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The Notion of Space in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and Huda Shaarawi's *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1879-1924)

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Dedication

To our families, friends and teachers

Acknowledgement

Firstly, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to our supervisor Seddiki Sadia for her useful remarks and instructions; we assert that the process of this dissertation would not be accomplished without her commitment, plying and honesty in work.

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Abstract

This research is a comparative study between *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by the English feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft and *Harem Years: the Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1879-1924) by the Egyptian feminist writer Huda Shaarawi. The purpose of our dissertation is to study how the two writers read the notion of space (public and private spheres). To explore this issue, we have used Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962) as a frame theory. This theory will be supplied by a secondary one advanced by Chandra Talpad Mohanty in her essay *Under Western Eyes* (1986). We have come to the conclusion that the two writers share the same objectives and preoccupations. They fought to bring women from private sphere into the public one through education and politics. They also stress the importance of education in the private space. Besides, they used their writings as a means to gain access and visibility in the public sphere. The work has also revealed that Huda Shaarawi, like many other Muslim feminists, indiscriminately espouse Western feminist rhetoric despite the huge differences between the Western and Muslim cultures.

Key Words:

Mary Wollstonecraft, Huda Shaarawi, Western women, Muslim Women, Public and Private Spheres, Education, politics.

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I. General Introduction

For centuries, trapped in a male dominated society, women were restricted to the domestic (private) sphere. They have had to fight earnestly to overcome their inflicted burdens, gain recognition and enter the public sphere to exert their rights and duties as fully acknowledged citizens. A large number of female writers used their pens as a means of liberation. They challenged their societies and tried to prove their important role in it. Our dissertation will be a comparative study between two of these female authors: the English Mary Wollstonecraft and the Egyptian Huda Shaarawi and their works *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1879-1924) respectively. These two writers belong to two different cultures and times, yet their writings tackle similar issues.

Women represent half of the society, yet they have long suffered from marginalization and discrimination. They were believed to be weak both physically and mentally compared to men. Such discrimination led to the emergence of feminism. The latter has generated an ongoing debate all over the world and has sought to solve women's problems and put an end to their abject conditions. In this context, Freedman declares, "feminism concerns itself with women's inferior position in society and with discrimination encountered by women because of their sex."¹ Both Wollstonecraft and Shaarawi criticized their respective patriarchal societies and initiated changes to improve women's conditions.

Mary Wollstonecraft is regarded as one of the founding feminist philosophers and theorists. She is also a representative of eighteenth century England, a period which boasted thinkers like Rousseau, Voltaire, Kant and others. She emerged as a modernist feminist against women's exclusion from education, politics and work. Her several works show her deep commitment to women's rights. For instance, her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

(1792) revolves around the idea that women should be educated in order to free themselves from the shackles of domesticity and their patriarchal society.

Similarly to Wollstonecraft, Huda Shaarawi who represents the twentieth century Egypt, sought to improve the lives of Egyptian women. Her writings express the need to fight against patriarchal society (harem, seclusion and the practice of veiling). In *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1879-1924), Shaarawi shows the relationships between private (harem and seclusion) and public (education, politics and work) spheres. She also considers that education plays a pivotal role in the emancipation and the liberation of the Egyptian women.

Mary Wollstonecraft and Huda Shaarawi belong to liberal feminism which focuses more on issues related to total equality in education, workplace, and political rights. The two writers experienced gender inequality and oppression that had deeply influenced their agendas and their feminist campaigns. Thus, both of them emerged as feminists against women's subjugation; they challenged men and fought to bring women to the public sphere.

Review of Literature

Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and Huda Shaarawi's *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1879-1924) have received a lot of critical attention. Though the former is a collection of essays and the latter is an autobiographical work, both of them tackled important issues related to women such as the notion of space, education, oppression and male domination. This may be the reason why the two works were warmly received by the audience and the critics.

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: A Reflection of the Tension Between Conformity and Rebellion in the Life and Times of Mary Wollstonecraft* (2009), Ann Sophia-Rothschild discusses how Wollstonecraft's personal struggle against gender inequality made her defend her "fellow creatures."² Sophia-Rothschild studies "the dichotomy between the

public and private sphere that most women of Wollstonecraft's time experienced."³ She also focuses on Wollstonecraft's experiences during her life including the unjust traditional values she grew up with. Sophia-Rothschild explains how a life of conformity leads to a life of oppression and argues that all what Wollstonecraft lived and witnessed led her to develop new values to defend women's rights.

In her thesis *Aspects of Mary Wollstonecraft's Religious Thought* (2007), Suzanne Melissa Morgan studies four of Wollstonecraft's works including *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). She argues that Wollstonecraft's writings have been largely tackled by feminist studies, but a lot of them overlooked the influence of religion in her works. Through her thesis, Morgan aims to prove "that religion was a foundational element within Wollstonecraft's thought and arguments."⁴ This means that Wollstonecraft used religion to argue against social injustice. Morgan focuses on how Wollstonecraft used religious language and imagery in order to ask for equality between men and women, and to prove that women's inferior position is not "God's will" but rather it is made by men.

Shaarawi's *Harem Years* has also been analyzed and evaluated by many critics. In her book, *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Shahrazad Tells her Story* (2003), Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, a literary critic who studies Shaarawi's memoirs from a reformist and nationalist perspective, taking these memoirs as the best example that shaped the Arab feminism. For Golley, Shaarawi's memoirs present the lives of women of her class and gender through the conflicts she experienced.⁵ It is worth mentioning that the work of Shaarawi is examined in the two versions (the original and the translated works) for two different audiences. The critic also considers Shaarawi's work as a representation of self-awareness and self-evaluation. Moreover, Golley regards Shaarawi's autobiography as a means of "self-construction" and for the advancement of her "political consciousness" with concepts that are related to "class and gender".⁶

Another critic who has looked into the work of Huda Shaarawi is Rula B. Quawas in her *A Sea Captain in Her Own Right: Navigating the Feminist Thought of Huda Shaarawi* (2006). Quawas studies how Shaarawi advocates women's rights. She claims that Shaarawi was one of the first female Egyptians to defend the rights of women.⁷ Her work is considered as a tool which helped Egyptian women gain a position in the public realm. Quawas also considers Shaarawi's memoirs as a means of progress "they became Shaarawi's mirror and her mouthpiece, ventriloquizing her words and self-reflexive point of view".⁸ The critic considers Shaarawi's writings as an act of rebellion against the patriarchal constitutions which imprisoned and secluded women in their houses. Quawas quotes the Poet Najeeb Hawawini who argues that the "importance of Shaarawi's work which is still imbued with plenty of energy and zeal to stir up passions among new generations of readers."⁹

Earl L. Sullivan is another critic who has studied Shaarawi's work in his *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1879-1924). Sullivan concludes that Shaarawi's *Harem Years* provides a deep understanding of the "character, personality and turmoil of the life of a major Egyptian political figure."¹⁰ While much of *Harem Years* hold ordinary issues, many parts hide important public subjects. For instance, feminism implicated within the context of the Nationalist movement. In his work, Sullivan focuses on the impacts of foreign ideas which are often indicated as being the cause of Egyptian feminism.¹¹ For him, Shaarawi's autobiography constructs a basic input to one's awareness of Shaarawi's life and her defence of women's rights.

Although the above cited critics have studied and analyzed Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and Shaarawi's *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1879-1924), they have not compared the two works. Thus, our concern in this dissertation is to compare these two works by focusing on women's position in both

private and public spheres and how education plays a crucial role in liberating and allowing them to contribute in the social and political affairs.

Issue and Working Hypothesis

A number of books and articles have explored different themes in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and *Harem years: The Memories of an Egyptian Feminist* (1879-1924). To our best knowledge, these two works have never been compared together. Despite the fact that these two writers belong to two different cultures and times, their writings tackle similar issues and present surprising affinities. Thus, we propose a comparative study of these two texts by focusing on the notion of space (public and private). The reason why we used two authors belonging to two cultures far removed from each other is to stress women's sufferings all over the world from gender inequalities and to show how the Muslim feminists are influenced by Western ones. Mary Wollstonecraft's writing is considered as a source of inspiration for Huda Shaarawi. Even though Shaarawi did not acknowledge her influences, a close perusal of her writing shows that she was influenced and inspired by Wollstonecraft's writings.

Our aim in this work is to show how Wollstonecraft and Shaarawi stressed the importance of bringing women out of the private sphere to the public one through education. The latter is a significant theme in the two respective works since it plays a crucial role in liberating women. According to the two writers, education develops women's abilities, gives them access to the public sphere, and allows them to be involved in the political affairs.

The two writers used their revolutionary writings in order to push women to demand and defend their rights in the public sphere. But, that does not mean they totally rejected the private sphere. For both writers, education plays an important role in the private sphere. Both Wollstonecraft and Shaarawi believed that in order for women to be good wives

and mothers, they should receive a good education. The two authors argued that their writings in the private space paved the way to access the public sphere.

Our work also tries to highlight how these two female writers used their writings in order to gain visibility and voice in the public sphere. Both writers wrote about their real life experiences in order to confirm their existence both physically and intellectually. Writing, thus, helped both Wollstonecraft and Shaarawi to strengthen their voices in the public sphere. For them, writing is a vital weapon towards women's liberation.

Our study will also shed light on the Western influence on the Arab Muslim feminists. Many of the latter have adopted the concepts of Western feminism and called for the same rights despite the huge differences between the two cultures. Huda Shaarawi, for instance, accepted Western womanhood as her model and called for a collective feminist ideology. She had the opportunity to travel to different countries which gave her access to different cultures and increased her interaction with European and American women.

In our analysis, we will adopt Jürgen Habermas' concepts of the public and private spheres, developed in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public: an inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society* (1962). We will try to apply them to the two works in order to show to what extent Mary Wollstonecraft and Huda Shaarawi reflect women's struggle against male domination and how both of them fought for women's liberation in both the private and public spheres. In this research, we are also going to show how Huda Shaarawi has embraced Western thought in order to free herself and other women from the patriarchal society regardless of her own traditions and cultures.

Methodological Outline

Our work is composed of five sections; the first section is devoted to the general introduction where we tackle women's issues in society and their sufferings from gender inequality and introduce the two literary works by Mary Wollstonecraft and Huda Shaarawi respectively. We also review some previous critics that have been written on these two works. Then, we raise the issue and working hypothesis, which is the study gap that we aim to fulfil. The second section contains the methods and materials. It consists of Jürgen Habermas' discussion of concepts of public and private spheres and a brief summary of Chandra Talpad Mohanty's essay *Under Western Eyes* (1984). It also includes the summaries of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1879-1924). The third section consists of the results. The fourth section is dedicated to the discussion and the analysis of the two works; it is divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and the second one tackles *Harem Years*. Both chapters explore the notion of space in relation to women's education and their involvement in politics. As for the third chapter, it is a critique of Huda Shaarawi's total dependence on Western feminist rhetoric in her endeavour to emancipate Egyptian women. The last section is a general conclusion of our study and a summary of the whole work and restatement of the main findings.

Endnotes

¹ Freedman Jane. *Feminism Concepts in the Social Sciences*. Great Britain: St Edmund Sbury Press, 2001, p 4.

² Rothschild, Ann Sophia. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: A Reflection of the Tension Between Conformity and Rebellion in the Life and Times of Mary Wollstonecraft*. University of South Florida, 2009. Accessed on January 20th 2020.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Morgan, Suzan Melissa. *Aspects of Mary Wollstonecraft's Religious Thought*. University of Waikato, 2007. Accessed on January 20th 2020.

⁵ Golley, Nawar al-Hassan. *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Shahrazad Tells her Story*. The University of Texas Press, 2003, pp 35-36. Accessed on July 10th, 2019.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Quawas, Rula B. "A Sea Captain in Her Own Right: Navigating the Feminist Thought of Huda Shaarawi". Vol 8, N. 1, 2006, p 221. Accessed on January 20th, 2020 <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol8/iss1/17>. Pdf.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, p 232.

¹⁰ Sullivan, Earl L. "Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924) by Huda Shaarawi and Margot Badran". Vol 21, N. 3, 1989, p 426. Accessed on January 20th, 2020. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/163457>

¹¹ Ibid.

II. Methods and Materials

a. Method

To analyze the above mentioned issues, we have decided to follow and borrow some concepts from the theoretical guidelines of Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962) to discuss the concepts of the public and private spheres. We will use Habermas's take on the notion of space as a frame theory. This theory will be supported by a secondary one developed by the Indian feminist writer Chandra Talpad Mohanty in her influential essay *Under Western Eyes* (1986) to criticize Shaarawi's total reliance on Western feminist thought in her criticism of Egyptian women's conditions.

Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* was originally published in Germany, but was not accessible in English until 1989.¹ He begins his discussion of the word "public" by focusing on the French, English and German languages. The word "public" itself may refer to the state, common man, space such as public fields and sometimes as public opinion. But the majority of historians consider the concept of "Öffentlichkeit" as a "space" or "public sphere" which appeared as a place or a concrete thing, rather than as a more abstract idea of "publicity."²

In his seminal work, Habermas has recognized the present day notion of the public space which appeared during the 17th and early 18th centuries. He shows that the origins of the notions of "public and private spheres" go back to Ancient Greece and Rome and are used to show how society is composed of two different spheres the "polis and oikos" which are separated from each other, but mutually dependent. The sphere of "polis" designates a public space which is built on open co-operation between free inhabitants in the political realm, while "oikos" sphere shows a private sphere founded on hidden interaction between free

individuals in the domestic realm.³ This shows that the public space was separated from the private but intrinsically dependent on each other.

According to Jürgen Habermas, “We call events and occasions ‘public’ when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs.”⁴ This concept of “public” becomes apparent according to its utilization with such expressions like public education, public health, which are debated with the expressions of private education, private health. Later, Habermas examines how this humanistic public sphere was passed on through Renaissance architecture and how it was protected in Roman law which characterized the private and the public.⁵

Despite the fact that Habermas’s *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is one of the most dominant works in German political and philosophical sciences, recent researchers argue that the bourgeois public sphere deals with exclusions. Some researchers tackled issues related, for example to gender discrimination. The notion of public sphere embraces the exclusion of certain members from the public sphere, for example, the exclusion of women and those who were deprived of political and educational opportunities. Our purpose in this work is to focus on women writers who are excluded from the public sphere.

We have adopted Chandra Talpad Mohanty’s essay *Under Western Eyes* (1986) as a reference work because it meets the needs of our critical approach. In her work, Mohanty criticizes Western feminists thought for universalizing women’s experiences and neglecting the distinctions of race, culture and ethnicity. She exposes the notion of ethnocentricity that neglects the Non-Western’s geographical background. In addition to this, she argues that third world women (and by extension) Muslim women are portrayed in Western feminist writings as victims of Male domination and culture without having information about historical and geographical context. The westernized Huda Shaarawi borrows Western feminist rhetoric in order to address the problems of her largely conservative and religious fellow sisters. Mohanty argues:

The existence of Third World women's narratives in itself is not evidence of decentring hegemonic histories and subjectivities. It is the way in which they are read, understood, and located institutionally that is of paramount importance. After all, the point is not just to record one's history of struggle, or consciousness, but how they are recorded; the way we read, receive, and disseminate such imaginative records is immensely significant.⁶

We have also used Mohanty's essay as a starting point in order to highlight that Shaarawi relied on the Western thought without taking into consideration local religious and cultural values in her rejection of the Islamic veil. Mohanty tries to contextualize the complexity of Non-Western women's culture (Islam) which is interpreted by Western eyes as oppressive. For instance, she criticizes Western's interpretations of the concept of veiling as universally oppressive in Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi-Arabia and India. For her, Westerners believe that women who wear the veil are all secluded. "While there may be a physical similarity in the veils worn by women in Saudi Arabia and Iran, the specific meaning attached to this practice varies according to the cultural and ideological context."⁷

In *Under Western Eyes*, Mohanty enlarges her debate through selecting some texts yielded by various sources, for instance, Maria Rosa Cutrufelli's *Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression*. In her work, Cutrufelli's stipulates that all African women as being economically and financially dependents. Juliette Minces also claims that all Muslim women are secluded and created only to be mothers and wives. Mohanty opposes the above mentioned ideas which assume that the oppression of women is universal regardless of the diversity of their culture, class and ethnicity.

The last thing that Mohanty criticizes is the "sisterhood or the solidarity of women without taking into consideration their experiences and interests. Here, she attempts to display the difference between Third World Women as a "representation" from that of "Real life". In other words, Mohanty tries to explain that historical and geographical backgrounds are necessary in order to assume that all women are the same.

b. Materials

In this section we will provide brief summaries of the two works by giving the most important ideas of Wollstonecraft's essay *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and Shaarawi's autobiography *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1879-1924).

b-1 Summary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman is a philosophical essay written by the British proto-feminist Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792. It was published during the French Revolution (a period of social and political changes in France). Wollstonecraft objects the hypocrisy of educational and political theorists who did not hold women should obtain a rational education. In her treatise, she begins with a brief note directed to French statesman and a former bishop Charles Maurice De Talleyrand-Périgord, who wrote about the rights of men ignoring those of women. Wollstonecraft wished her work will promote him to re-examine his ideas concerning women's education.

In the first chapter, "The Rights and Involved Duties of Mankind Considered", Wollstonecraft draws general observations concerning the state of humanity. She recognizes virtue, reason and knowledge as the basics that differentiate the individuals. In the second and the third chapters "The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed" and "The Same Subject Continued" Wollstonecraft argues that men believe that women do not have adequate strength to keep their lives, therefore they require men's guidance. The fourth chapter "Observations on the State of Degradation to Which Woman Is Reduced by Various Causes" deals with women's state of degradation caused by erroneous opinions which render them weak, inferior and irrational. In addition to this; Wollstonecraft opposes the false education which curtailed women from development. For her, women, just like men, deserve a good education because they are also human beings. The fifth chapter, "Animadversions on Some of the Writers Who Have Rendered Women Objects of Pity, Bordering on Contempt",

Wollstonecraft critically addresses some modern and misogynist writers who wrote on women. She begins with Rousseau who sees women as weak and inferior. He wants to teach women only how to please men. She also criticizes Dr. Fordyce's Sermons who suggests that women require a small amount of knowledge in order to keep up their attractiveness to men. Wollstonecraft objects Lord Chesterfield's ideas and wonders why men should acquire knowledge at a young age while women are limited in acquiring it.

In the sixth chapter, "The Effect Which an Early Association of Ideas Has upon the Character", Wollstonecraft switches her ideas to the inadequacy of education that caused women to be enticed by men. Women do not have this from birth, but it is what their own society taught them from infancy to adulthood. In order to explain better her ideas, she quotes from Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa* which highlights how Lovelace undermines Clarissa's virtue. While the seventh chapter, "Modesty-Comprehensively Considered, and Not as a Sexual Virtue" treats the misguided notion of modesty. She states that men in front of women behave in immodest way. Chapter nine, "Of the Pernicious Effects Which Arise from the Unnatural Distinctions Established in Society", outlines the effects of unnatural distinctions on both the high and low status.

We have learnt that in the tenth and eleventh chapters: "Parental Affection" and "Duty to Parents", Wollstonecraft's thought about the relation between children and their parents which should be based on reason rather than prescription. Concerning the twelfth chapter "On National Education", she speaks about the system of national education. Much of *Vindication* emphasized the fact that women are regarded as toys made to please men. Finally, in the last chapter, "Some Instances of the Folly Which the Ignorance of Women Generates" Wollstonecraft assaults her own sex and blames women for accepting oppression and for being too sentimental. She invokes society to improve women's education and supply more social opportunities.

b-2 Summary of Shaarawi's *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*

Huda Shaarawi's *Harem Years, The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)* was first published in Arabic under the title "*Mudhakirrat*" in 1986. She dictates it to her secretary Abd al-Hamid Fahmi Mursi. In 1986, Margot Badran, a British writer married to an Egyptian Arab, translated, edited and introduced it in English. The English version came under the title *Harem Years*. It is divided into four major parts and to smaller sections with headings. The first three chapters deal with her personal life, family, childhood in harem between 1884 and 1892, marriage and separation. Then in the last part, Shaarawi turned to record her national and feminist activities.

Shaarawi's *Harem Years* is an account of the first portion of Shaarawi's life. She was born in Minya, Upper Egypt in 1879 and grew up in Cairo. She is the daughter of Sultan Pasha, a wealthy Egyptian noble and aristocratic man, and a strong Circassian mother named Iqbal Hanim. The outlines of her life reflect those of other girls belonging to upper-classes for instance education at the hands of tutors in the harem, closely supervised recreation, an early arranged marriage, motherhood, and a gradual expansion of leisurely and instructive pursuits as an adult. Although she memorized the Quran at the age of nine, she did not master Arabic grammar because it was considered unnecessary to teach girls to read and write Arabic. She also talks about how she was prevented at the age of eleven from playing outside with boys and sent to the company of women where girls were obliged to ask permission to leave the harem with a full head scarf and face veil. This was a painful experience which deeply influenced her. Then, she moves to speak about the ignorance of the preparation for her wedding. She married against her wishes at the age of thirteen to her cousin, Ali Shaarawi, many years older than her.

After a year of marriage, Shaarawi is separated from her husband for a period of seven years. During this separation, she turns back to her education, works hard on women's right and starts her feminist activities. As a result of her brother Umar's refusal to get married until his sister reunites with her husband and her awareness of the importance of preserving the family estate, Huda decides to return to her husband Ali Shaarawi. After the reconciliation with him, Huda had two children, a daughter, Bathna, and a son, Muhammad.

After that, Huda Shaarawi was encouraged by Ali Shaarawi, and became one of the national and feminist activists. She travelled in Europe and attended conferences that called for women's liberation. She supported women to achieve their rights of justice and equality. Shaarawi also talks about her experience in Rome that influences her to remove the veil upon her return to Egypt with the purpose to liberate women. Huda Shaarawi died on August 1947 after an active life which was full of achievements.

Endnotes

¹Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989. Translated by Thomas Burger.

²Ibid, p 2.

³Ibid, p 3.

⁴Ibid, p 1.

⁵Ibid, p 4.

⁶ Mohanty, Chandra T. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press, 2003, p 77.

⁷Ibid, p 34.

III. Results

Our analysis of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and Huda Shaarawi's *Harem Years* (1879-1924) has shown that both works deal with women's struggle in society against men domination in both the public and private spheres. Our understanding of the notion of space has been based on Jürgen Habermas's discussion of public and private sphere developed in his influential book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962).

A close reading of Shaarawi's and Wollstonecraft's works show an uncanny similarity in the themes they tackled and the preoccupations they responded to. It also highlights how Shaarawi embraced Western feminist thought in her endeavour to liberate Egyptian women from patriarchal, cultural and social practices. Despite the fact that Shaarawi did not write about her influence, her writing overlaps with that of Wollstonecraft. Because of Shaarawi's total reliance on Western feminist thought, she tended to neglect her own cultural values and heritage as a Muslim woman. Shaarawi's discourse fails to differentiate the struggle of Muslim women from that of Western ones.

The analysis has also demonstrated that Mary Wollstonecraft and Huda Shaarawi were lucky enough to have access to education through which they gained an intellectual level that allowed them to enter into the public sphere and be on par with men. This is why the theme of education was given a prominent place in their works. Both of them criticized the fact that women were limited to certain commitments out of intellectual subjects, they declared that women were not inferior to men and were able to use their minds just like men did. Therefore; they should enjoy the same rights. The analysis has also revealed that both writers suffered from gender inequalities due to preferential treatments of their brothers inside their families.

These feelings contributed in making them fight against such social injustices. In addition, both writers met important persons who influenced and inspired them to write.

Furthermore; while reading the two works, we have noticed that the two writers were against male domination and expressed clearly their disagreement with women's position in both private and public spheres and with the idea that women must be dependent on men. This disagreement may be seen in the fact that the two writers have liberated themselves: Wollstonecraft escaped from her alcoholic and irresponsible father and Huda Shaarawi left her husband for seven years. This liberation allowed them to be more independent and to devote much of time to their writings.

The analysis has also shown how the two female writers used their writings in order to gain visibility in the public sphere. They used the first person narration to reflect their real life experiences. Wollstonecraft and Shaarawi believed that through writing, women could make an end to male domination as well as give them access to the public realm by making their voices and opinions heard. Writing, in this sense, is considered as a means of resistance and emancipation of women against the patriarchal society.

Through their works Shaarawi and Wollstonecraft described how women were kept in the private sphere and were prevented from getting involved in the political sphere. The two authors did not just criticize male domination and gender inequality; they also criticized women themselves and blamed them for having accepted this submissive situation without resistance. The private sphere (harem and seclusion) was the starting point for Shaarawi's liberation. She organized several lectures at her home in order to discuss women's question (which is considered as a salon). Shaarawi attended several salons like Eugenie Le Brun's salon. It is these public lectures and salons which shaped Shaarawi's outlook and feminist ideal.

To conclude, the two works are the result of what Huda Shaarawi and Mary Wollstonecraft have witnessed during their life time and life experiences. They rebelled against the injustices and the general thoughts that showed women under men's authority. Though they are from two different periods, both of them defended women's rights and tried to improve their position in society.

IV Discussion

Chapter One: The Notion of Space in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

The present chapter deals with the public and private spaces in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). It sheds light on women's inferior and marginal position in Wollstonecraft's society. It also focuses on education as an essential means for women's emancipation and gaining access to the public sphere. Through this chapter, we aim to show how this feminist writer fought to vindicate women's rights in both public and private spheres, and how she encouraged women to fight for equal social, economic and political rights.

a. Education in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

Mary Wollstonecraft is a pioneer feminist, author and educator. She belongs to Liberal Feminism which seeks "to defend the equal rationality of the sexes and emphasize the importance of structuring social, familial, and sexual roles in ways that promote women autonomous self-fulfillment."¹ Wollstonecraft is known for her diverse writings including essays, letters, and literary criticism. To put things in the right context, we would like first to show how an essay as a literary work functions since *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is a collection of essays.

An essay is a material text that exists as knowledge composed and constructed by writers. It is a short form of literary composition based on a single subject matter, and it often gives the personal opinion of the author. The famous English essayist, Aldous Huxley defines an essay as, "a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything."² The Oxford Dictionary describes it as "a short piece of writing on a particular subject, written in order to be published."³ In simple words, we can define it as a scholarly work in writing that provides the author's personal argument. The essay generally uses the first person narration

and may reflect experiences of its writer and his ideas⁴. Therefore, Mary Wollstonecraft writes essays since this category of writing allows her to show her ideas and share her experience.

Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is an extended essay that can be seen as a reflection of her own life. Through it, she displays her opposition to the degrading women's conditions of her time and tries to change their situation. The theme of education is primordial in Wollstonecraft's work. Allan Richardson, a professor of English at Boston University, states that, "A keen and vital concern with education, especially the education of girls and women, runs throughout Mary Wollstonecraft's writings and remains a dominant theme to the abrupt end of her career."⁵ She focuses on women's education since they represent half of the society and since education starts from them once they become mothers. Therefore in order to give knowledge they must acquire it: "if she [woman] be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue."⁶

But, women during the eighteenth century were suffering from gender inequality. They were always in obedient positions lacking freedom and were subservient to either their fathers or their husbands. Their only task was to stay at home, raise their children and take care of their husbands. In fact, women's lives were centred on men; they became wives and mothers at an early age. As for the spinsters, their lives were hard. They often lived with their relatives and had to work in order to support themselves. This inferior situation of women made Mary Wollstonecraft claim that education is an important means of liberation, it is essential for a complete development of any individual. According to her, men and women have an innate ability for reason, but they are not innately rational; instead, education is used to direct and cultivate rationality:

By individual education , I mean[...]such an attention to a child as well sharpen the senses, from the temper regulate the patients as they begin to ferment, and set the understanding to work before the body arrives at maturity; so that the men may only have to proceed not to begin the important task of learning to think and reason.⁷

Wollstonecraft read a large number of books related to education and observed carefully the way parents behaved with their children and the management of schools. She found out that the education of women was neglected and considered men the main culprit for women's oppression especially through their writings. She argued that men see women's minds in an unfavourable light, they are less intelligent; therefore, education is needless for them. In fact, Wollstonecraft sees the system of education as being false because it is based on books by men written about education, men who most of the time consider women as weak and inferior. In this context, Wollstonecraft declares that, "The education of women has, of late, been more attended to than formerly; yet they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied by the writers who endeavor by satire or instruction to improve them."⁸

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft disagreed with the philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau's ideas about women. Rousseau argued that women have a natural condition of dependence on men. He considers women as being passive, weak and inferior. Their mission in life was to take care of their husbands and raise their children. Most of these ideas are developed in Rousseau's "*Emile*" (1762). He contends that "men and women are not, nor ought to be, constituted alike in temperament and character, it follows of course that they should not be educated in the same manner."⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft wrote against Rousseau's idea that a woman "should never feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her natural cunning, and made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a sweeter companion to man."¹⁰ Women were raised and told such ideas and thought from their early age: "women are told from their infancy [...] and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives."¹¹ They were convinced that the only thing that they should care about is

pleasing their men. And women could not escape from such ideas and boundaries due to the lack of education; they were just like prisoners because even within the private sphere, their authority and influence are limited.

Furthermore; Rousseau claims “that man and woman are not, nor ought to be, constituted alike in temperament and character, it follows of course that they should not be educated in the same manner.”¹² according to him girls should be raised to become good wives and mothers. In this context Wollstonecraft responds:

The woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practicing various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent, of her husband; and if she deserves his respect by having such solid qualities, she won't find that she needs to conceal her affection or pretend to an unnatural coldness of constitution to excite her husband's sex.¹³

Mary Wollstonecraft tries to demonstrate that women should be educated in order to be emancipated and to make themselves more valuable in society. She asserts that “Men and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in.”¹⁴ For Wollstonecraft men and women are equal therefore they have to share the same benefits and rights, “legal and moral responsibilities.” But during Wollstonecraft's period women were kept only in the private sphere. The latter is defined as “the internal domain of the domestic sphere (the private home) or the literary salon, which were closed to the outside world.”¹⁵

Much of what is said about the private sphere can be found in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962) by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. He elaborates on the origin and the meaning of the word “private”:

Thus the German word *privat*, which has borrowed from the Latin *privatus*, can be found only after the middle of the sixteenth century, having the same meaning as was assumed by the English “private” and the French *privé*. It means as much as “not holding public office or official position” [...] “private” designated the exclusion from the sphere of the state apparatus.¹⁶

Habermas explains that since ancient times, societies excluded women from the public sphere¹⁷. They were denied all political privileges and did not have a right to a civil existence i.e. their lives were centred on their duties at home and did not have a life outside.

Women during Wollstonecraft's time did not have legal rights and were obliged to do all the domestic work: cleaning and cooking. Through her work, Wollstonecraft underlines the fact that women were treated unequally compared to men in her society. They were taught to focus only on their appearance, their marriage and their children, whereas men have many other important aims to achieve. In this context Wollstonecraft explains how society tries to make women superficial beings:

I say the same of women. But the welfare of society isn't built on extraordinary efforts; and if society were more reasonably organized there would be still less need for great abilities or heroic virtues. In running a family and educating children one has a special need for strength both of body and of mind [...], and yet the men who in their writings have worked hardest to domesticate women have tried [...] to weaken their bodies and cramp their minds. But even if these writers really persuaded women—by working in an underhand way on their feelings—to stay at home and fulfil the duties of a mother and mistress of a family, this would be a bad way of getting women to do the right thing—bad because it would be an insult to reason. I appeal to experience to confirm that if by neglecting the understanding women are actually more detached from these domestic duties than they could be by the most serious intellectual pursuit [...], I may be allowed to infer that reason is absolutely necessary to enable a woman to perform any duty properly, and I'll say it again: sensibility is not reason.¹⁸

Wollstonecraft points out that women can achieve their duties by reason. This concept (reason) is one of the important themes in Wollstonecraft's work. It is defined by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor as "the capacity to see and understand."¹⁹ Moreover; Wollstonecraft adds that even the private duties can be properly done only by "cultivating woman's understandings on a large scale."²⁰ Thus women need to understand their contribution to the development of the society in order to practice their private duties in a perfect way.

In fact, Wollstonecraft considers that the private sphere, or more specifically the family, is the starting point towards social reform. In this respect, Sylvana Tomaseilli declares

that according to Wollstonecraft, the family is “the unit of the social and moral reproduction of society.”²¹ Therefore; women must have an access to education and her virtues must be founded on knowledge. In order to win respect: “women must use their understandings; there is no other basis for independence of character. I mean explicitly to say that they must only bow to the authority of reason.”²² She also believes that women who use their minds and reason could challenge men’s domain, and argues that they have the right to share the advantages of government and education with them. Through *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft asks for women’s participation in political activities in the public sphere.

On this point, Jürgen Habermas claims that “the public sphere” is “conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public.”²³ According to him, this arena was “a distinguishable entity in contrast to the public as each family’s individual economy had become the center of its existence.”²⁴ He explains that public arena comes to “debate over general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publically relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor.”²⁵ He adds that to have access to public space “education was the one criterion for admission-property ownership the other.”²⁶

In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft explains the way the private sphere became even smaller for women because they could not speak with the same authority as men. They were controlled by their fathers and after marriage this control shifted to their husbands. She believes in the human nature that is common to every individual who, irrespective of his or her sex, can reach universal true rational judgement. Thus, she claims that education is essential for women to improve their role in society.²⁷

Wollstonecraft states that women should fight in order to gain a better position in society. She encourages them to change people’s collective opinion that sees women as slaves of their passions. “This habitual slavery to first impressions, by which society binds women to

false assumptions about their roles and capacities, viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone.”²⁸ Because of viewing women as weak and dependent, men always kept them in a state of childhood as an excuse to protect them.

b. Politics in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

As it is mentioned above, women were not allowed to participate in any economic or political activity in society. The majority of women were under the control of men (father, husband or brother), as a result, their only role was to become good wives, mothers and daughters. Through the following chapter we will deal with the importance of giving women their rights to improve themselves in the public sphere and to participate in the political domain.

For better understanding of the women’s situation in society during the eighteenth century, one must go back to the French Revolution which took place in the late eighteenth century. In this context different texts and writings appeared in response to the violence and political upheaval. Among some of the most notable and compelling writers were the Irish statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke. His *Reflection on Revolution in France* (1790) was a political pamphlet in which he argues that “citizens do not have the right to revolt against their government, because civilizations, including governments, are the result of social and political consensus. If a culture’s traditions were continually challenged, he contends, the result would be anarchy.”²⁹

Weeks after Burke’s *Reflection on the French Revolution*, Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790). Her ideas were about the role of women within society and the way they are influential and persuasive. During that period women were excluded from the public sphere. As a result of this exclusion, women were isolated from the political domain. This was done through obstacles erected by society to prevent them

from gaining an intellectual degree that equals men. For instance, in addition to limiting their access to education, women could not sign a legal paper or own a property.

Two years later, Mary Wollstonecraft published the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). It marked the starting point of women's emancipation in England (to gain the same rights as men). She started her radical movement against patriarchal laws in the pick of the French Revolution after responding to Edmund Burke's political pamphlet, *Reflection on Revolution in France* (1790)³⁰. According to Wollstonecraft, stability in the public sphere requires respect in the private one. She contradicts those who limited women's liberties and stresses on education as a means for freedom. In this context she claims:

Contending for the rights of women, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all [... and] if children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot [...] but education and situation of women, at present, shuts her out from such investigation.³¹

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft introduces the idea that women can participate in the political domain. She believes that through hard work and education, women have the capacity to be as "strong and active" within society as men. She declares that women have to take responsibility for themselves: "[...] her first wish should be to make herself respectable, and not to rely for all her happiness on a being subject to like infirmities with herself."³² In fact men's lack of respect towards women's power of reason and virtue makes them feel weak and wretched.

During the eighteenth century, "the coffee houses" that propagated all over England emerged. They were popular places where men from different professions such as: doctors, writers and politicians met for conversation about different issues.³³ According to Habermas, it was in the coffee houses that "intellectuals met with the aristocracy."³⁴ Their conversation first centred on literature then shifted to economic and political debates: "the coffee house not merely made access to the relevant circles less formal and easier; it embraced the wider strata

of the middle class.”³⁵ But according to Habermas, only men were admitted in these coffee houses, as for women, they were not welcomed in such public places.

Wollstonecraft’s “coffee house” was the mansion of the English publisher Joseph Jenson where the intellectual elite of society often met to discuss different topics. Thanks to this place, Wollstonecraft was able to improve her knowledge by reading different books, and by meeting different important figures such as her husband, the political philosopher William Godwin and the radical philosopher Dr Richard Price. The contribution of this place in improving Mary Wollstonecraft’s knowledge and her understanding made her realize the importance for women to have access to such public places in order to understand the political context and find their mislead identity.

Habermas claims: “women and dependents were factually and legally excluded from the political public sphere.”³⁶ In the letter that Wollstonecraft wrote as a response to the French Diplomat M. Talleyrand Perigord, she invited him to revise his claim that seeing half of the human race excluded by the other from all participation in government is a political phenomenon that is impossible to explain. She even accused him that his arguments were used to justify women’s oppression. According to Wollstonecraft, because women share “the gift of reason”³⁷ as men, both of them deserve equal rights, and men cannot be the exclusive judge. Instead they must give women the freedom of choice and decisions. She states: “you force all women, by denying them civil and political rights, to remain walled in by their families and groping in the dark.”³⁸

One of the means to limit women’s access to the public sphere and politics is through limiting their opportunities for work outside the house: “the few employments open to women, so far from being liberal are menial.”³⁹ Rousseau claims that men and women are not equal especially in the public sphere. He was against those who called for the same preoccupations of the two sexes. His argument is supported by the differences of physical and

moral traits.⁴⁰ Therefore; only few women had an access to superior education. Most of them worked as governesses. Despite this, they were “not always treated in a manner calculated to render them respectable in the eyes of their pupils.”⁴¹ Due to the lack of chances of work, women were obliged to get married in order to support themselves.

Thanks to Marry Wollstonecraft’s intelligence and her desire to free women and make them more respectable, she was able to surpass the different boundaries set by society to limit her freedom. She succeeded to make a professional life outside the private sphere. She defended women’s rights by arguing that they must be defined by their character and work rather than by their physical appearance and marriage. She stresses the importance of education as means of liberation that allows them to have an access to the public sphere and participate in the political domain.

Endnotes

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- ²⁵ Ibid, p27.
- ²⁶ Ibid, p 85.
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Chapter Two: The Notion of Space in Huda Shaarawi's *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*

This chapter is devoted to analyse the notion of space, both private and public, in Huda Shaarawi's autobiography, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*. This section is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the concept of education and the second one centers on the concept of politics. In this part, we will see how Shaarawi functions in both spheres. Our discussion of the public sphere is shaped by both education and politics.

a. Education in Huda Shaarawi's *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*

Huda Shaarawi (Nur Al-Huda Sultan before marriage), is an Arab Muslim feminist born on June 23, 1879 in Menya in an upper class, wealthy and elite family. She died on December 12, 1947. Shaarawi was the daughter of Sultan Pasha and Turko-Circassian mother Iqbal Hanim. She grew up in a family that had its own political and financial influence in Egypt at the time. Huda Shaarawi produced articles, essays, and letters in *L'Egyptienne* published from 1925 to 1940 under the editorship of Saiza Nabarawi. *L'Egyptienne* would later become '*Al Misriyya.*' All these works were collected by Huda Shaarawi in her memoirs named '*Mudhakirati.*' It is worth noting that our work examines and analyses the English version which is translated by Margot Badran (1987) and some chapters in *Casting off the Veil* (2012) by Sania Shaarawi Lanfranchi. Even though Shaarawi's memoirs are autobiographical, she deals with the notion of space that she experienced throughout her life. Shaarawi's writing is indeed an instance of the influence of Wollstonecraft's work. This influence is shown through the relationships between the two works (texts). But before doing that, we have to highlight how this genre of literature (autobiography) functions in this work.

Autobiographical texts are the writings of an individual narrated by himself. This type of writing involves a connection between the writer's self as author, as a subject and as

depicted in literary texts. Autobiography uses the first person narration which reflects the experiences of the writer and tries to share them with the audience. It is in this context that Ann Walters argues “writing becomes a medium used by women to relieve pain, to cope with lowliness, and to confirm their existence physically and intellectually.”¹ For instance, Shaarawi uses the first person mode and creates a self-authorization text directed to the audience to relieve her suffering. Huda Shaarawi’s *Harem Years* reveals not only her own personal and domestic life, but also shows the social and political history of Egypt. Roben Sayre asserts that autobiography discloses not only the personal and private accounts of its writer, but it also should be read as cultural documents.²

Narrating always involves an establishment of subjectivity because it tells one’s real story and experiences which pave the way to public realm. All what we have said above can be found in Habermas’s theory *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). He argues that “the first-person narrative became a conversation with one’s self addressed to another person. These were experiments with the subjectivity discovered in the close relationships of the conjugal family.”³ Though Huda Shaarawi has not spoken about her writing influences, the subjects she deals with in her writings clearly indicate that there is an uncanny similarity with the English writer Mary Wollstonecraft’s writing. Roland Barthes argues that “There are no texts, but only relationships between texts. These relationships depend upon a critical act, a misreading or misprision that one [writer] performs upon other.”⁴

As we have seen with English women, Egyptian women also were considered as subordinate citizens and were accorded a lower position in society. Sonya Rose claims that women were “not just been hidden from history. They have been deliberately oppressed.”⁵ They were prevented from education which is an important element in the development and growth of the individual as well as nation. For Shaarawi, education was the fundamental element for women’s liberation and emancipation. Thus, through education, women could

achieve their complete rights and would become ethical, virtuous and enlightened creatures. In order for women to be good wives and mothers, they should be provided with a good education. The deficiency of the latter makes women unknowledgeable, ignorant and irrational. As Leila Abu Lughod argues, “the focus on education was a consequence of a belief that educated women could better serve as mothers and wives and consequently, support the progress of the nation.”⁶ Women were kept away from education for fear they would seek to achieve their freedom, and in order to keep them in their right places. In this sense, Shaarawi argues that “Men have singled out women of outstanding merit and put them on a pedestal to avoid recognizing the capabilities of all women.”⁷

In the late of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, Egypt witnessed the emergence of a range of feminist writers who started to question their status in order to bring a change in their cultural and social practices, emphasizing on the importance of education as a key to their freedom and emancipation. Huda Shaarawi was one of these pioneering women who paved the way to other women, not only feminists, to fight for equal opportunities in all domains.

In her memoirs, *Harem Years*, Shaarawi writes about her childhood experiences and her understanding of gender imbalances, particularly of her mother’s favorable treatment of her brother Omar. According to Shaarawi, the main source of her misery was her mother Iqbal Hanim because she gave more attention to her son. As a curious girl, Shaarawi asked her mother about the difference between boys and girls. Her mother told her that this was because of her brother’s “Omar” weakness and bad health.⁸ In addition to this, the “Big Mother, Umm Kabira (Sultan Pasha’s first wife and the mother of Ismail)” explained that Shaarawi’s brother was the only boy in the family and that, “One day the support of the family will fall upon him. When you marry you will leave the house and honour your husband’s name, but he will perpetuate the name of his father and take over his house.”⁹

Shaarawi records numerous occasions on which her brother was given special opportunities that she would have wished for herself. For instance, when her brother became sick, he was given a preferential treatment. Through this event, she observed to the extent to which gender discrimination affected her and “injured her self-esteem.”¹⁰ Shaarawi believed that since she was older than her brother, more attention should have been given to her and not to her brother, but she realized the opposite was true and from this point “she began to prefer death to her miserable lot.”¹¹

Huda Shaarawi also observed the educational discrepancy with her brother. For her, women’s lack of education was due to gender and religious attitudes. This is evident in her memoirs when she tried to learn Arabic grammar “of all the subjects, Arabic was my favourite.”¹² But, unfortunately she was prohibited to acquire grammar because she was a girl not a boy. When Shaarawi tried to understand more about Arabic Language, her eunuch orders her teacher, “Take back your book *Sayyidna Shaikh*. The young lady has no need of grammar as she will not become a judge!”¹³ From this statement, one can notice to what extent teaching Arabic for girls was prohibited. In this stage, Shaarawi began to hate her gender as a female because it kept her away from the education she ardently desired, “I became depressed and began to neglect my studies, and hating being a girl because it kept me from the education I sought. Later, being a female became a barrier between me and the freedom for which I yearned.”¹⁴

Women, as we have said before, were barred from education which was their first step for participation in all domains including politics. It is evident that formal education is associated with other fields because through education one could participate in any areas of public sphere as noted by the American Sociologists Burns Schlozman and Sidney Verba, “education is an especially powerful predictor of political participation.”¹⁵ Shaarawi

consecrates education as the supreme path to social and political improvement thanks to her private education.

In *Harem Years*, Shaarawi recognizes that the only way to end male as well as patriarchal domination is through education. Thus, education is the basic principle and the starting point for her journey towards liberation. As cited in *Al-Misriyya*, “Shaarawi always cherished education as a basic principle and a necessary means of improving and transforming the social order.”¹⁶ In other words, Shaarawi believed that only through education, the rights of women and the balance of both sexes could be granted. She argued for “women’s liberation, starting with education which would lead to full participation in the social and cultural reform and result in social usefulness and its legal and civic equality.”¹⁷

Moreover, Shaarawi claims that if Egyptian women succeeded in education, they would be able to assert other advantages like political suffrage. For her, with education women could be involved in all fields that were reserved for men. It was in the *International Woman Suffrage Alliance Conference* in Rome (1923) that she produced the first public declaration of the *Egyptian Feminist Union* (which will be explained later) thoughts on female education. In this context, Jayawardena Kumari highlights that the Egyptian Feminist Union focused its concerns on education and social welfare to provide equality between the sexes.¹⁸

In her memoirs, Shaarawi describes how she was impressed by the poet Sayyida Khadija al-Maghribiyya in the ways she resolved cultural and literary issues with men, she writes:

Sayyidah Khadija impressed me because she used to sit with the men and discuss literary and cultural matters. Meanwhile, I observe how women without learning would tremble with embarrassment and fight if called upon to speak a few words to a man from behind a screen. Observing Sayyidah Khadija convinced me that with learning, women could be the equals of men if not surpass them. My admiration for her continued to grow and I yearned to be like her.¹⁹

Huda Shaarawi was convinced that God created all humans equal, but it was society which rendered women object, inferior to men. She believes that since men and women have the same mind, women should stand on their own and be given the same opportunities as men especially in the areas of education and politics. Quawas argues that “Shaarawi believes that females are in all the most important aspects the same as males, possessing the same souls, the same mental capacities, and the same human rights should therefore stand on their own.”²⁰

In her autobiography, Shaarawi writes about how she was interested in reading books. She was a curious girl who loved to learn, snuck into her father’s extensive library where she would choose books to read for hours. She began buying foreigner books from the itinerants’ peddlers who came to their house, as she writes:

I began to buy books from pedlars who came to the door even though I was strictly forbidden to do so. I could not judge the quality of the book. If it was easy to read it was good, otherwise I tossed it in the cupboard. But the books failed to satisfy me and I grew eager to read those of my father who had loved literature and had been surrounded by poets and learned men.²¹

From this passage, we notice that Huda Shaarawi’s reading of different books encouraged her to seek for knowledge and become educated. For her, through reading, women could challenge men in their sectors (public sphere). If women were well educated, they would challenge the view that women were designated only for men’s pleasure and thus in need for protection.

b. Politics in Huda Shaarawi’s *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*

Women’s political participation refers to women’s capacity to get involved at all fields equally with men. Egyptian women were concerned with public sphere issues by bringing them into their private salons (a place where they discuss literary and cultural concerns). Huda Shaarawi was a significant figure in this emerging trend (salon). She organized several lectures, first in different salons and, then, in her private home where she discussed cultural and social issues. For instance, Shaarawi’s attendance of the French woman “Eugenie Le

Brun's salon was unique not only because it was organized by women, but also because the women who attended discussed social practices such as veiling.²² Her autobiography also reveals how she was involved in organizing public lectures for women of all classes.

Through her involvement in this female intellectual movement, Shaarawi succeeded to involve herself in the creation of the first philanthropic society *Mabarrat Mohammad Ali* (an Egyptian benevolent women's association constituted in Cairo in 1909), which allowed women to experience a new space outside home. The private sphere "Salon" is considered as a whole society not only a "room or house" because men, as we have mentioned above, had access to the salon. In her memoirs, Margot Badran claims that:

In January 1922 Huda opened her house to a mass meeting of women. They passed resolutions calling for an end to martial law, the abolition of the protectorate, and opposing the formation of a cabinet while the president of the cabinet was in exile.²³

This idea of public and private space is explained by the theorist Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* as follows:

The most imposing room in the distinguished bourgeois home, in contrast, is reserved for a completely novel chamber, the salon, yet this salon[...] does not serve the 'house' but 'society'; and this salon society is by no means to be equated with the small intimate circle of friends of the house.²⁴

Harem Years also demonstrates how Shaarawi was involved in the field of politics and how she fought for women's rights. According to her it is necessary to develop public schools for both males and females and for all classes. For instance, in 1925, Shaarawi improved the conditions of the Shubra Secondary School for girls which pursued the same syllabus as that of boys. It is worth mentioning that for Shaarawi women should not only have access to educational opportunities, but they should also have the right to perform in the same professions as men such as business, medicine, law and they should even be represented in parliament.²⁵

In the light of women's political rights, Huda Shaarawi shows her opposition to a *fatwa* (legal announcements in Islam, done by law specialists on selected issues) which prevented women from their right to vote. In this context, Shaarawi fought and expressed her support in order to gain women's right to vote. In 1944, she carried out a strong argument regarding women's political rights at the *Arab Feminist Conference*. She claimed that the political rights of women should be restored since Islam provides the same rights for both sexes, "The woman also demands with her loudest voice to be restored her political rights, rights granted to her by the Sharia and dictated to her by the demands of the present."²⁶ Unfortunately, rights to vote was not granted to Egyptian women during the feminist movement headed by Huda Shaarawi, but rather it was authorized to them after the 1952 Revolution by the President, Gamal Abdel Nasser.

But eventually, and though men restricted and imprisoned women in their houses, the latter succeeded to enter the public sphere. Many public figures like Prince Umar Tusun, did not accept women's emancipation; they tried to voice their opposition to women's access to the public sphere (education, politics and work). Such opposition prompted Shaarawi to defend women's right to work in the context of Islam, saying:

Your Royal Highness, in your opinion half the nation is made up of people without capabilities and rights. However, Muslim law clearly acknowledges and advocates the equality of the sexes and does not ascribe one domain of work to one more than the other[...].It is as if your highness has forgotten that our religion had given the woman the free range and right to dispose of her goods in any way she sees fit. She is able to sell and secure a mortgage and to bequeath and to testify [...] The Great Lawgiver has high reverence for the woman, but man refuses to admit that and grant her respect owing to his self-centeredness. He wishes to constrain woman and deny her any field of action.²⁷

According to our reading of the memoirs, we have observed that the most important and significant event that paved the way for Huda Shaarawi, as well as for other women, to get involved in the nationalist struggle is the revolution of March 16, 1919 (a series of outcries headed by the Egyptian Saad Zaghloul opposing the British Occupation.) During this revolution, the majority of women marched because they believed that it was their right as

that of men. Huda Shaarawi was among these women. In this respect, Sir Valentine Chirol argues that “in every turbulent manifestation women were well to the front.”²⁸ In *Harem Years*, Shaarawi makes it clear that this revolution helped her to reformulate her intellectual development. She was convinced that the 1919 Revolution helped her and other women to be involved in the public sphere with men. As Badran asserts “the Egyptian revolution made it possible for women to expand their scope of feminism from the harem to a public feminist movement; that is, from a prescribed limited sphere to a public activism.”²⁹ Shaarawi describes the events of this revolution as follows,

No sooner were we approaching Zaghlul's house than the British troops surrounded us. They blocked the streets with machine guns, forcing us to stop along with the students who had formed columns on both sides of us. I was determined that the demonstration should resume. When I advanced, a British soldier stepped toward me pointing his gun, but I made my way past him. As one of the women tried to pull me back, I shouted in a loud voice, "Let me die so Egypt shall have an Edith Cavell" (an English nurse shot and killed by the Germans during the first World War, who became an instant martyr). Continuing in the direction of the soldiers, I called upon the women to follow[...] At the thought of Egyptian losses sure to follow, I came to my senses and stopped still. We stood still for three hours while the sun blazed down on us.³⁰

Despite the fact that women were involved in the 1919 Revolution, Shaarawi lamented, they were still considered as inferior. Men rejected the idea that women could be equal to men. This notwithstanding, this Revolution helped Egyptian women to spread their feminism and strengthen their demands. In this sense, Shaarawi writes that,

In moments of danger when women emerge by their side, men utter no protest. Yet women's great acts and endless sacrifices do not change men's views of women. Through their arrogance, men refuse to see the capabilities of women. [...] Women reflected on how they might elevate their status and worth in the eyes of men. They decided that the path lay in participation with men in public affairs. When they saw the way blocked, women rose up to demand their liberation, claiming their social, economic, and political rights. Their leap forward was greeted with ridicule, but that did not weaken their will. Their resolve led to a struggle that would have ended in war, if men had not come to acknowledge the rights of women.³¹

Since we are speaking about the 1919 Revolution, it is useful to point out that, at the end of the Revolution, middle and upper-class women formed their first formal political nationalist organization in 1920, the *Wafdist Women's Central Committee*, which elected

Huda Shaarawi as president. “At this moment when the future of Egypt is about to be decided, it is unjust that the Wafd, which stands for the rights of Egypt and struggles for its liberation, should deny half the nation its role in that liberation.”³² It was a parallel organization to the male Wafd nationalist organization, reflecting the gender segregation in the larger society. Through their own organizations, women mounted their own activities, cooperated with Wafdist men, and took over their roles when they were jailed by colonial authorities or sent into exile. In this sense, Shaarawi writes “my husband kept me informed of events so that I could fill the vacuum if he were imprisoned or exiled.”³³

Shaarawi’s participation in the field of politics shaped the foundation of the *Egyptian Feminist Union*. It was the first feminist movement, founded on 6 March 1923, in a conference at the home of Huda Shaarawi. As we have stated before, the home became an area of discussion and meetings. We have understood from this that Shaarawi tries to form a public space inside her home (private space) where she could debate and discuss several issues. As Habermas puts it:

The line between private and public sphere extended right through the home. The privatized individuals stepped out of the intimacy of their living rooms into the public sphere of the *salon*, but the one was strictly complementary to the other.³⁴

Shaarawi’s private home “Qasr al-Nil Street” was considered as a meeting place for feminist pursuits. Later, Shaarawi’s home was called Bayt al-Misria (House of the Egyptian Woman), which became the headquarters of the social movement in Cairo.³⁵ According to Jürgen Habermas, “the family room became a reception room in which private people gather to form a public.”³⁶

The Egyptian Feminist Union sought to improve women’s education and their participation in politics equally with men. It “campaigns for better health care, educational opportunities, and raising of the marriage age to 16 for women.”³⁷ Shaarawi’s feminist activities were executed in the private sphere (harem) because at that time women did not have a place in the public one. In 1925, the *Egyptian Feminist Union* changed its name to the

“The House of the Women.” This is a proof that the establishment of the public space for women was already possible and harem conventions were slowly disintegrating. Shaarawi writes, “I began to search for a headquarters for our society which we had dared not to call a club (*nadi*), as our traditions would not allow it. At that time it was still not acceptable for women to have a place of their own outside private houses.”³⁸

The most significant event that demonstrates Shaarawi’s participation in the political life is her support for Palestine. This support led Shaarawi to spread her activism regarding several issues as Lanfranchi puts it,

Shaarawi’s activism reached a high point, as she amplified her strategy for using her magi to publicize her thoughts on official corruption, government ineffectiveness, the neglect of women, and one of the most pressing issues in the Middle East: Palestine.³⁹

The advances of the Zionist efforts (from Zionism, the movement’s name is derived from Zion, the hill on which the Temple of Jerusalem was located and which later came to symbolize Jerusalem itself). This is evident in the Appeal of 1938 in which Egypt notably stressed on the importance “to rise up [...] to come to its neighbor’s rescue.”⁴⁰ In this context, Shaarawi believed that it was necessary to support Palestine since both nations (Egypt and Palestine) shared the same language, beliefs and customs. In this respect, Badran argues that Shaarawi “pressed the Prime Minister Nakhas to support Palestine.”⁴¹ In addition to this, she was invited by Palestinian, Syrian, Lebanese and Iraqi women’s associations to represent them in International Conferences and arrange a meeting which discussed the situation of Palestinian women.

In 1938, Shaarawi founded the Eastern Women’s Conference for the Defense of Palestine which called all women’s associations to find a solution for the Palestine Question. Shaarawi writes “I urge all feminist organizations [...] to join us by sending delegates as a gesture of solidarity, to this Conference [...] together we shall examine the Palestinian question and how it may be resolved.”⁴²

We have already noted how Shaarawi's private home became a space of meeting. According to her work, her home was considered as a convention space for notable individuals. She, For instance, welcomed Palestinian Presidents to her mansion which became known as Bayt al-Shark 'the Orient House' directed to discuss Eastern People's welfare in general and Arabs in particular.⁴³ Shaarawi's protest is evident when she wrote to the British Colonial Secretary opposing the White Paper on Palestine in 1939 (was a poly issued by the British government as a response to the 1936-1939 revolt in Palestine). Shaarawi argues that:

They form a single nation that will never agree to be enslaved or to undergo such suffering. Palestine has always been Arab, Excellence ...It will therefore remain Arab, despite Lord Balfour or any other person who might wish to make their own fantasies come true.⁴⁴

This passage shows how Shaarawi supported the Palestinian question, highlighting her political commitment. For her, enslaving and dominating Palestine was not acceptable. Shaarawi's work illustrates her opposition to the British domination. In this regard, she claims "I would never cease to defend the women of Palestine".⁴⁵

To conclude, similarly to Mary Wollstonecraft, Huda Shaarawi devoted her life to improve the conditions of Egyptian women. She experienced these conditions since she was secluded in the harem (private sphere) at the beginning of her life. She began her reform against the patriarchal practices with education because it was the fundamental element through which women could be advanced and display their capabilities. Then, she moved to show and convince us that women, like men, have the right to participate in the public field, and could even be better than men. In short, Huda Shaarawi advocated the rights of women through both education and politics (public sphere).

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Chapter Three: Huda Shaarawi's Western Feminist Rhetoric: Challenges and Implications

It has been argued so far that the position of Huda Shaarawi as well as Westernized Muslim feminists on women's question is nothing but a continuation of Western feminist thought. This chapter is a critique of Shaarawi's discourse which fails to differentiate Muslim women's struggle from that of Western women; it also fails to place this fight for equality in its correct social, cultural historical and religious context. To achieve this aim, we have relied on Chandra Talpad Mohanty's essay *Under Western Eyes* (1986) which criticizes the political discourse of Western feminism and its construction of "Third World Women" (and by extension Muslim women) as homogeneous and victimized creatures.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Huda Shaarawi committed herself for improving Egyptian women's conditions. We have also seen how Shaarawi liberated herself from the restrictions of the private space to become a prominent public figure as a nationalist and woman activist. Despite her pivotal role in Egyptian feminism, a close reading of her autobiography shows her unwavering admiration of Western feminist thought and Western culture. In her work, Shaarawi uses Western liberal feminist's thought and rhetoric in order to improve women's status in society; this had undoubtedly influenced the reception of her Westernized views by a largely conservative and religious audience. It is worth noting that Huda Shaarawi did not directly acknowledge the influence of the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, but a perusal of the writing of the former shows an uncanny similarity in the themes and issues they wrote about.

As was argued above, Non-Western feminists are hugely influenced by the liberal Western feminism (a social and political theory which aims to advocate women's rights. It emphasizes on gender equality in education, politics and work for both sexes "men and women"). This influence was evident in early 20th century Egyptian feminists such like Huda

Shaarawi and Doria Shafik, as well as the feminist and scholar Nawal El Saadawi.¹ In this context Mary Ann Fay writes,

Some contemporary scholars have characterized reformers such as Qasim Amin and Huda Shaarawi as being overly influenced by Western ideas and internalizing the critique of Eastern/Muslim women propagated by orientalist who misrepresented Islam and degraded women.²

A close reading of Shaarawi's autobiography shows the influence of Western feminists and ideas on her work. The first sign of this influence is education. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, upper class Egyptian women had the opportunity to be educated at home by foreign tutors. Shaarawi was among these women who were educated in French and Turkish. In her memoirs, *Harem Years*, she writes that she "went to study Turkish with eminent teachers like Anwar Afandi, Hassa Afandi Sirri, the famous calligrapher, and Hafiz Afandi, accomplished in elocution and widely celebrated for his recitations of Turkish and Persian poetry."³

She was also taught French and music by an Italian woman. Badran argues, "as an upper-class woman, Huda Shaarawi's social language was French. She also knew Turkish, the language of her mother, and the Turko-Circassian elites and royal family."⁴ It is ironic that Shaarawi used the language of the colonizer in order to voice her objection to the oppression for the overwhelmingly illiterate Egyptian women and the traditions that confined them to the private space. Shaarawi's love of music also shows this Western influence, she writes "I loved music very much, especially European music."⁵ We have observed that Huda Shaarawi adopts not only the European education, but also its arts and culture.

Huda Shaarawi was thirteen years old when she married her cousin Ali Shaarawi who was forty years old and already married. Then, they separated after seven years of marriage. In her memoirs, she describes this period of separation as a "time for new experiences and for growing into adulthood."⁶ This event also helped her to form strong connections with several significant figures such as Adila Nabarawi, Mme Richards, and most notably Eugenie

Le Brun (a French woman who was married to the Egyptian politician Hussein Rushdie Pasha). Le Brun played an important role in shaping Shaarawi's performance in the social scene of the 1890s upper class female private life and in supplying her with a psychological incentive to fight for Egyptian women's rights. Shaarawi also writes that "Mme Richards played an important role in my upbringing, both spiritually and in practical matters."⁷ In the same context, Quawas argues that "Le Brun occupied an interesting position because of her French background."⁸

In her autobiography, Shaarawi describes Le Brun as her mentor who urged her to unveil. Through this friendship and shared rational concerns, Le Brun became the lantern of Shaarawi's social life. In her work, Shaarawi describes this period of her life as "the Intellectual awakening" of a woman of high rank.⁹ Badran argues that "Eugenie Le Brun became a surrogate mother to Huda and counterpoise to her real mother."¹⁰ Shaarawi writes "she (Le Brun) guided my first steps in 'society' and looked out for my reputation."¹¹ and "Mme Rushdie not only guarded my reputation, but also nourished my mind and spirit."¹² It is obvious that Shaarawi's interaction with various European women helped her feminist activities using her home (private sphere) which is a symbol of seclusion and confinement.

Shaarawi's various travels also show this Western influence. She writes about her travels as a wealthy lady to different countries of Europe and tries to compare these nations to her own nation. Rula Quawas states that,

Shaarawi, as President of the Egyptian Feminist Union, traveled quite extensively for a woman: to Rome (1923), Washington (1925), Paris (1926), Berlin (1929), Marseilles (1933), Istanbul (1935), Copenhagen (1939), and Interlaken (1946). As a traveler, she was a cosmopolitan, and rather than assuming her own nation's superiority in culture, she commented on and compared the societies visited in an impartial spirit which we would call now sociological.¹³

It is during these travels that Shaarawi had her first taste of freedom as she was able to remove her veil to more open and "civilized" nations. When she returned to Egypt after participating in the *International Feminist Conference* in Rome (Geneva) in May 1923,

Shaarawi threw her veil in the sea at the port of Alexandria and began to call for a rejection of the traditional female roles in Egypt and for gender equality. Huda Shaarawi's unveiling act represents her total acceptance of Western thought. In this sense Katherine Bullock contends that "Unveiling became a central urgency for elites attempting to 'catch-up' to the West".¹⁴ Margot Badran argues that since Shaarawi's childhood:

Travel to Europe became a new habit of wealthy Egyptians. By Huda's time, they had grown accustomed to summering in Europe, instead of following the tradition of the royal family and the Turko-Circassian elites of vacation on the Bosphorus. When Egyptians voyaged to Europe, the customary segregation of the sexes broke down and veils were set aside.¹⁵

Western feminists view Muslim women as oppressed and dominated by men. This supposed oppression is shaped mainly by two fundamental notions: the harem and the veil. This view originated in a Eurocentric perspective (the interpretations of the eastern world in terms of European values and traditions). Veiled Egyptian women were portrayed as victims of oppression and as Leila Ahmed states: "the veil has been altered into a symbol of domination and primitiveness".¹⁶ For her part, Bullock asserts,

The veil-as-a-symbol-of-Muslim-woman's-oppression discourse has its roots in a Eurocentric vision of the world that would have the West as superior and the non-West as inferior. The current Western concern that the veil oppresses women masks these disreputable origins and conceals a further irony.¹⁷

Western feminists also believe that Muslim women share the same gender oppression with Western women. They suppose that just like other women, Muslim women are dependent on men but are, much more persecuted because of their patriarchal culture. Mary Ann Fay maintains that:

The West stood as the dominant referent in conceiving a modern future, and Eastern women were inspired by and sought connection to the Western-dominated international women's movement. But Eastern women had to balance the competing obligations of feminist internationalism which emphasized women's solidarity based on their shared subordination to men.¹⁸

It is in this context that transnational Feminism (a movement founded by postcolonial feminists) emerged. Its purpose was to criticize Western "liberal" feminists' assumptions about non-Western women as a homogeneous group facing the same problems Western

women face. One of the most influential figures of the Transnational Feminism is the Indian feminist writer Chandra Talpad Mohanty. In her essay *Under Western Eyes* (1986), she criticizes the universality and homogeneity of women regardless of religion and culture. She argues that:

This universality of gender oppression is problematic, based as it is on the assumption that the categories of race and class have to be invisible for gender to be visible. Claiming universality of gender oppression is not the same as arguing for the universal rights of women based on the particularities of our experiences.¹⁹

Following the same idea, the majority of Western feminists disregard the different identifications of women and look at the female sex in a hegemonic perspective. They examine gender discrimination and women's question from a global viewpoint disregarding these women's own culture, class, and ethnicity. Mohanty asserts that:

The assumption of women as an already constituted coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally.²⁰

Muslim women were (and are still) considered submissive, victims of oppression and that they did not put enough efforts in order to alter their own situation. This makes Western feminists believe that they are superior, more advanced and more enlightened than Arab women. Thus; Western feminists try to model Arab women in their own way. Mohanty highlights this distinction between the two worlds and describes Western and Eastern women as follows:

A homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as a group is assumed, which, in turn, produces the image of an "average third world woman". This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "third world" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions.²¹

Focusing on the submission of women in the Islamic world, many Western researchers view Islam as one of the worst kinds of patriarchal religions that validates gender imbalances. However, Mohanty refers to these assumptions as a product of Western ethnocentrism (the belief that one's culture is superior to other cultures. For instance, the description of Western feminists as "advanced" and Eastern world as "backward"). She criticizes this view, claiming that Western women could not be considered as the same as Muslim women. Mohanty asserts that:

Just as Western women or white women cannot be defined as coherent interest groups, Third World women also do not constitute any automatic unitary group. Alliances and divisions of class, religion, sexuality, and history, for instance, are necessarily internal to each of the above groups.²²

Muslim women have emerged as a homogeneous entity with similar thoughts and behavioural paths in the Western feminist thought. This approach, as we will argue, not only denies Muslim women's practices, but it also leads to the imaginary constructions of a fixed and unitary 'other'.²³ In the same vein, El Guindi shows that Western feminist theory considers the veil a sign of women's 'backwardness, subordination, and oppression', through discounting its deep and complex past to a 'fixed thing'.²⁴

It is also clear that Shaarawi was greatly influenced by the Egyptian French educated lawyer, reformist and supporter of women's rights Qasim Amin (She called him the "Defender of the Women.")²⁵ He encouraged her to remove her veil. Amin published two seminal works, *The Liberation of Women* (1899) and *New Woman* (1900), stating that "the first step for women's liberation is to tear the veil and totally wipe out its influence"²⁶. In addition, Leila Ahmed asserts that veiling was "a huge barrier between woman and her elevation, and consequently between the nation and its advance."²⁷ Shaarawi's unveiling marks the starting point of her resistance and emancipation against her patriarchal society. In this context Fadwa El-Guindi writes,

The liberal Western-influenced feminism of the aristocracy and the Islamic one are not far apart. Both are about emancipation of women. The early feminist lifting of the face veil was about emancipation from exclusion; the voluntary wearing of the hijab since the mid-seventies is about liberation from imposed, imported identities, consumerist behaviors, and an increasingly materialist culture.²⁸

In her work, Shaarawi goes on to show us how she chose to follow in the footsteps of the Western feminists and take “Western women as her model” in order to liberate Egyptian women from all patriarchal practices. According to her, Egyptian women should follow “the footsteps of the women in Europe [...] so that we could take our land to its rightful place among the advanced nations”.²⁹ For Shaarawi, in order for a nation to be developed and awakened, it is necessary to follow the path of others and forsake the “backward” traditions of Muslim society.

As stated previously, Western feminists view non-Western women’s seclusion and veiling as an act of oppression and suppression, regardless of the conditions of this practice. The latter is read and interpreted without taking into consideration its meaning and symbolism which varies according to time and place. The social meanings of head covering and its purpose are as diverse as the cultures they belong to. So the time and the place are very important in order to speak about the veil as Mohanty writes “while there may be a physical similarity in the veils worn by women in Saudi Arabia and Iran, the specific meaning attached to this practice varies according to the cultural and ideological context.”³⁰

In the same context, Abu-Lughod explores the limitations of Western feminists regarding the meaning of the veil in the Muslim world. She writes that Western feminist researchers need to establish “a serious appreciation of differences among women in the world as products of different histories, expressions of different circumstances, and manifestations of differently structured desires”.³¹ This is the idea which Mohanty tries to highlight. She provides an example of this diversity as follows:

Iranian Middle-class women veiled themselves during the 1979 revolution to indicate solidarity with their veiled, working-class sisters, while in contemporary Iran, mandatory Islamic laws dictate that all Iranian women wear veils. While in both these instances, similar reasons might be offered for the veil (opposition to the Shah and Western cultural colonization in the first case and the true Islamization of Iran in the second), the concrete meanings attached to Iranian women wearing the veil are clearly different in both historical contexts.³²

From a Western perspective, the veil is the foundation that differentiates between civilized and non-civilized women, and Muslim women must abandon their veils and customs in order to be developed and as we have argued earlier this the same position Shaarawi espouses. Leila Ahmed contends that defenders of advancing women's rights settled their interests in the "need to abandon the innately" and "irreparably" anti-feminist practices of the indigenous culture, preferring the traditions and customs of another culture mainly, "the European".³³ For instance, when Huda Shaarawi travelled to Europe, she donned a European dress code and this shows the adoption and readily acceptance of other cultural values.

For Muslim women, the veil can be seen as one of the means that permits them to move freely in the public world. As Leila Ahmed points out, the adoption of the veil does not signify women's seclusion in the home but, on the contrary, it shows their presence outside it.³⁴ In *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil, Challenging Historical & Modern Stereotypes* (2002), Katherine Bullock writes about the veil as allowing women access to outside employment as well as a way to gain respect. For her a woman who wears the veil indicates that "she was a respectable woman who would care for and respect her husband and home. Despite her unconventional economic behavior."³⁵ We do agree with this view because for us the veil allows women to move freely without any constraints and that it is a sign of respect.

After having analyzed what is overlapping between Marry Wollstonecraft's and Huda Shaarawi's works, we have noticed that Shaarawi was hugely influenced by Western feminist thought. This influence is shown through her various travels and interactions with Western feminists from all over the world and through the ideas and reforms she advocates. It is true that Shaarawi vindicates the rights of Egyptian women through her efforts to involve them in

education, politics and work (public sphere), but she also closes her eyes to her own cultural and religious values. One can say that Shaarawi's writing is a copy of Western values and ideals. This is the problem since such a discourse will not allow Muslim feminists reach the masses because the majority of women are religious (not Westernized) and conservative.

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- ² Ann Fay, Mary. “Early Twentieth-Century Middle Eastern Feminisms, Nationalism and Transnationalisms”. Vol 4, N.1, 2008, P 2. Accessed on October 19th, 2019.<<https://read.dukeupress.edu/jmews/article-pdf/4/1/1/441054/0040001.pdf>.
- ³ Shaarawi, Huda. *Harem Years*. New York: Feminist Press, 1987, p 41.
- ⁴ Ibid, p 1.
- ⁵ Shaarawi, Huda. *Harem Years*. New York: Feminist Press, 1987, p 61.
- ⁶ Ibid, p 60.
- ⁷ Ibid, p 50.
- ⁸ Mokalled, Sandra N. “Faces of Feminism in Early Twentieth Century”. Clemson University: Tiger Prints, 2016, p 32. Accessed on June 7th, 2019.
- ⁹ Shaarawi, Huda. *Harem Years*. New York: Feminist Press, 1987, p 63.
- ¹⁰ Marlita, Tita. “Ways of Knowing: Islamic Customs of Polygamy, Veiling and Seclusion in the Autobiographical Writings of Huda Shaarawi and Kartini”. University of Newfoundland, 1997, p 80(qtd in Badran, 1985 p 37).
- ¹¹ Shaarawi, Huda. *Harem Years*. New York: Feminist Press, 1987, p 78.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Qawas, Rula B. “A Sea Captain in her Own Rights: Navigating the Feminist Thought of Huda Shaarawi”. Vol 8, N.1, 2006, p 224. Accessed on January 20th, 2020.<<http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol8/iss1/17>.
- ¹⁴ Bullock, Katherin. “The Politics of the Veil”. University of Toronto, 1999, p 100. Accessed on June 7th 2019.
- ¹⁵ Shaarwi, Huda. *Harem Years*. New York: Feminist Press, 1987, p 13.
- ¹⁶ Ahmed, Leila. *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil’s Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*. New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2011. Accessed on August 21, 2019.
- ¹⁷ Bullock, Katherin. “The Politics of the Veil”. University of Toronto, 1999, p 142.
- ¹⁸ Ann Fay, Mary. “Early Twentieth-Century Middle Eastern Feminisms, Nationalism and Transnationalism”. Vol 4, N.1, 2008, P 4. Accessed on October 19th, 2019.<<https://read.dukeupress.edu/jmews/article-pdf/4/1/1/441054/0040001.pdf>.

- ¹⁹ Mohanty, Chandra T. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press, 2003, p 107.
- ²⁰ Ibid, p 21.
- ²¹ Ibid, p 22.
- ²² Ibid, p 49.
- ²³ Ibid, p 19.
- ²⁴ El-Guindi, Fadwa. "Veil, Modesty, Privacy and Resistance". Oxford: Berg, 1999, p 3. Accessed on February 6th, 2019.
- ²⁵ Shaarawi, Huda. *Harem Years*. New York: Feminist Press, 1987, p 82.
- ²⁶ Alkhawaja, Assim. "The Complexity of Women's Liberation in the Era of Westernization Egyptian Islamic and secular Feminists in their Own Context". University of San Francisco, 2015, p 35 (qtd in Samman, 2011, 185).
- ²⁷ Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Heaven : Yale University Press, 1992, p 160.
- ²⁸ El-Guindi, Fadwa. "Veiling Resistance". Vol 3, N.1, 1999, p 71. Accessed on June 7th, 2019. < <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233692233>.
- ²⁹ Shaarawi, Huda. *Harem Years*. New York: Feminist Press, 1987, p 13.
- ³⁰ Mohanty, Chandra T. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press, 2003, p 34. Accessed on June 7th, 2019.
- ³¹ Abu-Lughod, Leila. "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflexions on Cultural Relativism and its Others". Vol 104, N.3, 2002, p 781. Accessed on August 21, 2019. <[http:// http://www.jstor.org](http://http://www.jstor.org).
- ³² Mohanty, Chandra T. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press, 2003, p, 34.
- ³³ Ahmed, Leila. "Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate". New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1992, p 129. Accessed on January 25th, 2019.
- ³⁴ Ibid, p 224.
- ³⁵ Bullock, Katherine. "The Politics of the Veil". University of Toronto, 1999, p 162.

V. General Conclusion

Throughout our work entitled the Notion of Space in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and Huda Shaarawi's *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (1978-1924), we have attempted to shed light on women's struggle in order to bring about positive changes for women's lives. We have analyzed those two works based on Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962) and Chandra Mohanty's *Under Western Eyes* (1986) in order to show women's contribution in the public and the private spheres and reciprocal influence that exists between these two places.

Though Wollstonecraft and Shaarawi belong to two different cultures and periods, both of them struggled in societies which limited their freedoms. The two authors are representative of their times, they witnessed many difficulties and injustices inflicted on women obliging them to be confined in the private sphere far away from the public sphere from which they were banned. They rebelled against stigmatizing views which considered women as weak and inferior creatures unable of reasoning effectively. They also criticized the social norms conditioning women from childhood to be beautiful creatures, charming spouses and caring mothers.

Our study has led us to notice that the two authors were not intimidated by the denigration of women in society. Despite the problems that both writers faced, they attempted to improve women's conditions in society. To redress their situation, they were summoned to vindicate their rights by asking for equality between men and women to gain respectability as well as freedom to manage their own lives. According to these two writers, women represent half of society; therefore they must share the same rights as men in order to form a balanced society.

The first step to build a balanced society is by bringing women from their private sphere to the public one through education and involving them in politics. Thus, Wollstonecraft's and Shaarawi's works stress the importance of education for women. Through their writings they aspired for an equal educational system between boys and girls and invited women to surpass their limits by cultivating their understanding of the world through further reading of history, economics, literature and science. According to them, this would not only allow women to understand and participate to the political and social domains but would also help them to improve the quality of their private lives through the appropriate fulfilment of their duties. The two writers supported this idea by stating that mothers constitute the first source of knowledge and civility for their children hence the urge to women to be well groomed to uplift the intellectual capabilities of the next generations. The importance of the private sphere is also evident in the fact that it was the starting point for Shaarawi's involvement in the public sphere with the different salons she attended and organised.

Our work also highlights how the two writers used their writings to gain visibility in the public sphere. They wrote different pieces of writings. Wollstonecraft used a collection of essays and Shaarawi shared her own biography, yet both of them used remarkably similar ideas to defend women's cause and justify why they deserved the same political rights as men. The writing process helped them to transform their lives and heal their emotional and physical wounds. These writings also can be seen as a means of emancipation.

Huda Shaarawi borrows her ideas from Western feminists. This influence is shown through her several travels and interactions with several European women. Shaarawi's autobiography shows her approval of the European culture and its beneficial effect on the Egyptian society. As a Westernized woman, Shaarawi embraced Western customs without taking into consideration her own traditions and this is obvious when she removed her veil

publically. She could thus be considered to be far removed from the aspirations and preoccupations of her overwhelming religious and conservative Egyptian sisters.

Indeed, our dissertation has tackled the theme of space in Wollstonecraft's and Shaarawi's works *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and *Harem Years* (1879-1924). We have concluded that even if women have achieved a certain freedom by being heard in the same domains as men, women are still oppressed by men in a way or another. The scope of this study that we have undertaken can be enlarged to include how both Western and Muslim feminist writers tackled polygamy and institution of marriage in Muslim society.

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