

Muslim Women's Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East

An Honors Thesis for the Department of International Relations

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Introduction

Western norms and the decisions of international bodies such as the United Nations have created a certain overarching version of what the ideal vision of women's rights should look like. We sometimes forget, however, that not all women are from the West, and not all women want the same things. The Middle Eastern Muslim world is a different cultural sphere. Women there have different cultural norms, religious texts, laws, desires, and challenges to address when they think about what rights they want and need. My research will be important because I will examine how Muslim women are (or are not) determining their own rights, how different Middle Eastern Muslim majority countries have responded to international bodies', such as the United Nations and European Union, visions about women's rights, and whether or not the U.S. does or should consider women's rights when making foreign policy decisions in a dynamic Middle East. I have three broad research questions, each of which address what I see as a critical area in determining the best way for the United States to move forward with respect to gender rights in foreign policy in the Middle East.

Fundamental Research Questions

What do Muslim women want?

My first question concerns the influences on how Middle Eastern Muslim women think about and decide what they want. This is a broad question that has more specific sub-questions that must be answered: Which sources are informing Muslim women's ideas of what their rights should be? How successful are Muslim women in different regions at achieving their ideal rights? The most important conclusion from this question is a determination about *what rights*

Middle Eastern Muslim women are demanding. Muslim women have the prerogative to contribute to and in fact *create* and *decide* what their own rights should be. My research will show that the ways in which Muslim women work to create these rights differ not only from traditional Western ideals, but also between different Muslim groups; they are affected not only by religious expectations, but also by cultural contexts and ideals.

Compatibility of Western Ideas of Women's Rights

My second question examines the issue of applying a generally Western conception of women's rights, as put forward by the U.N. and EU, to the Middle East as a whole. How compatible are the rights women are granted and have come to expect in the West with the rights Muslim women want and need? Is it appropriate to apply the same standard of women's rights to the Islamic religious context? What about accepted cultural norms that differ widely from Western ideals? This question will also include a detailed comparison of what I find through my research on the first, the rights that Muslim women in the Middle East today are demanding, and the norms that Western international bodies put forth.

Gender Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East

My third question analyzes the role of women's rights in the Middle East as foreign policy motivation for the United States. The liberation of Muslim women has been used as justification for foreign intervention on the part of the U.S., namely when the U.S. invaded Afghanistan in 2001. While the concern for women living under the brutal Taliban regime may have been legitimate, there is a problem with associating the eradication of terrorism with the liberation of all Muslim women, as there is with associating "oppression" with Muslim women in general. In much of U.S. and international media, Muslim women, regardless of where they are from or live, are portrayed as oppressed by their Islamic governments and traditions. The

questions here will be: How has U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and more broadly, been influenced by women's rights in the Muslim world? Are Muslim women's rights a factor in foreign policy today, ten years after the Afghanistan invasion, and if so, how is that affecting the United States' relationships with Middle Eastern countries? I want to question whether or not women's rights in the Muslim world should be part of U.S. foreign policy, namely in the context of the changes taking place in the Middle East now – do we need to take up women's rights causes in order to create more strategic bonds with the post-Arab Spring governments? If so, how would we do this?

Methodology

What do Muslim women want?

I will approach this question through a combination of textual and comparative analysis. One of the most important influences on ideas of women's rights in the Middle Eastern Muslim context is theological scholarship of women's history and roles in Islam, as well as interpretations of what the Qur'an and *hadith* really mean when they include certain phrases or stories about women. As mentioned in the review of existing literature that follows, Fatima Mernissi is among the foremost scholars in this area. Her work, along with other similar scholarship about women provides a foundation for understanding how leading religious scholars are thinking about women's issues in a Muslim context.

While this scholarship is important, it is often removed from any concrete political or cultural framework, and more ideological or theoretical in nature. Therefore, another essential way of gauging women's demands is a comparative analysis of current women's movements. I will conduct a focused case study of Egyptian and Turkish women and women's movements. I

choose Egypt as a case study here because of my own personal experience of study abroad at the American University in Cairo, which lead to a deeper understanding of Egyptian culture. I choose Turkey because of its long history of more secular, civil law, the reemergence of the veil debate in recent years, and its role as an emerging power in the Middle East. I will do this through a combination of reading primary source material (press releases, website information) from the organizations, as well as secondary scholarship about the most successful women's groups throughout the Middle East. I will then compare the demands of these women's groups amongst themselves, as well as with the ideas in the theological interpretation work described above. Through these analyses and comparisons, I will be able to determine what rights women in the Middle East today are demanding, as well as their tactics and whether or not they are generally successful.

Does the Western Concept Apply?

As stated in the introduction, I am interested in investigating the application of Western women's rights norms to Muslim-majority contexts in the Middle East. In order to do this, I have decided to use examples from the United Nations, as well as the European Union as mechanisms to judge just what comprises these Western norms. I will be undertaking a close analysis of the gender rights requirements the European Union placed upon Turkey in order for it to become a member of the E.U., as well as the stipulations laid out in CEDAW, the 1979 U.N. Convention that is seen as a major contributor to international gender rights standards. Building on the aforementioned case studies, specific information about how components in both Egypt and Turkey will shed some light on how the women of the Middle Eastern Muslim world, as well as their governments, view Western norms, and whether or not these norms can be successful in Muslim majority contexts. Both Egypt and Turkey have ratified CEDAW, but with specific

reservations, and examining these will add an additional dimension to a comprehensive understanding of each of these countries' reactions to the Convention.

Gender rights in U.S. foreign policy.

In this final and perhaps most important section of the thesis, I will seek to determine the state of women's rights as part of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. The State Department's Office of Global Women's Issues (GWI) states on the front page of its website that it is "committed to advancing the rights of women and girls as a central focus of U.S. diplomatic, development, and defense interests"; clearly this is the place to look for foreign policy initiatives in the region. A close analysis of the programs this office operates in the Middle East and an examination of how these programs and policies have changed over time will show how the U.S. government has changed its focus as the U.S. has become more deeply involved in the Middle East. I will also perform a comparison between the programs under this office and my conclusions in from question one (What do Muslim women want?); this will reiterate any differences in the two ideas of ideal women's rights as well as shed light on the efficiency of the Office of Global Women's Issues.

IV. Review of Existing Literature

In the introduction to her work entitled *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran*, Ziba Mir-Hussein proposes that the subject of gender in Islam has been addressed at three levels: interpretations and reinterpretations of sacred texts, local and national political ideologies with their own histories and discourses on women, and the lived experiences of individuals (3-5). While these categories are not explicitly accepted among the scholars on

these topics, they do serve as a useful framework for the literature that exists on the subject of women, their rights, and their demands in a Middle Eastern Muslim context.

The following review will deal with the immense amount of literature on the subject of Muslim women in three categories loosely modeled off of the categories Mir-Husseini delineates in her work. These are: Muslim theological perspectives (interpretations of the sacred texts), analyses of U.N. reforms on women's rights and how Middle Eastern governments have or have not dealt with them (national political ideologies), and a survey of the existing research based on study of specific Muslim women in the countries of the Middle East (lived experiences).

These three categories also serve well in addressing my three principle research questions, although the first of my research questions (what do Muslim women want, and how do they work to make their demands realities?) is discussed more frequently than the others in the existing scholarship. All three of the aforementioned categories of literature address this question to an extent. Analyses of the political status of Muslim women in the Middle East address my second question: does the Western concept of women's rights promoted and legislated by international institutions like the United Nations fit a Muslim-majority context? Scholarship is the thinnest on the third question, which asks if the United States should pursue gender rights as a part of its foreign policy. The literature review for each of these three categories will be expanded upon at the beginning of their respective chapters.

Gaps in Existing Research

The research I have described here is truly the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the subject of women in the Middle Eastern Muslim world. There is an overwhelming amount of research, most of it descriptive in nature. Scholars describe and interpret how women are depicted in the Qur'an and how that should translate to political reality. They describe the

resistance of Muslim nations to CEDAW and other U.N. reforms, and they describe and analyze the origins and goals of women's rights movements in the Middle East. All of this is helpful in determining what Muslim women are demanding now. What the existing research doesn't speak to is whether or not gender rights should be a part of United States foreign policy in the Middle East. It is clear from the U.S. State Department's Office of Global Women's Issues that policy-makers are thinking about, and have specific goals toward, women's rights in the Middle East. There are very specific programs aimed at increasing Muslim women's political and economic participation, but this leaves two major questions: If gender rights are truly part of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, why has the U.S. still not ratified CEDAW? And secondly, do these programs match the rights Muslim women are demanding today? Public opinion is not silent on this matter, but I have yet to find a comprehensive study of the question, case studies that might apply, or human rights policy theory applied specifically to women's rights. I want to examine gender rights as foreign policy at the international level and answer a question that does not seem to have been asked, which is whether or not gender rights should be a part of U.S. foreign policy, and I hope to use cases from the Middle East, as well as what I have learned about women's rights there, to help me answer this question.

Chapter One

Theological Perspectives on Women and Gender In Islam

I. Introduction

My initial research question asks which rights Middle Eastern Muslim women are really demanding -- and how they are doing so. I will approach this question through a combination of textual and comparative analysis. One of the most important influences on conceptions of women's rights in the Middle Eastern Muslim context is the theological scholarship on women's history in Islam, as well as interpretations of what is really meant by some phrases that concern women in the Qur'an and *hadith*.

In this chapter I will be analyzing the work of four important feminist scholars of Islam: Fatima Mernissi, Leila Ahmed, Amina Wadud, and Riffat Hassan. Each of them approaches the issues of women and gender in Islam in a unique way, and all are useful for understanding the nature of women's issues in the Middle East today. I will provide a close examination of the main pieces of each of their work and extract from this examination a number of themes that are common throughout. These themes, to be explained below, are important to the discussion of what Middle Eastern Muslim women want now not only because the scholars I am examining are themselves female and espousing feminist viewpoints about Islam as a religion, but also because these holy texts are perhaps the most powerful weapon for those who claim women's inferiority and promote gender inequality in the Middle East today

II. Review of Existing Literature

Any productive discussion of Muslim women's rights in the Middle East requires a close examination of the theological scholarship on how the sacred texts in Islam present women and

their rights. In fact, a large portion of the scholarship on women in Islam or women's issues in Islam is of this nature – it examines how women are portrayed throughout Islamic history from a textual standpoint. The literature on this subject focuses mainly on the Qur'an and the *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). Some scholars make connections between the sacred texts and modern political context, but examining the text itself seems to be the focus of most of the literature on women in Islam.

There are several influential scholars in this area, both men and women, and their views combine to represent not only the diversity of opinions about women in Muslim social and political contexts, but also the variety of interpretations of these two sacred texts that exist in the Muslim world.

The questions most scholars in this field are asking, and are being asked, relate to how women are portrayed in the Qur'an and the *hadith*. In many predominately Muslim countries, cultural norms and expectations are based on whatever interpretation of these texts is dominant at any given time. For example, Egypt has some secular laws, but family law (which includes divorce, marriage, and custody law) remains under *shari'a*. This observation demonstrates the importance of examining the prominent thinking on what the Qur'an and *hadith* have to say about women. It seems to me that, because of the religious influence on laws, any significant changes in the laws that govern women's lives would have to find strong support in the religious community to have any tangible effect. It is obvious that female scholars in this area tend to provide a feminist interpretation of the sacred texts, and are working within this religious community to cause change from the inside.

Two well-known and often-cited female scholars in this area are Fatima Mernissi, a Moroccan feminist, and Amina Wadud-Muhsin, an American-born Muslim active in the field.

While each of these women has slightly different interpretations, their views reflect the majority of the feminist literature on interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadith*. Mernissi has several well-known and influential books, and in each of them she discusses a combination of Islamic history, the sacred texts, and the modern political situations surrounding women and their rights. Her basic arguments are that Islam is not the *cause* for the oppression of women and patriarchy we see in the Muslim world today. Rather, she argues, there are factors external to the religion itself that undermine its emphasis on gender equality. These pre-existing and persistent structures are the real reason for women's oppression today. She also notes that while many Muslims cite *hadith* or the Qur'an as a "weapon" against women, many of them do not have the skills to undertake the right kind of evaluation to know the true meaning or clout behind what they are saying (Mernissi 1987, 1998, 1991).

Amina Wadud focuses much more on close readings of the Qur'an, which is helpful because much of modern Muslim culture, society, and even law is based on the perceived or popular interpretation of this text, which tends to be patriarchal. Although she is American-born, Wadud has made significant contributions to the literature on women in Islam. In her book *Qur'an and Woman*, Wadud delineates three categories of existing interpretations of women in the Qur'an: traditional, reactive, and holistic. The first two are not adequate, in Wadud's view, but instead we need to strive to reach the third, which will ultimately "demonstrate the link between...liberation [of Muslim women] and this primary source of Islamic ideology and theology" (Wadud, "Qur'an, 128).

Although I have highlighted these two scholars, there is an abundance of research on the general issue of women in Islam. Theological approaches to this question constitute a large portion of this research because if one wants to make a point about almost anything to do with

Muslim women, at least a mention, if not a lengthy discussion and focused study, of the Qur'an and *hadith* is all but required. In the analysis to follow, I will expand on the work described here, as well as examine the work of two other important feminist scholars, Leila Ahmed and Riffat Hassan. The work of these four women gives a descriptive picture of the literature on women in Islam as a religion.

Complementing this feminist body of research on interpretation of women's positions in the Qur'an is a wealth of "traditional" scholarship by men. It is important to note that while this literature might not be a direct reaction to the growth of feminist theology in Islam, and much of it precedes the feminist wave, it is still part of the discourse around Muslim women. We might look to Murtaza Mutahari, an important Iranian religious figure who stresses incompatibility between Western and Islamic norms, for a summary of the male scholarship: women and men are equal, but they do not and should not have identical rights (Euben 2009).

III. Themes in the Theological Scholarship

A close examination of the feminist theological scholarship on women's issues in Islam reveals important themes that can shed light on what Muslim women in the Middle East want today. One of these themes is the notion that Islam as a religion does not in essence encourage suppression or degradation of women, but in fact puts forth the idea that both sexes are equal and deserve the same rights. This theme appears across the work of each of the feminist theologians I will examine in the following analysis, and each scholar has her own answer for why gender inequality has persisted, despite what Islam says, in the Muslim world today. The combination of each of these scholars' hypotheses toward this issue highlight factors that are contributing to gender inequality in the Middle East today.

Women's movements in the Middle East may or may not directly rely on feminist theological scholarship to bolster their arguments, but this type of work definitely comprises a large portion of the existing scholarship on the "issue" of women in Islam. Therefore, it is important for us as scholars of this topic to understand some of the reasons gender inequality still exists in countries where the dominant religion apparently espouses nothing but equality.

A. Factors External to Islam – Fatima Mernissi

Perhaps the most common Western misconception of Islam as a religion is that women are considered essentially inferior to men and must live their lives as subservient to their male relatives and companions. While this is actually true in some societies today, it is important to distinguish between different places and note that the bulk of feminist theological scholarship argues that it is not the Islamic religion that causes this phenomenon, but some other influence in modern Muslim societies.

As mentioned in the literature above, Fatima Mernissi is one of the foremost scholars in this area. Throughout her work, she is adamant that a number of modern factors external to Islam itself have been the major factors in the creation and perpetuation of gender inequality in the Muslim world today. Some of these factors, which I will elaborate on below, are misinterpretation of or misinformation on the sacred texts in Islam; pre-Islamic gender relation patterns; and the struggle to construct an Arab identity in the post-colonial era.

i. Misinterpretation of and Misinformation about the Sacred Texts

In the introduction to her work entitled *A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, Mernissi traces the *silsilah*, or chain of reference (i.e., "check[s] the identity of the Companion of the Prophet who uttered it, and in what circumstances...as well as the chain of

people who passed it along” (Mernissi, “A Feminist” 113).) for a certain famous *hadith* that reads “Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity!” This phrase is quite alarming, and even more so because it is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, which is the impetus for Mernissi’s undertaking in tracing its exact origins. She calls this single phrase “a sledgehammer argument for those who want to exclude women from politics” (Mernissi, “A Feminist”, 114), and also points out that it is considered absolutely true without question because of its position in “Al-Bukhari’s prestigious collection of traditions” (113).

A detailed examination of Mernissi’s findings regarding this particular *hadith*, while interesting, may not be as pertinent to the subject at hand as the main points she arrives at through her analysis of the phrase. In summary, she finds that several prominent male companions of the Prophet Muhammad attributed this phrase to him, namely Abu-Hurayra, who was “attacked by Companions of his own generation” and is generally not regarded as a reliable source for *hadith* (Mernissi, “A Feminist”, 125). The Prophet’s companions claimed he said things that supported women’s oppression, but they were often taken out of context or in some other way inaccurately recorded in the *hadith*. Mernissi argues that the Prophet himself was *not* supporting gender inequality, nor trying to create a religion that did so; in fact, she says that “this phobic attitude toward women is all the more surprising since we have seen that the Prophet has encouraged his adherents to renounce it” (Mernissi, “A Feminist”, 83). While it is not possible for us to know what exactly the Prophet said, Mernissi finds telling evidence that this verse, and others, do not accurately represent his speech nor opinions. This conclusion is important because it discredits the notion that Islam itself is a factor in the situations Middle Eastern Muslim women face today. Mernissi uses astute theological scholarship to make her point: there is a fairly widespread problem of misconception of what the religious texts of Islam actually say

about women. Mernissi cannot find evidence in the Qur'an or *hadith* that the Prophet or his teachings contributed to the gender inequality we see in the Muslim world today. In fact, she can take some of the most potent evidence often used by proponents of gender inequality and show how it was transformed and influenced by culture and history that exist outside of the sacred text and the teachings of the Prophet. These outside forces corrupted the original substance of the Qur'an and *hadith*, and these forces, *not* Islam, are what perpetuate gender inequality in Muslim societies today.

ii. Pre-Islamic Traditions of Inequality

In addition to misinterpretation of and misinformation about the sacred texts, Mernissi points to the traditions that existed in the Muslim world before it was Muslim. In her earlier version of *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, Mernissi provides a detailed and poignant analysis of sex and marriage before Islam. She outlines several different types of marriage that existed in the time referred to as *jahiliyya* (ignorance), some of which were actually matrilineal in nature. Mernissi brings in the scholarship of Robertson Smith here, who wrote that in pre-Islamic Arabian culture there were two “trends” of marriage: “a matrilineal trend which [Smith] calls *sadica* marriage and a patrilineal trend he calls *ba'al* or dominion marriage”. *Sadica* marriage was “initiated by a mutual agreement between a woman and a man”, “takes place at the house of the woman”, and the children resulting from it belong to the mother (34). *Sadica*'s counterpart, the patrilineal form of marriage that was prominent before the rise of Islam was centered on the male, and the “offspring belong to the husband”; this kind of marriage, the male is considered the woman's *ba'al*, which means “lord”, or “owner” (34).

There was also another type of marriage, *mut'a*, which was temporary and solely focused on the sexual satisfaction of both partners (34).

Mernissi's research about sexual and marriage patterns before the rise of Islam shows that in the Arab world before Islam, "women's sexuality was not bound up by the concept of legitimacy", and that "the main unit was the mother and child within an entourage of kinship" (37). While she concludes that many of the policies the Prophet Muhammad instituted regarding marriage did in fact encourage the patriarchal forms of marriage to persist, these things were done as a safety net for women, and not necessarily intended to make them inferior. For example, polygamy was justified as part of this safety net: "the Prophet, concerned about the fate of women who were divorced, widowed, or unmarried orphans, decided to create a kind of responsibility system whereby unattached women were resituated in a family unit where a man could protect them" (38). There is danger, however, as Mernissi insists, in referring to the exact historical context of the life of the Prophet when interpreting religious law with regard to women. Mernissi makes the point that "since modernization grants women more independence and self-determination, modern Muslim society is in some ways moving closer to pre-Muslim sexual patterns" (41). This might not necessarily have positive implications in the future, but any increase in women's power within marriages and families is almost certainly for the better. Women who are making demands for political, economic, and social equality today are the "ghosts of women of the pre-Islamic Arab aristocracy", a scary and challenging thing for Muslims who consider the dawn of civilization to be the year 622 and anything before that an uncivilized unknown (Mernissi 1987, 85).

iii. Struggle for Identity in the Post-Colonial Era

The last important factor that Mernissi points to as a cause for persisting gender inequality in the Middle East is the Arab and Muslim experience in the post-colonial era. During the colonial period, when the Arab states were under largely Western control, there was a loss of identity; the identity during the colonial period had been, essentially, colonialism, an identity provided by an external force. When colonization ended, the Arab nations “found themselves almost feminized – veiled, obliterated, nonexistent” (Mernissi 1991). Mernissi points to the rush of Arab nations onto the international scene, implicating a very sudden need to be modern in the continuation, and even worsening, of gender inequality in the post-colonial period. She points out that documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights did not work toward gender equality in the Muslim world because the transition into the liberal international community was too drastic and too quick. If one considers the amount of time it took American feminism to make real progress for women, and the fact that today there is still no perfect level of gender equality in our country, it is easy to see how the UNDHR, which compels governments to eliminate all human rights violations fairly absolutely, might not be the most effective way to foster gender equality in the Muslim majority nations. These countries were far behind the developed world in terms of gender equality at the time the UNDHR was passed, and the UNDHR does not really allow for or give guidance about a more gradual, practical arrival at gender equality for nations behind in that respect. Another manifestation of the identity struggles in the post-colonial period is the heightened instance and intensity of Islamic fundamentalism. According to Mernissi, we need to see this new surge of Islamic fundamentalism as part of the ongoing struggle for identity in the Arab Muslim world. She says: “...if we are to assess correctly women’s prospects and future in Muslim societies, we have to...read [fundamentalism] as a political statement about men undergoing bewildering, compelling changes affecting their

economic and sexual identity” (Mernissi 1987, ix). Because of patriarchal traditions in these countries, men tended toward more conservative views on women, which aligns with their adherence to a stricter, “back to basics” Islam in the face of pressure to define themselves as something different than the West that had colonized their world for so long. She sees in the Muslim world a strong need for identity in a dynamic international environment, and sees fundamentalism as one manifestation of that identity that contributes in a negative way to women’s situations there. Since fundamentalism is a large part of this identity struggle, we can, and must, see their calls for the veil and other conservative policies toward women as a “reshuffling of identity” (Mernissi 1987, x).

For Mernissi, the “roots of the modern situation” (the modern situation being inequality for women) are not an “ideology of female inferiority, but rather a set of laws and customs that ensure that women’s status remains one of subjugation” (Mernissi 1987, 11). Family law remains under religious law, which is outdated and sometimes hard to adapt to modern contexts. This, along with competing ideas of the best way to legally regulate relations between the sexes, makes for a volatile environment where gender relations are constantly shifting, and where women often come out on the bottom. Her conclusion to *Beyond the Veil* also makes some important points that speak to the argument that it is not Islam but political, legal, and social structures that have created the gender-unequal situations in the modern Muslim world. Mernissi mentions here that while women’s liberation in the Muslim world is often seen as a religious issue (by both Muslim men as well as Westerners viewing the situation from the outside), it is in fact “predominately an economic issue” (Mernissi 1987, 165). While women’s liberation in Muslim countries is often “perceived as a direct attack on Allah’s realm and order”, the main problem with liberating women in these countries is that: “a society which decides to liberate

women not only has to provide them with jobs, but also has to take upon itself the responsibility for providing child care and cooked food for all workers regardless of sex” (Mernissi 1975, 99). So, the consequences of liberating Muslim women do not only mean changes in the religious climate, and potentially law, but also more bodies added to the list of people the state has to take care of. It is a disconcerting but real problem that Mernissi insists is a real barrier to women’s advancement today. She also points out that there do not exist adequate models of women’s liberation for the Muslim world to emulate. The only ones that do exist are pre-Islamic sexuality and family patterns, or the Western alternative: neither is favorable and both “provoke traumatizing images of sexuality” (Mernissi 1987, 166).

iv. Conclusion

Through an analysis of some of Mernissi’s most important works, I have made clear her main argument and her justifications. She argues that gender equality actually is an important part of Islam as it is understood through accurate interpretation of the Qur’an and the *hadith*, but several things have hindered its realization. I want to close my analysis of Mernissi’s important and impactful work with one of her most potent insights. Mernissi insists that:

“To interpret the relationship between the massive participation of women voters and the small number of women elected as a sign of stagnation and backwardness would be in accordance with the usual stereotypes of the Arab world. However, it would be more insightful to see it as a reflection of changing times and the intensity of the conflicts between the aspirations of women, who take the constitution of their country seriously, and the resistance of men, who imagine, despite the laws in force, that power is necessarily male.” (Mernissi, “A Feminist”, 113).

While she is specifically talking about women's political participation here, there is a broader point both implicit in her statement as well as essential to the discussion of what Muslim women are demanding now. This is that the cultural influences as well as the patriarchal legacies in Muslim and Arab nations have been essential in creating the dynamic and challenging situations Middle Eastern Muslim women face today. Notice that she specifically does *not* mention anything about the Qur'an, or *hadith*, or even the Islamic faith as attribution for this phenomenon, which indicates her belief that forces other than the religion itself not only caused the rise of gender equality in the Middle Eastern Muslim world, but also contributed heavily to its perpetuation.

B. More Misinterpretation and Misinformation - Amina Wadud

As mentioned above, Amina Wadud-Muhsin is an American-born Muslim who has done much important work on the topic of women and gender in Islam, with most of her work focused on feminist exegesis from the Qur'an. The dedication in one of her most famous works, *Qur'an and Woman*, is telling in itself. It reads: "This book is dedicated to all who struggle to hear the voice of their faith expressed by the Qur'an – especially the Sisters of Islam". This suggests that while they may not be obvious, women's voices do exist in this foundational text. Most of Wadud's scholarship, as suggested by the title of this major work and her dedication, is focused on textual analysis of the Qur'an, as well as commentary on current interpretations of the status of women in the Qur'an. Wadud characterizes the Qur'an as a "world-altering force which must be recognized and understood" (Wadud-Muhsin 1992). In her view, Islamic studies have evolved more as study of the huge volume of literature that came out of the disciplines that were based on

the Qur'an, rather than as study of the Qur'an itself. Therefore, in her study of women in the Qur'an, she wants to return directly to this indispensable text.

In her discussion of the rights and roles of women, Wadud fleshes out several controversies that persist to this day and still impact perceptions of Muslim women in the modern world. In her view, the Qur'an is not definitive on the issues of women's roles and their status with regard to men. In fact, she is fairly insistent that "the Qur'an does not strictly delineate the roles of woman and the roles of men" (Wadud-Muhsin 1992). To support this argument, she analyzes several verses from the Qur'an that have typically been used to make a case for the inferiority of women to men. This is one of the same techniques Fatima Mernissi uses to the same end – to show that because few members of every modern Muslim society are educated enough to do detailed study and analysis of the Qur'an, it is easy for those who want to oppress women to throw around phrases from the Qur'an and make them sound like support for their argument of inequality. I will elaborate on some of these verses and concepts below; they include women's roles as mothers and the guardianship relationship between men and women.

One of the most interesting anti-female empowerment arguments that Wadud upends is the common conception that women's sole function is childbearing. The word that many use to convey this is "primary", which in Wadud's view has a negative and restrictive connotation. She is confident that "there is no term in the Qur'an which indicated that child-bearing is 'primary' to a woman" (Wadud-Muhsin, "Qur'an, 113). The only way the task of childbearing could be considered 'primary' is because it is essential to the continuation of the human race, and "since only the woman can bear children, it is of primary importance that she does" (113). The Qur'an reads: "O humankind...have *taqwa* towards God in Whom you claim your rights of one another,

and (have *taqwa*) towards the wombs (that bore you). (Sura 4, Verse 1)” (133). This verse commands followers to have respect for women as child bearers, bolstering Wadud’s point.

After making this crucial distinction between ‘primary’ as restrictive versus as imperative, Wadud proceeds to emphasize that “the Qur’an is emphatic about the reverence, sympathy, and responsibility due to the female procreator” (113). The role of the female as mother is often used to ensure that women stay at home and to limit their participation in economics and politics, but Wadud shows that instead it should be seen as one of the reasons to respect and revere women.

Another central part of Wadud’s argument and commentary on the Qur’an is her analysis of two important terms that are often used to justify and perpetuate the superiority of men over women. These two terms are *darajah* and *faddala*. The latter in Arabic means “step”, “degree” or “level”, and in a Qur’anic sense is used to refer to a sort of step up or elevation over others in relationships between individuals, as well as between Heaven and Hell (Wadud-Muhsin, *Quran*, 65). *Faddala* is the notion that “Allah has preferred some of creation over others” (69). Wadud does with these two terms exactly what she does with the idea that women’s sole function is childbearing – takes them as common support for anti-woman arguments and then demonstrates that in their true sense, they do not reflect inferiority of women.

Many people use the fact that men and women usually have different roles in society in conjunction with the fact that a *darajah* is earned by deeds to conclude that men have a *darajah* over women because their work is considered more valuable. Wadud counters this argument by observing that the Qur’an actually “does not determine the actual value of specific deeds” (66), therefore in theory women’s and men’s deeds, while different, could both end with the same *darajah* compensation. It is the societies that determine the value of deeds; therefore it is a result

of their active determination that men's deeds are more valuable than women's which has led to gender inequality in Muslim societies. Wadud breaks down a specific verse from the Qur'an which says that men have *darajah* over women in divorce, mentioning that while it is often taken to mean that "*darajah* exists between all men and all women, in every context" (68), it is extremely clear from the wording that this particular verse is referring specifically and exclusively to cases of divorce. This verse could still be considered to disadvantage women because it actually does, as Wadud admits, give men the advantage in divorce, but Wadud significantly narrows its application by proving that divorce is the only context it can be applied to.

The concept of *faddala* refers to God's preference [the root of the word is "to favor", or "to prefer"] of some parts of creation over others. For example, Wadud tells us that "humankind is preferred over the rest of creation", and sometimes some groups of people are preferred over others (Wadud, *Qur'an*, 69). The direction this concept could take with regards to gender equality is fairly obvious: men are preferred over women. Wadud verifies this by citing the verse that seems to reflect this superiority:

"Men are [*qawwamuna 'ala*] women, [on the basis] of what God has [preferred] (*faddala*) some of them over others, and [on the basis] of what they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are [*qanitat*], guarding in secret that which God has guarded.' (Sura 4, Verse 34)" (Wadud, "Qur'an, 136).

She upends the common patriarchal misinterpretation of this verse through close analysis of the language used in the verse, and concludes basically that the verse cannot be used to as support for the claim that all men are superior to all women at all times. Wadud tells us that while this verse is often interpreted to mean that men are superior over women in all circumstances,

“*faddala* cannot be unconditional because Sura 4, Verse 34 does not read ‘they (masculine plural) are preferred over them (feminine plural).’ It reads “*ba’d* (some of them over *ba’d* (others).” (Wadud, “Qur’an, 137).

In her conclusion to this book, *Qur’an and Woman*, Wadud makes the important point that any reading of the Qur’an is conditioned wholly by the background and hermeneutic of the reader. She says that if any reader of the Qur’an has ever had reason to assume any inequality between men and women, it is easy for them to interpret some of the verses she analyses as proof for why that inequality does and should exist (Wadud, *Qur’an*, 96). The central point I am trying to make by citing Wadud’s work here is that her reasons for why gender inequality exists in modern Muslim societies is, like part of Mernissi’s, the fact that so many people have misinterpreted the words of the sacred texts. These people have an agenda that is decisively not feminist, and since there are so many devout Muslims that do not have the religious education to do informed exegesis of the text, these verses are both easily colored and easily disseminated by those who do.

From a close analysis of Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud’s principal works, it is clear that that they are both speaking to the central issue of why gender equality has persisted despite the fact that perhaps the most influential force in Muslim societies, Islam itself, seems to support a gender-equal, or at least *more* gender-equal system. We will see that Leila Ahmed and Riffat Hassan are speaking to the same issues through the following analysis of their work.

C. Pre-Islamic and Western Influence - Leila Ahmed

Leila Ahmed is an Egyptian-born scholar of Islam and is currently the Victor S. Thomas Professor of Divinity at the Harvard Divinity School. Her work on women and gender in Islam is

extremely influential, and one of her most widely acclaimed books is *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. In this work, Ahmed traces women's history in Islam, from pre-Islamic history, to women during the formation of the religion, to new discourses emerging today. Much like Mernissi and Wadud, Ahmed discusses the sacred texts and the interpretations that have led to gender inequality today. She also discusses extensively the pre-Islamic conditions of women that led to the current situation. Her arguments both differ and align with those of Mernissi and Wadud, and I will elaborate on those similarities and differences below.

i. Pre-Islamic Traditions of Inequality

While Ahmed agrees with Mernissi that at one point in pre-Islamic history women were considered equal, if not “held in esteem” (Ahmed, *Women*, 11), she blames the rise of gender inequality on the rise of cities in Mesopotamia. This urban growth, she argues, made military roles more important, which “further entrenched male dominance” (12). Family dynamics also changed during this time, as urbanization “lead to the rise of demarcation between respectable women and non-respectable women” (12). Because of this new distinction, patriarchal families were insisted upon to produce verifiable heirs and control of female sexuality (12). Laws, such as the Code Hammurabi, became more and more restrictive toward women and permissive toward men. Women's sexuality was economized and seen as men's property, and there arose a class difference between women who were sexually tied to one man and those who were sexually available to any man (13). This new system required legitimate heirs, which mean that a woman's chastity was of the utmost importance; her “sexual purity (virginity in particular) became negotiable, economically valuable property” (12). As cities got bigger and maintaining

power became more important to leaders, restrictions on women aimed at keeping them sexually pure became not just the norm but codified law.

In the Mediterranean area, which by the fifth and sixth centuries was predominately comprised of Christian and Jewish populations (Ahmed, *Women*, 25), women may have fared a bit better because of the Christian idea that virginity was superior even to reproductive duty, but the ideas of philosophers like Aristotle countered this line of thinking. Aristotle emphasized that women were “not merely...subordinate by social necessity but also as innately and biologically inferior” (29). Ahmed goes into great detail about both the Mesopotamian and Mediterranean histories of women before the coming of Islam. It is essential to note that Ahmed is placing some amount of blame upon the ideas of gender inequality and women’s inferiority in the pre-Islamic Middle East. This resonates with some of Mernissi’s argument about the traditions that existed during *jahiliyya*. Islam did not invent gender inequality in the Muslim world – it existed there before the coming of Islam and was, as Ahmed tells us, even codified into law before the rise of Islam.

ii. Western Influence

While Mernissi points to the identity struggle that happened in the Middle Eastern world after the colonial period, Leila Ahmed discusses in detail the impact that Western domination of the region had for women. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a period of cultural, economic and political domination of the West over most Middle Eastern countries. Ahmed describes the impact that this period had on Middle Eastern women as both “decidedly negative” in some ways, as well as “broadly positive” in others (Ahmed, *Women*, 127). For example, “rural workers and lower-class women in countries, such as Syria and Egypt, where European-made goods had made inroads, undoubtedly suffered as a consequence of the shifting

economic and political patterns” (127), but the overall impact was “broadly positive, because the social institutions and mechanisms for the control and seclusion of women and for the exclusion from the major domains of activity in their society were gradually dismantled” by this pervasive Western influence during the colonial period” (127). One of the most important changes during this period was “the emergence of women themselves as a central subject for national debate” (128). The increased interactions with Western society made the topic of women’s rights a public one for the first time, and Ahmed points to this as the most significant development of the period, and it makes sense that feminism in both Egypt and Turkey picked up momentum shortly after this, in the 1920s.

In her conclusion, Ahmed touches on some of the very same issues Mernissi talks about, and blames, for the continuation of gender inequality in the Middle East today. Ahmed’s discussion of Islamism here is comparable to Mernissi’s discussion of fundamentalism as both part of the struggle for identity in a post-colonial world as well as part of the reason that we still see inferiority of women in the Middle East. Ahmed states that the “Islamist position regarding women” (Ahmed, *Women*, 237) is an issue because it is reactive in nature. Islamists emphasize “the notion of returning to or holding onto an ‘original’ Islam” (237), one that they see as subordinating to women. This echoes what Mernissi said about fundamentalism – recall that her hypothesis regarding this phenomenon is that it is a reaction to and against Western influence and more often than not results in gender inequality.

D. Theological Motifs - Riffat Hassan

Riffat Hassan is a Pakistani-American scholar of Islam, and her work focuses on women in Islam as well as human rights in Islam. She is credited as “a pioneer of Islamic feminist theology” and has many publications addressing this important topic (“Riffat”).

The work I want to focus on here is found in a volume with several different topic areas surrounding the question of Islam and modernity. This relationship clearly has many manifestations and can be answered in many different ways, but Hassan uses a lens of women’s issues and modernity to approach it.

The title of her selection in this book is telling in itself. Hassan asks: “Is Islam a help or a hindrance to women’s development?” (Hassan 189). Her acknowledgment here is that there is a question about whether or not Islam is good for women, but that she might be able to provide an answer. This is a theme many of the scholars I have highlighted so far fall into: there is a stereotypical and for the most part real problem of gender inequality in Islam, *but* it should not and does not have to be that way. I will show through my analysis of Hassan’s work that she too is able to take traditional Islamic material that is used to subordinate women and upend it, showing that its true essence is one of equality for all before God and on Earth.

Hassan is of the opinion that the reason Islam remains largely patriarchal until today is that “the sources on which the Islamic tradition is based...have been interpreted by men who have arrogated to themselves the task of defining the...status of Muslim women” (189). This strikes the same chord as Mernissi’s, Wadud’s, and Ahmed’s work – there has been some miscommunication and misinterpretation in Islamic history that has caused Muslim societies to structure themselves based upon inaccurate interpretations of the sacred texts of Islam. Hassan sites three major reasons in the Islamic sources that have led to the inequality we see today. (It is interesting to note that she also sees these themes in Christian and Jewish texts. The question this

raises in my mind is what has been the difference in Western nations that have Christian and Jewish populations that has allowed for much more gender equality, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?) The three things she cites are the belief that Eve was created *from* and *after* Adam; the belief that Eve was responsible for the Fall of Man; and the question of the purpose of women's creation (192-201). She tells us that the "ordinary" Muslim believes these things and takes them essentially as they are, but that they do not exactly have a basis in the most authoritative of the Islamic texts, the Qur'an (192).

Hassan goes into great detail about how the Qur'an talks about the creation of man and woman, and concludes that for all of these beliefs, there is a striking lack of proof for male superiority in this part of Qur'an, which generally depicts the creation of humanity as a holistic experience that did not even differentiate between man and woman. Hassan points out that "in the thirty or so passages pertaining to the subject of human creation, the Koran uses generic terms for humanity" (192); the terms she includes here are *al-nas*, which means "the people", *al-insan*, which means "humanity", and *al-bashar*, which means "mortal" or "people" (my own translations). Hassan summarizes the Islamic creation story by saying "the Koran evenhandedly uses both feminine and masculine terms and imagery to describe the creation of humanity and not either man or woman (who appeared simultaneously at a subsequent time) is implicit in a number of Koranic passages" (193). She goes on to say that the "Koran makes no distinction between the creation of man and woman" (193). The belief, then, that Eve was created after and from Adam "entered the Islamic tradition through being incorporated in the Hadith literature during the early centuries of Islam" (193). She cites six important *hadith* which advance this notion, and they use phrases like "woman is created from a rib"; "the woman is like a rib, if you try to straighten her, she will break"; "woman has been created from a rib and will in no way be

straightened for you; so if you wish to benefit by her, benefit by her while crookedness remains in her” (193-94). These *hadith*, while important, are “obviously in opposition to the Koranic accounts about human creation” (195). They have remained important, despite their apparent illegitimacy, because they are included in the writings of the two most important officials, al-Bukhari and al-Hallaj, who have almost unquestionable authority in the world of Islam (195). Hassan, in conclusion to her analysis of human creation in Islam, makes the important point that “the continuing popularity of these *hadith* amongst Muslims in general also indicates that they articulate something deeply embedded in Muslim culture, namely, the belief that women are derivative and secondary in the context of human creation” (195). This statement emphasizes the process by which the *hadith* I have quoted from create a society where gender inequality is in the fabric.

Another important point that Hassan makes and that I want to emphasize is that “modernity” is perceived by Muslim societies as double faced: one side is the progress in science and technology, which is seen as desirable. The other is cultural and sexual Westernization, which is seen as undesirable because it is “associated with promiscuity and all kinds of social problems ranging from latch-key kids to drug and alcohol abuse” (190). She goes further to say that “modern” women are seen as Western, which makes them an anomaly that crosses the traditional borders of public space as male and private space as female. This, again, relates back to what Mernissi said about the struggle for Arab and Muslim identity in the post-colonial world. If Westernization is seen as bad, and liberated women are seen as part and parcel of Westernization, then it is logical to understand the subjugation of women in Muslim countries as a return to what are thought to be “traditional” Muslim gender relation practices. While Hassan highlights some new verses that I have not yet discussed, like those from the *hadith* that claim

that Eve was created from one of Adam's ribs, her overall analysis is consistent with those of Mernissi, Wadud, and Ahmed.

IV. Connections and Conclusions

I have already alluded to some connections between the important feminist work I have thus far discussed, but I want to emphasize these connections and relate them back to my original questions – what led to the situation we see now regarding women's issues in the Middle Eastern Muslim World, and what do Muslim women want now that they are in this situation?

My reason for including feminist theological work as a step in discovering what Muslim women want was based on the idea that Muslim societies are largely organized around actual Islamic texts and various interpretations of them – this is supported by the content of the arguments of each of these women. The fact that they are all talking about the texts, which were obviously written down in a time distant from our own memories, as a cause for a problem we see taking place in front of our eyes, emphasizes the connection between the texts and the values of societies they create.

The four women whose work I have analyzed are also talking about how, in a time where many women in the Western world do not even think about gender rights on a regular basis, the majority of Muslim countries still witness gender inequality in the extreme. Each of them have their own reasons for this phenomenon, and I want to highlight the themes that appear through all of their work. One of the most potent of these themes is the idea that the sacred texts of Islam (mainly the Qur'an and *hadith*) have been interpreted, throughout Islamic history, by the men in charge. These men simply did not and do not have women's issues on their minds. The real power that feminist theology has, though, is the power to take the verses typically used by these

men to justify the subjugation of women and discredit them, revealing that these verses, when interpreted correctly, uncover the gender *equality* implicit in Islam. Although these women do point out that the majority of Muslims do not have the education to undertake this informed analysis of the text, the idea that these sacred texts can be fluid unleashes a possibility that Islam could be a liberating force, rather than an oppressive one.

Another important theme that comes up in all of the scholarship outlined above is the impact of external factors on gender relations in the Muslim world. These external factors are often both external to Islam as a religion, as well as external to the geographical region. For both Mernissi and Ahmed, Western influence has contributed significantly to the state of women's rights in the Muslim world today. Recall Mernissi's argument that fundamentalism, one of the strongest forces against women's empowerment, is also a direct result of and reaction to the Western dominance and subsequent feminization that was perceived by men in their loss of identity. For Ahmed, Westernization becomes a problematic part of the modernization package for Muslim nations, largely because its support of women's liberation leads to jarring ideas about sexuality that are not acceptable in traditional societies. As a result of the fact that the Western model of gender relations is *not* preferable, many fundamentalists have recoiled, emphasizing a return to traditional ideas about many things, including women. It is easy to see how these arguments overlap, and they are important in pointing out that factors external to Islam as a religion are a huge part of why Muslim women are still facing the struggles they are today.

So, what have we learned by focusing on the arguments of these four important feminist theologians? We have seen that almost all of them aim to explain why, if Islam espouses gender equality, the state of women's rights in the Muslim world remains unfavorable at best. I have shown that while each of these women come from different geographical regions and different

religious and secular educations, their arguments and answers overlap and intertwine significantly. This is important because these ideas show that there is a possibility for reform – even of texts that are often taken as unquestionably true. These women are an inspiration for women’s movements throughout the Muslim world. As we will see in Chapter Two, which will involve a detailed analysis of feminism and women’s rights in Egypt and Turkey, their arguments have taken the first step in dismantling a thick wall of patriarchy that has enclosed Muslim women throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Chapter Two

Feminism, Women's Movements, and Women's Rights in Egypt and Turkey: Case Studies

I. Introduction

I intend to examine not only theological perspectives but also make real connections with how the themes I have pointed out in the work of Fatima Mernissi, Amina Wadud, Leila Ahmed, and Riffat Hassan are operating in political practice. While theological scholarship is important, it is often removed from any concrete political or cultural framework, and it is more ideological and theoretical in nature. Therefore, another essential way of gauging women's demands is a comparative analysis of women's voices in the Middle East. In this chapter, I will provide a brief history of feminism in Egypt and Turkey, two nations which I believe exemplify the different ways in which Middle Eastern Muslim women are making clear their demands today. I will then conduct an analysis using contemporary coverage of women's movements in these two countries – how does the feminism that grew in each country color the women's movements of today? This chapter will speak to my first and second fundamental questions: what do Muslim women want, and is the western conception of what women want compatible with the demands of Muslim women? My assessment of feminism (its history and current manifestations) in each country will assist me in answering this, as will a detailed analysis of how each country's governments and women's groups have reacted to international legislations aimed at improving gender equality worldwide. These legislations will include the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), passed by the UN in 1979, and the European Union gender rights standards required of all member applicant states. I will elaborate on the backgrounds of each of these as embodiments of Western norms below.

II. Review of Existing Literature

The scholarly literature on women's movements and feminism in the Middle East falls into three broad categories: subjective, interview-based study of individual women in different countries; more objective study of women's economic, social, and political initiatives; and some broader public opinion polls conducted throughout the Middle East. Each of these categories sheds a different light on the topic at hand, and I will use each of them to come to conclusions about what women's movements are demanding in Egypt and Turkey.

In terms of evaluating Egypt and Turkey's respective responses to western influence on gender norms, there is a body of literature that focuses specifically around CEDAW, and how both of these countries ratified it, as well as some that concentrates on how Turkey's European Union candidacy has effected women's rights and legal reform for gender equality.

A. Individual Women and Women's Movements in the Middle East

It is in this research that the sheer variety of "what Muslim women want now" is displayed. In her important book *In Search of Islamic Feminism*, Elizabeth Warnock Fernea interviews Muslim women around the globe. Her work highlights women's issues and movements in several Middle Eastern countries, including Kuwait, Turkey, Egypt, and Israel/Palestine (her labeling). The personal interviews vary in both content and context, and they lead the author to "[discover]...that feminism seemed alive and well in many countries in the Middle East and North Africa" (Fernea 414). I will elaborate on Fernea's findings in Egypt and Turkey in the sections on each to follow. Leila Ahmed, who is active in this more contemporary subject matter in addition to theological scholarship, points out that feminism in the Middle East did not emerge from women themselves, but rather from a male concern for progress of their

nations, which some saw as dependent on women's education and liberation. The Muslim men who began advocating women's liberation witnessed that the "undisguisedness of male control of women in Muslim societies" was where they "most visibly and glaringly differed from the West" ("Feminism" 158). As the Muslim world saw the West becoming more and more prosperous and powerful, some men "came up with some unanimity with the idea that at the root of ['despotism', 'vice', 'backwardness'] lay the Muslim world's low valuation of and its degradation of women" ("Feminism" 158). She also names two factors that contribute to the way feminist movements take shape in the Middle East: cultural attitudes regarding women, and attitudes toward the West (since feminism originated here) (158). The work of the two women cited above reflects the nature of the research, and the reality, in this area: Muslim women face some of the same issues, but live in different cultural, social, economic, and political realities; therefore, their demands and movements take different shapes as they are influenced by the various factors described above.

In addition to this research on individual women, feminism, and women's groups in the Middle East, there also exist several large public opinion surveys, the most interesting of which is the Gallup Organization's Poll of the Muslim World, from which some specific conclusions about Muslim women were drawn. This type of public opinion information is valuable, and it will be interesting and enlightening to compare findings such as this to the popular women's movements in some Middle Eastern countries. The poll, conducted in 2005, involved "more than 1000 face-to-face interviews" and aimed to determine how Muslim women "perceive Islam and their own status in Muslim society" (Mogahed). The findings of this survey regarding Muslim women's opinions on several different issues are telling. Gallup researchers found that "the diversity of achievements and the expectations of women in the region defy [the] idea" that

“women in the Muslim world [are] socialized to expect second-class status” (Mogahed). This is an important observation both because it counters the Western notion that Muslim women are complicit in their own subjugation and because it clarifies that women who are advocating for their own equality are not doing so with an assumption that they cannot be completely equal to men. Some of the most interesting findings of this survey, especially in light of my intention to evaluate applicability of Western norms to Muslim societies, are about Muslim women’s (and men’s) impressions of the West in general. While “both men and women cite political freedom, free speech, and gender equality among the most admired aspects of the West”, “many women in the Muslim world disapprove of the way women are treated in Western societies” (Mogahed). This section of the report points out that “the perceived lack of modest portrayed in Western media is thought to signal women’s degraded cultural status” (Mogahed). This is a common point throughout the scholarship – the West sees Muslim women as oppressed because they are often depicted wearing veils or other types of bodily covering, but the sexual objectification of women in the West is seen by Muslim women as the same type of, or and even worse form of, degradation. Interestingly, the poll found that gender equality is not necessarily at the top of all Muslim women’s lists: “gender equality did not commonly spear as an unprompted response in open-ended questions” (Mogahed), and was not often offered as something they disliked about their societies. The survey report does not go into detail about why this might have been, but there is the question of societal pressures or conditioning to answer a certain way, or the fact that for many women in the Muslim world, basic rights for everyone, like political and economic rights are seen as more urgent than their rights as women. The survey report on results about women concludes with some important advice for those whose “goal [is to] help promote justice for women in the Muslim world”: “outreach will have to center around addressing the problems

they are most concerned about, which, in most countries are more likely to be economic and political than gender issues” (Mogahed). The survey report also reveals some discrepancies between the eight Muslim countries it included in the poll. Since I am focusing on Egypt and Turkey in this chapter, I want to point out one of the most interesting contrasts between those two countries revealed by the Gallup poll. In response to a question about whether or not *shari'a* law should be considered a basis for legislation, 62% of Egyptian women surveyed responded that it should be the “only source” for legislation, whereas only 10% of Turkish women gave this answer. Additionally, 54% of Turkish women answered that *shari'a* law should not be a source at all. While there is an expected difference on this issue because since the 1920s, Turkey has had civil law codes and Egypt until today retains some *shari'a* laws, it is nonetheless interesting to note the size of the discrepancy here. This departure also indicated that there might be different issues of concern for Turkish and Egyptian women regarding their legal structures and roles within them.

It is obvious that women’s groups are active right now in what is one of the most transformative times in Middle Eastern history. I intend to analyze current news articles from international newspapers covering the Arab Spring revolutions in Egypt and current events in Turkey to come to some more up-to-date conclusions about what Muslim women in the Middle East have been talking about over the last five or ten years, a time period that has yet to be thoroughly documented by the literature I have described above.

B. U.N. Reforms and Middle Eastern Reaction

Research on this topic centers around the 1979 U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW was prepared by the U.N.’s

Committee on the Status of Women, and the drafting began in the 1960s with the aim of creating a “single, comprehensive and internationally binding instrument to eliminate discrimination against women” (“Short”). It was signed by 64 states in 1980 and entered into force in September of the following year. Several scholars have examined ratification and implementation of CEDAW in the Arab and Muslim majority nations and used this evaluation as a basis to discuss whether the Western notions of women’s rights contained in CEDAW are compatible within a Muslim context. Many Arab and Middle Eastern countries ratified the treaty, but with reservations. Egypt, for example, ratified with the reservation that they would not be making any women’s rights reforms that went against *shari’a* law, which still governs family, marriage, and divorce issues (Mayer 24). Some scholars, like Mayer, argue that the U.N. and international community should not tolerate these types of reservations because they mean *de jure* discrimination against women will continue in these countries and that cultural relativism is not an appropriate way to interpret the Arab reservations to CEDAW. Others argue that the U.N. took neither the Muslim world nor religious law into consideration during the creation of CEDAW (Kazimov 4). One can conclude from the differences in research on this topic that there is still a great deal of debate in academia around whether the U.N. convention is compatible with a Muslim context. I will elaborate on the details of CEDAW, its requirements, and how Egypt and Turkey responded to it in the following sections on each country.

Another measure of Western norms and their compatibility within a Muslim context is the European Union’s gender rights requirements for member states. Turkey applied for membership in 1987, and the “impact of the EU candidacy on women has been mixed” (Arat 91). Zehra Kabasakal Arat has written an in-depth essay on the evolution of Turkish women’s

rights, and I will elaborate on her findings about the EU gender rights requirements and Turkish women's in the following section on Turkey.

III. A Brief History of Feminism in Egypt and Turkey; 1900s to present.

While I have discussed mainly theological perspectives on women's rights and gender issues in an Islamic context, research on the evolution of feminism in Egypt and Turkey tells us that women's movements (and their study) are also strongly linked to nationalism in each of these countries. In order to understand women's demands in the Middle East today, it is important that we have some background knowledge on how feminism emerged and developed in Egypt and Turkey. The following short history of feminism in each country will support my later analysis of how women's groups and governments in Egypt and Turkey are responding to U.N. reforms like CEDAW and European Union requirements for gender equality.

A. Egypt

Feminist movements in Egypt emerged as part of a redefining of national identity and in the context of strong nationalist movements during the post-colonial period. There existed an idea, much like in Turkey (which I will discuss below), that women's education, empowerment, and liberation was a fundamental key to the modernization of Egypt as a nation. Note that it was, as in Turkey, primarily men that espoused this viewpoint before women took it up themselves (Ahmed, "Feminism" 158).

Many historians will point to Huda Sharawi as the mother of Egyptian feminism. Born in Cairo, Sharawi was an upper class woman who became politically active in the 1920s. She and the women around her led what is considered the first feminist political initiative, a massive march in support of Egyptian nationalists in favor of continued British control (Ahmed,

“Feminism” 160). Sharawi is also renowned for her famous veil removal – she was one of the first women in Egypt to be seen in public uncovered. She, along with the women supporting her ideas, founded the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1922. The main issues this group focused on were increase in women’s education, reforms in family law, and the restriction of polygamy (160). Most of Sharawi’s calls for reform were guised in an Islamic context, with “cautious conservatism” (160) so as to maintain some influence in a society that might not have lent an ear to more liberal views. While her actions were important, some feminists and scholars are critical of Sharawi and her organization because of its focus on the issues facing elite women. During the 1920s and 1930s (and before), veiling was practiced primarily by elite women and was seen as a sort of privilege. Poorer women who could not afford to stay at home but were forced to work for money often did not veil because of the interference it caused in their work.

Some other important feminists in this period include Doria Shafik, described as “a balance between Islamic teaching and feminist reform” (Ahmed, “Feminism” 161), and Malak Hifni Nassef, who in 1909 proposed ten points on women’s rights to Parliament (161). Her points included: giving girls proper religious education, access to primary and secondary education, instruction on “home economics, health, first aid, childcare” increasing numbers of women in healthcare, giving women opportunities for advanced study, solid moral upbringings, adhering to Shari’a marriage laws, adopting the veil and “outdoor dress of the Turkish women of Istanbul”, stressing the best interests of the country and foreign interactions, and making it “incumbent upon our brothers, the men of Egypt, to implement this program” (Hassan, “Speaking”). According to Leila Ahmed, this list “beautifully exemplifies both the qualities mentioned above as typical of the history of Arabic feminism, and of how feminism then becomes merely an instrument by which the fundamental assumptions of the culture are

reinforced” (“Feminism”, 161). The points were pitched as supporting women’s rights, but were really reinforcing the “traditional conception of women” (161).

All in all, in the earlier part of the twentieth century, women’s rights emerged as a cause because Egypt found itself in a new, post-colonial phase in which it was forced to redefine itself. Fatima Mernissi points to this identity struggle as a force for the perpetuation of gender inequality, but it seems that in Egypt it was part of the reason women’s rights advocacy emerged. As I pointed out above, many men saw that one of the major departures between Muslim societies and Western ones was the level of women’s empowerment. Because the West was clearly progressing faster than their own country, Egyptians began to associate progress with women’s rights. They sensed from watching Western progress that in order to see the same kind of fortune, they needed to address this major discrepancy; thus, women’s education and economic empowerment became issues for Egyptian women during this time.

During much of the rest of the twentieth century, women’s groups remained strong. A vibrant spectrum of women’s organizations has been active in Cairo and elsewhere since the 1930s. Some of these include the Muslim Women’s Association, the women’s magazines *Haw* and *al-Musawwar*, the New Woman Center for Research and Study, and the Egyptian Society for Prevention of Harmful Practices Against Women and Children (Fernea 240-1, 253, 268). Elizabeth Warnock Fernea’s interview-based research in Egypt reveals a dispute within the feminist movement there, where the resurgence of a more conservative Islam is present in women’s groups. According to Zaynab Ghazali, a member of the Muslim Women’s Organization, “women had to be called to Islam” as an essential part of their feminism (Fernea 240). Another woman Fernea speaks to is Nawal al-Saadawi, who claims that “Islam is a given in the lives of Egyptian women, but how it is expressed in response to the conditions of national

life is currently being contested on all sides” (246). Besides the issue of how to navigate conservative Islam in terms of feminism, Fernea finds some Egyptian women focusing on a “third way” of feminism, formed from their own traditions and out side of Western or Islamic feminism (253); she also finds several organizations focusing on ending female circumcision, like the Cairo Committee on Human Rights (269). From her interviews with women from different parts of Egypt and different socioeconomic backgrounds, she finds that the “major issues at this time were female genital mutilation, family planning, legal aid, and political rights” (271).

I mentioned in Chapter One the massive amounts of scholarship on women in Islam in a theological context, and there is a similarly overwhelming amount of literature on feminism in the Muslim world as well. While this is an indicator of how important Muslim women’s demands today really are, it also means there are many conflicting viewpoints about what feminism in the Middle East really is or truly means. In Egypt, feminism emerged as a movement strongly linked to the advancement of Egypt as a nation, and from there it evolved into a strong movement encompassing many topics related to women (and men and children). The most important issues at the end of the 20th and coming into the 21st century, as Elizabeth Warnock Fernea tells us in her masterful work *In Search of Islamic Feminism: One Woman’s Global Journey*, and as other scholars conclude, are access to education, increased political participation and equality, an end to female genital mutilation, and changes in Islamic family laws that subjugate or disadvantage women. Sexual harassment is another issue that, while less documented in traditional scholarship, is often highlighted in current events articles, which can serve as a more current assessment of women’s issues and a supplement to scholarly work that is a few years behind.

A search on any major international news website yields endless results about Egyptian women's action before and during the recent revolutions of the Arab Spring, which began in January 2011 and are still impacting daily life in Cairo and elsewhere. As mentioned above, the issue of women in Muslim countries is a major one for many international newspapers. The literature on this topic that is available now does not provide the same day-by-day information of women's issues, demands, and actions as does international press. An analysis of the articles covering Egyptian women over the last ten years or so shows the dynamic situation they are living in and the changing nature of their desires.

Most of the articles in the New York Times Global Edition, Al-Jazeera English, and The Guardian have headlines that reflect the negative situation of Egyptian women in this tumultuous time. When there are positive headlines, the articles usually describe a small positive change in women's situations, but focus on the fact that women are still not getting equal rights.

Many articles from the 2000s report on a new law implemented by then president Hosni Mubarak that gives women more freedom in divorce. The law meant that a woman could file for divorce without having to prove to the court that she had been wronged. The articles paint the new legislation in a positive light, but also highlight opposition that came from the more conservative sectors of society, which predictably argued that the law went against Qur'anic law and gave women power that they were not meant to have. Another article from 2000 details Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak's participation in an international conference on women's rights (Crosette). She is described as being at the "center" of the debate and as the leader of the Egyptian delegation, and as a long-time crusader for women's rights. The article quotes Mrs. Mubarak saying that because the Prophet Muhammad's wife was a strong businesswoman, all Egyptian women should have equal rights. This is just one example of the many articles published during

the 2000s that reflect an agreed upon negative view of the situation for women in Egypt. What seems more significant for Egypt, however, is the increased coverage of women's roles before and during the 2011 Arab Spring revolt there, and the outcomes the revolution produced for women.

The New York Times has wide coverage of Egyptian women in the period leading up to, and especially during the revolts that began in January 2011 and are still affecting Egyptian life today. An article from July 2010 announces that Egyptian women have “burdens but no privileges” (El-Naggar). The author of this article (also a woman) sheds some light on the plight of many working-class Egyptian women, forced to work outside their homes to make ends meet for their families. The young woman interviewed in the article works exhaustively for very little money per month, and expressed her desire to “rest” once she gets married, and the economic burden is shouldered by her husband (El-Naggar). The author also highlights the difficulty for women of “modest” economic backgrounds. This is one of the realities of Egyptian (and many other Middle Eastern countries); if you have the money, your opportunities are virtually unlimited, including political power. Corruption is not only a barrier to achieving democracy in Egypt, but also inhibits many women from gaining places of power because they do not have the money or influence to achieve higher status. The article also highlights other problems that have persisted throughout the twentieth century, and before. Illiteracy among women remains high, while female representation in the government is low.

An Al-Jazeera English article from November 2010 seems to counter this negative representation of women's situations in Egypt. The title of the article “Women make leap in Egyptian parliament” is much more positive, and it explains that while the election that was to take place that month would not witness much change in terms of control (the National

Democratic Party was projected to maintain majority), a new 2009 law would guarantee women 64 seats in Parliament, meaning they would make up 12% of the total seats (Hill).

In the past year, most of the coverage of Egypt in general has obviously been about the revolution. While women are often mentioned in the articles that were published during the height of the protests, they were not necessarily the focus of most *Times* reporters. The general consensus is that there were more men than women at the actual marches, but the presence of women of all types – veiled, unveiled, young, old, married, unmarried is well-documented in articles as well as photos from Tahrir and other protests. A February 2011 Al-Jazeera English article details the experiences of several women who were very active at the Tahrir protests. Most of the women say they felt liberated by the revolution, and even surprised by the number of women that came out in support. One of the women provides some insight into the future, saying at the end of the Tahrir protests “all of our demands have not yet been met. We must continue.” (Naib).

One of the most jarring reports that came out of this revolution was that of “virginity tests” performed by soldiers on women in public. This seems, from my experience, a very rare and violent occurrence in terms of ‘normal’ sexual harassment in Cairo, but it did happen and certainly sparked a lot of anger in response. In December of 2011, these tests were ruled illegal and a violation of human rights by the Egyptian court, but one article from that month points out that the tests were originally justified as a safeguard against Egyptian soldiers being charged with rape (Kirkpatrick). Physical examination without permission does not seem to me that far off from rape itself. The ruling of the Egyptian court that deemed these actions illegal received extensive coverage from the *Times*, and it seems that women were, on the whole, satisfied with

the decision, but that it does not make up for the humiliation and pain they were forced to endure at the hands of the military.

After the peak of the revolution, the Times shifted its focus to the aftermath of Mubarak's ouster and how it would affect Egyptian women going forward. A January 2012 article claimed that "Egypt's women still find power hinges on men", and explains that while Egyptian women are "emboldened by the revolution to claim a new voice in public life, many still find that they are dependent on the protection of men" (Kirkpatrick, "Egypt"). For right now, it seems that while women are still demanding the same things they have been, they are now also including participation in the creation of the new Egyptian state in their demands.

It is important to remember that while much of feminist activity in Egypt is framed in a secular way, there is a documented segment of the feminist movement that advocates a return to Islamic ways and principles. This is demonstrated by the return to much more conservative dress by many women on the streets of Cairo and elsewhere. It seems from both the scholarship, like Fernea's interviews with some women advocating a more religiously conservative women's movement, and current news coverage of the Arab Spring and its aftermath that Muslim women are asserting their brand of feminism as something altogether different, and sometimes even opposed to, the Western conception of feminism.

B. Turkey

Turkish politics and history are somewhat of an anomaly in many ways – it has deviated from Middle Eastern norms in terms of government systems and politics, and perhaps the most glaring difference is the secular nature of Turkish government in comparison with the religious governments in place in many other Middle Eastern countries. This fundamental difference has colored the way Turkish women have expressed their desires and what those desires actually are.

As in Egypt, Turkish concern with women's issues emerged as part of Mustafa Kamal's post World War I reforms to transform Turkey from the center of the Ottoman Empire to a modern, secular republic. It was also Turkish *men* who first took up this cause and saw women's advancement as key to the country's modernization and progress. (Ahmed, "Feminism" 155). The Young Turks movement, which was at the center of Turkish modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was an influential group for support of women's rights. The members of this group had been educated about European ideas and progress, and thus developed the idea that Turkish advancement was dependent upon women's advancement. During the 1900s, more girls' schools were opened, and in 1920 women were admitted into the University of Istanbul. Women gained the right to vote in 1930. (157). With the coming of World War I, women were able to enter both the work force and government to replace the men who left to fight, and "by 1930 Turkish women had achieved legal and civil status equal to that of women in the more advanced of European countries" (157). They received the right to vote in 1930, and four year earlier the "Islamic family code [was] abolished and replaced by a civil code" (157). Rather than modifying existing laws, where "radical reform" was "highly unlikely" (157), a new system of laws that gave women more freedom was implemented. Turkish women focused mostly on education and literacy during this period and definitely had more success than Egyptian women.

However, Fernea's recent work includes some interviews with Turkish women that deal with the issue that seems most pressing today, veiling, and it seems from this work that by the 1980s and 1990s, there was again discontent within Turkish feminism. Of course, the debate in Turkey about the veil highlights a more important underlying issue that faces many Muslim countries today: the resurgence of a more conservative Islam. In her many interviews, Fernea

discovers that *tesettir*, the new “Islamic” way of dressing for women in Turkey, is one of the major signifiers of the resurfacing of these conservative values that challenge the secular structure Turkey has worked so hard to build over the past century. It also represents the rural-urban movement that has taken place on a massive scale over the past thirty years (Fernea 1998). From the existing research on the history of feminism in Turkey, it seems that women there are a bit better off than Egyptian women – they have more economic and educational opportunities, and have gotten further with actual government policies. As with Egypt, many of the issues Turkish women are facing today, especially how to deal with the resurgence of conservative Islam, are well documented in the international press.

An enlightening and in-depth 2009 essay by Zehra Kabasakal Arat, a professor of political science at SUNY Purchase in New York, explains that religion, the state, and the family have been the major influences on women’s rights in Turkey since the 1920s (Arat 79). She mentions that some religious laws were obviously discriminate toward women and that while secular law did take over, much of Turkish culture relied on Islamic law, so some of that discrimination persisted. Her discussion of women’s situations after the 1980 military coup is more important for this section, however. She emphasizes that Turkey’s candidacy for European Union membership had an impact on women’s rights, but not necessarily a completely positive one (Arat 91). While the EU gender rights requirements, which I will address in more detail, did give women more grounds for demanding legal changes that eliminated some discrimination, these requirements emphasized equality in the private sector, which unfortunately did not include many women at the time (Arat 92). Arat concludes her essay with some comments on the state of the women’s movement today. She says that women’s groups have been invaluable in the progression of new laws supporting women’s rights, but also that “their effective

implementation will require pressure from national and international advocates of women's rights" (99). From Kabasakal's astute analysis of the evolution of women's rights and movements in Turkey, we can see that while Turkish women might be facing a different (and maybe less dire) set of issues than are Egyptian women, they still have a long way to go.

Because Turkey has experienced much more political stability than has Egypt in recent years, there obviously is not as much for the international press to cover there. Turkish women are also, as already mentioned, facing some different issues than Egyptian women, and they are not as far behind in terms of equality. There is also some more current scholarly work on the state of women's rights in Turkey. Some issues that are coming up in current international coverage as well as more recent scholarship are the underrepresentation of women in Turkish government, the controversial words of Prime Minister Recep Ergodan regarding women's status, as well as legal reforms that will improve women's economic, political, and religious rights.

An online search of international papers for articles about Turkish women yields slightly fewer results than the same type of search about Egyptian women. One issue that does come up repeatedly, and Kabasakal touches on this as well, is the difficulty for women to stay in jobs once they have families, even if they have university degrees (Fowler). Another issue that appears often is the issues of domestic violence. A January 2012 *New York Times* article cites a Turkish charity teaching women how to use guns to defend themselves (Güsten). Among the most alarming, but as far as I can tell true, statements in this article is that "In Turkey, hundreds of women a year are killed by their husbands, lovers or male relatives, many right under the noses of the authorities" (Güsten). The author quotes a spokesperson for the charity in questions, Sefkat, as saying "we believe the state should protect these women, but it is no use pretending it

does” (Güsten). Another charity, We Will Stop the Killing of Women, supports the view that the state is useless in stopping these abhorrent killings of women by their male family members. While Arat tells us that legal reforms favorable to women have made some progress since the 1980s, the current Prime Minister of Turkey is known as a somewhat controversial figure in regards to women’s issues. A June 2011 article from Al-Jazeera English tells us that while many liberal Turkish groups have applauded the same legal reforms women’s groups have fought hard for, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who became Prime Minister in 2003, the tension between women’s groups and Erdogan’s government dates back to 2004 (Bozkurt). This particular article paints some of Erdogan’s decisions regarding women, such as his “calls for Turkish women to have at least three children” and his “argument that birth control was advocated by those who wanted to weaken Turkey”, as controversial and hindrances to women’s progress. This contrasts with a more recent November 2011 from Hurriyett Daily News, one of the major Turkish newspapers, heralds Erdogan for signing a “declaration against violence targeting women” (Bozkurt). The declaration was the product of a collaboration between the Family and Social Policies Ministry and the parliamentary Gender Equality Commission, and required male legislators to wear a white ribbon in protest of violence against women. The article contains no mention of reactions from women’s groups, and only a brief mention that Erdogan had called for Turkish women to have at least three children. This article and the campaign it describes might be one example of one of the reforms that was undertaken by the Turkish government, but does not have significant meaning or a long-lasting impact. Erdogan and his administration have fallen under criticism for being insincere in their efforts to further women’s causes, and while this particular article makes the effort seem genuine, there is evidence against that.

IV. Conclusions – Women’s Movements and Issues in Egypt and Turkey Today

Through this brief summary of the history and contemporary states of feminism and women’s movements in two important Muslim majority nations, Egypt and Turkey, I have highlighted some of the key issues for women there today. There are some similarities – both Egyptian and Turkish women are concerned with different forms of violence against women, as well as with the low rates of women’s participation in government. They are each struggling against cultures that have long been patriarchal, and in which change is not always readily accepted by those in power (usually men). The differences in the issues Turkish and Egyptian women are dealing with until today might shed some more light on the question I set out to answer in this chapter: are Muslim women’s demands in the Middle East compatible with Western issues, norms, and feminism?

Turkish women might be facing issues more similar to the ones Western women are struggling against. They have relatively more economic empowerment than women in Egypt, and the government ministry created to deal with women’s issues has a focus on women’s experience with promotion in the workplace. Egyptian women, unlike those in Turkey, are in the midst of a society-wide upheaval unlike one their country has ever experienced. While women in both these countries are still struggling to have their voices heard politically, Egyptian women do not have the privilege of laws that support their equality the way Turkish, and Western, women usually do.

My conclusion after this thorough investigation of women’s groups in Egypt and in Turkey is that while women in these places may have some similar demands to those of Western women (political equality, education, empowerment in the workplace), they are facing more drastic issues and are actually struggling to define feminism *on their own terms*. For example, in

many interviews I have read (from Fernea's work and elsewhere), Muslim women who would consider themselves feminists criticize Western feminism for taking the veil as the only issue for women in the Muslim world, and for wrongly equating it with oppression. As I already mentioned, the veil is a form of empowerment and expression for some women (e.g. women in Turkey demanding to wear it in universities and government buildings), and for Western feminists to prioritize it is almost insulting to the women working for gender equality in the Middle East.

Another aspect of Middle Eastern feminism as manifested in both Egypt and Turkey is the fact that there actually is an Islamist branch of feminism in each. These are women who are supportive of a more conservative Islamic ideology, and feel that empowerment for women lies within the religion. Feminism in the West tends to be secular (although there is a thriving community of feminist theologians in Western Christendom and Judaism) and this religious manifestation of women's rights in the Middle East might be a point that cannot be understood or reconciled with in the West. All in all, it seems as though the women's movements in Turkey and Egypt do not want to identify themselves in terms of what they can achieve or what Western women have. They want to create their own identities, work for their own goals, and do it without having to defend themselves to Western feminists.

VI. Western Norms in Another Form: CEDAW and EU Requirements in Egypt and Turkey

The U.N. is one of the international organizations that has developed a specific and concrete plan for women's advancement. While the U.N. has many different divisions that deal with women (UNIFEM, UNICEF, etc.), I choose to focus for this paper on CEDAW, the

Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, as an example of a fairly sweeping legislation that was signed by a majority of member states in the 1980s because the Middle East had a meaningful reaction to this Conventions's gender rights goals.

CEDAW is a comprehensive document whose thirty articles address discrimination against women and its prevention in detail. I want to highlight some of the major points in this document before going into a discussion of the ways in which Egypt and Turkey responded to this sweeping legislation. First, the Convention defines the term "discrimination" in Article 1 as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex...in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field" ("Convention"). It is not necessary to explain that this definition alone poses a serious and lofty challenge to almost every society in the world. The problem of accepting international norms for women's rights in the Middle East has already come up in this work, when Fatima Mernissi talks about the UNDHR and the too-quick transition the Arab world tried to make in order to satisfy its requirements and increase its involvement in the international community. I think the same logic applies here. From the very outset, the definition of discrimination means that every country in the world probably has some form of it. The Committee aims to eliminate this in *all forms*. This seems like a daunting goal that certainly will not be realized immediately. Another important issue CEDAW claims in its own introduction to address is the issue of human reproduction as essential to women's rights and apparently left out of many of the major human rights efforts in the past. This is an important point, and coincides with many of the issues Egyptian and Turkish women are facing today. In both places, women are still working to eliminate female genital mutilation in rural areas, and marriage and family law that governs sexual relations between couples remains a problem for women's groups as well. Here is one example of an international standard having the potential to

help women's cases and make their voices heard by demanding that governments address issues of sexual and reproductive discrimination and violence. The other two major "dimensions" addressed by this document are women's civil and legal rights and the impact of cultural factors on gender relations. There is no doubt that these types of issues -- representation in government, equality under the law -- are also a large part of women's groups' agendas in both Egypt and Turkey

In addition to these major areas that the Convention addresses, I want to highlight the reasoning the U.N. provides for the creation of this new group charged with monitoring the progress of women's rights internationally. The reasoning provided is that despite the fact that many international groups, national governments, and other actors have been trying to address gender equality for decades, gender inequality still exists on an "extensive" level. The introduction to the document also makes the important point that the progress of all countries, and in fact "the welfare of the world" is dependent upon "the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields". This is lofty language making a simple but probably ambitious point -- the only way we are going to reach the level of development, sustainability, and peace that we want as a world community is to make sure women everywhere are empowered to U.N. standards. The standards iterated in this founding document are considered by the U.N. (and apparently the countries that have ratified the treaty) to represent an international agreement, and are based on the fact that universal human rights are a major goal of the U.N., and that these include the rights of women. There is also an emphasis on family roles, which tends to be very controversial in Muslim societies, that says that rearing children is a shared responsibility not to be thrust upon a woman alone, and that a woman's reproductive ability should not and cannot be a basis to discriminate against her.

While all of the Articles of this document are important, I want to highlight some of what I feel are the most potentially controversial Articles in terms of the reactions from Egypt and Turkey to the treaty. Article 3 compels all signatories to take “all appropriate measures” to make sure that gender inequality does not persist in any field. While it might seem that this statement allows member states to make no exception in their pursuit of gender equality, it seems more likely that this might be a loophole. All “appropriate” measures will surely vary depending on cultural circumstances, and in cultures that have been patriarchal for as long as those in Egypt and Turkey, these measures might not add up to much for the governments charged with enforcing CEDAW. One study of CEDAW’s implementation in the Muslim world claims that because so many of the Islamic laws contradict this article, it is clear that the governments of these states are not taking this very seriously (Mayer 23); “all appropriate measures” is not specific enough to force governments to really address gender inequality. Article 5 charges national governments with making sure that “social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women” are modified so as to eradicate inequality. For anyone who has ever traveled to the Middle East, or anywhere that has such a long and intense history of patriarchy, that might be a laughable statement. It is never easy for a government to change or even influence deeply engrained social and cultural patterns, especially when those patterns are inextricably linked to religion in states with high levels of religiosity like Egypt and Turkey. Article 14 is about taking into consideration the struggles of rural women – remember that rural women in both Turkey and Egypt are a target of women’s groups there due to the continuation of genital mutilation and unemployment there in both places. Article 16 is especially relevant because it touches somewhat of a sore subject in terms of compatibility with Islam (and we see this tension manifested in both Egypt and Turkey’s reservation to it): it gives the states the responsibility to

“eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations”, and to give women and men the same “right to enter into marriage” and the “same rights and responsibilities” once the couple has entered into marriage (“Convention”). Considering that only recently were Egyptian women given the right “initiate a ‘no-fault’ divorce against her husband” by way of “The Law on Reorganization of Certain Terms and Procedures of Litigation in Personal Status Matters” in 2000 (Singerman 161), and that most violence against Turkish women is experienced within their marriages and families, we might see this Article as having failed in both places. I will discuss this controversial requirement in more detail later. Each article in this landmark document makes an important point regarding gender inequality, and also serves as an excellent goal for any nation striving for the creation of true gender equality and women’s rights. However, some of the Articles, while seeming perfectly acceptable in the Western world, could be (and were) met with serious reservations from some Muslim majority countries in the Middle East. Below, I will detail the ratification processes for Egypt and Turkey, as well as their reservations to CEDAW, and make some important conclusions about how these processes relate to the analysis of women’s rights and movements in these two countries. I will use conclusions both about CEDAW, the EU gender equality requirements for Turkey’s membership, and women’s movements in each place to shed some light on whether Western norms of women’s rights and gender equality are truly compatible with the demands Muslim women are making today.

A. Egypt

i. Reservations Egypt signed CEDAW in 1979, but with that agreement came some serious reservations dealing with family law (Article 16), as well as being subject to arbitration by the

U.N. if there were violations of the treaty (Article 27). More consequentially, upon ratification, Egypt's reservation stated that it would submit to all terms of CEDAW, as long as that submission did not interfere with the Islamic *shari'a* law that plays such a large part in Muslim and Egyptian life ("Reservations"). This reservation is alarming because the *shari'a* actually comments on some of what CEDAW does as well, especially family law regarding marriage and governing married life. One scholar on the issue of CEDAW in the Middle East Muslim majority states, as well as a prominent scholar in the field of women in Islam in general, Ann Elizabeth Mayer, tells us that while it is permissible for a nation to ratify an international treaty with some reservations, these are "not supposed to be incompatible with the object and purpose of the treaty or convention" (Mayer 24).

Before analyzing how CEDAW really played out in Egypt, and whether or not it might have actually made some strides at improving women's rights there, we need to understand the specific objections Egypt made in regards to the two Articles I mentioned above. Upon signing the treaty, Egypt entered reservations to Article 16. The article has eight different points, and charges states to "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations" ("Convention"). This reservation comes, fairly obviously, from the fact that family law in Egypt falls under the Islamic *shari'a* law, rather than civil law, and accepting Article 16 would mean overriding *shari'a*. This clearly was not an option for Egypt at the time, as it would require a complete overhaul of the legal system, and that takes time. Perhaps Egyptian women themselves were ready for this type of freedom, but the government was apparently not ready to move from one extreme to the other so quickly.

The other reservation Egypt entered upon signing was to Article 27, which deals with arbitration by the United Nations should a dispute over the treaty arise. Again, this lessens

Egypt's accountability to the treaty and indicates that while Egypt signed CEDAW, perhaps it was not fully prepared to cooperate with all the terms, let alone take "all appropriate measures" to stop discrimination against women. As I have mentioned above, the most alarming reservation was the one entered upon Egypt's ratification of CEDAW, that they would comply with all the terms so long as they did not contradict *shari'a*. This almost negates CEDAW all together, and following will be an analysis of how these reservations might have effected the implications for CEDAW in Egypt after ratification.

ii. Progress? Egypt's Country Reports to CEDAW

CEDAW requires that all countries submit "a report on the legislative, judicial, administrative and other measures that they have adopted to implement the Convention within a year after its entry into force and then at least every four years thereafter" ("CEDAW"). The U.N. has not published Egypt's initial report, but it has on file the third, fourth, and fifth periodic reports, which were all examined at the Committee's 24th session in 2001. Each of the reports is very detailed, so I will use the third periodic report as a basis for my analysis of how CEDAW was implemented by the Egyptian government after it was signed. Since each of these reports were reviewed at the same meeting, it is likely that they contain much of the same information.

To provide some context, I want to set out a few statistical measures of women's progress given in the report. At the time of this third report, there were two women in the Cabinet (the Minister for Social Affairs and the Minister for Scientific Research) out of a total of thirty-four ministers, and the female illiteracy rate was 54.71% (1992), down from 62% in 1986. As is fairly obvious from just these two numerical measures, women in Egypt had seen some progress (there was only one female minister at the time of the second periodic report), but that there is still much progress to be made.

There are a few interesting and important points that become clear through a close reading of this report. First, the Egyptian government adamantly claims that it universally supports women's advancement. Second, the government points out that many laws that already existed in Egypt are in fact compatible with CEDAW's stipulations. And lastly, there is no explicit explanation of why exactly the reservations to certain articles were made, or recognition that these reservations lead to violations of women's rights.

Throughout the report, the authors emphasize the fact that the Egyptian government has been supportive of women's rights since the beginning of the twentieth century, when the women's movement began to flourish in Egypt. For example, the report echoes the very language of CEDAW when it claims that "ever since Egyptian women began their renaissance movement at the beginning of this century, the Egyptian government has taken whatever means were necessary and appropriate in order to support, strengthen, and develop...that movement" ("Third" 4). Elsewhere in the report, when the authors are describing how exactly the government has gone about supporting the women's movement, they say "action by the government sector has naturally been closely linked with Egypt's national policy for the advancement of women in all spheres" (12). The government is also reverent to international norms throughout the report, claiming that while it respects differences between "cultural characteristics and prevailing values", "these should not...conflict with the values that the international community protects" (3). The Egyptian government here is claiming support of both women's movements as well as the international norms embodied in CEDAW. The fact that women in Egypt are still fighting hard to solve some of the issues the government was claiming to address tells me that government support in these areas was either not strong enough, or not adequate to combat deeply rooted patriarchal ideas in Egyptian society.

In an apparent effort to demonstrate Egypt's legal compatibility with the stipulations of CEDAW, there is a detailed analysis of several Egyptian laws that existed before CEDAW and align with its goals. For example, "law no. 73 of 1956 stipulates that all Egyptian men and women over 18 years of age may personally exercise their political rights" (6). This law seems like it would do away with all women's angst about political empowerment, but what is obviously missing is a definition of what exactly those political rights are. Voting is probably one of the rights the authors are talking about here, but I question whether things like participation in elections or representation in government are included. These things might be permitted by law, but the real question is whether the government fosters an environment where they are accepted in society. Another law cited as already in accordance with CEDAW's provisions is Law no. 58 of 1937, the Egyptian Penal Code, which "categorizes all violence or attacks against women as crimes" (8). My obvious objection to this is the fact that sexual harassment and female genital mutilation are still problems for Egyptian women today, seventy-five years after this law was put into place. The problem here might be that even though crimes against women are illegal, there is no adequate legal system in place to try the perpetrators of these crimes. The general conclusion here is that by citing these laws and describing them as already in agreement with CEDAW, it seems that the authors of the report are trying to make strong connections between its own laws and Western norms. There are, however, problems with these laws that are fairly easy to pinpoint. They support women's rights in name, but in practice lack the efficacy to do so.

Lastly, the report does not adequately address reservations made to CEDAW upon Egypt's ratification. I am focusing here on Article 16, which is about marriage and family law. The report claims that "since [marriage] is a matter that relates to personal status, it is also

subject to the provisions of the religious law” (10). Specifics are not given, perhaps because this would mean admitting that *shari’a* law is discriminatory toward women, which would further threaten its credibility as an acceptable legal system. Later in the report, in the section where the progress relating to each specific article is addressed, there is a notable lack of mention about the reservation to Article 16. The report again states that “since marriage in Egypt is governed by the law on personal status, it is also subject to Shariah law, which imposes obligations on both parties with regard to the validity, conclusion, dissolution, and annulment of the marriage” (54). Here again, the specifics of those “obligations” are not made clear, and only the “liberties” allowed to women are mentioned, such as her right to continue economic interactions regardless of her marital status, as well as her rightful custody of children (daughters until the age of 12, sons until the age of 10). One could infer that there is something about the *shari’a* marriage law that does not satisfy CEDAW requirements, but that is not explicitly stated here. By omitting this recognition, the report does not give an adequate description of the current marriage laws, nor does it provide information about what is being done to give women more freedom under them or to meet the CEDAW requirements from Article 16.

So, has CEDAW been implemented adequately in Egypt? It is hard to tell. The government seems to have a real desire to adhere to the requirements of CEDAW, except for the essential reservations it entered. As is clear from my above analysis of women’s groups in Egypt, there is still ground to be covered in terms of economic, political, educational, and societal gender equality. There also does not appear to be a full recognition on the part of the government of the severity of the issues facing its women constituents – the report has a generally positive tone, despite the fact that there are still major problems in Egypt until today surrounding gender roles and inequality. It is good to see what appears to be some effort on the part of the Egyptian

government to adhere to CEDAW, to which it is legally bound, but the progress made leaves something to be desired.

B. CEDAW and EU Requirements in Turkey – Challenges and Progress

i. Reservations to CEDAW I have already provided some in-depth description of the state of women's rights and women's movements in Turkey from the 1920s, when women's rights became forefront in formal Turkish policy, to the 1980s, when the women's movement of today began to take shape, to today, when Turkish women are still dealing with issues like violence in the home, education, and the right to openly practice their religion.

Turkey ratified CEDAW in 1985 but, like Egypt, did so with certain reservations. One of these coincided with Egypt's reservation to Article 16, which talks about family law. The reason for Turkey's objection here was that the content of this Article seemed to contradict the part of the Turkish national civil code that deals with this topic (Levin 206). The laws cited in this reservation give the husband legal rights to represent the family, as well as mandate that the family (including children) take the father's name. They also stipulate that "the wife...must assist the husband by word and deed in his effort to maintain the home" (Levin 206). This objection is similar to Egypt's only in that it is to the same Article, but also in the fact that the nation's pre-existing law is cited as reason for the objection. While this may not indicate that Turkish women are in favor of keeping the civil code over the CEDAW mandate, it does make it seem like CEDAW might be too many steps too fast for countries whose own laws are so far behind the things it requires.

The other reservation Turkey made to CEDAW was to two parts of Article 15, which deals with equal rights under the law, specifically regarding rights "in civil matters" and "the

movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile” (“Convention”). The reasons for Turkey’s objections to these parts of the document are presumably the same as those for objection to Article 16 – that they contradict parts of the Turkish civil code that give the husband different and more extensive rights in the marriage than the wife.

While it seems from the reservations Turkey entered upon ratification of CEDAW that the government was objecting for the same reasons Egypt was – CEDAW was a document of Western norms that either did not fit or directly contradicted part of existing law in their country. The most important thing we need to note about Turkey’s reservations, however, is that they were all withdrawn in September of 1999 (Levin 206). Scholars have noted that CEDAW did in fact lead to many legal changes in Turkey that have improved women’s situations since the 1980s, and that the women’s movement that gained strength around that time have been able to use CEDAW as an argument for why those legislative changes should be made (Levin 206).

ii. Progress? Turkey’s CEDAW Reports

Turkey submitted a combined second and third periodic report, which was reviewed at the 16th session of the Committee in 1997. The report has some similarities to Egypt’s, but also some important differences. There is great effort put into showing how laws that existed before CEDAW coincide with its stipulations, but there is also greater attention shown to how laws that *do not* coincide will be altered. This report is overall more thorough than Egypt’s, and shows a more serious effort to address women’s problems than does the report from Egypt.

The report begins by outlining the steps the Turkish government has taken in support of gender equality since the 1920s, when women’s issues came to the forefront of Turkish politics with the emergence of a strong nationalist current. One example given is the “reforms realized under the leadership of Ataturk [which] brought radical change which led to the recognition of

women's rights as full-fledged citizens" ("Second" 2). One of these specific reforms was the "Law on the Unification of the Education System first enacted in 1924" which gave "women equal rights with men in the field of education" (2). Some more recent steps include the establishment of "The Directorate General of the Status and Problems of Women" (3) and of "centers for research and policy implementation on women's issues" at universities across the country (4). While the Egyptian government claimed to be taking the same kinds of steps, it is clear that the efforts in Turkey were more formalized and widespread than those of the Egyptian government. Consistent with the acknowledgement that there is still work to be done for Turkish women, the report admits that "despite improvement over the years, women's position with respect to basic indicators like education, health and employment could not be enhanced to the desired level in Turkey" (5). No such admission is made in the Egyptian report.

There is a focus on Turkish law that existed before CEDAW and how much of it already aligns with the Convention's expectations. For example, Article 2a of CEDAW compels party states "to embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions" (11). To this requirement, Turkey answers that Article 10 of the Turkish constitution satisfies this: "all individuals are equal without any discrimination before the law, irrespective of language, race, color, sex, political opinion...or any such considerations" (11). In addition to this effort to demonstrate the compatibility of some Turkish laws with CEDAW, there is also a focus on how improvements can be made to those laws that do not foster gender equality. An example is the Turkish Civil Code, "which was enacted on February 2, 1926", and "had quite progressive characteristics" but is "presently...outdated for the needs of the modern society" (16). The efforts being made to correct this problem are detailed in the report, and include the "Draft Law For the Modification of the Civil Code, prepared by the State Ministry responsible for women's

and family affairs” (16). Another example is Turkey’s progress regarding Article 5a, which requires states to “take all appropriate measures...to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view of achieving the elimination of prejudices” (21). The Turkish government recognizes that “mass media will have an important influence on the modification of judgments based on gender” (21), and so the government held a meeting with the Turkish Radio and Television corporation in 1995 “for the production of programs that would contribute to the promotion of women’s consciousness and the enhancement of women’s status in the society” (21). It is clear that the government in Turkey is doing a more effective job of recognizing continuing problems and outlining a specific plan for how they are being addressed.

The last point I want to make about Turkey’s CEDAW report is that it does a much better job of addressing each part of the Article and explaining why specific objections were made, what Turkish law actually says on these matters, and what progress is being made to alter these laws. In response to part c. of this article, which requires that both partners have “the same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution” (124), the government responds that “women cannot claim any rights on the properties registered in the husband’s name...for this reason, a great majority of women suffer losses in case of a divorce. Regarding the section of that article that deal with custody of children, there is admission that “both parents have authority over the children during the marriage, but in case of a dispute, the husband’s view prevails” (124). Following this statement, however, it is made clear that “this article is being considered with other articles of the Turkish Civil Code that are to be amended” (124). This is a much more thorough report on Turkey’s reservations to Article 16, and makes some important admissions that there are still problems with the Turkish law governing marriage. The report also points out that efforts are being made to address these problems at a government level, and the efforts seem

much more specific and effective than those of the Egyptian government, which are not spelled out nor elaborated upon. While it is clear that there is still work to be done in many aspects of women's issues, there have been some formal changes, such as new government departments to address women's rights as well as institutionalization of women's studies programs in Turkish university that indicate more progress than in Egypt.

iii. European Union Gender Rights Requirements and their Effects on Women in Turkey

As mentioned in the literature review at the beginning of this chapter, there is some literature that examines the impact of Turkey's application to the European Union in terms of gender rights. One such study is the piece by Zehra Kabasakal Arat I described above. In this essay, Arat tells us that there have been both negative and positive impacts on Turkish women as a result of the government's effort to comply with EU requirements. Before I go into detail about those effects, I want to provide a brief summary of some of the requirements, as well as how the EU has responded to Turkey's efforts to meet them.

The EU has released several documents detailing its gender rights requirements for member states. The self-defined "central concepts of EU gender equality law" (Burri 15) included "direct discrimination" which is defined as "when one person is treated less favourably on grounds of sex than another is" (15); "indirect discrimination", which is "where an apparently neutral provision, criterion, or practice would put persons of one sex at a particular disadvantage compared with persons of the other sex" (16); "positive action", which allows members to "maintain or adopt measures...with a view to ensuring full equality in practice between men and women in working life" (17); prohibition of sexual harassment, defined as "any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile,

degrading, humiliating or offensive environment” (17); and the barring of “instruction to discriminate” (18). These are the central tenets of EU gender rights law, which it requires all members to adhere to.

A 2005 article by Meltem Müftüler Baç entitled “Turkey’s Political Reforms and the Impact of the European Union”, discusses the legal reforms directed at women’s rights and their relationship to Turkey’s accession. The author points out that “one of the major improvements of this Civil Code [that became operational in 2002] was to guarantee that in the case of divorce, women’s rights to property accumulated during marriage would be recognized” (22). This is an example of legal reform in favor of women’s rights that works to meet the EU requirements, but he also points out that “the legal rights of Turkish women and the Penal Code’s articles on violence against women remain the most important obstacles to Turkey’s Europeanization process” (28). He cites as an example the fact that “while the new Penal Code forbids virginity tests on women without a court order; however, it still does not require the woman’s consent” (28).

A 2004 Report from the EU regarding Turkey’s “progress toward accession” confirms Baç’s findings. While Turkey has made efforts to change laws to meet the membership requirements, there is still a need for “strengthening and implementation of provisions relating to freedom of expression, freedom of religion, [and] women’s rights...” (“2004” 3). Some of the problems that still exist in Turkey are “discrimination and violence against women, including ‘honor killings’” (12). This report continuously cites failure of full implementation of legal reforms for women’s rights as a factor that is holding back Turkey’s accession to the EU, just as Baç stated in the work described above.

I have thus far outlined some general principles of EU gender rights law and shown that as of 2005, Turkey was still behind in terms of meeting those requirements. Now, I will examine some of the positive and negative changes the attempts (like the new Penal Code, for example) to meet EU requirements have brought to the lives of Turkish women. Kabasakal tells us that the “EU’s political criteria for membership...helped improve the legal foundation for the protection of civil and political rights” (Arat 91). We already saw evidence of this in the EU report and Baç’s work – the legal changes were made, but did not necessarily eradicate all problems. The biggest *negative* effect of the EU gender equality requirements has been economic – the EU’s “economic criteria undermine job and social security” because “women carry the burden of economic adjustments at a disproportionate level, and as the last to be hired and first to be fired they find themselves pushed to the informal economy and marginal positions” (Arat 91), which the EU requirements do not address in full.

It seems that while the EU gender rights requirements are generally compatible with what Turkish women want, they are not fully equipped to address all the issues these women are confronting today. The EU is still pushing the Turkish government to make changes to address the drawbacks cited in the 2004 report, and the hope is that the potential for EU membership will continue to motivate society-wide improvements in women’s lives.

VII. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed study of women’s groups and individual women in Egypt and Turkey and taken from this research several major demands they are making today. Women in Egypt are demanding political equality and full participation, increased access to education, and, especially in light of the recent revolution, freedom from sexual

harassment and sexual violence. Turkish women are working to navigate the resurgence of a more conservative brand of Islam and feminism, to support legal reforms that give them equal rights, and to raise awareness of women's issues throughout society. Women in both countries are still struggling to amend marriage and family laws that do not grant them matrimonial equality or equal rights within the family. It is important to note that in both countries, there is a brand of the feminist movement that self-identifies as Islamist, and advocates women's advancement through a more conservative religious lens. Also important to point out is that while some of the demands I have attributed to the women's movements in both of these countries might overlap with demands of Western women, there is a strong desire for Middle Eastern Muslim women to own their own feminist movement, and the progress they are making. They object to the Western notion that veiling debates are the greatest of their issues, because as is clear from my above analysis, they are still struggling to achieve basic rights that women in the West generally already have.

I have also asked whether or not Western norms, as put forth by CEDAW and the EU gender rights requirements are compatible within a Muslim context. My findings in relation to the objections each country had to CEDAW and Turkey's progress (or lack of it) to meet EU requirements shows that while these two western normative documents do espouse rights that coincide with those of the women's groups, they are not compatible with the societies as a whole, or their preexisting law systems. While it's clear that the reservations to Article 16 (about marriage rights) from both countries impede the implementation of CEDAW, one must note that the legal, religious, and societal norms that inform the laws about marriage in each country are deep seeded and hard to eradicate. I think both countries, more so Turkey, are trying to make progress toward amending these laws, but as of today there is still work to be done.

Chapter Three

Gender Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East – History and Future Implications

I. Introduction

Women's rights and demands in the Middle East and how those interact with Western norms of women's rights have been the focus of this paper to this point. In addition to the important conclusions I have made about these two issues, I am interested in exploring the evolution of gender rights as a consideration in U.S. foreign policy. The reason I link women's demands and U.S. foreign policy here is because there exists an odd and pervasive stereotype in the United States (and probably elsewhere in the world) that Muslim women are oppressed and need 'saving' by outside, Western forces who can bring them the liberation our women enjoy. This might be true in some circumstances, but my work until this point has shown that while Muslim women in the Middle East, specifically Egypt and Turkey, are still facing real difficulties, they are taking ownership over their fight for equality and have made significant progress over the past century. I have also highlighted the fact that while the women's movements in Egypt and Turkey might draw from Western feminism and may in fact be focusing on some of the same issues, the women involved in these movements do not always appreciate Western influence because it lacks a real understanding of the issues Middle Eastern Muslim women are facing.

How do gender rights factor into U.S. foreign policy in this region and more generally? In this the following chapter, I will answer that question, and also provide a close analysis of how gender rights as part of U.S. foreign policy have evolved and grown over the past twenty years.

II. Review of Existing Literature: Lack of Comprehensive Study

While there is a plethora of scholarly work on the questions of whether or not human rights should be part of foreign policy and when it is appropriate. There is very little if any scholarship relating to gender rights or women's issues specifically. One impactful article by anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, entitled "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving", discusses the 2001 United States invasion of Afghanistan and analyses a speech by then First Lady Laura Bush, who spoke about the women of Afghanistan as prisoners that needed to be liberated by the West. In this speech, Mrs. Bush also made women's rights seem like a foremost goal of this particular invasion: "The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (L. Bush). It is hard to tell if this is really true, but Abu-Lughod's work makes the important point that Muslim women might not need, or even want, American or Western help.

Joachim provides a brief overview of the time period in which women's rights became important priorities of the U.N., and subsequently U.S. government, agendas. Joachim gives us some information regarding why the Clinton administration made international women's rights more of a policy priority than previous administrations (for example, the pressure from domestic women's groups was mounting and gender rights fit well with Clinton's general foreign policy goals) (Joachim 259). However, the focus of the article is *not* U.S. foreign policy, nor is the Middle East specifically highlighted. The author makes an important point, however, in his tracing of the history of gender rights in the U.N. – that there were several "symbolic events", such as "the dumping of unsafe contraceptives, and the U.S. Mexico City policy" since the 1970s that "made Northern women aware of women's situations in developing countries and prompted a search for solutions" (Joachim 262). This statement is not applied specifically to the Middle East, but I wanted to highlight it because I feel that it characterizes this notion that it is the "job"

of Western women to find out what is “wrong” for women in the Middle East, and the Western desire to fix those problems. This article, while detailed and useful for information about the different ways in which the U.N. and international NGOs have viewed and worked toward women’s rights, does not focus on the evolution of gender rights in U.S. foreign policy specifically, nor does it cite studies or works that seem to do this.

Matthew Yglesias, the current business and economics correspondent at *Slate* magazine and an avid political blogger for the site ThinkProgress, has long been commenting on the war in Afghanistan and particularly about the United States’ policy and rhetoric toward women during and after the invasion. His first book, *Heads in the Sand: How the Republicans Screw Up Foreign Policy and How Foreign Policy Screws Up the Democrats*, was published in 2008 and deals with many issues regarding American foreign policy and partisan politics. While he is not an academic in the traditional sense, he is well respected in the blogging world and for his books and articles. Yglesias seems to be critical of the Bush administration’s “cynical stunt of trying to pretend that U.S. military engagement in Afghanistan is primarily about helping Afghan women” (Yglesias, “The Surge”) and he praises the Obama administration for steering clear of this justification. He makes the important point, however, that U.S. efforts in Afghanistan are not, in fact, “irrelevant” for Afghan women. He says: “it’s hard to see how supporting a government with Karzai’s record could support a substantial gain for women’s rights until you consider that the most plausible alternative is...the Taliban”. He writes about some human rights groups, like Human Rights Watch and the Feminist Majority Foundation, saying that “none of them are cheerleading for Obama’s policies, but none of them are calling for withdrawal of international military forces either”. This is an important point: while our efforts to support Afghan women are neither the sole reason for our being in Afghanistan nor the only way Afghan women will

gain freedom, U.S. efforts are making a difference and are generally welcomed by these women. He reiterates this point in several other posts, and also insists that “the Taliban *are* horrible for women” (Yglesias, “Women’s”). Yglesias’ work focuses only on Afghanistan and is not formal academic research, but it shows that there are people thinking about this act of U.S. foreign policy in terms of the intentions and implications for human rights.

There are two major issues Yglesias is raising and that come up in the debate about whether or not we can or should feasibly pursue women’s rights as foreign policy. One of these is that the Bush administration did not have a clear picture about what Afghan women wanted, only that we wanted to help them. The other issue is that, because helping women was not, in fact, the primary reason for our going into Afghanistan, we cannot easily maintain our commitment to the women there. Once American forces are withdrawn, women there will probably continue to suffer. This raises the question of how to decide where to intervene, and the problem that choice implies.

It is clear that there exists scant if any in-depth academic research on the evolution of gender rights in U.S. foreign policy since the 1970s, when Joachim tells us that domestic women’s groups in the U.S. began pushing for women’s rights on the international level. I hope to supplement the existing literature on this topic below by taking a closer look at women’s rights, U.S. foreign policy, and how these have interacted in the Middle East.

III. Methodology

Due to the lack of scholarly work on gender rights in U.S. Middle Eastern Policy, I intend to trace the history of the U.S. federal government office under which gender rights formally fall in order to help answer my various questions here. This office is today called the Office of

Global Women's Issues (GWI) within the Department of State. The office has maintained archives of its website dating back to the Clinton administration, which prove helpful in determining how the U.S. has shifted its goals regarding international women's rights since that time. The website includes reports, press releases and other useful information that I will be analyzing.

IV. Gender Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East

a. Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues

This office was founded in 1993 and is currently under the control of Ambassador-at-Large Melanne Verveer. It is "committed to advancing the rights of women and girls as a central focus of U.S. diplomatic, development, and defense interests" ("Office"). The work of the OGWI is now structured into four areas, which are described by the office itself as follows:

- "1) Promoting the full engagement of women in the political and economic spheres;
- 2) Mitigating the impact of violence against women;
- 3) Addressing underlying socio-economic problems, including women's access to health and education, food security, and global problems such as climate change;
- 4) Ensuring that women are integrated as equal participants in reconciliation, post-conflict reconstruction and development in areas affected by conflict" ("Office").

Reading these four areas of concentration might give the reader a similar feeling as reading the CEDAW articles that are so comprehensive as to seem almost unattainable. Each of the four areas is a "good" goal – of course the ideal situation for women would involve all of these things. The question I want to answer, however, is how did the United States government and its

foreign policy come to deal with women's rights in this manner? I also want to investigate specific programs in the Middle East and give a sense of how well they are being received there, as well as how seriously these programs are taken in terms of U.S. policy as a whole.

The archives for this website are divided into two different time periods: the first is 1993-2001 and the second 2001-2009. Below, I provide some analysis of what information each of these archives and the current website contain, as well as some analysis of how the goals of this office have shifted over time.

i. 1993 – 2001: The Clinton Administration

At the time of its establishment by President Clinton in 1993, the office was called the Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues. This office was featured prominently in the website archives from the beginning, and includes quotes from President Clinton as well as then First Lady Hillary Clinton. The President's initial statement on the office is notable: "We are putting our efforts to protect and advance women's rights where they belong—in the mainstream of American foreign policy" ("The Office"). Here is another encouraging statement from an important Western official, and we already know from some existing work that Clinton was one of the first Presidents to take real initiative in pursuing international women's rights as an objective of foreign policy. Despite the fact that the rhetoric here is encouraging, the specific plan of how these efforts are going to be pursued. There is some coverage of the President's Interagency Council on Women, which has some specific initiatives with regard to trafficking and the Beijing conference goals, but there is a notable lack of organization or outlining of a specific plan. In other words, President Clinton says that women's rights are now going to be a bigger part of American foreign policy, but does not necessarily explain how.

This oldest part of the website is divided into three sections: Fact Sheets, Remarks, and Press Statements, each of which contribute to a fuller picture of how gender rights fit into foreign policy. The majority of the Fact Sheets in this earliest version of the website are related to the trafficking of women and girls and the efforts of both the United States and the United Nations to stop it. It is clear from this information that human trafficking was a high priority of the Clinton Administration. During this time, the U.S. government developed a three-fold plan to combat trafficking: prevention, protection and prosecution. This plan embodies the execution of foreign policy on this issue, and there is something to be said for the actions the U.S. took through it. We focused on increasing economic opportunities for women in high-risk areas for trafficking so as to diminish the “lure” that causes them to leave their home countries and land in trafficking rings. The U.S. also donated funds to areas with high rates of trafficking victims (protection), like Asia and Eastern Europe, and also worked to increase the quality and frequency of prosecution of perpetrators of trafficking in women and girls. The U.S. partnered both with the U.N. and the European Union in the fight against trafficking, which increased engagement with the issue on the international level.

While most of the Fact Sheets do not give detailed information about different areas of the world the United States is working in, there is one Fact Sheet dedicated to women in Afghanistan. The page starts out by naming “the Problem”: the Taliban completely controls women, has almost eliminated women’s access to education and medical services, and restricted women’s movement outside of their homes. Madeline Albright characterized the Taliban’s treatment of women as “despicable”, and the Fact Sheet emphasizes that “promoting the observance of human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls, is one of our highest foreign policy priorities in Afghanistan”. The U.S. at that time had pledged \$2.5 million to fund

“women’s grassroots organization” in Pakistan and for training of Afghan women. Although Afghanistan and Pakistan do not have many similarities with my major case studies for this paper, Egypt and Turkey, because they are the only Muslim-majority nations addressed specifically in terms of women’s rights during this period of U.S. policy, it is important to take note of the way they are treated in this context. The Clinton Administration clearly took an interest in women’s issues there, perhaps because the Taliban’s treatment of women was so outrageous that inaction would have been impermissible, but nevertheless it is important that Afghan and Pakistani women get specific mention here.

The “remarks” in this part of the archives are primarily speeches that former Secretary of State Madeline Albright gave in several different settings, the earliest one documented here being at an International Women’s Day Celebration in 1997. In this speech, Albright makes a statement similar to the one quoted from President Clinton above. She states: “Advancing the status of women is not only a moral imperative; it is being actively integrated into the foreign policy of the United States. It is our mission. It is the right thing to do, and frankly, the smart thing to do” (Albright). There are several major themes that run through all of Secretary Albright’s speeches, and they include ending trafficking of women and children, ratifying CEDAW, the continuation of U.S. leadership in the International War Tribunal, and focusing on increasing women’s economic participation worldwide. It seems from the speeches recorded here that throughout her time in office under Clinton, Albright is insistent that advancing women’s rights worldwide is an integral part of establishing the kind of future Americans want. She wants to increase women’s participation in higher government positions and assure that United States foreign aid goes to projects that benefit women. Through its participation and leadership in the

International War Tribunal, the United States aimed to ensure that war criminals were brought to trial for violence against women in wartime.

Most of Albright's speeches reiterate the same points, but I want to point out something that she said in an address at her own induction to the National Women's Hall of Fame in July of 1998. While she had again been emphasizing the same themes I have explained above, in this particular speech she points out that while the U.S. is trying to advance women's issues worldwide, there is an understanding that "this does mean that women everywhere want to be the same" (Albright 1999). The United States is in fact *not* trying to impose any specific idea of women's rights on the world. On the contrary, the policies Albright is talking about aim at "making progress toward consensus goals that have been articulated and agreed upon by women everywhere" (Albright 1999).

A close examination of the information that the Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues was putting out between the years of 1993 and 2001 reveals that women's rights were an integral part of U.S. foreign policy during this time, or at least that a significant effort was being made by the American government to make them so. Trafficking was obviously a main concern, and with respect to the Muslim world, Afghanistan was the only country that received significant individual attention because of the influence of extremist Taliban there. An analysis of the other two historical periods and the current administration will show whether the trends I have mentioned above have changed, and how they were or were not realized for women in the Middle East.

ii. 2001 – 2009: The Bush Administration

Jutta Joachim pointed out that with the shift from a Republican to a Democratic administration when Clinton took office, women's rights took more priority because they were

more in line with Democratic and Clinton's international human rights policies. With the next change in administration, the Republican George W. Bush took office. In this section, I will elaborate on how this transition might have caused some shifts in women's rights as part of U.S. foreign policy from when Bush took office to when Obama did the same.

The general mission statement touches the same notes as that of the Clinton Administration: to make women's rights part of mainstream American foreign policy. The mission statement from this era claims "the United States is in the forefront of advancing women's causes around the world...through various programs that help increase women's political participation and economic opportunities" ("About"). There is more of an emphasis here on the advancement of women's rights as essential to "democratic development" throughout the world. This, coupled with the addition of new tabs for Afghanistan and Iraq might hint at how the goals shifted once Bush took office and the United States became engaged in military action in both of these countries.

A quick glance at the "remarks" section from this period shows a clear shift in the priorities of the U.S. government regarding international women's rights. In the Clinton era, a majority of the speeches and fact sheets revolved around combating trafficking in women and children worldwide. Now, in the Bush Administration, there is a clear focus on women in Afghanistan. I will explain below that the peak of focus on the women of Afghanistan is between 2003 and 2005. After that, the number of remarks from high U.S. government officials on women decreases, and there is a more general focus on women's issues worldwide, and a much less specific focus, if any, on Afghanistan. I want to provide some details about the rhetoric regarding women in Afghanistan, as well as iterate some of the other themes that come out of an analysis of the Remarks from this period.

Starting in 2001, the emphasis on women's issues in Afghanistan increased dramatically. There was a small amount of focus on this topic during the Clinton Administration, but it seems that when Bush took office, and especially after September 11, 2001, Afghanistan was the subject of the majority of speeches by American government officials until 2005. I will begin by making some points about Laura Bush's nationally broadcasted radio address in November 2001, only a few short weeks after the 9/11 attacks. This speech stands out as important to me not only because it is the topic of Leila Abu-Lughod's article, which was part of my motivation for investigating this topic, but also because it is novel in its rhetoric about Afghan women as "prisoners", captured against their will and forced to live miserable lives under the Taliban, or as Mrs. Bush refers to them, "the terrorists" (keep in mind that the Taliban was *not* implicated in the September attacks of that year).

In this address, the First Lady explains that oppression of women is "a central goal" of the Taliban, and that this oppression should serve as a warning for the kind of "world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us" (Bush, Laura). She condemns the oppression of women as an illegitimate religious practice and heralds the progress that the United States has made against the Taliban enforcing it. Because of this progress, she says, "women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment" (Bush, Laura). Mrs. Bush also makes the crucial (in an American rhetoric sense, not a factual one) link between fighting terrorism and liberating women. She says, in fact, that "the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (Bush, Laura). While it might be true that U.S. forces had made military strides in Afghanistan by this point (the invasion happened about six weeks before this address was given), it is probably not the case that all Afghan women were rejoicing at their newfound freedom after

such a short period of time. Nevertheless, the crucial points made in this address, and the ones that continued to come up in the rhetoric about women in Afghanistan through 2005, are that fighting terrorism means liberating women; women in Afghanistan are prisoners under the terrorist rule of the Taliban; and that the United States has done a great service to these women by removing the Taliban forces after September 11.

To provide some more support for those points as cornerstones of American policy toward Afghanistan regarding women, we can look to other remarks made by President Bush, Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice, and several other officers connected to the Office of International Women's Issues (as it was called at the time). Colin Powell is consistent with Laura Bush's rhetoric of Afghan women being prisoners in a speech made a few days after the one discussed above. There is also a notion of American liberation: "...as the Taliban retreat, the women of Afghanistan...are eager and ready to resume active participation in the life of the country" (Powell). Powell also emphasizes that the United States did not take a sudden interest in women's rights in Afghanistan, but has always had a strong commitment that is now at its strongest, and, echoing his predecessor Madeline Albright, that supporting women's rights is not only the right thing to do, but it is very much in our national interest in the region. It is also key to upholding American values around the world.

In President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address, Afghan women are almost the first thing he brings up, which is notable since there are clearly other political, military and economic considerations surrounding the war in Afghanistan that was still underway at the time. His point is basically that Afghan women are now free: "Today women are free, and are part of Afghanistan's new government" (G. Bush). He does not provide more details, no examples of how the U.S. has worked for freedom for Afghan women and essentially moves on from the

topic, making the mention seem like a plug for American attention to the subject rather than real progress in Afghanistan.

In addition to these important specific addresses and officials I have addressed, there are a few consistent themes that come up in almost any remark from 2001-2005 specifically concerning Afghanistan and women's status there. American support of access to education for women and girls, advocacy for women's political participation, fighting terrorism to support women's rights, and increasing economic opportunities for women are all major themes of this period.

There were also several concrete initiatives during this period that were executed to serve the goals stated above. One of these was the U.S.-Afghanistan Women's Council, established jointly by President Bush and Afghan President Hamid Karzai, which aims to "forge public-private partnerships to provide Afghan women and girls with the skills and training which they need to help rebuild their country" (Dobriansky). Another was the U.S.-Middle East Peace Partnership, which provided scholarships for women and girls to improve access to education (Powell 2002).

Overall, from 2001-2005, the focus on Afghanistan revolved around liberating women from the oppressive terrorist rule of the Taliban and ensuring that women were given voice and participation in the creation of the new Afghan government after the U.S. invasion that ousted the Taliban. Women were most often described as prisoners – in their homes and their country – and perhaps this is what led Leila Abu-Lughod to ask whether or not Muslim women actually need "saving". After 2005, the specific and extreme emphasis on Afghanistan sharply decreased. The number of formal addresses regarding international women's issues actually seems to

decline after that time, and perhaps this indicates that such emphatic support of women's rights was not as long-term a goal as the addresses that I have analyzed above make it seem.

From 2006-2008, while Condoleezza Rice was Secretary of State, the remarks about international women's rights are much broader than in the previous four years, and they show a return to some of the priorities of the Clinton administration. We see a strong influence now on women's empowerment as essential to the success and progress of democracy in the Middle East, a continuing focus on women's education and political and economic empowerment, as well as a renewed energy around ending trafficking of women and children. These things were not off the table from 2001-2005, but it is clear that they came back into focus as the specific emphasis on Afghanistan waned. This is not to say that Afghanistan drops off the radar, either, but I am pointing out the shift from almost exclusive focus on the women of Afghanistan to the inclusion of other geographical areas (Africa, the broader Middle East, Eastern Europe) as well as other issues.

Condoleezza Rice's speech at the American University in Cairo in June of 2006 is indicative of the above-mentioned broadening in focus. The broader context of her address is advocacy of democracy in Egypt, but she makes a point of mentioning that "across the Middle East, women are inspiring us all" (Rice). She gives the example of Kuwaiti women fighting for their right to vote and a few other general examples. She emphasizes, like much of the material from this year through 2008, that women's empowerment is an absolute necessity if the countries of the Middle East hope to work toward the establishment of a democracy. Consistently, Secretary Rice's 2007 and 2008 International Women's Day statements reflect the same sentiment that we need to support women's rights in order to support our national interests abroad. In 2007: "Achieving the United States' mission of advancing democracy, prosperity, and

security worldwide is not possible without the empowerment of women” (Rice 2007); and in 2008: “...enfranchisement of women, supported at all levels, is essential to meeting our global prosperity” (cite). These statements clearly reflect self-interest on the part of the United States. Afghanistan is not mentioned explicitly here, but these comments remind us of former Secretary of State Colin Powell’s insistence that supporting women’s rights is absolutely part of the national interest.

Several addresses by representatives of the Office of International Women’s Issues, and representatives to the U.S. Commission on the Status of Women also reflect the broadening of U.S. imperatives regarding women’s rights that I am trying to characterize. Ellen Sauerbrey, the Ambassador to the Commission on the Status of women, focused in a November 2005 address at the Heritage Foundation that the “systematic and violent exploitation of women” is one of the issues we need to be addressing worldwide. She also argues that the advancement of women is essential to progress in any country, and that the “cost for ignoring [exploitation of women] is simply too great” (Sauerbrey 2005). Here, Afghanistan is mentioned in passing at the end of the speech, when Sauerbrey tells her listeners that the U.S. has donated money toward women’s health education and literacy training there. Patricia Brister, another representative to this Commission, focused in a March 2006 address at the Commission on human trafficking and the efforts the U.S. government had made under Bush to fight it. The U.S., she said, had “provided about \$375 million to support anti-trafficking efforts in over 120 countries” (Brister 2006). Other goals she mentioned were fighting “honour crimes”, which are those “committed by family members, usually male, who believe their female relatives have behaved in an in appropriate manner” (cite), as well as fighting HIV/Aids, aiding refugee women and children, and again supporting women’s political and economic empowerment worldwide.

Afghanistan was brought up during this time mostly through forums that were specifically focused around it, unlike in the past when women there were the focus of just about every general address about international women's rights. A January 2006 address by Secretary Rice mentioned Afghanistan in the context of nation building, but women were only mentioned in passing and not the focus of the address. In June of 2006, the Acting Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues, Steven Steimer, gave an address at the Afghan Women Members of Parliament Conference in Paris, and obviously the developments in women's rights in Afghanistan since 2001 were the focus here. Steimer pointed out that while "conditions for Afghan women [were] improving", based on the fact that around 40% of the six million Afghans enrolled in schools are female and that women are entering the workforce at a high rate (cite), maternal and infant mortality rates are among the highest in the world, and illiteracy is still a major issue for Afghan women and girls.

It is clear that while the goals may have shifted, women's rights, at least in name, were part and parcel of Bush era foreign policy. It is not surprising that there was such a focus on the women of Afghanistan. Whether this focus came from a true desire to do right by the Afghan people after the invasion or a more selfish desire to justify the war and be seen as a savior, it is clear that the U.S. put a lot of time, money, and energy into programs to educate and empower women there after the Taliban retreat in 2001. More general issues like trafficking of women and girls, education, violence against women, and political and economic empowerment were also on the agenda during the later half of Bush's time in office. These issues are along the same lines as the issues that the U.S. pursued in the 1990s, and it's clear that the strong interest Clinton took in international women's rights did not dwindle during the Bush administration. In the next section,

I will characterize how the policies and programming of the Obama administration differs from the policy activity of the Bush and Clinton periods.

iii. 2009 – Present: Obama

I want to begin by stating that the current administration's website for this office is structured differently than that of the previous two administrations. There is no longer a section devoted to remarks, but the entire website is structured around showcasing the variety of programming that the office is undertaking worldwide. This necessitates a more general analysis, but I am going to focus, like I have with the Clinton and Bush periods, on determining what the main goals of the United States are in terms of advocating women's rights internationally.

I have already explained above the current mission statement of the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues (S/GWI) (as it is called today), but as a reminder the major areas of focus for policies and programming are climate change, economic security and empowerment, education, food security, health, peace and security, political participation, and sexual and gender-based violence. These categories seem to be a more thorough iteration of some of the policies from the Bush and Clinton administrations. I want to point out that several of these categories did not appear during either the Bush or Clinton administrations. These include climate change, food security, and peace and security. While these goals might have been subtly included in the aims of the two previous administrations, they are explicitly laid out for the first time in the current administration's policies. The divisions I am describing seem to represent a more formal program for advancing international women's rights, and the casting of a more comprehensive net in terms of formal programming toward these goals. In the Clinton and Bush periods, most of the remarks I analyzed mentioned the funding that went toward women's

programs in some areas and at most highlighted some partnership efforts in different places, while the focus in the current administration seems to be on the actual activity that United States representatives are taking part in abroad and at home toward gender equality.

I would like to start with the goals that line up closely with those from the two previous administrations and then move on to the new policy imperatives that have been added since then. In terms of economic rights, the GWI emphasizes that gender equality necessitates women's full participation in the economy. It focuses on the fact that women are such valuable contributors to the economy that leaving them out is doing a disservice to the overall development of any country. This opinion basically coincides with what Bush and Clinton and their staffs were saying about women's economic rights – all members of society must be engaged in the economy to further development. GWI is more specific, however, in its delineation of the actual goals that the United States has in terms of increasing women's economic security. GWI works to support better access to financial institutions (credit, banking, loans), "enterprise growth", women's important roles in agriculture, economic training, business leadership, and the collection of gender-based economic data in order to better inform policy ("Office"). This is clearly a more extensive program, but it's important to note that the only specific program for the Middle East is an Entrepreneurship Masters Class, which takes place in Egypt and is focused around teaching young girls the economic skills they need to improve their situations.

The State Department calls education for women and girls "the best tool we have available to reliably change entrenched attitudes", and it's clear that the strong emphasis on this aspect of women's rights has not dissipated since the Clinton and Bush administrations. The more specific goals here are increasing "enrollment and completion of primary, secondary, and

tertiary education”, as well as increasing the capacity of schools that are already established and focusing on teacher quality. Political participation is also still on the table, and while it’s clear that “women are participating in local governments”, there is still a long way to go. The U.S.’s specific plan here includes election and issue advocacy training to “equip [emerging leaders] with the knowledge, access, and skills to run for political office, participate in elections, and lead community-based organizations”, working against discriminatory laws that prohibit women from participating in the political process, and supporting women’s participation in conflict resolution.

The final category that represents continuation from the two previous administrations is the policy initiative against sexual and gender-based violence. While the category title itself reflects a broader focus, the same kinds of problems are targeted here as they had been the 1990s and early 2000s. Included in this type of violence, according to this office, are “sex-selective infanticide...child marriage, trafficking, domestic violence, female genital mutilation/cutting, ‘honor’ killings, the neglect and ostracism of widows, sexual violence, rape as a tool of war, and much more”. This is clearly more specific in terms of identifying the problems that fall under gender-based violence. The actual plan to fight these things includes “prevention and response”, aimed at helping women in areas of conflict, “community engagement” to raise awareness among men of violence against women, and “capacity building” to support legal processes to deal with crimes against women.

There is one formal program happening in the Middle East under this policy goal, and again it’s happening in Egypt; the program is working to raise awareness about female genital mutilation. There is a program in Turkey, as well: Demystifying Gender Based Violence for Future Journalists: From Self Awareness to Gender Sensitive Reporters, which works to increase

awareness that negative depictions of women in the media as well as violence in the media can contribute to gender equality in reality.

From this brief analysis of the goals that have been continued into the Obama administration from previous ones, we can see that while the phrasing of certain goals and problems has become more pointed and specific, there seems to be less of a focus on certain areas of the world. In most of the descriptions of the policy initiatives I have explained above, there is no mention of a specific place in which the problems are the worst, or where the goals are to be implemented. This either means that the previous administrations, especially Bush's, might have been *too* geographically specific, or that Obama's focus is too geographically broad. Judging by the fact that Afghanistan is obviously not the only place violations against women's rights occur, I am inclined to believe the former.

As mentioned above, there are goals that have been specified by this office under the Obama administration with Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State that did not seem to be factors in the 1990s or early 2000s. This could be due to the fact that these issues have simply become more important in American policy as a whole, domestically as well as internationally, but it is nevertheless worthwhile to examine how they have impacted our policy in women's rights.

Climate change is an issue that was almost never mentioned before. The sense here is that women are already involved in environmental initiatives, and the U.S. wants to support these ongoing efforts by supporting the women leading them. More specifically, there will be support for "providing education and training for women on adaptive farming techniques to respond to environmental changes and enhance agricultural productivity". GWI also wants to make sure women's voices are heard in this global initiative to combat climate change and work toward environmental protection. Food security is another new issue, and actually less specific than

others. It is a combination of ensuring that women, who are “just as efficient agricultural producers as men” have the economic training and resources they need to maximize productivity and be “full and equal agricultural producers”.

Women’s health was not completely left out of Clinton and Bush era goals, but it has become more of a priority since 2009. The overarching Global Health Initiative (GHI) has apparently made “women and girls...the center of U.S. global health strategy”. This is important – a national policy controlled by an office other than the one focused specifically on women’s issues is making international women’s health a priority. This shows that gender rights and issues are an important goal throughout our foreign policy, not just in the formal place dedicated to them. Important goals here include working to improve maternal health, as well as supporting care of fistulas, one of the major health problems facing women in developing countries.

The above analysis is restricted to the iterated policy goals that the Obama administration has specified. There are also a number of remarks here, and I want to find out if they also reflect a broader set of policies rather than an issue- or area- focused set like was found in the Bush and Clinton administrations. There are a comparable number of remarks for this period, and I want to focus primarily on those by the Ambassador for this office, Melanne Verveer, as well as those by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. These two women seem to be the driving forces, or at least executors of most of the policy goals I have elaborated upon above.

From 2009 until today, the majority of the remarks by these two women (which also comprise almost the entire set of remarks recorded here) essentially echo the goals I’ve mentioned above, but with a strong emphasis across the board on ending violence against women. Ambassador-at-Large Melanne Verveer talks frequently about the value of investing in women as key to progress worldwide. Her remarks also exhibit a focus on violence against

women up until today: in 2010 she called the problem “endemic around the globe” and was critical of many countries in which “these acts are seen as family matters”. She also emphasizes the need for a better and more serious system to prosecute perpetrators of violence against women. Child marriage comes up in some of her addresses, as does entrepreneurship and food security. In a 2011 comment about women’s roles in the Arab Spring, Verveer is careful to point out that “each country will evolve differently” and that there might be policies we do not support, but that it’s essential that women are active in the processes that are forming the new governments of the Arab world today, and that “gender equality be enshrined in the constitutions from the beginning” (Verveer). Her statements line up well with the goals that the office has made clear it is pursuing, and it’s obvious that as Ambassador-at-Large and director of this office, Verveer is actively meeting with women around the globe and trying to make their voices heard.

The bulk of what Secretary Clinton has spoken about since 2009 is also violence against women, with a particular emphasis on aiding women in areas of conflict. She attended a roundtable in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in August of 2009 at which she expressed American condemnation of rape and sexual violence as war tools and also announced a new “\$17 million in new funding to prevent and respond to gender violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo” which would go toward “medical care, counseling, economic assistance and legal support to 10,000 women” (Clinton). In another set of remarks at a September, 2009 Female Heads of State and Foreign Ministers Luncheon, she praised the United Nations for addressing women’s issues “not just as a marginal issue...but as a core issue”, and reminded the attendees that she had “advocated for many years that women are the key to progress” (Clinton, Sept. 2009).

What is especially striking to me about the activity of these two women over the past four years is the frequency with which they are actually holding meetings with the women they are talking about and at whom the policies explained above are directed. Compared with the previous female Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, it seems that Secretary Clinton is much more active in terms of personally meeting with women living out the experiences, the violence, the inequality, that we are working against. It appears that while Rice was certainly espousing that women's rights are an important part of U.S. policy around the globe, she did not have or take time to meet with or hear from the very women she was talking about. Over the past four years, Secretary Clinton and Melanne Verveer have held meetings and giving remarks with women from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, China, Yemen, Libya, the Dominican Republic, and several other countries (See "Remarks"). This is yet another improvement that points toward the Obama administration as having a more effective plan toward aiding women's rights internationally as compared with the Bush administration, which might have been doing more lip service to Afghan women than acting on a true desire to help.

In addition to the increase in meetings and discussions with actual women around the world, there seems to be less insistence that women's rights are in our national interest, as we heard from Colin Powell and others. Perhaps this is because the government and the American people became convinced of this when it was being argued, but the absence of this insistence also makes American focus on women's rights seem like it comes from a more genuine desire to aid women rather than to justify an invasion that many disagreed with.

iv. Conclusions about the Office of Global Women's Issues

I have provided a detailed analysis of remarks and policies of the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues from its conception under President Clinton in the 1990s through the

Bush and Obama administrations. I have made some conclusions at the end of each section about each era, but now I want to trace the evolution in a more general sense to give a picture of the broad issues each administration was pursuing. We saw that the office was founded in response to domestic pressures as well as the issue of trafficking in women and children. Clinton's administration focused almost solely on this issue, but we did see a shadow of the beginnings of concern about women in Afghanistan here prior to September 11 or the thought of the 2001 invasion. From there, the Bush administration exhibited complete and intense focus on women in Afghanistan, from Laura Bush's address to the nation in November of 2001 to her husband's State of the Union address in 2002 in which Afghan women were one of the first things he mentioned. Recall that the emphasis here was on the progress women had made there since the United States forced the Taliban to retreat, and, more practically, on women's education and vocational training. Toward the end of the Bush years, we saw a decline in the focus on Afghanistan, and issues like trafficking, economic and political empowerment, and literacy came back on the table more generally.

Moving into the current administration, we witnessed a huge transformation in the structure of the office and a specification in the goals it was pursuing. Now, there are more goals than ever, and the U.S. seems to be pushing for women's rights in almost every aspect possible. There seems to be a higher level of dialogue, maintained particularly by Ambassador-at-Large Melanne Verveer and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, yet we see that the focus remains on violence against women and U.S. and U.N. efforts to stop it, especially in conflict and post-conflict areas.

No administration has claimed that it has solved any of the problems I have been talking about, but they all are quick to make statements of progress, as well as to remind us of the

problems that still exist for women today. What, then, can we take from this analysis of the formal U.S. pursuit of women's rights as foreign policy, especially in regard to my original questions? First, I asked whether or not gender rights are a part of U.S. policy. The answer to that has been made extremely clear – without a doubt, they are. Another question I wanted to answer was whether or not gender rights *should continue to be* a part of our foreign policy, especially in the Middle East. The answer the U.S. government would give to that question today is undoubtedly yes, but I want to take a closer look and put the policies of the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues in broader context of the human rights policy debate, and the demands of Muslim women in the Middle East I have described in the previous two chapters.

V. Gender Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy – Benefits?

V. Gender Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy – Benefits?

i. Hoffmann – Human Rights Policy Applied to Women's Rights

I have already clarified that while there is little scholarship on the pursuit of gender rights as foreign policy generally, there exists a heated debate in the field of international relations on the benefits and drawbacks of pursuing human rights as part of foreign policy. I want to examine two things here to shed some light on whether or not it is beneficial for the United States to continue their intense efforts in supporting international women's rights: a major work by Stanley Hoffmann, *Duties Beyond Borders*, as well as a few studies (Inglehart and Norris?) that might tell us how much progress has actually been made during these three administrations, and how much American attention has contributed to that progress. The first of these works can add to an understanding of how gender rights as foreign policy relates to the

national interest (does it benefit us?), and the second can tell us whether or not our policies are working (does it benefit women?).

Stanley Hoffmann struggles with the definitions of human rights and how they should or should not fit into foreign policy. Because the United States' (and the U.N.'s, for that matter) rhetoric around women's rights is that we must support them *as* human rights, we can glean some insight from this work. Hoffmann wrote in 1981, which was right around the time the U.N. was formalizing women's rights as human rights in their policies, and before the U.S. took a noticeable interest in their pursuit. He makes several important points about the dangers in pursuing a human rights policy, and seems to be generally against this pursuit. He points out that "one can argue quite convincingly that it is precisely a nation like the U.S., with its almost magical fondness for 'stability' abroad, that has an interest in defending and promoting human rights there" (Hoffmann 111), but himself believes that "before one goes chasing violations outside, one ought to take care of one's own domestic problems" (Hoffmann 112).

Hoffmann describes human rights as a conflict between an "ethics of imperatives" and an "ethics of consequences", and between "country citizenship and world citizenship". He makes the points that states are the most common violators of human rights, and this is the problem with a "moral" foreign policy – how can we pursue human rights when we ourselves violate them? Or the more pertinent question here might be: how can we support women's rights when the United States still suffers from problems in that field (sexual exploitation of women, porn, low percentage of women in government compared with other developed countries). He also argues that human rights as foreign policy are "inseparable from the extension of Western forms of government and constitutional systems all over the world" (Hoffmann 97).

Hoffmann raises some essential questions about human rights in an international relations context, and most of these serve to highlight the dangers for the United States of pursuing this type of foreign policy regarding women's rights. The first of these questions is: Can we give an equal importance to all human rights? Can the U.S. practically demand that states adhere to standards that we ourselves do not meet? How can any country pursue a human rights policy when there is a lack of international agreement on what basic human rights consist of? These are all important questions to consider, and it is easy to see how they relate to women's rights as U.S. foreign policy. Can the U.S. really pursue women's rights equally in each country? We saw a lack of equality during the Bush administration when most attention was by far focused on Afghanistan, as well as during the Clinton administration when the strongest emphasis was on human trafficking. Perhaps the Obama administration is doing a better job of balancing issues as well as geographical areas – I've already explained the much wider range of policy objectives as well as the geographically diverse countries Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Verveer have visited. This seems to be a step in the right direction, but it is hard to say whether or not the U.S. has given equality to each issue involved in women's rights – in name or funding.

The next question is important as well. While the U.S. does have a higher level of gender equality in terms of economics, education, literacy, health, than the countries it is addressing in its policies, there is still room for improvement in our own women's rights realities. For example, the U.S. has a comparatively lower percentage of women in government positions, and trafficking, women's health, and equality in the workplace still remain on the table of women's rights organizations here at home. Hoffmann asks whether we can expect other states to adhere to human rights standards when we ourselves are in violation of them, the same way that I ask whether or not we can expect such a high standard of women's rights when we have some

ground to cover here. The United States also has yet to ratify CEDAW, and this is a major point for those who argue the hypocritical nature of the U.S. supporting women's rights abroad. If we do not adhere to such an important international document, why do we, and how can we, expect others to do the same?

I think the answer to this lies in the fact that, internationally, the United States is advocating *basic* women's rights, not the more advanced ones women might focus on here. Access to education, economic training, the political process, are all basic necessities we are fighting for in developing and conflict stricken countries. Whether or not this is "fair" is still open to debate, but I would distinguish between the two types of women's rights that are at issue here and abroad.

The last of Hoffmann's questions that I've mentioned is especially applicable here: is there really an international consensus on which human, or women's, rights are universal? Based on the fact that Egypt and Turkey both ratified CEDAW with reservations, and that there is a strong insistence on the part of women's groups in these countries that they want to create their own brand of feminism that takes into account the issues they face daily, I would argue that it is dangerous to assume that there *is* an international agreement on what are universal women's rights.

In outlining the more concrete arguments against a human rights policy, Hoffmann pinpoints the essential question facing the U.S. right now: what benefit can we get from pursuing support of international women's rights as foreign policy? One of the potential benefits, and reasons for, this type of policy is "quite simply to help victims" (Hoffmann 113). This "obviously is not bad", and I would argue that whatever our intentions, our work in the Middle East and worldwide *has* done that. Another benefit, which we have definitely seen in the rhetoric

of U.S. officials around women's rights is "consciousness raising" (Hoffmann 113). I think it is safe to say that this has not really been enough, at least for the Obama administration. Secretary Clinton and Ambassador-at-large Verveer have certainly done a lot of work to raise awareness of international women's issues, but it does not appear that they've stopped there.

Another potential benefit is that "the policy should advance the national interest" (Hoffmann 113). This is *key* – many U.S. officials (Powell, specifically) have been insistent that women's rights abroad are essential to our national interest. This may be a goal that is easily accepted, but as Hoffmann astutely points out, "there is a big difference between asserting that this is indeed the case – that the best way to enhance the nation's security, prosperity, and values abroad is to promote human rights in the world...and deciding that such promotion will be undertaken only in the specific cases when it directly and demonstrably contributes to the power and prestige of the nation in the world" (Hoffmann 113-114).

So, how can we break this down in terms of our own evolving gender rights policy? It's relatively clear that the Bush administration was addressing women's rights in Afghanistan for some strategic purpose, and *not* addressing women's rights in other places as vigorously for some strategic purpose as well. Whatever this purpose, we can see some problems here with the way in which we pursue women's rights and where and when we choose to support them. The Obama administration has possibly done a better job of this – a wider variety of countries have been included and the links between strategic policy and women's rights have become a bit greyer.

These are the most important questions Hoffmann grapples with that I can also apply to my own research about the U.S. and gender rights policy. The overall concern is whether or not interfering in another country's gender or human rights is an infringement on that country's

sovereignty (which is the basis of modern international relations), and how to deal with the strings that come attached to support of human rights abroad. Generally, the U.S. government strongly believes that one of the major ways to protect our interests and values abroad, but it's clear that this policy is subject to the questions Hoffmann is posing.

ii. U.S. Human Rights Reports – What are the real results of our actions in Afghanistan?

There is another way to measure the benefits of the United States pursuing women's rights in their foreign policy, and that is to determine how much progress our efforts have caused in the main areas of focus. If there has been a lot of progress, we can conclude that our efforts have been successful in at least one sense. This is beneficial to the United States because, as has been pointed out in countless scholarship on women's rights as well as in U.S. rhetoric about women's rights, more women's participation leads to economic and political development in places where it's in our national interest to have this happen. Since the only country that has stood out as a long-term focus of the United States' gender rights policy is Afghanistan (a preliminary focus during the Clinton administration, a singular focus during the Bush era, and a lesser but still important focus during the current administration), the U.S. human rights reports from the 1990s until today can serve as a case study for how U.S. advocacy of women's rights plays out in terms of actual improvement of women's rights there. While it's clear there are other factors that can hinder or improve women's status, the American rhetoric has consistently reflected improvement, and I want to determine whether this rhetoric reflects reality.

The State Department has archived the Human Rights Reports for Afghanistan from 1999-2010. This works well for my purpose because it provides some padding around the peak years of U.S. military activity there. Women's rights do not make up the entire content of these reports, but they are prominently featured and discussed in detail.

Beginning in 1999, the report characterizes that status of women's rights is described as "very poor" (cite). "Rape, kidnapping, and forced marriage" are major problems, the Taliban's many restrictions on the rights of women were "institutionally sanctioned, and systematic" ("Afghanistan" 2000). Some women were able to run underground schools for girls "despite the formal restrictions", but overall the Taliban was creating a very bleak situation for Afghan women. The 2000 report's section on women reads word for word like the 1999 one. Clearly there were no significant improvements, except that the Taliban began to experience something called "enforcement fatigue" which might have led to some relaxing of formal restrictions and enabled "nonformal education for women and girls" ("Afghanistan" 2001).

The 2001 report has a slightly different tone, as in October of this year the United States invaded Afghanistan. The report reads: "the human rights situation for women remained extremely poor for most of the year, with widespread and widely accepted societal discrimination throughout the country". In fact, "the Taliban increased enforcement of strict dress codes" and "appeared to reverse a 2-year trend of relaxing enforcement of restrictions on women and girls". 2002 is when improvements start to be reported: "significant efforts were made to improve the situation for women" ("Afghanistan" 2003). The dress codes restrictions were loosened, and "in December President Karzai decreed that women had the right to choose whether to wear the burqua". Schools for both genders reopened around the country, and it seems that during this year, women's situations started improving, albeit slowly at first. 2003 saw some more improvement, although kidnapping and rape were still happening. President Karzai appointed some women to new forms of government put in place by international decrees, like the "Judicial Commission", to which two women were appointed. ("Afghanistan" 2004). There was some more work by NGOs supporting women's rights, and more women were

elected to the new government. This report shows a marked decrease in information about the negative aspects of women's rights, and has an overall more positive tone regarding some new initiative taken by Karzai and international NGOs. The 2004 report is similar – emphasizing that while “violence – including rape and kidnapping – and societal discrimination against women continued” (“Afghanistan” 2005), “there were two women in President Karzai’s ethnically inclusive Cabinet”. Despite some gains in terms of more *appointed* slots in government (women didn’t fare as well in elected spots), kidnapping and imprisonment were still huge problems for Afghan women. At this point, three years after the U.S. invasion, it seems that some institutional progress had been made, but not many of the practical, every-day problems like violence and discrimination did not seem to improve.

In 2005, “the law provides for equal rights of men and women; however, some local customs and practices that discriminated against women prevailed in much of the country” (“Afghanistan” 2006). This report is a bit more optimistic: there was greater access to education for women in 2005, but “the denial of education during the Taliban years...continued to impede the ability of many women to improve their situation” (“Afghanistan” 2006). The overall tone of this report reflects strong efforts on the part of the United States and the interim government to improve women’s statuses, but also the prevalence and stubbornness of deep-seeded, long-standing patriarchal tendencies that inhibited progress in many aspects. The 2006 report also starts out on a positive note: “Women in urban areas continued to make strides toward greater access to public life, education, health care, and employment” (“Afghanistan” 2007), but, as the 2005 report mentioned, many women were hindered by the attitudes left behind by the harsh restrictions during the Taliban period. This year also witnessed “the number of female cabinet members...reduced from three (Minister of Women’s Affairs, Minister of Martyrs and Disabled,

and minister of youth) to one (Minister of Women's Affairs)." Violence against women, especially "at the hands of their husbands, fathers, and brothers", and various forms of societal discrimination continued. There was also not a reliable network of support for female survivors of violence: "the concept of women's shelters was still not widely accepted" ("Afghanistan" 2007). While the ban on wearing the *burqa* had been lifted by President Karzai a few years earlier, "many...women felt compelled to wear one out of fear of harassment, violence, or bringing shame to their families". All of this again reflects efforts by the government to improve women's situation by changing laws and other formal controls in the face of fundamental patriarchal ideas that have a greater influence on women's (and men's) daily lives.

In 2007, "women continued to face pervasive human rights violations and remained largely uninformed of their rights under the law" ("Afghanistan" 2008); again, women in cities fared better than women living in small, rural towns, where discrimination was "more acute". The same types of problems persisted: violence against women from family members, kidnapping, lack of support for victims of sexual violence, and lack of a structure for effective prosecution of perpetrators of rape or other crimes against women. While "the government and NGOs continued to promote women's rights...according to MOWA [Ministry of Women's Affairs], women made up less than 25 percent of government employees" ("Afghanistan" 2008). A major problem seemed to be unawareness of the new constitutional laws that give women more freedoms, especially in rural areas.

In 2008, despite some of the same issues and persistent continuation of violence against women, we do see that there "were at least 19 women's shelters across the country", and that the "Ministry of Women's Affairs referred women to the centers, which were designed to give protection, accommodation, food, training and healthcare to women escaping violence..."

(“2008”). Again, the problem of unawareness of the law and of rights persisted as a main obstacle to the advancement of women’s rights in this year. There were some female police officers, which would seem to be a step in the right direction, but they “complained they were instructed not to do outreach to victims but simply wait for them to show up at police stations”.

2009 was an important year because Afghan “citizens voted in their second presidential and first-ever contested election” (“2008), in which President Karzai was elected for a second term. The elections were criticized for corruption, and there were “insufficient conditions for the participation of women”. Despite this, many women, “more than ever before” ran in these elections. Karzai signed a new law this year, the SPSL, “a civil law governing family and marital issues”. While the law only “applies to the 20 percent of the population who are Shia”, it makes new stipulations about “minimum age of marriage, polygamy, inheritance rights, rights of self-determination, freedom of movement, sexual obligations, and guardianship”. This law was a good attempt, but was criticized “both domestically and internationally for its failure to promote gender equality”. This year saw a decrease in the number of women’s shelters, meaning that “women who could not find a place in the Kabul shelter often ended up in prison”. On top of this, “women who reported cases of abuse or sought legal redress for other matters reported pervasive discrimination within the judicial system” (“2009”). A positive improvement was that women now “made up 26 percent of government employees” – it is a small increase but worth noting.

The final human rights report, from 2010 paints the same bleak picture as the ones from the previous ten years. For example, even a decade after the United States invasion, still “87.2 percent of women had experienced at least one form of physical, sexual, or psychological violence or forced marriage in their lifetimes” (“Afghanistan” 2010). This is clear evidence that

the situation has not improved drastically since 2001. Violence and discrimination against women are still obviously cited as one of the top human rights violations in the country. All of the same issues persisted, and it does not look like there were any major improvements.

VI. Conclusions

I have analyzed the evolution of gender rights in U.S. foreign policy from the early 1990s through today, and shown that while there were some major themes, such as trafficking, violence against women, education, and political participation, that persisted through all three administrations, each had its own priorities that were clear from the statements from officials from each period. The real question I set out to answer is whether or not it is in the national interest for the United States to pursue women's rights as a legitimate foreign policy concern. As I have already stated, the U.S. government is clearly in favor of this type of policy and is not planning to abandon it any time soon. We have seen some real results from our efforts in Afghanistan, such as increased female participation in government and growing NGO and government advocacy of women's rights, but we have run into the same issues year after year: the pervasiveness of violence against women, and the stubborn continuation of patriarchal, discriminating ideas about women in Afghan society. Other Muslim-majority countries have not received nearly as much attention, despite the fact that there are certainly comparable violations of women's rights in many of them.

The Muslim women in Egypt and Turkey whom I wrote about in Chapter 2 expressed a strong desire to "own" their feminism. They want to be free of Western influence, even though they are facing some of the same issues Western women are confronting here. It is clear that when more women are empowered economically, politically, and educationally, societies develop faster. Perhaps the U.S. could take a stronger interest in Egyptian and Turkish women in

a way that does not infringe upon their individualism but offers suggestions for this tumultuous post-revolution period in the Middle East. Secretary Clinton has done a good job of making women in these countries aware that she is personally interested in their development by meeting face to face with groups of women almost every time she travels. It's clear from the case in Afghanistan that U.S. financial aid and support can provide women with *some* opportunities that might not exist otherwise, so perhaps a combination of a more understanding, open-minded approach like the one that Secretary Clinton is taking part in and a continuation of financial support to women's initiatives in the Middle East is the best combination we can hope for to foster real change in women's situations abroad. I do not mean to be contradictory – clearly our efforts to support Afghan women were not as successful as the Bush administration made them out to be. Women certainly were not flocking out of their homes waving their *burqas*, but instead still suffering from the plague of patriarchy that is such an essential foundation of their society. We did, however, aid some progress in legal changes that might just be taking longer than we might have hoped to affect real change. Education for Western women about Islam, its customs and laws, and the women's groups I've written about who are working hard to help themselves could also help soften the Western perception of Muslim women as helpless and oppressed across the board.

The goals published and pursued by the Obama administration fit well with those espoused by the women's groups I researched in Egypt and Turkey. This is a good thing – we are focusing on the same things that the women we want to help are. After all of this research, I conclude that the U.S. absolutely should be considering women's rights as a foreign policy objective, especially in the Middle East. The U.S. cannot talk about the democratic changes it wants to support in the Arab Spring countries, and elsewhere, without making a sincere effort to

support the empowerment of half of the populations in these countries. We need to listen to the women we claim to be helping and adjust our policies to their demands as necessary. Western norms are not always exactly compatible with what they want, and we have witnessed in Afghanistan is that change does not come as quickly as we want it to. The U.S. also needs to ratify CEDAW: this will give the document more clout internationally and make it a more legitimate tool for women demanding that the stipulations laid out in it are followed. A continued focus on ending violence against women and ensuring access to basic needs – food, shelter, water, security – will serve as a good foundation for policy that advocates more advanced improvements where appropriate.

Conclusion

I want to begin this conclusion by restating my fundamental research questions. First, what do Muslim women want? What are the specific rights and changes they are demanding? Secondly, are these rights compatible with Western norms, as manifested in the U.N.'s Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the European Union's gender rights standards for member states? And finally, how have gender rights influenced U.S. foreign policy and what should be their role in U.S. policy in the Middle East going forward?

I have examined many different types of sources – from theological scholarship, to interview-based research, to U.S. government and U.N. documentation and public opinion surveys. These sources, while different, have helped me come to some broader conclusions about each of my three research questions.

I. What Do Muslim Women Want?

Chapters One and Two both speak to this question. In Chapter One, I examined theological scholarship on the question of women and gender in Islam and in the sacred texts, the Qur'an and *hadith*. The four feminist scholars I examined are all grappling with the same question: why, if Islam as a religion does *not* support gender inequality, but in fact equality of both genders before God, has gender inequality persisted with such stubbornness in much of the modern Muslim world? They each provide their own answers to this question and use their theological backgrounds and broad knowledge of the sacred texts and how to interpret them to show that some verses in both the Qur'an and *hadith* have been misinterpreted to mean that women are inferior to men in a variety of ways. One of the main reasons such interpretations have spread so quickly and pervasively is that the average Muslim does not have the extensive

religious education necessary to make informed decisions about what the verses really mean. Therefore, when men in power twist the words and meanings of some verses to justify their patriarchal positions, there is no societal force to check these meanings. I think one of the demands coming from the feminist theological community within Islam is that the common misperceptions and misinterpretations of these texts are reexamined and the truth is revealed. This may not be a practical demand in women's movements exactly because accurate interpretation of these texts does require such rigorous study, but the women whose work I have studied are certainly influential and their work is well known throughout the Muslim world.

The more pragmatic demands of women in Egypt and Turkey were revealed in the two case studies in Chapter Two. My general findings indicate that Turkish women have been dealt a slightly better hand. The 1920s reforms under Ataturk were a secular and modernist breaking point from a patriarchal religious history. The Civil Code that Ataturk established was relatively more permissive toward women, and they have been making progress since then. There was a lull in feminist activity between the 1960s and 1980s, but after that the women's movement picked up again. On the agenda for contemporary Turkish women's groups are ending violence against women, especially raising awareness for domestic violence and honor killings, as well as reform in marriage laws that are still discriminatory toward women. There is a debate within the Turkish feminist movement around the emergence of a more conservative brand of Islam in what has long been a secular society – this is alarming for some women's rights activists there, but there is a sector of the women's movements that is supportive of returning to a more religiously conservative way of life. Women's groups have also been concerned about Prime Minister Erdogan's controversial policies on women, which are seen by some as limiting women's freedoms.

In Egypt, women have not seen the same degree of progress that Turkish women have. There has not been nearly as much of an effort to reform laws that are clearly barriers to gender equality, like the ones that regulate marriage, divorce, and custody. For example, only in 2010 were Egyptian women given the right to request a divorce without having to prove that they had been wronged in the marriage. Egypt also does not have the motivation of EU accession to motivate legal and societal change. Turkish motivation for reforming laws around women's rights is intimately tied with the desire to become an EU member, and this means meeting the legal requirements set forth to do so. Egyptian women are also fighting against sexual harassment, which has become worse after the Arab Spring revolt. One example is the forced virginity testing that happened at the hands of the military. This kind of incident is not common in every day Egyptian life, but sexual harassment in general is a persistent and dangerous problem. Female genital mutilation is a problem in rural areas, and female political participation is still on the agenda even after a recent quota guaranteed women a bigger (yet still relatively small) representation in Parliament.

The common thread between Egyptian and Turkish feminism, outside of their corresponding demands, is that they are each struggling to distinguish themselves from Western feminism and create a women's movement that they own. They appreciate Western support, but do not see Western women's lives as a model. In fact, some scholars point out the fact that Western sexuality and family patterns are not at all what Muslim women want. We in the West need to be wary of the line between genuine support and imposed standards.

II. Are Western Norms Compatible?

My case study of Egypt and Turkey and how each responded to CEDAW, and how Turkey responded to EU women's rights requirements, serve to answer this question. My findings here indicate some incompatibility in terms of existing legal frameworks in both Egypt and Turkey. Both countries ratified the Convention with reservations to Article 16, which mandates that women and men have equal rights within marriage, custody, and in the case of divorce. Turkey's marriage laws, while secular and not religious, leave something to be desired in terms of gender equality. These have been amended slightly since Turkey applied for EU membership, but there is still no law that states that both partners are completely equal in marriage. Egypt, on the other hand, has *shari'a* law governing marriage and has not made strong efforts to change these laws that give men the upper hand in marital contract. In the reports to the CEDAW Committee from Egypt and Turkey, there is a clear difference between each government's efforts to comply with CEDAW stipulations. Turkey's report spells out each part of Article 16, and explains the contradictions it has with Turkish law, as well as specific efforts that are being made to amend the laws. The report does this with other articles as well, especially where Turkish law falls far below the standards. Egypt's report takes on a more positive tone, but does not provide specific information about what initiatives the government has taken to comply with CEDAW. This shows that while the stipulations in CEDAW are fairly compatible with the demands of women, there are problems implementing international norms in these two countries. Progress is being made, more quickly in Turkey than in Egypt, but we need to keep in mind that patriarchal ideas are so deeply engrained in these societies that signing and ratifying an international document is not going to change them immediately.

The EU gender requirements, as Kabasakal tells us, have had mixed impacts on Turkish women because they focus so much on formal aspects of human rights: the formal economy,

political participation, and others. Often, however, Turkish women are marginalized because they are active in the informal economy and non-formal political engagement. There have been significant efforts on the part of the Turkish government to amend legal codes to meet these requirements, however, and women's groups have been active in this process. While EU accession does not seem to be a priority for women's groups, they have been supportive of the reforms that have taken place because of membership candidacy.

III. Should Gender Rights Be Part of U.S. Foreign Policy?

This question should perhaps have been stated in a different way, because despite the possible disadvantages of pursuing a women's rights policy, like those that Stanley Hoffman points out in his work on human rights policy, the U.S. government has already invested a huge amount of time and money into pursuing international women's rights. The Clinton administration focused on trafficking in women and children; Bush focused almost completely on Afghan women; and the Obama administration has done an admirable job of both expanding the goals of our women's rights policy as well as specifying the plan for how we will support women internationally.

We need to consider the benefits of maintaining a focus on women's rights in our foreign policy, and the Middle East is one of the most important places this policy is being implemented. It is hard to tell what the long-term results of the Arab Spring revolutions will be, and how U.S. policy in the Middle East will navigate the changes in governments and influences there, but thus far, Obama has been vocal about supporting democratic change in states that have had revolutions. He faltered slightly as he maintained support for Mubarak at the outbreak of Egyptian protests, but since then has rhetorically encouraged democratic change in Egypt. An

absolutely essential part of the democratic processes' chances of success is the power of women to help shape their new governments, laws, and through this ability to begin to break down the long-standing patriarchal biases that have oppressed them for so long. I do not see how the United States government can claim support for democracy without making an active effort to ensure that women's rights are a priority of the new governments emerging now in the Middle East. This, again, is a fine line. We must support *indigenous* women's movements, rather than co-opting them or trying to provide a strict outline for what they should demand and how they should demand it.

Through my research here, I have characterized what I think is a vibrant group of Muslim women who, rather than accepting the oppression and restrictions they face every day, are fighting hard to define themselves as well as the rights they demand. While they are talking about some of the same issues Western women deal with, they are facing a much higher likelihood of sexual assault or domestic violence, as well as problems that are virtually non-existent in the West, like female genital mutilation. One of the reasons I wanted to investigate this topic was to find out what truth was behind the Western stereotype that "veiled equals oppressed." I certainly found out that while for some women, like Afghans living under the Taliban regime, the veil was imposed as a tool of degradation and entrapment, I also found that in the context of the resurgence of more conservative Islam, women elsewhere were finding liberation and identity in their form of covering. The *tesetir* dress for Turkish women is an example, as is the increased number of Egyptian women I saw in Cairo veiling, many claiming it as a response to increased incidents of sexual harassment. Western advocates of international women's rights are missing the point if they are focusing on the veil as the only indicator of

women's oppression in the Muslim world. There are bigger issues and more dire circumstances we need to be thinking about.

I have also characterized responses to international norms from Egypt and Turkey. These were mixed, but it became clear that there are inevitable difficulties in implementing such a comprehensive, sweeping international legislation in countries that have such a deeply engrained patriarchal history. The solution? There may be more than one, but it certainly seems that Turkey's desire to be part of the EU has drastically quickened the reform process there. There, as always, is still work to be done, but Turkish women have seen more progress than Egyptian women have. Egypt presents a tougher puzzle because its political future is in jeopardy. The hope is that women in Egypt will seize the opportunity to demand that they become equal participants in a new democracy, but based on the fact that no women were included in the committee in charge of drafting the new Constitution, that seems an ambitious goal. The solution here is unclear – perhaps continued U.S. and international pressure for women's rights there will encourage the women to keep fighting for their rights as full citizens of a new Egypt.

The most important conclusion I can draw from my research is that approaching the topic of women in Muslim societies requires one to consider the issue from different perspectives and to draw from each of those to understand what Muslim women are facing. One must consider theological research because Islam itself is the heartbeat of so many of these societies. One has to think about political and legal realities – what informs the laws in these societies? A rich history of patriarchy is at the top of the list and in the forefront of collective memory. Societal processes are based on it and progress against this trend is slow and difficult. The United States government, as well as international bodies like the U.N. and EU need to fully understand all of these perspectives in order to craft policy that will be applicable, accepted, and effective in

Muslim societies. And, most importantly, we need to remember that we are not Muslim women.

We have some more learning to do before we fully understand the best way to support their struggle for equality while keeping far away from their ownership of that struggle.

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