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the views of some



h CenturyIntroduction.. so much energy has been expended by Muslim men and then Muslim women to remove the veil and by others to affirm or restore it ..

(Ahmed 167). This paper explores these efforts in two specific stages: the first and the last thirds of the twentieth century. Through an analysis of some of the various arguments on the veil, I will try to induce some general characteristics of the debate on the issue and on women during these two specific periods of time. The starting point will be Kasim Amin's *Tahrir el Mara'a* (Liberation of Woman) and the counter argument of Talat Harb's *Tarbiat el Mara'a walHijab*, (Educating Women and the Veil). The debate between those two protagonists which has become a prototype of the debate on the veil throughout the century (Ahmed P. 164). Malak Hefni Nassif's and Hoda Sha'arawi's attitudes towards the veil represent an interesting insight to two different interpretations of the hijab issue by feminist activists that prevail throughout the century.

The whole synthesis of this early debate is then put in juxtaposition to the debate later in the century as represented by the avalanche of literature on the topic in the seventies, the views of some famous sheikhs like Mohammed Metwally el Shaarawi and others, and the heated debate initiated by the Minister of Education's decree of 1994 to prevent school administrations from imposing the hijab on girls as part of the uniform. The Early Debate Kasim Amin's *Tahrir El-Mara'a* (Published 1899) It may not be an exaggeration to say that Amin's *Tahrir al-Mara'a* was one of the most controversial books in Egypt's modern history. It has ignited a strong debate and prompted more than thirty reaction articles and books either to defy or assert his argument

against the veil (Ahmed P. 164). The ideas of the book were not totally new, they echoed the writings of some writers like Mariam al-Nahhas (1856-1888), Zaynab Fawwaz (1860-1914), Aisha al-Taymuriyah (1840-1902), and Murqus Fahmi's (a Coptic lawyer) four act play *Al Mar'ah fi al-Sharq* or (The Woman in the East) (Badran P.

19). Yet, Amin's book double-scored for coming from a Muslim judge and for his overt proposal to unveiling women's faces. His words were not the only challenge to the existing notions of the hijab, it was his caliber as a Muslim judge that has vocalized his call to unveil women and gave his book importance. After an introduction loaded with emotional phrases on the degradation of the Egyptian woman and an exaltation of the European woman, the book is divided into four sections: Educating women, Women's veil, The woman and the nation, and Marriage and divorce. Amin starts his argument calling for the Hijab Shara'ei stating that the Hijab in its form then (covering the face, the hair and the whole body) was not mandated by the Shari'aa. He further adds that he was not calling for the extreme of the West which makes the woman liable to seduction (Amin P.

65). The argument against the veil is in two sections: The religious section which is mainly text interpretation and some Hadith that prompt women to cover the hair and the whole body except for the hands and the face; and the social (practical / everyday life) perspective. The later section includes social ideas such as the inconvenience for women with their faces covered to dwell in business, to testify in courts or to get engaged (as the groom should see her face first). Furthermore, he argues that unveiling would make women watch their behaviors as they could be recognized and hence

their reputation would be at stake if they did any wrong. Still, from the practical social point of view, the flimsy 'bourqo' (face cover) used was more tempting as it makes the viewer curious to see what was intended to be hidden.

He further argues that, if women are imprisoned in the hareem (part of the house where women are secluded), then even if they did not commit any shameful act, it would not be due to any virtue in them, but to the fact that they did not have the freedom to do otherwise. Amin accuses the veil of being a barrier to women's development and education (P. 85), arguing that it deprived her from interacting with the society and learning how to live. He illustrates by comparing the ignorant peasant with the elite urban lady who can speak French and plays the piano, and concludes that the ignorant peasant would be