INTRODUCTION

In all the periods of Egyptian history, what we call the "Women’s Question" was, and remains, salient. It is a question that involves the state, the scope and nature of civil society, and Islam as an important place in a variety of fundamentalist and leftist political discourses. The debates on "Women’s Issues" fostered by the feminist voluntary organizations (FVOs) in the first and second decades of the twentieth century centered on women’s rights in education, work, and politics (including the right to vote). Women’s agenda at this early stage focused on the principle of equality and the need to change the personal status law* (as a step toward liberalizing Egyptian women’s position in society and relieving them from patriarchal domination). Although many reforms had been introduced by the end of the twentieth century, women’s issues continue to be debated, although in different ways, and much of the discourse still concerns women’s rights in education, work, political participation, revisions in the personal status law, and the principle of equality.

The struggle for education is no longer aimed at recognizing women’s right to education, as at the beginning of the twentieth century, but at affording educational opportunities in poor villages where more than 50 percent of all females are still illiterate. Women’s right to work is now recognized in the constitution and the laws, but women’s agenda continues to address discriminatory practices. Although the percentage of women in the labor force is continually increasing, conservative Islamic voices are asking women to go back home, giving priority to their roles in the family and the raising of children.

The political rights of women were legally recognized in 1956, but the impact of women’s political participation remains slight. Nor has

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*Personal status law or the family law is under the jurisdiction of Islam, although the state removed all other areas of law from the jurisdiction of Islam; accordingly, different responsibilities and duties are placed in the family.
their policy-making role in parliament significantly influenced women’s issues on the national level. Feminist struggles to change the personal status law at the beginning of the twentieth century had been partly realized in 1979, but a “retreat” at the state level in 1984 undermined many of these changes.

In conclusion, women’s right to work, to be educated, to participate in political life, and to change the personal status laws were the main issues of women’s voluntary organizations at the beginning of the twentieth century. These issues remain on the agenda at century’s end, but with different components and objectives. Competing discourses and agendas relating to the “Question of Women” in Egypt have had important implications for women’s philanthropy, especially in women’s voluntary organizations (WVOs). These efforts have been marked by solidarity and collaboration between different voluntary organizations. This paper investigates the historical development of women’s contributions to philanthropy and WVOs in Egypt, from the nineteenth century to 1996, focusing on key debates and women’s agenda in each period that have shaped women’s voluntary organizations.

Before I proceed, three points should be noted, two of them related to the conceptual framework, and the third related to social, religious, and political factors conditioning the “women’s question” in Egypt.

1. The project and the title of the paper are centered on “Women and Philanthropy in Egypt.” As it is understood and used in Arabic culture and language, the concept of philanthropy is linked to help and assistance of poor people and those who are in need. The idea of giving is connected to religions—Islam and Christianity—and, thus, the concept does not go beyond this “traditional” way of helping the poor. From this point of view, the concept of “philanthropy” is quite limited and does not cover advocacy activities, nor does it include certain modern types of service delivery. Moreover, the concept of “philanthropy,” from this point of view, is not related to institutional entities but might cover “individual giving” whether institutional or not. This understanding leads us to define philanthropy as used in this study as: voluntary initiatives to establish non-profit organizations. We call these “voluntary organizations.” These voluntary organizations aim to achieve collective benefit and/or sectoral benefits for groups or individuals. They have autonomous or independent structures, are administered by people themselves, and, thus, are by nature nongovernmental, although ruled according to certain laws.

Thus, I am concerned in this paper with organized and institution-alized initiatives active in different areas, such as health, advocacy, education, culture, training and rehabilitation, childhood, etc. These vol-
Voluntary organizations reflect women’s initiatives and visions to change reality.

2. The second observation deals with the special nature of the relationship between WVOs in Egypt and the women’s movement. The boundaries between them are not very clear, because historically and in the twentieth century, most of the leaders of these voluntary organizations were involved in the women’s movement. In addition, WVOs were the main vehicles and channels for the expression of the demands and opinions of the women’s movement before 1952. Therefore, when we address at some points of this paper the issue of women in philanthropy, we have to acknowledge the role played by voluntary organizations in strengthening the women’s movement.

3. The third note is related to the understanding of the triangle of state, society, and Islam that has historically shaped the women’s question in Egypt and, in part, WVOs. The strong central state characterizes Egypt even in the historical moments of weakness in the country. This central state, which could be described as the “distrustful state,” has had an impact on the voluntary sector in general and on WVOs in particular. There have been moments of confrontation and moments of alliance, but tensions between the state and civil society were present at all times. The central state might have adopted at some points socio-economic policies to promote and empower women (educational policies under Nasser are an example). Nevertheless, the same state remained reluctant when it came to introducing amendments in the personal status law, which is governed by Islamic law, Shari’a (and, thus, contributed to perpetuating patriarchal relations inside the family, as we shall see later). Consequently, while Islam played a crucial role in motivating women in philanthropy, in addition to recognizing women’s identity and economic independence (granting them the right to property ownership, to buy, sell, and sign contracts), some Islamic interpretations tend to withhold complete recognition of Muslim women and impose restrictive interpretations of Islam. The interaction of the state, society, and Islam have had serious implications for the formulation of women’s agendas, issues, and priorities since the nineteenth century.

THE BIRTH OF WOMEN’S CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The nineteenth century witnessed the rise of the modern Egyptian state and a fuller incorporation into the European-dominated world market system with its components of secularization, technological innovation, education, and urbanization. As Margot Badran notes in her book, these
forces changed the lives of Egyptians across classes and genders. After Egypt won its de facto independence from the Ottoman Empire when Muhammad Ali got rid of the Ottoman domination and set himself as a ruler of Egypt, he started the country on an ambitious project of modernization. He intended to build a strong army, develop cotton as a cash crop for exportation, establish industrial projects, establish a printing press, and achieve urban improvements. In this context, crucial educational reforms took place: educational missions were sent for the first time to Europe, public and technical schools were built, and in 1836 a first attempt to create a state system for girls’ education occurred. However, the appointed council for public education found it impossible to implement the system of girls’ education due to cultural and societal constraints imposed on women at that time.

In his discussion of the “women’s question” Abdel Malik believes that at this time “there were no women in men’s society, and no men in women’s society. . . . There is no society in a complete sense. . . . The status of Coptic women did not differ qualitatively. The question was not the status of women in Islamic countries; would it be different in any other traditional country?” Confining women to the home, rendering them invisible for urban upper and middle classes, are concepts linked to the “harim” culture. The Arabic word “harim” is applied to women and to the quarters where women live in the house. Neither domestic confinement nor veiling the face was ordered by Islam, although both had been imposed on women in the name of religion. These practices were reinforced by deeply rooted sexual and moral beliefs, which were likewise associated with religion. Domestic seclusion and veiling in Egypt were not practiced solely by Muslims but by Jews and Christians as well.

Restricting women to their homes and camouflaging them if they went out were deemed necessary to the preservation of their purity and the honor of their men and families. In all classes, girls were commonly married without their free consent (which contradicts the precepts of Islam) around the age of thirteen.

About the end of the century, the patriarch of the Coptic Church set sixteen as the minimum age of marriage for Coptic women. Nevertheless, the marriage age for females remained generally low until the 1920s. As Islam allows men under certain conditions to marry four wives at the same time, polygamy was widespread in the nineteenth century in the upper and middle classes. By the turn of the century, polygamy began to diminish but did not disappear totally. Setting a minimum marriage age, restricting polygamy and the right of men to repudiate their wives outside the courts, are part of the demands of the women’s movement in the twentieth century to amend the personal status law.
By the end of the nineteenth century, girls' education had begun to emerge, despite the initial resistance of families and conservative intellectuals at the beginning of the century. The School for Hakimats (Medical Nurses) was established in 1832. At first, Egyptian families refused to send their daughters to this school. However, very soon after it had proven its success, Egyptian women from modest families joined it. Although Muhammad Ali was unable to launch a state school system for girls, he set an example followed by the elite when he hired European women to teach his daughters at home. In 1830, religious associations established schools, and in 1853 a Coptic school for girls was founded.\(^6\)

In the second half of the century, when the state renewed its efforts to promote female education, some intellectuals helped to create a favorable environment for girls' education. Ali Mubarak, a technocrat, and Sheikh Rifa'I al-Tahtawi, a religious scholar and the first to be sent abroad on an educational mission, advocated for girls' education. For al-Tahtawi, educating girls was considered important “to prepare them to be wives and to be capable of participating with men in opinions and talks.” However, he did not recommend women's political rights.\(^7\)

In 1873, the first state school for girls — El Siyufiyah School — was established; the wife of Khedive Ismail became its patron. Then, the Qirabiya School was established under the leadership of the Minister of Awqaf, Ali Mubarak, followed by the Bent al-Ashraf School (Daughters of the Nobles) in 1878. In 1889, the Saniyah School expanded educational opportunity to middle-class women. Around the turn of the twentieth century, girls from the upper class began for the first time to attend schools, after having previously been restricted to home education by European teachers.

It is worth mentioning that having the right to allocate money or real estate for charitable purposes through Waqfs or endowments, some women, and men, allocated Waqfs to support and encourage girls' education in the last two decades of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century. The salient example is Samiha El Selehdar's Waqf, which allocated 1794 feddans (1 feddan = 4200 square meters) for the education of poor girls. Another example is that of Princess Fatima, the daughter of Ismail, who devoted a Waqf in 1910 to the education of girls in Mansoura, one of the governing districts of the Delta. Some other important contributions through the channel of Waqfs were made by women in upper Egypt in 1919, and before that in 1909 by Aisha Sidiqa, to send educational missions to Europe (two Muslim students every year).\(^8\)

Women's contributions through Waqfs to support education and culture in Egypt reflect the birth of a feminist consciousness of females' right to education. It is also an indication of women's economic inde-
pendence and the recognition of this right by Islam, despite the strong patriarchal practices based on conservative interpretations of Islam. Estimates of the total number of students, according to historical writings, differ. In his important book, "Egypt's Renaissance," Anwar Abdel Malik indicates that among a total of 89,893 students in Egypt in 1873, 3,018 were girls. Some early feminists, such as Maryam al-Nahas (1856–86) and Zaynab Fawwaz (1860–94), emigrated to Egypt from Lebanon. They presented in their writings models of women that were radical at that time. The first women to show a new awareness of gender were born in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. They published books, articles, and poetry in the 1870s and 1880s, and succeeded for the first time in expanding women's voices to the public and in communicating with each other.

Writer Aisha al-Taymuriyah (1840–1902) tackled the issue of women's domestic seclusion. She wrote about her life, revealing her early yearnings to become literate. She learned Arabic, Turkish, and Persian and succeeded in becoming a writer and a poet through her determination and with the help of a supportive father. Aisha al-Taymuriyah published in 1873 two collections of poems in which she expresses her isolation as a woman.

In 1892, Hind Noufal published the magazine Al-Fatah (Young Women); El-Hawanem (Ladies) magazine was published in 1900; and Women in Islam magazine in 1901. In 1892, Zaynab El Fawwaz expressed her protest in Al Nile magazine with these words: "We have not seen any of the divinely ordered systems of law, or any law from among the corpus of [Islamic] religious law ruling that woman is to be prohibited from involvement in the occupations of men." When Hind Noufal founded Al-Fatah inaugurating a women's press in Egypt, women found a new forum for discussing and spreading their opinions and ideas related to women's issues. This emergent feminism was grounded and legitimized in the framework of Islamic modernism that was expounded toward the end of the century by Sheikh Muhammad Abdu, a distinguished teacher and scholar from Al-Azhar. (Al-Azhar as a religious establishment interprets religious commandments. These advisories are "Fatawi" in Islam and have the force of orders. Al-Azhar is also the biggest Islamic university.) According to Abdu, through *ijtihad* (independent inquiry into sources of religion), one could be both Muslim and modern. Not all traditional practice was in accordance with Islam. In dealing with gender issues, Abdu confronted the problem of patriarchal excesses committed in the name of Islam, including males' abuse of the institutions of divorce and polygamy.

Before the early twentieth century, a few voices of liberal men ad-
vocated for women's rights. As women had already begun to manifest their discontent and had undertaken steps to liberate themselves from patriarchal practices, men began in a more abstract way to criticize the backwardness of their country in terms of the situation and status of women. These highly educated men had also been legally trained and exposed to European thought. One of them, Morqus Fahmi, argued that the country was retarded because women were oppressed by males in the family. He wrote and published in 1894 a four-act play about women in the East. It did not raise much debate in Egypt because, as a Copt, he was not able to challenge the main Islamic religious practices, such as veiling the face, repudiation, and polygamy.

Qasim Amin, a Muslim judge, published his first book in 1894. He used to attend Princess Nazli Fazil's salon to debate and discuss with other intellectuals progressive issues in Egypt. In 1899, Qasim Amin published his book Tahrir al-Mar'ah (Liberation of Women) asking for gender reform. Like Fahmi, Amin depicted patriarchal oppression and called for the abolition of female seclusion which, as he demonstrated, has nothing to do with Islam. He also adopted the claims of women feminists, such as the right to work and to education and the elimination of repudiation and polygamy. He called for an end to face veiling and argued that this practice had nothing to do with Islam. The opinions he preached were attacked by conservative voices and writings. In 1900, Amin published his book al-Mar'ah al-Jjadida (The New Woman), in which he uses secular arguments in favor of women's emancipation, and hence national liberation. Since that time, Amin's book has been considered a touchstone for feminist writings in Egypt (although, as Badran indicates in her book, Hoda Sha'rawi and Bahithat al Badiya argued that uncovering the face was a premature fight because society was not ready yet to accept it and that it was only a matter of time before the veil would disappear).

In conclusion, different variables contributed to the rise of feminist consciousness in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the most important being feminist newspapers and writings advocating for women's liberation. This rise of feminist consciousness helped to create an enabling environment for the establishment of women's organizations in the twentieth century.

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND WOMEN'S VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS (1900–23)

The period 1900–23 witnessed the birth of women's voluntary organizations, which represented more than an institutional framework to enable women's participation in public life. These WVOs were fora where
women had the opportunity to express their claims to the right to education, work, participation in political life, and amendments in the personal status law. In addition, they constituted vehicles for women’s empowerment and channels to achieve solidarity. Thus, interaction was established between WVOs and the women’s movement. Another interaction existed between the participation of Egyptian women in the national struggle for independence from the British occupation and their role in voluntary organizations. In the context of interaction between the women’s movement and WVOs, upper-class women, like Hoda Sha’rawi, and to a lesser extent middle-class women, like Nabawiyah Musa, operated within and beyond their classes.

By the early twentieth century, Egyptian women in the upper class tried to initiate their own independent voluntary organizations. Four main attempts were made to organize women’s groups, culminating in the establishment of the Women’s Union in 1923. The first was made under the initiative of Princess Ain Al Hiat, who invited in 1904 a group of women to establish the Mabarat Muhammad Ali Hospital. Hoda Sha’rawi, who later became the president of the Women’s Union (1923), was a member of this pioneer group. The second effort came in 1906, when Hoda Sha’rawi established a Ladies’ Club in Alexandria, which was considered by conservatives a breaking of tradition and culture. Actually, Sha’rawi aimed to create a forum to bring women together rather than establish a sports’ club, as Doreya Shafik noted in her book on Egyptian women: “the club was a way to bring women together towards solidarity.”16 This organization also provided care for mothers and their children.

The New Woman organization was established in 1919 by a group of distinguished upper-class women at a meeting in the house of one of the country’s most famous and wealthy families (Hussein Sabet). (There are historical references to two different dates for the establishment of the New Woman Association, 1919 and 1909; however, most historians favor 1919.) A few weeks later, Hoda Sha’rawi was elected honorary president; she subsequently supported the organization out of her own pocket. The New Woman, which was directly operated by Sherifa Riadh, was active in culture, education, training girls in certain fields (making carpets, nursing), and in philanthropy. One of its most remarkable economic contributions was the establishment of workshops for girls in poor areas to produce carpets using modern equipment. The New Woman’s pathbreaking contribution was recognized in newspapers and by official figures.17

The women’s agenda gradually formulated at that time included advocacy for participation in public life, care services for poor women
and children, and the right to education and work. Face veiling was not included in their priorities, as these women were aware that they should, for practical reasons, adopt a more conservative strategy regarding the process of unveiling women. Nabawiya Musa asserted in a public lecture the right of women to work and to be educated, arguing that “maternal duties did not imply that women should be imprisoned in houses...people can decide for themselves.” Bahithat al-Badiyah and Hoda Sha’rawi pleaded that women should keep the veil until men were ready for change. Men needed to be re-socialized in order to look at women not only as sexual objects. Women also needed to know how to conduct themselves when unveiled. Thus, the process of unveiling women was not on women’s agenda nor a priority. They gave priority to the right of education, of work, of participation in public life, and in changing the personal status law. They believed that by gaining these rights, women would tend to unveil.

During the struggle against British occupation in 1919, and while negotiations between England and the Wafd Committee were of primary political concern, women participated in politics for the first time. They organized demonstrations against occupation; and some of them were killed. In 1920, a group of women linked to the Wafd gathered at St. Mark’s Cathedral and created the Wafdist Women’s Central Committee (WWCC). Hoda Sha’rawi was elected president of the WWCC, whose initial members included Ulfat Ratib, Regina Habib, Mrs. Wissa Wassef, Sharifa Riyad, and others. Several were married to Wafdist leaders; most of them came from important landowning families. However, a few of them were from middle-class families of Cairo. Safiya Zaghlul, the wife of the Wafdist leader Saad Zaghlul, was not a member of this group. She kept strong ties with it, however, and came to be considered as the “Mother of Egyptians.”

The WWCC organized demonstrations, led women in the political struggle, helped and supported the families of prisoners and those who died in demonstrations. One of the important contributions of the WWCC was establishing ties and bridges with women in governing districts through women’s associations. The Committee also assisted in the process of establishing women’s unions in the Delta and in Upper Egypt and led a campaign for the boycott of British banks, shops, and goods in Egypt.

Women’s organizations were not limited to the capital nor to providing care services for mothers and children. Among associations established in Alexandria, the Association for the Promotion of Egyptian Girls was concerned with girls’ education and awareness. In the city of Tanta an organization was established in 1919 under the name of The
Union for the Promotion of Women’s Training and Empowering Poor Egyptian Women. In the same year, another voluntary organization, the Egyptian Ladies Renaissance, was created under the chairmanship of Labiba Ahmed. This organization was partly characterized by its adoption of Islamic principles. Because the number of women’s organizations is not documented, it is not clear how many of them existed.

The establishment of Cairo University in 1906 constituted a historic event in Egypt’s history. The university was established as a result of public initiatives through voluntary activities and donations, partly with funds allocated by Islamic Waqfs. Wealthy women, such as Princess Ain Al-Hiat, allocated agricultural land as Waqf to fund the University. A few years after the University’s opening, calls were raised to open its doors to women; a few lectures were eventually organized for Egyptian and foreign women intellectuals to give presentations. However, the branch for girls was closed in 1912–13 following conservative protests. Later, due to a decision by Ahmed Lotfi El-Sayed, Rector of the University and one of the intellectuals most supportive of women’s rights, the University again opened its doors to women in 1929.

Some of the major characteristics of the birth and development of women’s voluntary organizations in Egypt can be summarized as follows.

1. The women’s movement was first labeled feminist in 1923 by women activists using the French form of the word, since the Arabic translation was somehow different. The development of the women’s movement to obtain their liberation, mainly the right to education and waged labor, was institutionalized in the twentieth century through women’s voluntary organizations. The struggle against veiling the face (Hijab) in the late nineteenth century was raised and led by liberal intellectual men such as Qasim Amin. Female leaders, like Hoda Sha’rawi and Malak Hefni Nassef (known under the name Bahithat al-Badiya), preferred to focus on advocating for women’s rights to work and to education, and on requesting amendments in the personal status law. The question of the veil was not the major priority in women’s agendas it became in the next period (1923–52).

2. Cultural, socio-economic, and political variables shaped Egyptian women’s philanthropy. Religion has always been an important feature in motivating women’s giving, through the recognition of their economic independence and their active roles in Waqfs, and later in the twentieth century through wealthy women’s funding of voluntary organizations. Socio-economic factors also characterized the roles and responsibilities of women’s philanthropy. Women activists in the beginning of the twentieth century were mainly advocating the right to education and work,
at a time when the conservative culture was denying these rights, limiting females’ roles to being wives and rearing children. Thus, women in voluntary organizations established schools and training centers to enable poor women to have access to some professions (sewing, nursing, and producing carpets).

This movement could not have been a reality without the existence of educated, intellectual women and without consciousness of the woman’s question. Nor would it have occurred without the support of liberal men who believed in the emancipation of Egyptian women, as well as that provided by a few religious writings, such as those of Muhammad Abdu, which legitimized women’s rights according to Islam and emphasized that there is no antagonism between women’s rights (in education and work) and the Muslim faith.

The national struggle against British occupation (1882–1923) also had an impact on formulating the roles and responsibilities of women in philanthropy. Women participated in the national struggle, whether directly or indirectly, since social work was a mixture of advocacy and politics.

3. Women activists who had led the women’s movement and established voluntary organizations were mainly members of the upper class; few of them belonged to the middle class. The involvement of middle-class women characterizes the next stage (1923–52). Upper-class women were capable of leading the first steps of the women’s movement because they were educated and wealthy enough to initiate organizations and volunteer their time and efforts. These women were involved not only in advocating women’s rights, but also in social services addressed to poor women. Some of the voluntary organizations that opened schools and training centers for women in poor areas sought to meet women’s daily demands and needs.

4. Women activists gave both money and time to support women’s voluntary organizations. Some invested their own money in support of their non-profit organizations. But as a general rule, women granted support to their voluntary organizations by giving both time and money and tended to adopt the strategy of separatism by creating single-sex organizations, although we should remember that the cultural framework favored this type or organization in the first stage of the women’s liberation movement.

5. Until 1922, the fields of interest of these organizations were mixed since they were active in advocacy, social work, and politics. It is difficult to typify women’s philanthropic concerns as solely focused on motherhood and childhood, although this interest was developed in the next stages and ultimately became one of the characteristics of women’s philanthropy in Egypt.
6. Liberal women who believed in equality and advocated for their rights in education and work were the only activists challenging conservative culture. Female Islamic activists were not active before 1922; their voice was nearly absent in the struggles between liberal women and conservative Islamic men. Leftists were also absent up to 1922. The main discourse belonged either to liberal women or to Islamic conservative men.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S PHILANTHROPY: COMPETING DISCOURSES, 1923–52

Now we reach what we call in Egypt the "Liberal Era." This period witnessed the development and diversification of the voluntary sector in general and women's voluntary organizations in particular. Progressive women, or feminists, became openly militant, while most men who had been pro-feminist nationalists shifted their attention toward their new political careers following conditional independence from Britain in 1922. This era also witnessed the rise of Islamic activism, part of which — such as Zaynab Al-Ghazali — would move from feminism to Islamic fundamentalism, beginning an Islamic women's political movement, accompanied by organized Islamic voluntary organizations. The 1923–52 period, therefore, had an impact on the nature of women's voluntary organizations. One of the most important developments in women's philanthropy in Egypt between 1923 and 1952 was the involvement of middle-class professional women in addressing and motivating popular bases in different areas of Egypt. Cultural and class conflicts were salient in some instances, solidarity and cooperation were clear at other points, particularly concerning the national struggle and selected confrontations with the state. This era witnessed the emergence of both compatible and conflicting discourses, raised by feminists, radical Islamists, leftists, and the state.

With formal independence (British troops remained on Egyptian soil until 1956), nationalist men became part of the new state. At first the official discourse articulated in the new constitution of 1923 seemed to fulfill their promises to women, when it declared: "All Egyptians are equal before the law. They enjoy equally civil and political rights and equally have public responsibilities without distinction of race, language, or religion." However, the principle of gender equality was soon abrogated when an electoral law restricted suffrage to males only. At this point feminism became explicit — the word "feminist" began to be used — and tied to an organized political movement led by the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) created in 1923 and headed by Hoda Sha'rawi.
Egyptian feminism crystallized around this new organization, providing a clear agenda for women's claims to political, social, economic, and legal rights. However, priority was given to education followed by work opportunities, and reforms in the personal status law (see endnote 1). The profile of the EFU program also included demands to protect the family, health, security, and unions, recognize professional groups, establish national banks, provide more attention to improving the farmers' conditions and those of the unemployed, and decrease foreign authority in Egypt.

On June 26, 1923, the secretary general of the EFU clarified the main objective of the organization by these words: "We have seen the spread of ignorance which is responsible for the backward condition of women, half the society, we have witnessed declining health conditions and rising death rates. We have seen the bad relations between men and wives, the increase in divorces and multiple marriages. It is clear that we are aiming at promoting the social status of women, and building a strong base to liberalize her condition." In its first years, the EFU settled in a popular poor area, Al Sayeda Zeinab, to educate, train, and inform women. Then the EFU established the Woman Home (Dar El Mara'a) as a large central training center. "Egyptian and foreign newspapers have pointed to it as an open university for women in all classes."22

The EFU dealt with the family and with women's and children's security (included in the personal status law) in two ways, both moderate if not conservative, keeping in mind that the issues are the concern of Islamic religious establishment (Al Azhar). In the 1920s the EFU concentrated on reforming the family's legal structure, calling mainly for controls of male excess and abuses. They employed Islamic reformist arguments in a discourse of persuasion aimed at influencing the politically empowered male to enact changes in the Muslim personal status code. After the 1920s, they understood that chances for success were minimal. The EFU in the 1930s tried a different approach to dealing with family issues, addressing women themselves to protect and enhance their lives in the family through improved performance of their family roles.24 In their campaign to change the Muslim laws of personal status, they have addressed four issues:

The establishment of minimum marriage age, which was achieved in 1923;

The extension of the mother's legal custody (hadanah) over her children, which was achieved in 1929;

The regulation of men's ability to divorce;

The restriction of men's practice of polygamy.
The last two demands are related to the patriarchal relations between men and women, explained and understood by men as primary rights in Islam. None of these demands were met. Only some minor changes occurred in the personal status laws that were abolished in 1983. What feminists saw as “patriarchal excesses” men regarded as “patriarchal privileges.”

The EFU was active in health service, training, economic activities, philanthropy, and advocacy; the women involved in the organization were addressing social needs, and also policy makers through sub-professional committees. Their effort on the level of fund raising was remarkable. Due to the broadened areas of activities, donations from wealthy women were not sufficient to cope with all of the organization’s work, so the EFU organized special parties where distinguished artists contributed to supporting the organization. The products of the women who benefited from the training inside the EFU’s workshops were also sold, constituting another source of funds. The queen, princess, and ministers’ wives also supported the EFU. On the other hand, there is little evidence of public funding.

The EFU was not the only actor in the field of women’s voluntary organizations. Others were established in the same era, focusing on different activities. The Sisters of the EFU, established in 1924 and headed by Hawa Edris, was mainly active in supporting orphan girls. Working for Egypt was another women’s organization, created in 1924 and headed by Ister Fahmi Wisa, an intellectual activist who collaborated with 140 women in health services, advocacy for children and women’s rights, and opposition to drugs and alcoholism. Working for Egypt established a branch in Alexandria in 1926 and also in upper Egypt (Assiut, with a total membership of 200 women). It opened a school in 1927 to help the poor in educating their children.

Perhaps the most important role played by the Working for Egypt organization was the advocacy stance it adopted against the drug law. It advocated changes in the law in terms of adding restrictions on individuals to protect the society from the negative effects of alcohol and cocaine, both in widespread use at the time. Members of the Senate were invited to discuss the law with members of this organization, after which the Parliament agreed to change a few items in the legislation. Another, similar example was their successful effort to persuade the minister of education to include the art of taking care of children in the curriculum of girls’ schools.

Still another distinguished voluntary organization was established in 1929 under the name Egyptian Young Ladies (Al Shabat Al Masriate). Headed by a twenty-two-year-old woman, Young Ladies focused on providing cultural services for girls. It created a library, artists’ workshop,
sports programs, and a classroom to study languages; it also published a weekly magazine aimed at the middle and poorer classes.

Women also began to get involved in maternalist campaigns at this point. One example is the Association of Motherhood and Childhood, which was established by businessmen's wives; another is the Promoting Health Association, which was funded by princes and the upper class; and others include the Committee of Red Cross Ladies, Developing Health Associations, and other groups focusing on health in general, and childhood and motherhood in particular. Christian women's voluntary organizations were also established, such as the Association of Christian Women, which had much in common with Muslim organizations, most importantly in working against drugs and alcoholism.

1932 marked a historical turning point, as the first committee for Muslim sisters was established in Ismailia City under the name Teams of Muslim Sisters. Another committee was established in Cairo, through the support of the Muslim Brothers, which had been established in Cairo in 1927, headed by Hassan El-Bana. Before that, the same year, they had announced the group in Ismailia; Cairo then became the head office. These Muslim Sisters, who were mainly the wives, daughters, and sisters of members of the Muslim Brothers, presented an Islamic discourse addressed to the middle and lower classes, emphasizing the differences between themselves and the Western feminist discourse. However, this Islamic popular movement was the product of tensions and confrontations between themselves and the upper-class women who had adopted elements of Western manners expressed in dress, in everyday life, and in the use of the French language (the language of the EFU journal founded in 1924 was French). The Islamic Sisters movement achieved substantial successes in terms of mobilizing members, efforts, and funds throughout Egypt, and by 1948, fifty branches had been founded in different places, totaling five thousand members, most of whom were women from the middle and lower classes.²⁷

Due to the confrontation between the Islamic political movement and the government, the Muslim Brothers and Sisters were dissolved and their activities disbanded. However, Muslim Sisters were active in taking care of Muslim prisoners, and afterwards, when they began to work again, they established the head office of Muslim Sisters in Cairo. Their program was promulgated in 1947 under the name The Muslim Women; it included:

"Fighting against the ongoing system and ideologies, and correcting the present status of the woman, identifying all her rights, and recognizing her with respect";
Mobilizing women to lead the "correct" and "right women" promotion, and preparing them for this leadership;

Announcing women's right on the basis of the Qura'n and Islam, including "her right to freedom, her natural and private rights, [and] recognizing her equality with men in human rights which do not contradict with her special function to society."[28]

Another part of the Muslim Sisters program clearly indicated the importance of the role of the Muslim woman in philanthropic action, and promoted her role in social activities as part of her mission.

The sub-law of the Muslim Sisters organization expressed the previous principles and objectives, emphasizing the teaching of Islam to women, educating them in the methods of "Islamic Socialization," women's rights and duties, and also "contributing to social projects such as schools, hospitals, and taking care of orphans and children." So the main activities of the Muslim Sisters were teaching Islam, developing health information and awareness, advancing education, and fostering women's training centers and philanthropy.[29]

In one of their most important publications, they identified the right of woman to work; "but if there is a necessity for this," she also has the right to birth control due to health or economic conditions; and there is a need to recognize her political rights. The tensions between feminism and cultural authenticity were deepened after Zaynab Al-Ghazali, who was a member of the EFU, embraced the Islamic discourse after accepting the notion of secularism. In 1936 she established the Muslim Women's Association, which was depicted in their writings as the women's wing of Muslim Brothers. Al-Ghazali, in her book Days of My Life (1984), mentioned that she had known Hassan El Bana since 1937. He invited her to become the head of Muslim Sisters, stating that "this means that the new baby who I am proud of will be part of the Muslim Brothers movement."[30] El-Ghazali refused the suggestion, but supported the idea of cooperation between both groups.

The Muslim Women's Association (MWA) was disbanded twice before 1952 — first in 1940, and then in 1950 — resuming its activities after being granted a court decree in both instances. The MWA, headed by Al-Ghazali, led the call to respect Islamic traditions, and to teach women "the proper principles of Islam." Intensive activities were initiated in poor areas, addressing poor and uneducated women who had adopted ideas and practices far from the real Islam. Al-Ghazali and her group adopted Islamic dress, prayed in mosques, and wore veils for newspaper photographs, to provide models for Egyptian women.[31]

In the 1940s, the younger generation of female university students and
graduates moved in a new direction, as socialists and communists. For them the liberation of women was tied to the liberation of the masses, and both necessitated the end of imperialism and class oppression in Egypt. Inji Aflaton discovered Marxism, and after her graduation from Fouad University (later Cairo University), she founded the League of University and Institutes for Young Women, which Latifa Zayyat, a student leader, soon joined. The League sent Aflaton and others to the first conference of the International Democratic Federation of Women. But the League was closed in 1946 in the drive to suppress communists. Socialist feminists established another association, the National Feminist Association. Aflaton linked class and gender oppression in her published books, being careful to argue that women’s liberation was compatible with Islam.³²

Popular aspects of the feminist movement were added in the 1940s, not only by Islamic trends but also by liberal trends. New voluntary organizations were established in the 1940s, headed by middle-class professional women who had lacked popular bases before, including the National Feminist Party (NFP) (1942). Fatma Rashed, the head of the organization, gradually gained popularity after she announced her program, emphasizing equality between men and women, and recognizing women’s national, political, and social rights.

The other example of a women’s voluntary organization established in the 1940s was the Daughter of the Nile Union (DNU) (1949), headed by Doria Shafik. Both the NFP and the DNU mounted literacy and hygienic campaigns among the poor. They also sustained the concern with family law reform. Doria Shafik was very distinguished in the advocacy fields. As Aflaton mentioned in her book, “she was the most active in advocating women’s political rights.”³³

During this period, 1923–52, the official religious establishment supported some of the demands adopted by women’s voluntary organizations, such as their campaigns against drugs and alcoholism. But they opposed others, including efforts to change the personal status law. When religious scholars held a conference to examine all aspects of women’s status within the context of Islamic law in 1952, they openly attacked the feminist movement, claiming it was influenced and supported by British imperialists. The reactionary conclusions of the conference seemed to be in part a response to the growing numbers of women in the work force.³⁴ By the early 1950s, women were found in shops, factories, the professions, and the social services in sufficient numbers to alarm the patriarchal sensibilities of male fundamentalists.

The period of the liberal experiment in Egypt was a time when a capitalist economy with ties of dependency to a dominant Europe still
operated largely within a neo-imperialistic framework. The feminist or the pro-feminist ideology that served the nationalist cause was no longer useful or desirable during the period after the revolution (1952). In response, women began to crystallize their concerns around the concept of development, which was subsequently adopted by the state. Although women's voluntary organizations in the Liberal Era gained only limited success in political terms, their efforts constituted the wealthiest and most active chapter in the history of women's philanthropy in Egypt. In this context some conclusions are important:

1. As we have seen in the previous analysis, a host of differing ideologies were put forward through women's voluntary organizations in this period: feminism, Islam, the left. Moreover, cultural and class conflicts within the women's movement had a strong impact on the nature of women's voluntary organizations, and their agendas, their tactics.

2. Although there were differences between women's discourses, a coalition was created among the different wings of the movement in opposing occupation and laying claim to national liberation. The most important example was the establishment of the Women's Committee for Popular Struggle in 1951, which included all the wings involved in women's issues.

3. Women's participation in voluntary organizations provided an efficient mechanism for building parallel power structures. These organizations enabled women to gain political power, although their political rights were denied. These parallel power structures were channels for obtaining legal rights and recognition. In the case of Egypt, women had a modicum of economic independence, as they had the right to acquire and hold property and to sign contracts. For them, voluntary associations were mainly channels for advocating their political and social rights, and gaining political power. Women's economic independence, recognized in Islam, enabled upper-class women to establish and fund their own organizations and create opportunities for other women to work or to be involved in economic projects created by them.

4. Although the type of strategy that most of women's groups adopted was separatism (working in gender-segregated women's groups), some individual males and some other male voluntary organizations gave them support. This was clear whether in the case of the feminists or the Islamists. Thus, the common pattern between 1923 and 1952 was separatism, which proved suitable in that social and
women's philanthropy had an impact in drawing women's attention into the public sphere through voluntary activities. Islam encouraged and supported women's voluntarism through Zakat, Sadakat, and Waqf, and through the recognition of their legal rights to own their own property. This recognition played an essential role in facilitating the creation of women's voluntary associations, not only to give support to the poor but also to advocate women's rights. Conversely, the only sources sustaining women's organizations at that time were the time, money, and income-generating activities they developed for themselves.

SOCIALIST POLICIES AND INTEGRATING VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS INTO THE STATE, 1952–70

The military-led revolution of 1952 marked a historic turning point in Egypt's policies. Socialism was adopted, the one-party system dominated political life, civil society was quashed, and the Muslim Brothers, leftists, and liberal forces were suppressed as being dangerous to the state. This was also a time of contradictions because, although independent feminist voices were silenced, women gained political rights and expanded educational and labor prerogatives. State feminism had
an active role in the political economy,\textsuperscript{35} with genuine accomplishments during the 1950s and 1960s in the areas of education, employment, and political rights. Women’s access to education and to public employment rose dramatically at all levels during this period.

Social attitudes toward women’s education and employment also changed, while the extension of suffrage to women in 1956 successfully crowned the struggles of the older generation. On the whole, these public achievements presented a progressive picture in which women were integrated into the public arena; discrimination on the basis of gender was outlawed by the constitutions of 1956 and 1964, as well as by political discourse. At the same time, no changes occurred on the level of the personal status law, as the state under Nasser maintained the old patriarchal rules and relationships within the family.\textsuperscript{36}

Although state policies accomplished a great deal on the level of women’s rights, state authorities were distrustful of civil society. When feminist leaders tried to continue their political struggles, the government blocked their public activities. In 1956, the same year that the state granted women the right to vote, it paradoxically started to ban feminist organizations and to suppress the public expression of feminist views. The Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), under pressure from the government, purged the alleged communist, Seiza Nabrawi, from its membership. The state dismantled the old EFU, but allowed selected members to reconstitute it as a social welfare association under the name Hoda Sha’rawi Association.

The authorities also closed down the Women’s Committee for Electoral Awareness within a year of its establishment. Around the same time, when a coalition of women came together representing different political tendencies (under the name of the National Feminist Union [NFU]), the authorities did not permit them to work and finally shut them down in 1959. The leftist activist Aflatoon was sent to prison in the same year, and Shafik, who had struggled to obtain women’s political rights, was under house arrest. The Muslim Sisters were disbanded in 1964, and their leader Al Ghazali was sent to prison. This suppression of women’s voluntary organizations and feminist leaders should be seen as part of the suppression of civil society in general, and also within the context of state policies toward the voluntary sector in particular.

Before the 1952 revolution, voluntary associations were subject to the civic code which recognized the freedom of the people to establish or to initiate voluntary organizations. The only restrictions were related to political actions and underground organizations. Articles 54–80 in the civic code recognized the legal status of the association as soon as it was established, so the state had no control over the people’s initiatives.
Closing down an association could only be done with a decree from the court (article 63).

In 1956, a new law was issued (No. 348 for the year 1956) "to establish a new relation between the state and the voluntary associations..." with many restrictions on the establishment process and the members of the organization, denying the right of participation to people designated as "enemies of the revolution." One of the main conditions included in Law No. 348 was the government's right to recognize voluntary organizations. Under this law, all the active associations had to receive government permission to work. Thus, many active women's voluntary organizations (and others), were prohibited by the government. Beginning in this period many voluntary organizations were functionally integrated into the state, funded mainly by the public budget to carry out socialist policies in the field of social welfare. Eight years later, Law No. 32 for the year 1964 (which is still in operation) was issued, imposing numerous constraints on both the establishment and the activities of voluntary associations and foundations. Restrictions on the creation of new groups were imposed for four broad reasons: "national security," preservation of the nation's political system, support for social morality, and opposition to the revival of previously active associations. This last justification was used — and is still used — against the re-establishment of the outlawed Muslim Brothers (and Muslim Sisters). These restrictions allow the government wide latitude both in preventing associations from developing (Article 12), and in dissolving those already in existence (Article 57). Concerning associational activities, the government exercises control through several key provisions, such as checking the documents and records of the organization "to make sure of their conformity to laws." State authorities may, therefore, terminate "the material and legal entity" of associations.37 This last power was used in many cases of women's voluntary organizations. In this context, it should be mentioned that Law 32 recognizes thirteen activities of associations, including efforts focusing on childhood and motherhood, so the majority of women's organizations have tended to act in this field. The public funds allocated to support this type of activity contributed to the increasing number of associations in this area. It is also important to note the absence of women's advocacy organizations, partly because Law 32 does not recognize this type of activity, and because of the oppressive political climate.

Considering the impact of different socio-economic and political frameworks, if we compare women's philanthropic roles in the period 1952–70 with those of the liberal era (1923–52), a few comments might be useful:
1. Women's Voluntary associations in the Liberal Era were the main channels of the feminist movement, and also the main channels for anti-feminists. Comparable discourses were taking place, and each was mobilizing supporters through advocacy action and social work. On the other hand, in Nasser's era (1952–70) there was only socialist discourse, and women's voluntary organizations were not able to challenge the state. Oppositional tendencies were either suppressed or forced underground. The women's movement — what remained of it — was integrated into the state.

2. Due to the cultural and the socio-economic context, women's voluntary organizations — as a general trend in the liberal era — were primarily separatist groups. On the other hand women's voluntary organizations in the Nasser era played an auxiliary role, implementing the socialist objectives adopted by the state.

3. Women's voluntary organizations in the Liberal Era (1923–52) were mainly funded and established by wealthy upper-class and middle-class women. In Nasser's era, women's voluntary organizations were mainly funded by the state, a factor which deeply affected their independence.

4. The involvement of lower middle-class and grassroots groups was one of the characteristics of voluntary action in Nasser's era, compared with the liberal era. This was partly an outcome of state policies on education and work opportunities, which contributed to the process of social mobility. It was also related to the government's commitment to developing rural areas in Egypt.

5. Women's issues, or gender issues, were not part of the agenda of women's organizations under Nasser, as "state feminism" seemed to take care of these issues.

6. The intensive involvement of women's voluntary organizations in maternalist agendas, which characterized Nasser's era, was due mainly to the family planning policies adopted by the state in the 1960s. Thus the state encouraged, and occasionally created, voluntary organizations to implement its policies (such as the Egyptian Association for Family Planning, founded in 1964), indicating the functional integration of voluntary associations into the state.

In conclusion, although Nasser’s government technically increased women’s rights and educational and work opportunities, it simultaneously suppressed feminism and subsumed women’s voluntary organizations under the state, stifling their independence.
ECONOMIC LIBERALIZATION POLICIES, DEMOCRATIZATION, AND ISLAM: COMPETING AGENDAS FOR WOMEN'S PHILANTHROPY, 1970–96

This period witnessed the re-emergence of a more hospitable climate for women's philanthropy. As feminism became public once more, Islamic fundamentalists also found new scope for expression and for mobilizing supporters.

Under Sadat (1970–81), the state became an agent in the promotion of new forms of feminist and Islamist discourses. This role decreased under the Mubarak regime (1981–96), particularly concerning Islamists, as controls were imposed on civil society institutions to reduce their domination of civil society institutions, particularly professional groups (i.e., Law No. 100 concerning professional groups). The 1980s and the 1990s also witnessed a reformulation of the role of voluntary organizations in light of new political and economic variables (e.g., economic liberalization, a controlled multiple party system, and freedom of expression).

Egypt witnessed a dramatic shift from socialism to an economic open-door policy under Sadat, with the private sector taking a leading role in order to strengthen the market system and capitalism. On the political level there was a shift from the one-party system toward a multiple party system (with some controls) beginning in 1975, accompanied by a marginal space for freedoms of expression. These political and economic shifts were more pronounced under Mubarak (1981–96). The number of political parties had increased from four to fourteen by 1996, the arena of freedom of expression had been broadened, and the open-door economic policy became an economic liberalization policy accompanied by privatization related to the economic structural adjustment. (Privatization is a policy that leads to the strengthening of the private sector and to the liquidation of the public sector.)

In the 1970s, Sadat capitalized on the popular religious resurgence that followed the war with Israel (1973) and encouraged these groups, partly to create counter forces to Nasser's Arab socialism, and to control leftist forces. That was the beginning of strengthening Islamic forces again in Egypt, which gradually succeeded in creating a popular base in the society, and an effective role in some civil society institutions (e.g., political parties, professional groups, and voluntary organizations).

The advocacy of women's causes was espoused by Jihan Al Sadat and inspired by the UN decade of women (1975–85). As the wife of the president, Sadat styled herself as the supreme advocate of women in Egypt, pushing for fundamental changes in the personal status laws for the first
time in fifty years. Excessive patriarchal privileges were curtailed in an unprecedented manner with the expansion of women’s ability to initiate divorce, added protections for women in divorce, and controls placed on polygamy. The president’s wife actively lobbied for the 1979 decree, which was issued when parliament was in recess. These gains constituted an important if still inadequate step, although portions of the new legislation were rescinded in the 1980s, following public attacks on the changes of the personal status law (1985).

The 1980s and the 1990s witnessed the renewed visibility and organization of independent feminist and Islamist groups, a period of acquiring supporters, and a period of testing the new political and economic climate. Thus, although no distinguished women’s voluntary organizations were active, individual activists from different political tendencies (e.g., the famous feminist Nawal El Sa’dawi and the Islamist Zaynab El Ghazali after her release from prison) assumed an increasingly prominent public role. The 1970s were years of preparation for all political discourses within civil society. The 1980s witnessed the “explosion” of these discourses, revealing the strength of several often-competing forces.

It is worth mentioning the new constitution adopted in 1971 (and still operating with some changes), which reveals the state’s contribution in spelling out a dichotomy between woman as “public” citizen and as “private” family member governed by the Shari’a. Article 40 guarantees that “citizens are equal before the law, they are equal in public rights and duties, with no discrimination made on the basis of race, sex, language, ideology or belief.” The explicit declaration against discrimination on the basis of sex would seem at first glance to represent a step forward. However, according to some observers, the 1971 language “equal in public rights and duties,” was weaker than that of the 1923 constitution, which read: “they enjoy equally civil and political rights and equally have public responsibilities.” Moreover, the clauses in the 1971 constitution, mentioning state guarantees to balance between women’s duties toward their families on one hand and toward their work on the other, ultimately underscored the dichotomy between women’s roles as citizens and family members.

When we reach the 1980s and the present, we realize the serious impact of these contradictory socio-economic and cultural pressures. The retreat of the state sector as a result of economic liberalization policies and privatization made many women increasingly vulnerable to low-income levels and the loss of employment opportunities, particularly after the state rescinded its obligation to employ graduates in the state apparatus. Women also suffered from the government’s retreat from its former role in subsidizing goods and services, as retrenchment policies
dovetailed with those of economic structural adjustment. At the same time, conservatives began encouraging women to go back home, in order to open more employment opportunities for men, on one hand, and to respect the Islamic explanations, understood in a very rigid way, on the other hand.

At this point, Islamist factions began to strengthen their voluntary organizations and to dominate the council boards of some professional groups (including doctors, engineers, pharmacists, and lawyers). In the process, they became an increasingly visible factor in public life. The economic crisis and the success of Islamists in reaching public opinion and penetrating the most important civil society institutions, as well as their efficiency in delivering services, raised a competing model which attracted both men and women. Islamists' views of women's education and employment may have a serious impact on the coming generation. A study by Zaynab Radwan of veiled college women recently found that most embraced the new conservative perspectives. While they supported women's education, they saw it primarily as a means of preparing good wives. One third of the sample supported the unqualified right of women to work, while another third stated that women should only work if there is an economic need. All of these economic, political, and social variables have had an impact on the country's voluntary organizations in general, and on women's groups in particular.

The Islamist activist Zaynab Al Ghazali assumed prominence as the president of the Association of Young Muslim Women. Other new organizations were also established to advocate Islamic discourse. On the other hand, the feminist Nawal El Sa'dawi has struggled to establish the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA), created in 1985. The AWSA holds that the liberation of the people as a whole cannot take place without the liberation of women. The AWSA owned a publishing house, held conferences and seminars, built their own network, and attracted international contacts and communications, all of which advocated women's rights. But her organization was dissolved by the ministry of social welfare in the 1990s, under Law 32 (of 1964), which gives government the right to do so if the association has broken the law, which was the officially announced reason for disbanding El Sa'dawi's group.

Feminists were deeply disturbed by the growing conservatism in Egyptian public life. This concern increased when the state capitulated to growing opposition to the 1979 revisions of the personal status law in 1985. However, within two months new legislation was passed, restoring most of the benefits to women provided under the 1979 law.

In this context, and in response to the withdrawal of the state from the recognition of women's rights, an informal group of professional
women, including those concerned with women’s rights, published *Legal Rights and the Work Law*. They considered this book "a vital document to support every Egyptian woman who is struggling to achieve a better life for herself and her family."41

A number of women’s voluntary organizations were established in the 1980s and the 1990s in Cairo and the provinces, some of which were related to the competing political discourses that surfaced during the Sadat and Mubarak regimes. Others were related to economic crises, particularly those focusing on the promotion of increased opportunities for earned income for Egyptian women. Still other organizations acted in traditional fields to support the poor.

At this point, it is important to analyze the profile of women’s voluntary organizations in the 1990s, patterns intimately linked to socio-economic and political factors:

**Size and Development**

It should be noted in this context that there is a dearth of official data concerning voluntary organizations in general, and women’s organizations in particular, as official data do not recognize women’s organizations as a separate and independent category. The following analysis is based on the results of surveys conducted by the author and on partial official data.

The total number of voluntary organizations registered in Egypt in 1994 was 13,526, according to the report of the Ministry of Social Affairs. There is an imbalance in the geographical distribution of these groups, with Cairo and Alexandria accounting for the highest numbers.42

In trying to discern the total number of women’s organizations, the writer conducted a survey (1993) which identified 123 organizations. These institutions identified themselves as women’s organizations, most of which were separatist groups (membership for women only). This number—according to an official announcement—increased in the last three years, particularly before the Women’s Conference in Beijing in 1995 (estimated about 200). This tendency to increase is in accordance with the general tendency of voluntary organizations to increase over the last few years, due to government tolerance and willingness to accept the registration of voluntary organizations which are perceived as mechanisms for mitigating the negative effects of structural adjustment. The tendency to proliferate in the last few years can also be explained in light of the development of civil society, which has increased the level of citizen participation in public life. Table 1 underscores the trend among Egypt’s voluntary organizations:43
Strategic Types Adopted by Women’s Voluntary Organizations

Although separatist strategies were adopted by women’s groups in the liberal era (1923–52), they are no longer dominant, even in traditional areas of women’s interests such as maternalist and social assistance programs. The number of closed women’s organizations only increased from 123 in 1993 to 200 in 1996. The indicators of membership in voluntary organizations in general reveal that there is a growing tendency among women to work in male-dominated organizations.

In some female organizations, the members play an auxiliary role to the government, or to the main donor (as in the case of some development organizations). The second model of subsidiarity in women’s organizations can be found among some religious (Islamic and Christian) voluntary associations, where they integrate themselves into a male-dominated religious body (the Muslim Brothers as an example).

Membership and Decision Making Positions

The official data do not indicate the total scope of nonprofit membership, or the distribution according to sex, but a general figure announced by the Minister of Social Affairs in 1993 placed the number of all members of voluntary organizations at approximately three million.

To reach a better understanding of the scope of women’s membership in voluntary organizations, this paper depends on some partial indicators, including official data on 1084 voluntary organizations, which indicate that women constituted less than a quarter (22.4 percent) of all members. Women account for about 18.8 percent of all board members. But these general data can hide or ignore important discrepancies because women’s membership in voluntary organizations tends to decrease in rural areas. Also women’s roles as decision makers on the board tended to increase in certain areas of activity, such as motherhood and childhood associations (and maternalist activities in general), and in organizations located in Cairo and other large cities. Table 2
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Activity</th>
<th>Number of Associations</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Board Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherhood and Childhood (maternalist)</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>26,831</td>
<td>9,627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family planning</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>11,576</td>
<td>8,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philanthropy (social assistance)</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>62,168</td>
<td>14,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>4,303</td>
<td>1,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and scientific services</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>50,040</td>
<td>11,439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed activities</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>75,993</td>
<td>22,568</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

highlights women’s membership and board membership within 1084 Egyptian associations.

Table 2 reveals the gap between male and female membership. It also indicates the small contribution of women in the decision-making process. The only exceptions are family planning and maternalist associations. The situation is more promising in advocacy, a key conclusion drawn from a field study of 137 advocacy organizations in Egypt conducted by the writer in 1995. According to this study, women’s membership in groups that deal with these types of issues is about 30 percent, increasing to 60 percent in some fields of activity such as environmental concerns. Also the percentage of women on boards of directors was about 34 percent of the total, indicating a positive trend toward women's increased participation in public life which was previously absent.

**Fields of Activity**

If we classify the activities of women in voluntary associations, four main fields emerge:

(a) **Motherhood, Childhood, and Family Planning**, or maternalist activities, represent the main focus of women’s philanthropy, particularly since the 1980s. These types of voluntary organizations are funded primarily by the state, although family planning in particular also receives foreign and international funds. This type of activity is “state oriented” and functionally integrated into the state.

(b) **Social assistance** is a second main area of activity for women in philanthropy. In this context it is important to note the high percentage of Islamic and Christian voluntary organizations active in this field. A survey conducted by the writer in 1993 revealed that 34 percent of the total number of voluntary organizations were Islamic, and...
about 7 percent Christian. Most of these organizations were active in social assistance (traditional philanthropic activities). Thus about 40 percent of the contemporary women's organizations were religiously oriented.

(c) Development activities represent a growing arena for women's involvement in voluntary organizations in significant numbers. This type of activity is strongly supported by the government and foreign donors, including projects to change women's roles in society and raise their income levels.

(d) Advocacy is the fourth type of activity in which women participate in voluntary organizations. In this context in a developing country like Egypt, advocacy is not limited to lobbying and influencing policy-making, but also includes influencing public opinion to shed light on important issues such as women's political participation and their legal rights.

Some of these advocacy organizations are not registered under Law 32, but rather according to the civic code as civil companies, a device employed in order to free themselves from the bureaucratic controls of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Most of the advocacy organizations in Egypt are funded primarily by foreign donations, in part because the traditions of collective action in Egypt do not favor this type of activity. Also, the concept of advocacy — to the government — is often understood as opposition, so advocacy organizations which are active in human rights and women's rights do not receive support from the public budget.

There is also a clear lack of solidarity among contemporary women's organizations. There is no union, no single institutional body to advocate the rights of women, to push towards influencing the policy-making process, and/or to lobby to change laws, in particular the personal status law. But there have been some positive initiatives in recent years. The national committee for Egyptian NGOs, which was established to prepare for the International conference of population and development held in Cairo 1994, convened a women's task force to address women's main issues in Egypt. They focused on justice and equality in educational opportunities, since there are still gaps between males and females according to economic status, and between rural and urban areas, the Delta and Upper Egypt. The ratio of female enrollments to those of males in preparatory schools is 44.2 percent, a ratio which declines for higher education. The aforementioned document also indicates equality in employment: in agriculture woman's contribution is 50.7 percent, in the economic formal sector it is 35.4 percent; and 22 percent of Egyptian
families are headed by women. “[B]ut there are still calls asking for women to go back to their homes due to high national unemployment levels.”

The NGO document presented to the international conference on population and development (1994), in addressing questions of legal equity, raised a debatable issue (although one in accordance with the Share): the conditions under which stipulations might be included in the marriage contract to protect women’s interests. Another important issue adopted by the NGO document concerns women’s equality in the nationality law. Under current law, an Egyptian woman married to a foreigner, even an Arab Muslim, cannot automatically guarantee that her sons will have Egyptian citizenship. On the contrary, if the man is married to a foreigner, his sons enjoy Egyptian citizenship, a reality which runs against the grain of principles of equality in the constitution.

The International Population and Development Conference provided an opportunity for voluntary organizations to work together, to build solidarity, and to explore women’s issues. The preparations for NGO participation in the “International Conference for Women” in Beijing afforded another occasion for women’s voluntary organizations to build their networks and announce their demands. The Arab Alliance of Women, an Egyptian organization headed by Hoda Badran, made a substantial effort to bring women’s grassroots organizations in the provinces together with elitist organizations in Cairo, to jointly prepare the document for Beijing. But most of these efforts to build solidarity among women’s organizations are related to specific occasions and international events, more than an ongoing campaign to recreate the “women’s movement” of the Liberal Era (1923–52).

The contradictory socio-economic pressures of the last two decades negatively affected the creation of a national women’s movement in Egypt. Islamists contributed to these contradictory pressures, as did feminist organizations, which ignored grassroots issues for a long time. The state, although adopting a pluralistic system, where civil society institutions enjoy a modicum of marginal freedoms, is not yet ready to accept the institutionalization of a women’s movement.

Pressures from Islamists and conservative voices partially explain this situation. As an alternative, the government created the National Committee for Women, headed by the president’s wife, which included women leaders, professional women, voluntary organization representatives, and some official figures. This semi-governmental body prioritized women’s issues, influenced public policy making, and made some serious efforts to build a database related to women’s issues, which have been broadly discussed in the Women National Conferences.
CONCLUSION

1. From the nineteenth century to 1996, religion has been a primary factor in the birth and the development of women’s philanthropy. Islamic teachings and traditions, in particular Zakat and Sadakat, traditionally motivated Muslims to give and to volunteer. Also the Islamic practice, Al Waqf seems to be another organized tradition that has encouraged women’s philanthropy. These teachings and practices were present before the nineteenth century, when philanthropy began to be institutionalized. What helped Muslim women to become active was Islam’s recognition of their rights as a legal entity and recognition of women’s economic independence. Other factors, such as the struggle against their seclusion and rigid explanations of Islam, the national struggle against the British occupation, the presence of foreign minorities in Egypt, education and communication with western culture also played a role.

The role of religion was not always accompanied by positive results. Islamists contributed mainly to developing an Islamic discourse on women’s issues, in particular concerning the contradiction between “public roles” and “private roles." These competing discourses about gender relations have often been rooted in efforts to sustain sexual hegemony and mixed with issues of political power.

The state was another partner in shaping women’s philanthropic role, and the “woman question” in general. Different positions were adopted in different eras, according to the state’s vision concerning social and political stability.

In brief the state, society, and Islam presented the three angles which contributed to the formulation and development of women’s philanthropy.

2. Secular feminists created the only discourse that insists upon the need for radical changes in gender relations. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, they have used voluntary organizations as the main channels for building parallel power structures, particularly in the 1930s and the 1940s, when they lacked political rights.

3. Although women’s organizations, adopting “maternalist” programs, constitute a high proportion of voluntary organizations in general, and although other indicators suggest substantial contributions — as members and on boards — in this field of activity, it wouldn’t be wise in the case of Egypt to conclude that women made their greatest impact on policy-making agendas through maternalist campaigns. The state integrated the maternalist programs of voluntary organizations into its plans, and the state is the main
funding resource for these activities. Thus, the public policies in this field are in accordance with the “maternalist programs” of voluntary organizations.

Equally important is the recent establishment of independent advocacy organizations which are designed to influence the policy making process concerning reproductive rights of women, children’s rights, the issue of street children, and the quality of health services, but it is too early to evaluate their impact.

4. **Women’s organizations had a greater impact on policy making before independence** (1952) and the centralized Nasser regime. This study reveals that in the liberal era (1923–52), women made a substantial imprint on policy making. Their leaders participated on official committees addressing some of the main issues facing the nation at this time (i.e., drugs, women’s education, privileges and exceptions enjoyed by foreign minorities, health services, etc.), and they succeeded in implementing part of their agenda.

If we compare what women’s organizations gained in this stage of the nation building, with what they gained in the 1970s and 1980s, we find that the strong “centralized” state introduced under Nasser offered women only marginal opportunities to influence state policies. The changes in the personal status law (in 1979) were mainly pushed by the president’s wife, while the retreat of the state (in 1985) through passage of a new law according only minor benefits to women, was influenced by conservative opposition.

5. Another conclusion concerns **independence and the source of funds**. Women’s organizations between 1923 and 1952 generally enjoyed greater independence, forming the Egyptian Women’s Union, and engaging in advocacy as well as social welfare, trends due mainly to their economic independence. Thus, rich upper-class women established and/or funded their organizations, and they adopted other types of fundraising, such as income-generating activities and charity events. The public budget and/or foreign donations did not represent a substantial portion of their funds. In the 1980s and the 1990s, the main source of support shifted to public funding and/or foreign donations, an important factor influencing women’s voluntary organizations agenda.

Ironically, Egyptian women’s organizations were not historically under-funded, receiving *Waqf*, *Zakat*, and *Sadakat* donations. This enabled them to pursue a mix of advocacy and social welfare activities. By the 1980s and the 1990s, donations tended to decrease after a long historical experience of depending on the state (1952–70). When
Egypt began to suffer an economic crisis, most of the voluntary organizations—including women’s groups—became under-funded. The flow of foreign donations from international organizations and institutions seemed to be an open option to depend on. This foreign funding, particularly in the last few years, has placed a high priority to women’s organizations and women’s projects.

Now the challenge facing the non-profit sector in general and women’s organizations in particular is related to the country’s funding crisis and independence. Promoting the development of local funds is a critical task for women’s organizations, as is the need to forge new types of collaboration within the private sector, and to motivate the upper classes to support women’s organizations as they used to. Meeting these challenges will not be possible without increased solidarity among women’s groups.

NOTES

5. Ibid., 6.
7. Ibid., 335.
12. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 23.
19. Ibid., 80.
21. Abdel Moneim Dessouki, “Al Game’a Al Masria Wa Al Mogtameh” (The Egyptian University and Society) (Cairo: Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 1982), 19.
25. Ibid., 126.
27. Ibid., 56–58.
29. Ibid., 188–89.
31. Ibid., 27.
33. Inji Aflaton, “Nahno El Nesa’a Al Masriate” (We the Egyptian Women) (Cairo, 1949), 112.
34. Badran, “Competing Agendas,” 214.
36. Ibid. 5.
39. Ibid., 222.
44. Amani Kandil, Advocacy Organizations in Egypt, Cairo: USAID Cairo Office, 1996.