egyptian society. They included women from all age groups except teenagers. Their occupations included housewives, academics, sociologists, doctors, marketing executives,

engineers and accountants. The reasons they gave were that some people might argue that 'it is prohibited by Islam,' 'a woman's husband may not allow for it, being President is difficult enough so why make it even more difficult, for a female President would face' difficulties that a male one would not face and that in Egyptian culture women are brought up in a manner that does not allow for this to take place. For example, a 27 year-old married doctor said:

> Women would make wonderful Presidents. I believe that women are better than men. But women are always told stupid stuff about how their husband and children must come first. If an Egyptian woman never marries she develops psychological problems, whereas a Western woman who never marries just goes on with her life. The problem lies in Egyptian culture and mentality which leads to Egyptian men being better than women even if women are stronger. The way women are brought up makes them incapable of becoming President. Thatcher, Hillary, it is difficult to find a woman like that in Egypt.

Similarly, a 61 year-old widowed accountant said "[Egyptian] society will find that unacceptable, but women can do it."

Four percent of the participants found it difficult to make up their minds. They were in their thirties, fifties and sixties. One was a marketing executive, another was a employee in the Social Fund and one was a deputy minister. A 33 year-old married employee in the Social Fund found it difficult to conceive of a female President "because no woman has truly excelled so that I can picture her as President," while a 57 year-old divorced woman who works in marketing said "it is a brand new idea" and so was unable to form an opinion regarding it. Also, a 60 year-old married deputy minister said "I don't know, shouldn't women make it in parliament first so we can evaluate their performance? ... during the hey days of Islam numerous women played important roles ... we would love to see a female President, I don't know."

However, around 50% of the participants were against women attaining the post of President. They came from all age groups and various occupational backgrounds. The most cited reasons were 'because women are emotional', 'women have hormonal issues' and the belief that 'it is prohibited by Islam'. Other less cited reasons were that 'it is too much for a woman to handle' and 'bringing children up is better and more important contribution to society'. For example, a 37 year-old and two 35 year-old married housewives argued that that "women have no time for this" and "women have

a temper and are subject to psychological issues so they can not be in charge of an army". One of them said that she believes that "women can be advisors and can undertake some responsibilities but can not attain the post of President". Also, an 18 year-old single undergraduate student said "why not raise [a male child who later on becomes] President? That is a more important contribution." Another 29 year-old housewife said:

> being President is extremely difficult. A President has to look after so many things, has to have a vision, international relations. It has taken place in some countries, we are not there yet, … she has to be an iron woman who greatly resembles men and has a vision and her advisors and other government members must believe in her, otherwise she will falter.

7.5 Conclusion:

The evidence in this chapter shows that many Egyptian middle-class university educated women are in favor of women playing influential roles in society. However, most of the roles they described were ones that fall under the category of informal politics, such as a moderate Islamic preacher and a President of the body responsible for administering the affairs of the building that she lives in, while very few of them chose roles that can be described as formally political. When this is analyzed along with the very harsh criticism the vast majority of participants expressed of the political environment in Egypt, the willingness of almost all of them to vote for a competent woman who runs for parliament and how almost all of them were in favor of having female MPs, it is safe to conclude that choosing characters who are active in formal politics is something that did not cross their minds due to the political environment and not because they are not interested in formal politics nor because they believe that women should not play a role in this arena. Therefore, it is also safe to conclude that a much larger number of women would have been involved in formal politics if the political environment was different.

This chapter has shown that many women perceive their familiar roles in a politicized manner. For example, when asked whether or not she believed women should attain the post of President, an 18 year-old single undergraduate student said "why not raise [a male child who later on becomes] President? That is a more important contribution." Therefore, it seems that women's familial roles are not only valorized by the groups Singerman (1994) noted, namely nationalists and Islamists, but by other

groups in society, namely middle class women who do not necessarily adhere to any political ideology. However, it could also be argued that these women came to perceive women's familial roles in such a manner due to the arguments of the Islamists and nationalists. But at the same time, most women do not believe that women's activity should be confined to the private sphere. For many women chose characters of working women, women who work in a variety of professions and/or women who have both careers and families.

Chapters 4 and 5 has provided further evidence to support Abu-Lughod's (2005) argument that those in control of the drama serials industry believe that drama serials have an immense impact on viewers. It also added to this by showing that NCW plays a direct role in drama serials' treatment of women. The findings of this chapter show that viewers are not in the least passive and drama serials do not have an immense impact on viewers. This extends Abu-Lughod's (2005) findings to that effect among unprivileged women to middle-class university educated ones. Furthermore, it has shown that viewers do not have a uniform view of any given drama serial, its plot or the various female characters that it contains. For example, many of the participants expressed very different views regarding the protagonist in the drama serial *Kadeyet Rai Am* as well as the characters Mama Nuna and Dr. Nawal which covered the whole spectrum of different types of readings outlined in Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model (Ruddock 2001). In other words, Carey's (1992) construct of the masses is useful in explaining the discrepancy between the perception of drama serials impact on viewers by those who control and have a say in the industry and their real impact.

It is clear from the evidence in this chapter that, as previously argued by Lotz (2006), the constant portrayal of women in stereotypical roles, does not reinforce in viewers' minds that these are the only roles fit for women. In fact, not only is this not the case among female audiences, but also, many of them are displeased with this phenomenon and harshly criticize it. For example, several participants criticized the constant portrayal of young women as immoral in Egyptian drama serials and many participants said that they would like to see a female character who strikes a balance between her career and familial duties, whereas Egyptian drama serials constantly portray the children of working women as ending up doing drugs.

The evidence gathered here identifies one of the ways in which the distinction between the private and public spheres is blurred in Egypt, as previously noted by Tucker (1993). One such front is that some middle class women use women's

performance in and the responsibilities that they undertake within the private sphere to judge whether or not they are fit for playing roles in formal politics, i.e. in the public sphere. Examples, include how an 18 year-old single undergraduate student used the following reasoning to support women's attainment of the post of President. "Women are the ones in charge of the household budget and they ensure that the meager sum of money their husbands give them at the beginning of the month gets the family through to till the end of the month. Since women are capable of doing so, they may be capable of running a country." Another example is how a 45 year-old housewife said that one of the criteria she would use in evaluating a female candidate running for parliamentary elections is whether or not she is a good wife and mother because she wants to vote for somebody who is successful on all fronts.

The evidence in this chapter also reveals an important function of discussions among women about drama serials that has not been covered by Hobson (1989). The participants comments on the drama serial *Kadeyet Rai Am* show that such discussions are used as a pretext to address taboos, in this particular case rape, which may otherwise have not been discussed. It also demonstrated that one of the functions of discussions among women about soap operas discovered by Van Zoonen (2004) is not applicable in the Egyptian context. She found that discussing soap operas help women not to loose track of the soap operas complicated narratives. This was not the case in Egypt, probably because the narratives of Egyptian drama serials are not in the least complicated; they tend to be about just one problem or dilemma which is addressed throughout the 30 episodes and is solved towards the end of drama serial.

This chapter also builds on Singerman's (2006) findings by identifying another politicized response to economic policies which threaten the marital institution, namely questioning women's right to engage in paid employment. The arguments range from calling for an outright return to the home on the part of women to arguing that men should take precedence in job allocation during times of economic crisis only because they are the ones who are expected to provide for the family and that women who currently have jobs should give them up so that unemployed men can take them over.

Chapter 8

INITIATIVES

Having examined the stances and/or efforts of institutions like political parties and NGOs on women's rights as well as examining media treatment of these efforts in addition to female drama serials reception of political drama, it is time to look into initiatives by a variety of individuals and organizations in the area of women, media and politics.

These include an unprecedented move by a young woman as well as examining media content that focuses on women, which is a type of media content that has not been addressed in previous chapters. While doing so, it adds another elements to the argument made in Chapters 5 and 6 about how the state's approach to women's rights is not only leaving the societal structures that disadvantage women unchanged, as argued by Murphy (2003), but is strengthening the structures that disadvantage women. This new element is examining whether or not the strengthening of these structures is being reflected in media content focused on women. The chapter also builds on Chapter 7 by providing some insight into the ideas and approaches of the screenwriter of the drama serial which was used in that chapter. In addition, the chapter examines efforts to foster co-operation between members of political parties, which in turn is likely to provide an explanation for why women's political participation is hardly ever addressed by the media. Finally, the chapter investigates the media monitoring efforts of three women's organizations, which monitor drama serials' treatment of women. Their efforts will be examined in light of Lotz's (2006) arguments about how problematic the 'role model framework' is.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first examines media monitoring initiatives by several women's organizations, namely NCW and the women's NGOs ADEW and NWF [see Chapter 5 for details about all of these organizations]. The second section examines media content initiatives in both the broadcast and print media. These include programs focusing on women which are aired on both government and privately owned satellite channels, as well as a magazine supplement focusing on women. The third section is about initiatives by citizens. These include attempts to foster co-operation between female members of various political parties, which sheds light on why women's political participation is hardly ever addressed by the media. Other initiatives by citizens which are examined are a screenwriter who frequently addresses women's rights in her

drama serials and a woman who stood up against sexual harassment and assault, and who's action received very extensive media coverage.

8.1 <u>Media Monitoring Initiatives:</u>

Several women's organizations engage in media monitoring. They are NCW, the NGOs ADEW and NWF.

8.1.1 NCW's Media Watch Unit:

NCW established a Media Watch Unit in order to investigate the extent to which the messages advocated by the media convey a realistic image of Egyptian women. It was established in co-operation with UNICEF [147] and it also co-operates with UNIFEM. The objective of the Media Watch Unit is to play a role in NCW's efforts to change Egyptian society's perceptions of women and encourage the media to focus on positive images of women. Its activities are monitoring, analyzing and evaluating all media content which addresses anything to do with women, with particular emphasis on drama serials. The results of these studies are then discussed with representatives of media institutions in seminars and roundtable discussions (NCW nd: 1).

According to reports produced by the Media Watch Unit, the Unit monitors a sample of print and broadcast media outlets, including both government and privately owned ones on a regular basis. The conclusions and recommendations of the reports are rather similar. For example, these reports tend to conclude that most Egyptian newspapers' coverage of women's issues takes the form of news stories and not stories that contain in-depth analysis of women's achievements, the problems that they encounter and the challenges that they face. Thus, the reports repeatedly recommend training journalists who cover women's issues and talking to decision-makers in newspapers in an attempt to ensure that investigative journalists and columnists address women issues (NCW nd: 2, 4, 28-29). Other monitored media content were female characters in drama serials. In this regard, the reports tend to recommend reconsidering drama serials' treatment of women

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[147] Interview with Amina Shafik, Head of NCW's Media Committee, Cairo, 17 December, 2007

and the topics pertaining to women that they address so that they convey a realistic image of Egyptian women (NCW c2007: 7).

When NCW personnel discuss the media monitoring results with journalists many of them are offended[148]. However, when they draw decision makers' attention to these results they respond positively. These decisions makers include the Minister of Information and the President of Television[149].

It is not surprising that the President of ERTU responds positively to NCW's demands because the first lady is the President of NCW. As argued in Chapter 5, she is active in formal politics when it comes to women's rights. But given the authoritarian nature of the Egyptian regime, it is likely that she is active in other arenas of formal politics. Therefore, any government official must take the requests of an organization she heads very seriously.

8.1.2 ADEW's Analysis of Print Media:

ADEW engages in media monitoring on a regular basis. The long-term aim of media monitoring is improving media treatment of women and getting journalists to stand up against discrimination against women in the media outlet that they work for (ADEW 2003: 3, 4). The motivation behind their media monitoring projects is the belief that portraying women in the media as role models promotes the idea of women's success, encourages women to succeed and convinces readers that women can excel in any field (ADEW 2004: 2). Another motivation is the belief that the media plays an important and influential role in shaping public opinion in all issues, but more so in women's issues. Thus, it is the media's responsibility to play an integral role in enhancing women's role in society (ADEW 2003: 4).

An example of ADEW's media monitoring projects is an analytical study which monitored several newspapers and magazines during the period between September 2002 and February 2003. It investigated whether or not the media's treatment of women's issues is in line with feminist ideas. This culminated in recommendations for women's NGOs and other women's organizations, decision makers, journalists and academics.

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[148] Interview with Amina Shafik, 17 December, 2007
[149] Interview with Maya Morsi, UNIFEM Coordinatior in Cairo, Cairo, 11 January. 2009

(ADEW 2003: 3, 6, 9, 25-6). Another example is a study about the women's page of *Al Ahram* and the weekly women's supplement of the government owned newspaper *Al Gomhoria* (The Republic) entitled *Mahbobati* (My Lover). The criteria used in the analysis included the amount of space allocated to women's issues, the photos published in the women's pages, the writing style and whether or not they shed light on women who have excelled in their careers. The report ends with results and recommendations such as calling upon *Al Ahram* to issue a weekly women's supplement, training journalists on media treatment of women's issues, calling upon the newspaper to use photos of Egyptian and not Western women and cover rural women's issues more often (ADEW 2004: 1-14).

ADEW distributes the results of its media monitoring projects to media decision makers, such as heads of different television channels and the editors in chief of newspapers. They also draw their attention to changes that could be made[150].

8.1.3 NWF's Media Monitoring:

NWF has conducted two studies monitoring drama serials aired during aired Ramadan in collaboration with other organizations, including Media House and Appropriate Communication Techniques for Development (ACT). These studies aimed to detect violence against women, any discrimination against women and stereotypical images of women. They analyzed them using content analysis. Some of the conclusions they arrived at were that although many of the drama serials contained unconventional female characters such as strong and confrontational women, and women who played influential roles in society, other drama serials contained female characters confined to stereotypical roles (NWF 2003: 6). Other findings included that the number of male characters exceeded the number of female ones, that around 30% of the female characters were housewives and male characters were four times more likely to be university professors than female ones. When it comes to violence against women, they concluded that the vast majority of violence against women was psychological and most of the violence was familial and took place within households (Kamel and Darwish c. 2004: 6, 23, 25, 27-29).

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[150] Interview with Rasha Raslan, member of ADEW, Cairo, 11 September 2008

NWF also conducted media monitoring projects about other issues, namely the print media's treatment of sexual harassment (NWF 2007: 2, 5) and its coverage of women who ran for parliament in 2005 (NWF 2005: 1).

Darwish said that media personnel are offended by the media monitoring results. NWF's monitoring of drama serials is harshly criticized while some journalists even went as far as describing them as liars. Darwish said that she always stresses that the aim of these media monitoring efforts is not to infringe upon the freedom of journalists and those in the entertainment industry but to provide them with analysis of their work because some of them may unintentionally produce anti-women's discourse or present a negative image of women[151]. However, Darwish believes that these projects are effective. She gave an example of how, according to one of her acquaintances who watched that particular episode, Khairy Ramadan (who at the time used to work as) a presenter in a talk show aired on Orbit asked the editor in chief of *Al Masry Al Youm*, Madgi Al Galad, about NWF's study that concluded that the newspaper is not doing enough in its coverage of sexual harassment. Al Galad acknowledged that that was the case. "I believe that if three years of work in this area leads 10 media personnel to get it," then we are getting somewhere[152], Darwish added.

8.2 <u>Media Content Initiatives:</u>

8.2.1 Sa'et Zaman:

Sae't Zaman (An Hour) is a daily program that used to be aired on the government owned Egyptian Satellite Channel. On Thursdays it used to addresses women's rights but on other days of the week it used to address other topics all together. Every three months, some programming changes are made. As a consequence of one such change, the program disappeared all together - not just the weekly women's episode but the entire program. Despite this, I decided to include the program in the study because it is an indication of media content focusing on women aired on a government owned channel.

The episodes of *Sa'et Zaman* aired on the 4th of December was devoted to discussing 'NGOs and Laws Pertaining to Women' yet the speakers were not members of NGOs nor

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[151] Interview with Nawla Darwish, Cairo, Head of NWF's Board of Trustees, 17 Septmeber, 2008
[152] *Ibid*

were NGOs brought up at all during the discussion. The speakers were a lawyer called Somaya Darwish and a professor of sociology called Soheir Lotfy. Towards the end of her introduction to the program the presenter said "a lot of people say things like what else do women want? Haven't they had enough? Even the director of the program is telling me [in the earpiece] what else do you [women] want?"

After that the presenter asked Lotfy:

> **Presenter:** When some members of society raise issues like what else do women want and that women have attained everything that there is to attain, so why seek more? Does that mean that [Egyptian] society still finds discussing women's rights unacceptable?
>
> **Lotfy:** Yes, to some extent. We should not forget that when people say what else do women want, that we are not depriving men of some of their rights and giving them to women ... these are rights that exist within Islamic *Sharia*, we are not inventing any rights ... [Also] I would like to say something so that the viewers do not perceive this conversation as [one about] women versus men, but it is about the well being of society ... Some men do not give their divorcee the money they are suppose to give them in order to provide for their children in order to punish their ex-wives, but in reality it is the children who suffer. Similarly, some women give their ex-husbands a hard time in meeting up with their children while they are in their custody. … when women obtain a particular right, this is not an absolute right but it is a right in order to ensure the well being of children … women must understand that they should not perceive this as a victory over their ex-husbands but a measure to ensure societal well being.

Important points to be noted in this discussion are how the presenters started the episode by addressing arguments that women have obtained way too many rights rather than trying to highlight the importance of advancing women's status. One of the speakers came across as rather secular because she argued that when a couple get divorced, a woman should be entitled to half of everything her husband embezzled during their marriage. In contrast, in *Sharia* a divorced woman is entitled to money from her ex-husband using very different criteria, which leads to her obtaining a rather different sum of money. Yet despite her secularity, she framed her argument about women's rights in

the private sphere in Islamic discourse. She also completely avoiding using women's rights discourse at all times. For example, she framed some of her arguments about divorced women's rights in discourse about the well being of children of divorce.

The next episode aired on the 11th of December 2008 featured the same speakers and addressed the proposed amendments regarding divorced men's right to see their children who are in their mother's custody. The presenter said that throughout the week she received countless phone calls and was stopped by passers-by in the streets who wanted to tell her about their problems or views regarding the existing law or the proposed amendments to it. Towards the end of the introduction she said:

> I would like to stress that when we address any issue we are not biased to one side over the other, even though the program is concerned with women's issues ... However, we are objective in presenting [different views]. We are not biased towards one side over the other, we are not biased towards women and against men, nor are we biased towards men against women. At the end of the day, we want to arrive at justice … regain lost rights and solve unprecedented societal problems.

Thus, throughout the episode the presenter asked one question that addressed the concerns of women and then followed it by a question that addressed the concerns of men. For example, she raised women's concern that if children spend the weekend and some holidays with their fathers, this would make it easier for some of these men to kidnap the children and their mothers would never see them again. (This already takes place at present, the concern is that the proposed amendment would make it easier for fathers who already intend to do so to execute their plans). She followed this by a question regarding how some women could unjustly accuse their ex-husbands of being immoral in order to deprive them of having their children over during the weekend and some other holidays.

Therefore, in this particular episode the idea that women's rights are perceived as a process of taking away rights from men and giving them to women, ended up being reflected in a governmental program on women.

The following episode aired on the 18th of December 2008 featured two female researchers in order to discuss whether the global economic crisis would have a negative

impact on Egyptian and Arab women. They argued that many women would lose their jobs because many of them work in the services sector and that foreign funding for women's NGOs will not be readily available and therefore, the services that these NGOs offer to help women out will decrease. Another argument put forward by them was that a larger number of poor families will force their young daughters to work as maids.

Another episode aired on the 15th of January 2009 was about a program administered by UNIFEM to foster equal opportunities within companies in Egypt. The speakers were a female media advisor to the UNIFEM project, an academic and NCW member as well as the head of the HR unit in one of the companies that implemented the project, both of whom were men. The project's main aim was to ensure that companies do not discriminate against employees while appointing or promoting them primarily on the basis of sex and to a lesser extent on the basis of other criteria such as religion, race or disabilities. The project also aimed to establish a system to enable employees to file anonymous complaints within the company if they are discriminated against.

During the discussion, they mentioned that the male academic is the one who commences the training program in any company because they are concerned that if a woman does so the male employees would dismiss her and anything she says on the grounds that she is a woman who is there to provide women with rights at the expense of men.

This indicates that men perceive women's rights as taking away rights from men and giving them to women, which ended up being reflected in a governmental program on women.

A final episode aired on the 5th of February 2009 addressed yet again the proposed amendments to divorced men's rights of spending time with their children who are in the custody of their ex-wives. The speakers were the journalist and writer Hosn Shah and a male religious scholar. Both of them were largely more supportive of women's rights in this regard and gave many examples of divorced women's suffering when it comes to obtaining their various rights from their ex-husbands.

At one point, Shah said that

> Some people falsely accuse me of bias. I am biased towards the oppressed regardless of whether it is a man or a woman. I do not argue that women are better than men or vice versa because some women are awful and so are some men. My

> argument is that both women and men should have legal rights to support them if they fall out with the opposite sex. … as a Muslim woman, I would not dare go against *Sharia*. In fact, I call for the implementation of *Sharia* because if it is implemented, women will not be subjected to injustice, children will not be subjected to injustice and even men will not be subjected to injustice.

This is very similar to the very first episode of the program that was analyzed. Again, a rather secular writer ended up framing her argument about women's rights in the private sphere in Islamic discourse and she avoided using women's rights discourse.

8.2.2 Anisati Sadati:

Anisati Sadati (Ladies and Gentlemen) is a weekly program aired on *Dream TV*. The program always contained a brief interview with an artist who presented some of her work, a journalist who commented on some articles published in several Egyptian or Arab magazines and a discussion about a specific topic with experts in that field. Other features of the program which were included in many but not all episodes were fashion shows, a nutritionist talking about the nutritional value of a specific fruit, an expert in etiquette talking about topics like the principles of inviting people and the number of accessories one ought to wear.

The artists were always women and they included jewelry designers and painters, in addition to a home-accessories designer who actually demonstrated how she makes these accessories.

The journalist featured to comment on the articles was almost always a woman and more often than not was one who worked for privately owned magazines or newspapers and not government owned ones. The articles addressed in each episode are selected from more or less the same magazines, some of which were women's magazines while others were general interest ones. The topics addressed can largely be divided into several sub-topics, namely marital issues, household chores, career related issues, women's rights and childrearing.

The discussion always took place towards the end of the program with one or two speakers, which included both men and women. They were very often medical doctors, academics or PhD holders. The topics addressed included birth control, how men entrap

their wives, marital problems, why traditional extended family gatherings during Eid are being replaced with traveling to sea resorts with nuclear family members or friends, moodiness and having a temper as well as difficulties in expressing emotions.

In other words, this program was not one that was interested in advancing women's status or their empowerment. It addressed many stereotypical women's issues such as fashion and child rearing and at best addressed light topics that are more of a social nature.

One of the marital problems discussed was how men entrap their wives. The speaker was a male psychiatrist and marriage consultant. A segment of the discussion went as follows:

> **Consultant:** Every human being possesses three kinds of power: physical power, mental power and emotional power. Throughout history, women have rarely used physical power and have therefore used emotional power more frequently. However, in recent years, due to calls of liberating women, as if they were occupied and colonized
>
> **Presenter:** [interrupting and laughing] Yes, these strong terms
>
> **Consultant:** women have attained freedom at the expense of men's rights. Therefore men are no longer capable of using their physical capabilities on a frequent basis and have resorted to their emotional power. Consequently, entrapment is no longer exclusive to women. This is a scientific analysis. If I ask my wife to do something and she does it … there will be no need for me to get uptight. But if I am in a situation in which my wife disobeys my orders, challenges me, oppresses me and if we do not get along she can leave the marital home, divorce me and use the *khula* law to get rid of me, this oppression that men are now subjected to due to mishandling the male - female relationship has led men to try and entrap wives. Consequently - and this is no secret - this era is witnessing the highest rate of women complaining from their husbands, despite all of the rights women have obtained. … most - if not all - of those seeking marital advisors and psychiatrists are women. Their complaints revolve around men neglecting them, spending their time in cafes with their friends [rather than with their wives], they [men] seem to have their own private lives through mobile phones, he does not talk to me, he is not romantic and I run the house on my own. And if you ask men [why they behave in that manner], they reply by saying let

them have it. Since you [women] over did it in obtaining some rights that should have been mine, and I was forced to give up these rights for you, then I will deprive you of other rights. That's how men started entrapping to their wives. All of this has ruined so many things and we will eventually realize that women score a goal but end up losing the entire match - the marital match.

Presenter: So you are standing up for men.

Consultant: Many people falsely accuse me of being biased towards men and against women.

Presenter: On a previous occasion, you said that when you are featured in our program, you will be on women's side.

Consultant: I will always be on women's side because I believe that they are the ones who can change our society to the better, that is if we are interested in changing it to the better [in the first place]. But the problem is that women are preoccupied with unimportant issues in order to obtain minimal rights.

Another segment of the discussion went as follows:

Presenter: You said that men are the victors while some people are calling for the establishment of a national council for men on the grounds that they are being discriminated against these days.

Consultant: How do women benefit from stripping men of their rights on the grounds that they are protecting themselves even though at the end of the day all of this amounts to insecurity and not security because by nature women need men for protection. We all support women but my concern is that the euphoria that women are experiencing due to their consecutive victories, may lead them to lose men in the end, when by nature they are inclined towards falling in love with [men], being in a relationship with [men] and forming a family with [men].

This excerpt of the conversation is another example of how men perceive women's rights as taking rights from men and giving them to women. It also indicates that the existence of NCW is not boding well among men. It is very significant that such sentiments end up being expressed on a women's program.

8.2.3 Tahya Al Setat:

Roze El Youssef is a general interest magazine that was established by the Lebanese migrant to Egypt Roze El Youssef in the early 1900s. It was nationalized along with all other media outlets by the Nasser regime in the 1950s. Today, it remains government owned and is famous for its secular leftist ideology.

As of the end of January 2009, *Roze El Youssef* began running a section entitled Tahya Al Setat (Long Live Women). Its slogan was 'a section about women introduced along with efforts to allocate parliamentary seats for women.'

The very first time this section was run, it featured a column with the byline *Roze El Youssef* explaining

> that this section was introduced not out of bias towards women but out of bias for the values of Egyptian society. … *Roze El Youssef* perceives women's freedom as an indication of societal freedom and it is the duty of any society to provide women with their rights. But [Egyptian] society has become accustomed to women's news being confined to the social sections [of publications] when they ought to be on their front pages and should have nothing to do with women's organizations which use women's issues to their advantage (*Roze El Youssef* 30/1/2009: 80).

Examples of some of the stories included in this section are an interview with a woman who ran against 15 men during the last parliamentary elections and lost. She was about to run again because the MP had passed away (Loay 20/2/2009b: 80-1). Another story was about seven female members of the People's Assembly or Shoura Council who talked about how engaging in political activity has had an impact on their dress code. Some of their statements were about how they have to dress more conservatively, refrain from wearing attractive colors and wear light make-up (Emara and Hosny 27/2/2009: 78-9). Another story was about women excelling in the field of academia. According to the story an average of 60% of teaching assistants in a large number of Egyptian universities are women (Abd Rabo 6/3/2009: 84-6).

Examples of other stories include a story about how people perceive female judges. The story included quotes from male judges, lawyers - both male and female - and family members of people being persecuted (Abd El Rasol and Loay 6/3/2009: 86-7). Another

example is a story about how women dealt with the global financial crisis. Many of them described how they have cut down on some household expenses in co-operation with their husbands (Magdi 6/3/2009: 88-9). There was also a story about the first female marriage registrar. She said that she is doing very well, people have accepted her and that she has come to realize that it is an occupation that "suits women more than men" (Al Dabe' 20/3/2009: 84-5). Tahya El Setat also included the first two months' worth of diary entries of the very first female Omda in Egypt (Loay 30/1/2009a: 84).

Therefore, most of the stories in Long Live Women were progressive and addressed women's participation in the public sphere, with particular emphasis on arenas in which women are under represented, such as politics. It also focused on women which worked in occupations which women were prevented from joining for a very long time, such as judges and marriage registrars.

The section also always included an opinion column by a different woman every week.

An example of an opinion column is one in which the writer argued:

> I am aware that many male and female readers will argue that a section for men should also be in place. Such arguments are justified because readers and the public at large have been bombarded with talk about women's rights, their empowerment and their oppression over and over again by the government, NGOs, the international community, satellite channels, terrestrial channels, men, youth and women so that people have become fed up with women who have attained so many rights and yet are still asking for more. The problem is that women's rights are framed as needs which men then have to produce laws to address and not as rights enshrined in all faiths, constitutions and laws. I acknowledge that many men are subjected to injustice in the Arab world. On behalf of women, I vow to help them out as soon as we are empowered (Hassona 6/2/2009: 84).

Another opinion column was by a medical doctor in which she recounted the societal pressure on women to join the faculty of medicine, but after they finish their studies, they are met with other kinds of pressures to specialize in particular fields and not others. In some cases, they are even discriminated against if they try to specialize in particular fields, according to her (Amer 13/2/2009: 84). On another occasion the column was

written by a female screenwriter. She harshly criticized an ad for a soft drink for focusing on women's bodies and disregarding their minds (Naom 30/1/2009: 83). Other women who wrote the column harshly criticized the treatment of a particular television program of the proposed law to constrain polygamy (Radwan 20/3/2009: 86-7) and how growing numbers of university educated women end up becoming housewives. The latter writer recounted how one of her female students said to her "Young men find it very difficult to find jobs, so what are the chances that I will find one?" (Thabet 20/2/2009: 82)

The opinion columns by and large were progressive, however, they again reflected the growing sentiments against women's rights and the how supporters of women's rights deliberately avoid using women's rights discourse. They also brought to the fore an issue addressed in Chapter 7, namely women's return to the home.

Another sub-section that was included in Tahya El Setat was an opinion column entitled Barakat Adow El Setat (Barakat [a male name] Women's Enemy) and it was always written by the same man. The following is an excerpt from one of these columns:

> Instead of trying to find out why men do not vote for women, it looks like we are going to treat women like people with disabilities, who must be allocated specific parking slots and seats on public transportation facilities. Of course, this is in line with how I perceive women … but I am pleasantly surprised that the government agrees with me and indirectly acknowledged that women are incapable of competing with men in any field (Mahfouz 13/2/2009c: 87).

On another occasion, the column read as follows:

> Why do you want women to leave their natural place (prison, home or night club) in order to become heads of state, develop countries and utilize their skills and fulfill their dreams and such nonsense? Women are not rational like men … they are not fit for leadership … the evidence to support this is that women can't drive (Mahfouz 20/2/2009d: 85).

In one of his columns, Barakat Adow El Setat questioned why Egyptian women are concerned with the rights Western women have attained and argued:

> Men over there have given in because they believe in the funny principle of equality … how can we equate women with men when women do not join the army or grow a beard. … holding conferences and seminars will not have an

impact on us - men. You should be grateful that you have roofs over your heads during the economic crisis, and you should suffice yourselves with making tea for men after they have their meals instead of organizing conferences and such nonsense (Mahfouz 13/3/2009f: 82).

This regular column was very ironic and the views it contains about women can not be taken seriously.

8.3 Citizen's Initiatives:

8.3.1 Cooperation between Female Members of Political Parties:

There was an attempt to form a committee encompassing members of the various women's units of political parties. Analyzing this attempt will reveal one of the main reasons why women's political participation is hardly ever addressed by the Egyptian media.

The aim of this committee was to get female members of political parties to co-operate together in women's political participation. The first time I interviewed Saed, member of DFP [see Chapter 4], she told me that she was the one who came up with this idea because the small number of women who are members of political parties are largely confined to women's committees within those parties. She added that women must fight for their rights within political parties because the male members of the parties will not grant them their rights, just like men do not grant women their rights in society at large[153].

According to the minutes of their first meeting, 16 women representing eleven different political parties attended the meeting. They decided to form three sub-committees one to work on changing laws that hinder women's political participation, another to ensure that the media promotes women's political participation and a third one to enhance women's role within political parties. Saed said that at the time, they had been working on the committee for three months and had met up four times. She added that most of the women were very passionate about it[154].

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[153] Interview with Magda Saed, member of DFP, Cairo, 18 December, 2007
[154] *Ibid*

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However, when I asked the other female members of political parties about this committee, I got a very different impression. Shoukry, member of the NDP [see Chapter 4], addressed a similar but different issue. She talked about another activity all together in which the NDP used to invite female members of opposition political parties to work under its leadership. She said that she used to be a member of a committee that was established a long time ago in order to foster cooperation between women's secretariats in political parties. The NDP's Women's Secretariat was the one which organized these meetings and invited the female members of other parties to attend them[155].

> But this was a long time ago and things did not work out and the committee did not last for long because the female members of other political parties were not very cooperative. The senior female members of various political parties were not passionate about it and lower ranking members were the ones who attended the meetings instead, so it was pointless. Things did not work out because of diverging and conflicting policies of the members of the different parties[156].

Eventually, the NDP's Women Secretariat simply stopped organizing the meetings, she added. In addition, when I told her about Saeed and her efforts, Shoukry said, "we are not in touch with her regarding this issue, there is no communication between the NDP and DFP. I have never even heard of her [Saed] or of that committee[157]".

Meanwhile, Korashi member of the Wafd Party [see Chapter 4], said

> the institution 'One World' was the one that came up with the idea of this committee and suggested it to the female members of various political parties during a meeting. Saed then suggested that they - [the women themselves] - establish this committee on their own and not in collaboration with 'One World'. This way things will not work out because the female members of the different political parties will refuse to work under her [Saed's] leadership, I will be the first to refuse to do so. She has no right to be a leader because all of the female members of political parties are on the same footing. There is a lot of competition between the female members of the different parties, things are very individualistic. Also, if she [Saed] leads such a committee, this may raise the

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[155] Interview with Nihal Shoukry, member of NDP's Women's Committee, Cairo, 15 January, 2009
[156] *Ibid*
[157] *Ibid*

DFP's popularity, which is unacceptable. … Such a committee must be under the auspices of a neutral organization such as 'One World' for female members of various political parties to join it[158].

8.3.2 Screenwriter Initiatives:

Nadia Rashad is a drama serials writer and actress who frequently addresses women's rights in her drama serials. She is the author of *Mobara Zawgeya* (Marital Match), the drama serial used in Chapter 7. The drama serial was about six inter-related families through which different women's rights were addressed. One of the female characters in the drama serial was a woman who was verbally abused by her husband throughout their marriage and at the age of 50, decided to defy him and start a career and pursue her lifelong dreams which he had opposed all along. Other women's issues addressed in the drama serial were women's political participation, the problems sterile women faced in a society where having children is extremely important and a young woman who faced problems in her career and experienced difficulties in marrying her prince charming because he had to look after his aging and ill father. Another dilemma addressed in the drama serial was a woman who defied the societal taboo of marrying a man who is some fifteen years younger than her versus a woman who married a man who was twenty-five years her senior. The drama serial also depicted a young wealthy and spoiled woman who fell in love with and married a man who came from a much lower socio-economic background. Their marriage was very unstable.

Rashad said that she decided to address women's political participation in the form of running for parliament in *Mobara Zawgeya* because she is perplexed by how there is such a discrepancy between the discourse of decision makers and the political elite and the reality on the ground if women run for parliament[159]. In her words:

> The ruling elite makes wonderful decisions such as the much publicized slogan 'No to Female Genital Mutilation.' How come the government adopts such progressive statements while people are against it? How come they [the government] say 'No to Female Genital Mutilation' while people practice it? …

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[158] Interview with Mona Korashi, member of the Wafd, Cairo, 9 Septemebr, 2008
[159] Interview with Nadia Rashad, actress and screenwriter, 9 January 2008

So why is the [ruling elite's] decision regarding women's political participation so progressive, while people are so backward? Why do political parties refrain from nominating women despite all of the calls for doing so [that are expressed] in newspapers and on televised programs? And the few women who dared [to run for parliament] had a miserable experience, and so are unlikely run again. I wanted to confront people with this discrepancy because art should raise issues, maybe someone can solve this one. The President and the ruling elite all encourage women to play a role in politics by running for parliament and voting. But when I talked to four women who ran for parliament and lost [the elections] as well as some potential voters, I realized that women have a very hard time - just like male candidates - but they suffer a lot more and encounter other problems, just because they are women[160].

Rashad interviewed four female members of political parties who had run for parliament in order to prepare for writing the drama serial. Much of the problems the character who ran for parliament in the drama serial faced were based on the experiences of these women[161].

From Rashad's experience, only intellectuals who are concerned about women's political participation commented on this role when the drama serial was aired. However, a very large number of people commented on the character Soad, played by Rashad, who was mistreated by her husband[162].

He used to boss her around, belittle her opinions, harshly criticize her and all of her actions, he would never say a nice word to her and he would perceive her as a second class citizen. He never hit her but the manner in which he treated her also falls under violence against women. … Apparently many men treat their wives in such a manner because I met so many women who told me that they lead lives that are very similar to Soad's. … Many men also told me that I made them realize that the manner in which they treat their wives is horrible and that they will stop treating them in that manner. … Some young men told me that after watching the drama serial their mothers decided to start working again, some women even

[160] *Ibid*
[161] *Ibid*
[162] *Ibid*

revolted and insisted on having their own social lives and having some time to themselves away from their families. Instead of just moaning and groaning, they decided to do something about their lives[163].

The second most commented on topic addressed in the drama serial, according to Rashad, was the marriage of a woman and a man who was some 15 years younger than her.

So many people objected to this, whereas not a single person objected to another marriage [in the same drama serial] of a woman and a man who was some 25 years her senior. Yet many women told me that they had indeed fallen in love with men who were much younger than them but declined to marry them because they feared the societal perception of such a marriage. Even though Prophet Mohamed married a woman who was much older than him and another who was much younger than him in order to set an example for us that age difference either way is not a problem and does not necessarily lead to an unsuccessful marriage. … Both men and women objected to this marriage. … 'How can a man marry a woman who is many years older than him?' they would say. Despite all of the justifications that I made: he did not want to have children [because both of his children from a previous marriage were mentally retarded due to a medical condition that he suffered from], they came from the same socio-economic background, their educational levels and intellectual standing were similar - they were a perfect match - except for her being many years older than him[164].

Rashad said that she decided to address this issue because she met two women who married men who were several years younger than them and those marriages were far more successful than many marriages that Egyptian society tends to perceive as a match made in heaven. However, viewers' negative reaction has not discouraged Rashad from addressing such thorny issues because she believes that such stereotypes must be challenged[165].

Rashad also said:

I addressed the difficulties women face in playing these dual roles [being a wife and mother as well as having a career] in society in a televised movie. … The

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[163] *Ibid*
[164] *Ibid*
[165] *Ibid*

message that I was trying to send was that familial duties should be equally divided so that the family can go on. But we should not call for equality between men and women because this will only lead to an increase in the number of single and divorced women, because if men remain unchanged, women will start perceiving marriage as a burden. We need to appeal to men, they are the ones who have to be convinced that they have to do women justice. … I always try to appeal to both men and women, because I convey both sides - that of women that of men - because I want everybody to relate to the drama serial. As far as I know, my message does get through to both[166].

Rashad also argued that in the drama serials she writes she addresses "societal issues not only women's issues, men's issues or children's issues but societal issues.[167]"

8.3.3 Media Responses to Sexual Harassment and Assault:

Sexual harassment and assault is widespread in Egypt. According to a recent study, 64% of Egyptian women are harassed on a daily basis (ECWR nd: 6). To take a publicized example, in the last two years, during the Eid holiday large groups of young men sexually assaulted several women. This took place in downtown Cairo in 2007 and in Gamet al Dewal Al Arabiya Street in the heart of Cairo in 2008. Both incidents were filmed by passersby using their mobile phone video recording facilities and were uploaded on Youtube. The first incident was heavily criticized in the media but it was the second incident that caused an outcry. Thirty-six young men were arrested but thirty-four of them were released shortly after that without pressing charges against them because not a single woman dared to attest that she had been sexually assaulted. As for the two men who were not immediately released, a male journalist who happened to be in the area that night, attested that he did not see one of them sexually assaulting women and so he was released. The other one was 17 years-old and was sentenced to one year in prison because a policeman arrested him while he was sexually harassing a girl. It is important to note that this topic is a taboo in Egypt that hardly anyone dares to address. It is regarded as shameful for a woman to have been sexually harassed or assaulted and that is largely why

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[166] *Ibid*
[167] *Ibid*

not a single woman has ever dared to do much about it and why not a single woman attested to being harassed or assaulted in the incident described above. In fact, in the survey mentioned above, 41.2% of the women and 33% of the men who were surveyed said that a woman who is sexually harassed should keep it to herself and do nothing about it. Only 5.6% of the women and 12.9% of the men who were surveyed said that a woman who is sexually harassed should press charges (ECWR nd: 9).

Noha Roshdy, a 27 year-old director became the first woman in Egypt to press charges against a man who sexually assaulted her. The assaulter was sentenced to three years in prison as well as paying a fine amounting to 5,000 Egyptian Pounds (around £500). Roshdy's initiative received widespread media coverage. The rest of this section will provide an overview of that coverage.

Roshdy was featured on *Al Ashera Masa'n* [see Chapter 6 for details about the program] along with one of her lawyers, Zeyad Al Alamy, and her father was briefly interviewed over the phone. Roshdy described the incident by saying:

> My friend Hind and I were walking towards a busy street in order to take a taxi when a man driving a truck sexually assaulted me, I consequently fell to the floor and he laughed. He then started to drive away but was forced to stop shortly due to traffic. I chased him and Hind I pulled him out of the car and asked passersby to help us out. Some people offered to beat him up, asked him to apologize to me, some of them said some nasty things to him but almost all of them perceived pressing charges as totally unnecessary. One woman standing in the balcony of a nearby building went as far as saying to me "That's enough, forgive him." Only a 20 year-old man helped Hind and I drag him [the assaulter] to the police station.

On *Al Ashera Mas'an* Roshdy did not describe how he sexually assaulted her but on other occasions, such as newspaper interviews, she said that he stretched out his arm through the truck's window, held her breast and started driving away while still holding her breast, which caused her to fall to the floor.

Five men called-in to that particular episode of the program. Almost all of them spoke highly of Roshdy and her actions and applauded her. Some of them also described her as brave. For example, one of them said "I applaud you [the presenter] for featuring Miss Noha [on your show] and I highly applaud her and her friend Hind and the 20 year-old

man she talked about, this is how young Egyptian men should behave. Any girl [who is sexually harassed] must do something about it." Another example is how another caller in said that he his proud of Roshdy and that she should be a role model for other girls. However, one caller in, after applauding Roshdy and describing her as a victim said that she may be partially to blame because of the way she may have been dressed. This led the presenter to ask her to describe the clothes that she and her friend were wearing when she was sexually assaulted, after noting that she does not have the right to do so but that this is a societal issue that must be addressed. Noha described the clothes that they were wearing that day in great detail but also said:

> I have a question for the caller-in and society at large, how do you perceive sexual harassment? I think of it as a crime just like any other crime, and all women should be protected from it. One of the reasons why this phenomenon has become so widespread is because society perceives a girl [who is sexually harassed] as partially to blame … those who harass women believe that their actions are justifiable. Such societal phenomenon are extremely difficult [to address] because those who commit them do not realize that their actions are wrong, but believe that they are perfectly alright.

After that, the presenter said to her "you should join women's organizations and such things, directing is not the right field for you."

The presenter asked Roshdy's father whether or not he hesitated in supporting his daughter's decision to press charges due to the societal perception of the whole issue. His response was "the assaulter is the one who should feel ashamed … Noha is only fighting for her rights."

Several direct calls upon women who are sexually harassed or assaulted to press charges were expressed by Roshdy, her father and the presenter. For example, towards the end of the program, Roshdy said "I call upon every woman to press charges if she is sexually harassed, I believe that if ever woman does so, this will bring an end to this phenomenon in a years' time." Similarly, the presenter said that publicizing the verdict is beneficial for society as a whole because it sends a strong message that any harasser can be sentenced to three years in prison. She also said to Roshdy's father: "I greatly respect you. The media is supporting this case, not because the media is biased towards women and

against men, but it's supporting you because we believe that" Roshdy can become a role model. Meanwhile, Roshdy's father said "all girls should do the same [press charges] and their parents should support them because sexual harassment has become very widespread."

Roshdy was also interviewed by *Al Mary Al Youm* on the 23rd of October 2008. After the verdict was passed, she was quoted in *Al Masry Al Youm* as arguing

> the verdict will lead young men to think twice before they sexually harass a woman. I hope that the way I dealt with the incident will lead other girls to overcome their fears and react bravely if they are sexually harassed. I was heavily criticized for daring to press charges which led me to consider withdrawing the court case, but it was the phone calls that I received from several women whose daughters had been sexually harassed that led me to refrain from doing so. Those mothers and their daughters were either not brave enough to press charges or tried to do so but were advised against it by policemen in order to [protect the girls' reputation]. … They beseeched me not to back down (Azam and Farghali 2008).

Furthermore, many speakers in the broadcast media and columnists in the print media spoke very highly of Roshdy. For example, a religious scholar featured on *90 Dekika* [see Chapter 6 for details about the program] on the 22nd of October 2008 said "I applaud Noha who pressed charges and defied Egyptian society. She was brave enough to talk about it and should be a role model for other girls who are [sexually] harassed. If more girls do the same, things will change."

Another example is how a columnist in *Al Masry Al Youm* [see Chapter 6 for details about the newspaper] argued:

> Noha Roshdy who filed a court case was not the first [woman to be sexually harassed] but the bravest. She did not fear what people would say about her, even though she was told many things like 'the man is impoverished, don't be cruel, you are going to destroy his entire life.' I was so shocked at people's reaction. Instead of feeling for her, they accused her of throwing an impoverished man in prison. Have things turned upside down in our country? Have ethics become so unimportant? (Kharsa 29/10/2009)

Similarly, in an opinion column entitled 'Well Done Noha', another columnist applauded Noha for pressing charges because when crimes go unpunished other people are encouraged to commit them, she argued. She also criticized those who feel sorry for harassers (El Shobashi 30/10/2008b).

This is an excerpt from another opinion column:

> the brave young woman, Noha Roshdy, who was sexually harassed and stated that she had the right to seek to punish the sick young man who violently and barbarically fiddled with her body. She succeeded in bringing him to justice so that he was sentenced to three years in prison. This will bring an end to this disgusting anarchy (Gaber 8/11/2008).

Several women did indeed follow suit. During the few weeks following the media's extensive coverage of Roshdy's case, four other women reported that they had been sexually harassed or assaulted. On the 1st of November 2008, a 28 year-old woman reported that she had been harassed by a microbus driver while she was on the microbus (El Badri and El Dosoki 1/11/2008). Also, on the 7th of November 2008, a 23 year-old heavily veiled woman reported that she was sexually harassed by a laborer while she was walking in the street (Abdel Radi 7/11/2008). In addition, on the 15th of December 2008, investigations were underway about a case where a female employee in the Ministry of Education had accused her boss of sexually harassing her inside the Ministry's premises (El Badri 15/12/2008). Furthermore, on the 7th of December 2008, a 29 year-old woman accused a taxi driver of sexually harassing her and slapping her (Abdel Radi and El Dosoki 7/12/2008).

8.4 Conclusion:

This chapter has examined several different initiatives in the area of women, media and politics. It is therefore important to conclude whether or not these initiatives achieved their goals, i.e. whether they succeeded or failed.

The only initiative which partially succeeded is the one that urged women to press charges against men who sexually harass or assault them. It succeeded in the sense that

several women did indeed press charges and challenge the societal taboo of not doing anything about being sexually harassed or assaulted. But in terms of women's rights and their empowerment, this initiative was not in the least successful due to the manner in which the whole issue was framed in the media. It was not framed in women's rights discourse but using one of the discourse mentioned in Chapters 5 and 6, namely paternalism. This reinforces rather than challenges the idea that women need protection. This is not to mention how using paternalistic discourse failed to put forward the idea that women have the right to walk around freely.

Another initiative examined in this chapter was the attempt to address numerous and diverse women's rights through the drama serial *Mobara Zawgeya*. In a sense, merely succeeding in addressing women's rights in a drama serial rather than portraying women in the stereotypical roles outlined in Chapter 7 is an achievement in itself.

However, determining whether or not the media monitoring initiatives by NCW and ADEW and NWF succeeded is a bit more tricky. Their approach to media monitoring is clearly in line with what Lotz (2006) has described as the 'role model framework'. This is because they largely investigate whether drama serials convey a positive or negative image of women and largely call for drama serials to convey female role models. These organizations also encounter a problem that does not exist in the US context, namely how their findings are not well received when they publicize them. One explanation for this is that people are not used to criticism in Egypt, and therefore, they do not take it very well.

All of the media content initiatives to specialize programming or magazine sections to address women's rights have failed miserably. Their failure must be analyzed in light of the arguments made in Chapter 6 about how the government's approach to women's rights is backfiring against women within society and turning people against women's rights. Consequently, media content that is suppose to celebrate women and promote women's rights is trapped in apologizing for and having to justify addressing women's rights, stressing that they are not biased for women and against men, having to address the idea that women have already obtained way too many rights and are still asking for more and arguing that when women obtain rights this does not entail taking away rights

from men. Furthermore, many of them include sexist comments, anti-women's rights and anti-women's discourse. In other words, this chapter has built on one of the arguments made in Chapters 5 and 6, namely that the state's approach to women's rights is not only leaving the societal structures that disadvantage women unchanged, as argued by Murphy (2003), but is strengthening them by reinforcing the idea that women's rights are unacceptable and increasing opposition to them. This chapter added a new element to this argument by showing that the strengthening of the structures that disadvantage women is being reflected even in media content focused on women.

Also, the initiative to establish a committee to foster cooperation between female members of various political parties in Egypt has clearly failed miserably. The evidence presented in this chapter regarding the reasons behind its failure suggest that in an authoritarian context where political parties do not function properly, attempting to address women's rights through activism in the political party arena is not effective. These women are fragmented into being members of largely ineffective institutions in which the play negligible roles, as outlined in Chapter 4, and their membership of these different and competing political parties is one of the main – although not the sole – reason why they are unable to cooperate together on a matter that they largely agree on, namely enhancing women's political participation. It is also therefore not surprising that women's political participation is hardly ever addressed by the media, because there is no unified and coherent movement to work on media treatment of this issue.

It is also important to note that anyone who attempted to defend women's rights in any of the media outlets examined in this chapter avoided framing their arguments in women's rights discourse and avoided uttering the phrase women's rights, as previously argued in Chapters 5 and 6. Again, de-gendered discourse was used, whereby the argument was framed in a manner that had nothing to do with women. This framing their arguments in the well being of society as a whole and framing arguments about divorced women's rights in the well being of children of divorce. As noted in Chapters 5 and 6, this is because, drawing on Sakr's () argument that the media reflects and reinforces societal perceptions of women, if women's rights are justified using de-gendered discourse, this reflects and reinforces the societal view that the notion of women's rights is

unacceptable. But when it came to women's rights within the private sphere, a discourse other than the ones mentioned in the previous chapters was used. More specifically, Islamic discourse was used even by speakers who came across as rather secular. For example, a secular academic on *Saet Zaman* argued that the women's rights being called for "are enshrined within Islamic *Sharia*, we are not inventing any rights." Therefore, the evidence in this chapter suggests that the clear-cut distinctions between using secular and Islamic discourse to call for women's rights, which were outlined in Chapter 2, are no longer valid at least when it comes to calling for women's rights in the private sphere.

<h1 style="text-align:center">Chapter Nine</h1>

<h1 style="text-align:center">CONCLUSION</h1>

This study set out to investigate whether or not and how the media contributes to women's empowerment. However, the evidence presented in the previous chapters has shown that in order to determine this, the efforts to politically empower Egyptian women must be analyzed first. Furthermore, examining the ramifications of these efforts in addition to investigating how Egyptian society perceives these efforts are also pre-requisites for finding out whether or not the Egyptian media plays a role in the political empowerment of women. Thus, the previous chapters have identified the different players in decisions pertaining to women's political empowerment, namely the Presidential establishment, women's NGOs and political parties. They have also investigated their roles separately in relation to the media. This chapter will build on the previous ones by synthesizing the roles of these players in a collective manner in order to provide a clear description of what this process leads to in terms of women's political empowerment and the utilization of mass media in this regard. It will also provide a detailed analysis of the impact of this process on Egyptian society and its views on women, their status and their rights, much of which is reflected in and mediated through the media. Those views have led those calling for women's rights to frame their arguments in a specific manner, an issue which will be elaborated on during the course of this chapter. The chapter also includes a section about various different agents who are genuinely interested in women's rights and are trying to make a difference. The question of whether or not the media contributes to women's political empowerment will be returned to at the very end of the chapter. But first the chapter will provide a summary of the links between the findings of the various chapters of this study.

9.1 <u>Links between Findings of Individual Chapters:</u>

9.1.1 The State's Approach to Women's Rights and its Ramifications:

The findings of Chapters 4, 5 and 6 built on one another to clarify the roles of the President, first lady and their son Gamal in state decisions pertaining to women's rights. Chapter 4 showed that decisions pertaining to women's empowerment are

made by the President and/or first lady and to a lesser extent their son Gamal. It also indicated that the first lady and Gamal both play a role in formal politics.

Chapter 5 built on the findings of Chapter 4 and clarified the first lady's role in this regard even further. Its findings showed that the first lady is indeed involved in formal politics and not informal politics. For in her capacity as president of NCW, she has an official title and its mandate entitles her to written powers and not unwritten ones. These observations are different from those of Joseph (2001) who examined other first ladies and argued that they tend to be active in informal politics and are usually entitled to unwritten powers. These written powers include suggesting the introduction of new laws and the amendment of existing ones which pertain to women. The same chapter also outlined how the government owned media focuses on NCW activities that are headed or events attended by the first lady. Such stories are almost always to be found in the page entitled 'The State' along with news about various governmental institutions. This led to the conclusion that Kassem's (2004) notion of personal authoritarianism can be extended to the first lady in the area of women's rights, whereby the issue is personalized around her.

Meanwhile, Chapter 6 reinforced the finding of Chapter 4 that the government only addresses women's rights when the President and/or first lady approve of such a move and are more often than not directly involved in the matter. In addition, it elaborated on the role of the President in addressing women's rights. For adopting the women's parliamentary quota was part of the President's electoral program and he was the one who announced in person that it would be adopted. In fact, media treatment of the women's parliamentary quota was personalized around the President's role in the matter. For example, when interviewed on talk shows and in newspapers, one of the reasons used by members of the NDP to justify the need to adopt the women's parliamentary quota was that it was part of the President's electoral program. Even some members of opposition parties thanked the President for its adoption in the print and broadcast media. In addition, government owned newspapers glorified and praised the President's role in supporting women's rights. Furthermore, Chapter 6 provided additional evidence to support the argument made in Chapter 4 about how Gamal is involved in formal politics. It showed that he played a crucial role in the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota because the idea of implementing it using extra seats emanated from the NDP Policies Committee which he heads. In the

print media, especially government owned newspapers, quotes from Gamal were included in stories about the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota.

At the same time, Chapters 4 and 6 clarified the role of the NDP and NCW in the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota. Chapter 4 suggested that the NDP is a rather powerful institution which apparently intervenes on some occasions in some key decisions pertaining to women's political empowerment, while NCW is a rather weak institution because its vision regarding how to implement the women's parliamentary quota seemed unlikely to be implemented. Chapter 6 solidified these arguments. It showed that the NDP is indeed a powerful institution because its vision regarding the women's parliamentary quota was implemented in order to safeguard the interests of the NDP. Meanwhile, NCW's vision was indeed disregarded, which proved that NCW is a rather weak institution. The discrepancy in the power of both institutions was reflected in the print media's coverage of the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota. There were several stories in both the government and privately owned newspapers about meetings held and decisions reached by the NDP Policies' Committee regarding the women's parliamentary quota, while there were hardly any similar stories about NCW's role in this regard.

The ramifications of the state addressing women's rights was addressed in the findings of Chapters 5, 6 and 7. They provided cumulative evidence to show that it is backfiring among different groups of Egyptian society. Meanwhile, Chapters 6 and 8 conveyed that this backfiring is being reflected in different media outlets. For example, Chapter 5 indicated that some women's activists as well as some members of NCW believe that NCW's existence, activities and its constant media presence is backfiring and turning people against women's rights. Meanwhile, Chapter 6 provided numerous examples of how it is backfiring among intellectuals and television presenters who are affiliated to the regime, as well as demonstrating how all of this is reflected in the media. Several intellectuals wrote opinion columns in privately owned newspapers in which they ended up making comments hostile to women not because they are anti-women's political participation but because they oppose the state's cosmetic changes approach. In addition, the presenters of talk shows aired on government owned channels made several sarcastic and often sexist while addressing the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota. Chapter 7 provided the views of middle class women who are largely denied media access. It included examples of criticism levelled at state feminism, the cosmetic changes approach, imposing female

MPs on society as well as the association between women's rights and the neocolonizers in people's minds. Furthermore, it provided a vivid example of how the state's approach to women's rights is not only leaving the societal structures that disadvantage women unchanged, as argued by Murphy (2003), but is actually strengthening them. For it conveyed that ideas like that women's activity should be confined to the private sphere and/or that men should take precedence in job allocation because they are the ones who are expected to provide for the family are gaining momentum among some women. Another idea is some women are also starting to support is that women should temporarily withdraw from the workforce to allow men to take over their jobs. Finally, Chapter 8 outlined how the backfiring of the state's approach to women's rights and the strengthening of structures that disadvantage women that it is causing are reflected in media content that is suppose to promote women's rights or celebrate women. Such programs and magazine sections are trapped in apologizing for and having to justify why they address women's rights, stressing that they are not biased for women and against men and having to address the idea that women have already obtained way too many rights and are still asking for more.

9.1.2 Discourse Used to Address Women's Rights:

Chapter 5 showed that women's NGOs and NCW avoid using women's rights discourse when addressing women's rights. Instead, they use paternalistic or non-gendered discourse. Chapter 6 built on this by showing that these two types of discourses are also used by members of the ruling party and people affiliated to the regime. In addition, it provided additional examples for its usage by NCW members. Unlike in Chapter 5 where the women's activists explained their approaches away from the media, in Chapter 6 these discourses were expressed in talk shows aired on government and privately owned channels as well as in government owned newspapers. In addition, Chapter 6 revealed another type of discourse used to address women's rights, namely pan-Arabism. Chapter 8 built on the findings of Chapters 5 and 6 by showing that these discourses are also used in media content that is suppose to promote women's rights and/or celebrate women. It also revealed another type of discourse used while addressing women's rights in the private sphere, namely Islamic discourse. The same chapter also provided an example of how a bold initiative that challenges the structures that disadvantage women was downplayed by how the media

framed it using one of these discourses instead of women's rights discourse. For the unprecedented move by Roshdy to challenge sexual harassment and assault was framed using paternalistic discourse rather than arguing that women have the right to walk around freely without being intimidated.

9.1.3 Female Activism in the Political Party Arena in relation to the Media:

The findings of Chapters 4, 6, 7 and 8 built on one another to provide an analysis of women's activism in the political party in relation to the media. Chapter 4 showed that political parties and forces in general do not function properly in an authoritarian context, largely because they are crippled, harassed and coopted by the regime and they merely exist in order to maintain the system of fake pluralism previously addressed by Bianchi (1989). Chapter 6 extended this finding to the media arena by demonstrating how political parties have very limited access to the media. But in order to maintain the fake pluralistic system, the weaker and more coopted political parties have more media access than the stronger and less coopted ones, because the former do not pose any threat whatsoever to the regime. This extended Lust-Okar's (2007) notion of a divided level of contestation from the political party arena to the media. When it comes to women, Chapter 4 showed that women are largely confined to the women's unties of political parties in which they play negligible roles. Furthermore, the roles that they perform are can largely be categorized as social and community services activities and not political ones. Moreover, the same chapter outlined that female members of political parties have no decision making power. Chapter 8 built on this finding by putting forward the argument that addressing women's rights through political parties does not work in an authoritarian context and is actually detrimental to women's activism. This is because membership of these ineffectual institutions fragments women's activists on the basis of party affiliations and makes it almost impossible for them to cooperate with each other in an area in which they all believe in, namely enhancing women's political participation. That chapter therefore concluded that this fragmentation is a main reason why women's political participation and empowerment are not addressed in the media. Despite this, Chapter 6 indicated that the privately owned media has allowed female members of political forces – both secular and Islamic – some access to the media, whereas their voices are never expressed in government owned media outlets. But it is important to note that that this media access is used to comment on the state policies on women,

such as the adoption of the women's parliamentary quota, and not to promote women's political participation. Finally, Chapter 7 provided the views of non-activists on women's political participation. Its findings revealed that most middle class educated Egyptian women would like to see a larger number of female MPs and that almost all of them believe that women are better at representing 'women's issues'. It also revealed that most women do not bother to vote or participate in politics in any other manner - such as political party membership – due to the authoritarian nature of the Egyptian regime and the rigging of elections and not because they are not interested in politics, nor because they believe that women should not participate in politics.

9.1.4 Drama Serials:

Four chapters in this study addressed different but related aspects of drama serials. Chapter 4 showed that the NDP believes that drama serials brainwash viewers, which extended Abu Lughod's (2005) argument that those who control the drama serials industry hold the same view. Yet Chapter 6 provided ample evidence to prove that middle class female audiences of drama serials are not in the least passive or brainwashed by drama serials. But rather, they come up with various different interpretations of the text which span all of the different types of readings in Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model (Ruddock 2001). This built on the findings of Abu Lughod's study which concluded that less privileged women are not brainwashed by drama serials, by showing that the same is true of more educated women who are also better off.

Meanwhile, Chapters 5, 7 and 8 addressed another element of drama serials, namely their treatment of women. Chapter 5 showed that NCW plays a direct role in drama serials treatment of women by asking the President of ERTU to produce drama serials based on the complaints that it receives in its Ombudsman Office. But at the same time, Chapter 8 showed that NCW's media monitoring reports recommend reconsidering drama serials' treatment of women and the topics pertaining to women that they address so that they convey a realistic image of Egyptian women. In fact, this recommendation is rather similar to one of the findings of Chapter 7, namely the one that showed that some middle class female audiences are critical of the female characters featured in Egyptian drama serials and deem them as unrealistic.

9.2 <u>Lack of Structural Change:</u>

As stated in Chapter 2, this study contends that women can only be politically empowered if several structural changes take place in the arenas of politics, society and culture. This section will elaborate on the obstacles to women's political empowerment within these structures in relation to the media. These include the internal political structure, which refers to problems within the Egyptian political structure, which has implications for both who controls the media and its treatment of women's political empowerment. Another structure is the global political one, which encompasses relations between different sovereign states, where Egypt is situated in this structure and the implications of all of this on how the Egyptian regime addresses women's political empowerment and media treatment of its approach. In addition, how the societal structure is disregarded and not included in any way, shape or form in the efforts to allegedly empower Egyptian women politically is also elaborated on in relation to the media. Finally, some of the obstacles in the cultural structure are also noted.

9.2.1 Obstacles within the Internal Political Structure:

The political structure of the Egyptian regime is authoritarian but it allows room for fake liberalism and pluralism not only in the political arena, as argued by Albrecht (2007) and the civil society one, as noted by Bianchi (1989), but also in the media arena. The Egyptian media system is a fake pluralistic one which at face value comes across as rather pluralistic due to the proliferation of privately owned media. However, these media outlets are controlled by the state through a combination of co-optation and coercion, as argued in Chapter 6.

This study has shown that when it comes to women's political empowerment and political decisions pertaining to women's rights in relation to the media, the political structure of the Egyptian regime is personal authoritarian with power personalized around not only the President, as argued by Kassem (2004), but also around the first lady and to a lesser extent their son Gamal. As a result, the government owned media's treatment of women's rights largely consists of a glorification of the President and/or first lady, praising their wonderful efforts in the area of women's alleged empowerment while the alleged women's rights in question are simply very briefly mentioned. However, a critical analysis of how decisions pertaining to women are made has revealed that their powers are not unlimited and has also refined

Abrahms' (1988) theorization of how the state functions, especially in an authoritarian context. Even though the President, first lady and/or Gamal are the ones who decide which women's right will be addressed and when it will be addressed, how it is addressed is determined by a more complicated process. Some of the other divided and volatile institutions that constitute the state play a role in that process. These institutions reach a unified stance - a decision on how the women's right in question will be implemented - by a process in which the more powerful institution imposes a decision which keeps its interests and privileges intact onto the weaker institution which has hardly any say in the matter. This was clearly illustrated when the women's parliamentary quota was adopted: the President was the one who decided that women's ill representation in parliament would be addressed at this particular point in time and the media widely covered the speech in which he made this announcement. The vision of NCW - a weak institution - that it should be implemented using some of the existing parliamentary seats was disregarded. It was the vision of the NDP - a powerful institution - that was implemented and received considerable media coverage, as demonstrated in Chapters 5 and 6. Thus, the women's parliamentary quota was implemented by adding extra seats to parliament so that the NDP's MPs could all maintain their parliamentary seats, i.e. their power and privileges.

The analysis of how governmental decisions pertaining to women are made signified the need to problematize Hatem's (1992) notion of state feminism. Clearly the state is not a unified and coherent structure and different individuals and institutions within the state play rather different roles in the process that eventually leads to state policy on women. This was reflected in the print media in the form of stories about meetings held by different governmental institutions to address the women's parliamentary quota, as shown in Chapter 6. The study also demonstrated that authoritarianism is an integral element that must be taken into consideration while examining the politicization of the family and the blurring of the distinction between the private and public spheres, suggested by Singerman (2006) and Tucker (1993). Clearly because the Egyptian regime is authoritarian, this has enabled members of the President's family, namely the first lady and his son Gamal, to move beyond the accepted notion of them playing a role in informal politics (Joseph 2001), such as influencing the President's decisions or playing subtle political roles, to engaging openly and directly in formal political activity and having a say in state policy. This is reflected in the media in the form of stories about their formal political activity. In addition, it is

reflected in opinion columns which largely consist of hypocrisy for the first lady in the government owned newspapers and criticism of her in the privately owned ones. The latter tend to include criticism of women's rights as part and parcel of critiquing the role played by the first lady.

Both political parties and women's NGOs are largely ineffectual co-opted institutions which are in place in order to maintain a system of fake pluralism as argued in Chapters 4 and 5. Not surprisingly, they play no role whatsoever in the decisions pertaining to women's empowerment, nor do they have any impact on these decisions. They enjoy limited access to the media in order to maintain the system of fake pluralism and liberalism in the arenas of politics, civil society and media. That is why members of co-opted political parties are featured in the privately owned media from time to time to criticize the latest cosmetic change pertaining to women made by the state. But it is noteworthy that they are featured more often in the privately owned newspapers than the privately owned television stations, because the former enjoy more freedom than the latter. This demonstrates that the regime has extended one of the tactics it uses to contain its political opponents, namely a divided structure of contestation (Lust-Okar 2007), to controlling the media. Thus, some media outlets enjoy more freedom than others.

9.2.2 Obstacles within the Global Political Structure:

The main driving force behind the state's decisions pertaining to women's political empowerment is the international framework which the Egyptian government is embedded in. This international framework consists of an unbalanced global structure in which Egypt is in a weak position. Egyptian journalists and commentators in the media are alienated by Egypt's position in this structure and the ramifications of this position. This is reflected in the Egyptian media's treatment of the state's approach to women's political empowerment.

The analysis of this particular factor has shown that the arguments of Armstrong (1998) as well as True and Mintron (2001) need to be reconsidered. They have respectively argued that states tend to imitate each other in a peer effect fashion and that through their membership of institutions like the UN states are socialized into methods of good governance. However, states are not peers and they are not on the same level. Some countries are more developed than others and the less developed ones tend to look up to, admire and try to imitate the policies and tactics of the more

developed ones. In addition, some countries are more powerful than others and tend to interfere in the internal affairs of the less powerful ones because they provide them with various forms of aid and assistance. Therefore, if the institutions or policies of a weak state are similar to those of a powerful state - which provides it with some form of aid - it may very well be that this is the case because the weaker state was obliged to adopt policies and/or institutions that are similar to those of the more powerful state. Also, when states join institutions like the UN and become party to an international bill of rights like CEDAW, they are not only socialized into methods of good governance, there is actually pressure to conform to and implement the bill of rights in question. An example of such pressure is that the names of states which have not become party to CEDAW are read out in the UN's General Assembly which clearly embarrasses them and makes them seem like the odd ones out. Another form of pressure is that states which do become party to CEDAW are required to submit periodical reports to the CEDAW Committee in which they explain the steps and measures they have undertaken to implement CEDAW. In fact, almost all of the changes pertaining to women's rights taking place in Egypt are a response to various clauses in CEDAW and feedback from the CEDAW Committee. However, it is unsuccessful and does not lead to women's empowerment due to reasons that will be addressed shortly. Chapter 6 has shown that the sense that the Egyptian regime only addresses women's political empowerment due to pressure from powerful Western countries is reflected in the media in the form of scepticism or outright rejection of women's rights, as part and parcel of the scepticism and rejection of anything being imposed onto Egypt by powerful Western countries.

In addition, media treatment of the actual measures taken by the state to allegedly empower women is shaped by the objectives behind and outcomes of these measures. While examining these outcomes, this study has extended Adams' (2007) findings about how an authoritarian regime can establish a governmental women's organization in order to obtain legitimacy in the international arena and not because it is genuinely interested in women's empowerment. It has shown that the Egyptian regime has not only created NCW for this particular purpose, but its entire approach to women's rights is designed to merely obtain legitimacy in the international arena and not to advance women's status. More specifically, the state has opted for a cosmetic changes approach to women's rights which entails making changes and granting women rights in theory only, but in practice, things largely remain

unchanged and women do not truly obtain any rights or benefit from these changes. A vivid example outlined in Chapters 5 and 6 is how the women's parliamentary quota will lead to a numerical increase in women's representation in parliament but it is the female members of the ruling party who will join parliament by virtue of it, while Egyptian women will not be truly politically empowered. Thus, when the media addresses women's rights, in reality it merely addresses these cosmetic changes and not women's rights per se. This has dire consequences on media treatment of women's rights because much of it ends up consisting of commentators and columnists expressing their stances on the regime itself and not on women's rights. More specifically, those who support the regime end up speaking very highly of the cosmetic changes as part and parcel of expressing hypocrisy for the President and/or first lady. Meanwhile, those who oppose the regime end up harshly criticizing the cosmetic change in question as part and parcel of criticizing the regime as a whole, as shown in Chapter 6. This often also includes making fun of women and their rights as well as sexist comments which are fuelled by hatred towards the regime and its policies and not women or their rights. Hence the political system distorts even the privately owned media and prevents it from contributing to a balanced or well-informed discussion of women's political empowerment.

9.2.3 Obstacles Pertaining to the Societal Structure:

One of the main obstacles pertaining to the societal structure is that women at the grassroots level are far removed from all of the alleged attempts to empower women. The cosmetic changes approach as a whole as well as the meagre activities of women's activists do not even attempt to appeal to women at the grassroots level, reach out to them, mobilize them or involve them in the alleged attempts to empower women. At best, and in some rare cases, they merely offer a small number of women with some services in a particular area. This is very problematic because, as Jad (2004) has previously noted, women's empowerment can not be achieved without a mass women's movement at the grassroots level. It is also perplexing given that many middle class women are interested in women's rights in general and women's participation in formal politics in particular, as shown in Chapter 7. For example, they would like to see a larger number of qualified and competent women who truly represent them play an effective and significant role in formal politics, especially in the form of parliament members.

9.2.4 Obstacles Pertaining to the Cultural Structure:

Some obstacles pertaining to the cultural structure must also be noted. Chapter 7 has shown that many middle class women would like to see a drastic change in media treatment of women, especially the female characters featured in drama serials. This provided further evidence to support the different contributions made by various scholars such as Stuart Hall (Ruddock 2001), Abu Lughod (2005) and Lotz (2006) which discredit the idea that soap operas and drama serials have a massive impact on viewers. Furthermore, the same chapter has revealed that the politicization of the family and the blurring of the private and public spheres suggested by Singerman (2006) and Tucker (1993) have some rather different resonations among middle class women. It has shown that some of these women believe that this is a viable justification to confine women's activity to the private sphere. Yet others used criteria emanating from the roles women play in the private sphere to support and justify women playing roles perceived as similar in the public sphere.

9.3 How the Cosmetic Changes Approach is Backfiring:

As previously stated, instead of adopting an approach that changes the structures that disadvantage women which then leads to their political empowerment, the state has opted for a cosmetic changes approach which can not be described as state feminism. While analyzing the ramifications of the cosmetic changes approach, this study has identified many factors that were not mentioned by Murphy (2003) that must be taken into consideration in order to determine the drawbacks of women's rights being addressed by an authoritarian regime. These include the popularity of the regime in question, the popularity of the key figures within the regime who are associated with women's rights as well as people's take on governmental policies in other arenas. Other factors are how women's rights are perceived and the factors that influence that perception. In fact, this study has conveyed that the state's cosmetic changes approach is backfiring in a number of ways.

Since the approach is a top-down one where the state is the one which decides which women's rights are addressed as well as how and when they are addressed, there is a sense that women's rights are being imposed onto society by a deeply unpopular regime. This is backfiring because people hate the idea that something is being imposed on them, and they hate it even more because it emanates from an oppressive

regime. This is fuelling resistance to women's rights. As shown in Chapter 6, some commentators in the media who are supportive of women's rights ended up arguing that women's representation in parliament should increase due to a natural progression in societal perception of women and their rights, rather than being imposed from above. Others who apparently were less supportive of women's rights ended up questioning whether Egyptian society was not sensible and did not realize the importance of women's political participation so that it had to be imposed on to society.

Also, since the first lady is the one sponsoring women's rights and the whole issue is personalized around her and the institution that she heads, NCW, this is leading to an association between women's rights and the deeply unpopular first lady. This is reflected in the privately owned media in which some columnists and members of opposition forces criticize how changes pertaining to women are made in order to please the first lady. Many of them ended up expressing anti-women discourse in the process, as shown in Chapter 6.

In some cases, the cosmetic changes are made using measures very similar to other government policies which have failed miserably. This is leading to an association between women's rights and failed government policies. A vivid example is the correlation made by several commentators between the women's parliamentary quota and the quotas for peasants and labourers which have become a fiasco. This is leading to scepticism towards women's rights.

In addition, due to post-colonialism, many Egyptians perceive women's rights as a Western colonial invention to undermine Egyptian culture. They also perceive those who call for them as agents of the colonizers. As stated previously, the main motivation behind the changes pertaining to women is the regime's interest in gaining legitimacy in the international arena. This is strengthening the cultural structure which perceives women's rights as part and parcel of a neo-colonialist project to colonize Egypt and change its culture. It so follows that the state is perceived as an agent of the neo-colonizers. All of this is tainting the whole notion of women's rights and fuelling hatred and resistance towards it which is in turn strengthening the cultural structure that perceives women's rights as unacceptable. Indeed, some columnists and commentators, especially in the privately owned print media, related the changes pertaining to women that are taking place to foreign influence. Many of them also ended up expressing negative comments about women and their rights which was

largely caused by their hatred of foreign interference in Egyptian affairs in general due to post-colonialism and not because they were against women or their rights in principle.

One of the main tactics of the state's cosmetic changes approach to women's rights is changing, amending and introducing laws pertaining to women. Murphy (2003) has previously noted some of the problems related to the approach of changing laws pertaining to women while leaving the societal structures that disadvantage them unchanged. Meanwhile, Singerman (2006) has examined the politicized response to economic policies that threaten the marital institution. This study has shown that these two factors must be examined together. The state's failed economic policies have led to high unemployment rates, inflation as well as an increase in poverty rates, all of which is leading people to despair. This in turn is threatening the marital institution because growing numbers of young men can not afford to get married and are therefore marrying at a very late age. This inevitably means that a growing number of women remain single for a very long time and end up marrying well into their thirties. This is leading to a lot of anxiety in society and fuelling support for the idea that all of the employed women should give up their jobs, which would enable the unemployed men to then take over these jobs. The men would then be able to afford all of the marriage expenses, women would get married at a younger age and everybody would live happily ever after. This scenario is voiced through the media. In addition, arguments to the effect of women are incapable of doing much are usually voiced at more or less the same point in time or by the same people. In others words, the state's cosmetic changes approach which leaves the societal and cultural structures that disadvantage women unchanged, coupled with the politicized response to its failed economic policies are strengthening the cultural structures that disadvantage women by fuelling support for a gendered division of labour which involves women returning to their natural place - the home - and confining women's activity to the private sphere. Chapter 7 indicated that this line of thought is gaining momentum among some women - both young and old.

Another manner in which the state's cosmetic changes approach is backfiring is that it is leading men to perceive women's rights as a zero sum game in which only one sex and not the other can be powerful. So, men - both politicians as well as Egyptian men at large - have come to perceive women obtaining rights as a process in which rights are being taken away from men and given to women, so that men's power within both

the public and private spheres is slowly being eroded to the advantage of women. This is reflected in the media in the form of male columnists, television presenters and callers-in putting forward arguments such as the idea that women have obtained way too many rights, how certain measures will be necessary in the near future to protect men from women and even arguments that men are now oppressed, as shown in Chapters 4, 6 and 8. Another reason why framing women's rights in this particular manner is to be found quite often in the media, could be because it fits well with media narratives of reporting on winners and losers. Also, framing women's rights in this manner is rather sensationalist and is likely to attract audiences.

9.4 <u>Discourse Used to Support Women's Rights:</u>

Not surprisingly, in this environment even those defending women's rights cannot even utter this term in the media, or anywhere else for that matter, because it simply alienates people. Instead they end up framing the women's rights they are calling for in other discourses all together. One such discourse is what can be described as non-gendered discourse, whereby the argument is framed as something that has nothing to do with women. Examples include arguing that the nationality law needs to be amended because the children of an Egyptian mother and a non-Egyptian father suffer dearly. Using this particular type of discourse is problematic because the argument is presented as being totally unrelated to the way rights and responsibilities are assigned between women and men. Thus, it gives into rather than challenges the way rights and responsibilities are assigned between women and men. Another type of discourse used to call for women's rights is a paternalistic one in which women are defined in relation to their male relatives. An example is arguing that if sexual harassment and assault are widespread, then men will fear for their sisters, wives and daughters. Utilizing paternalistic discourse reinforces rather than challenges the idea that women are not independent human beings, but are defined in relation to their male relatives. The third type of discourse used was pan-Arabism. In this case, the argument was simply that other Arab countries have done the same, such as other Arab countries have adopted parliamentary quotas for women and appointed female governors. By referring to other Arab countries, the speakers were trying to discredit the idea that the women's right they are calling for was invented or is being imposed by the Western neocolonizers. The fourth type of discourse was framing the argument in Islamic discourse. This was only used while referring to women's rights within the private

sphere and the argument was basically that the right being called for is enshrined in Islamic Sharia.

The main problem with all four discourses is that they give into rather than challenge the unacceptability of women's rights. When they are voiced in the media, they reflect how women's rights discourse is unacceptable in Egypt society. But by doing so, they also reinforce its unacceptability. In the long-run, this will make it even more difficult for women's empowerment to occur.

9.6 Is the Media Contributing to Women's Political Empowerment?

Therefore, the media in Egypt does not contribute to women's political empowerment because there are no efforts to truly empower women politically in the first place. Instead, the state makes some cosmetic changes and purports that they empower women. The media then addresses these cosmetic changes and not women's empowerment per se. This largely consists of people expressing their stances on the regime and not on women's empowerment. The end result is that women's political empowerment is hardly ever addressed in the media.

Furthermore, those who try to address women's rights in the media in this environment end up having to avoid using women's rights discourse while doing so. The types of discourse that they utilize instead make it even more difficult for women's empowerment to occur. In this regard, the media is not only failing to play an enabling role in empowering women, but is actually hampering it. But it is important to note that this should not be blamed solely on the media because the media is simply one component of an entire apparatus that determines the prospects for women's empowerment.

GLOSSARY

ADEW	Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women
DFP	Democratic Front Party
ECWR	Egyptian Center for Women's Rights
NCW	National Council for Women
NDP	National Democratic Party
NWF	New Woman Foundation
UN	United Nations
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women

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