

American University in Cairo

AUC Knowledge Fountain

Theses and Dissertations

6-1-2018

Moral and cultural discourses surrounding women athletes in Egypt

Yasmeen El-Ghazaly

Follow this and additional works at: <https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds>

Recommended Citation

APA Citation

El-Ghazaly, Y. (2018). *Moral and cultural discourses surrounding women athletes in Egypt* [Master's thesis, the American University in Cairo]. AUC Knowledge Fountain.

<https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/456>

MLA Citation

El-Ghazaly, Yasmeen. *Moral and cultural discourses surrounding women athletes in Egypt*. 2018. American University in Cairo, Master's thesis. *AUC Knowledge Fountain*.

<https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/456>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by AUC Knowledge Fountain. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of AUC Knowledge Fountain. For more information, please contact mark.muehlhaeusler@aucegypt.edu.

The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

“Moral and Cultural Discourses Surrounding Women Athletes in Egypt”

A Thesis Submitted by

Yasmeen El-Ghazaly

Submitted to the Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women's Studies

April 2018

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in Gender and Women's Studies
in Middle East/ North Africa

The Gender and Women's Studies in the Middle East, North Africa specialization
has been approved by

Dr. Martina Rieker _____

Thesis Supervisor

Affiliation: IGWS

Date _____

Dr. Helen Rizzo _____

Thesis Second Reader

Affiliation: SAPE, AUC

Date _____

Dr. Hany Henry _____

Thesis Third Reader

Affiliation: SAPE, AUC

Date _____

Dr. Martina Rieker _____

IGWS Department Chair

Date _____

Nabil Fahmy, Ambassador _____

Dean of GAPP

Date _____

Table of Contents:

Abstract.....p.v

Chapter One

Introduction p.1
Overview: Thesis Questions.....p.2
Conceptual Framework.....p.4
Literature Reviewp.8
Methodology.....p.16
Ethnographic Fieldwork.....p.18

Chapter Two

Women’s Bodies and the Politics of Navigating Public Spaces in Egypt

- Introductionp.22
- The Discourses of Public Spaces for Women in Egyptp.23
- Introducing Women to the Athletic Scene.....p. 41
- The Dynamics of Accessibility of Public Spaces on Athletic Women.....p.46
- Concluding Notes.....p.58

Chapter three

The Interplay of Patriarchy with Women and Sports in Egypt

- Introductionp.59
- Patriarchy, Islam and the Impact on Athletic Women in Egypt.....p. 69
- Feminine Discourses of the Gendered Body on Athletic Women in Egypt.....p. 78

- Politics of the Veil and Women Athletes in Egypt.....p.102
- The Effects of Media Channels on Egyptian Athletic Women.....p.116
- Concluding Notes.....p. 126

Chapter four

The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion for Women Athletes in Women

- Introduction.....p.129
- The Everydayness of the State and Support to Women Athletes in Egypt.....p.129
- Challenges and Limitations of Athletic Women in Egypt.....p. 141
- Concluding notes.....p.162

Chapter five

- Concluding Notesp.167

References.....p.173

Abstract

Choosing my thesis topic and title was both no easy task; yet came naturally to me. My thesis titled, “Moral and cultural discourses surrounding women athletes in Egypt” discusses the effects of social spaces, notions of femininities, masculinities, and gendered power relations, social and cultural stigmas surrounding Egyptian women athletes through exploring the daily challenges of a selection of amateur and professional women athletes residing in Egypt as they embark on changing the various social stigmas, stereotypes and limitations facing them in the everydayness of their lives in Egypt as athletic women. The thesis argues that the interplay of the heavily gendered social structure in Egypt along with the patriarchal and cultural conformities defining gender roles in our society significantly affect the everyday lives of Egyptian women athletes.

Choosing sports as a means of investigating how culture, religion, state politics and gender stratification intervene with women’s lives and their accessibility to the public spheres emphasizing how their bodies are gendered in Egypt came very naturally to me.

I come from a fairly athletic family; both my parents as well as my brother still maintain an athletic lifestyle on a daily basis. Sports to me represents a plethora of values, it is a means of releasing stress, of having fun, of feeling alive and of course of maintaining a healthy long happy life. By far one of my biggest fears is to be forced to stop playing sports or having limited options in what kind of sports I would be able to pursue for any reason at all. Surely enough in my early twenties and due to my poor choice for a spouse, despite being in perfect health conditions, I was banned by my now ex-husband to play any sort of sports ‘publicly’. The only

thing I was allowed to do was to either join a closed ladies-only aerobics class or walk on a treadmill in baggy clothes, not even in the street.

After regularly playing tennis, squash, cycling and martial arts for as long as I can remember, this seemed alien and absurd to me, yet due to my fairly young age and inexperience, I obeyed his orders hoping to pacify the male insecurities in him thinking that it was his 'right' as a husband. This attitude was certainly fortified by the social, cultural and religious rhetoric surrounding me at the time. It is without doubt that after abandoning sports for the entire duration of my relationship with that abusive person, which was over 10 years, I felt my own personality wilt away and my identity collapse faster than I could even try to remedy at any point. I was just an empty soulless shell of myself. Needless to say, the first thing I pursued with a vengeance after my divorce was sports. This negative marriage only fuelled me along with my ever-supportive current husband Mohamed to explore the depth of why and how sports can be an issue for many women in Egypt. The multiple social, cultural and religious discourses and interpretations surrounding this topic was the main essence where I based my fieldwork among my interlocutors aiming to unravel the intricacies within the accessibility and acceptability of being an athletic woman in Egypt.

As with any academic research I needed to look for several reliable sources discussing women and sports in Egypt, although Egypt has positively come a long way in this domain, I did not find much research on the topic per se. As challenging as this made my research, but it also meant that researches like mine will hopefully add more value to this topic in the future for other researchers to perhaps build further work upon.

Furthermore, the executed fieldwork showed how inconsistent interpretations and perspectives both men and women had about this topic were regarding the interplay of culture laced with religious references in Egypt despite affiliating to certain supposedly well-educated and slightly westernized social classes. My research also aimed at spreading more awareness about the role and impact of sports on women's lives in Egypt analyzing the restrictions women who choose this lifestyle could be faced with that may interfere with reaching their athletic goals.

Choosing to observe and try out different gyms myself in different residential areas in Cairo as well as conducting interviews with a diverse span of interlocutors from acquaintances to friends to complete strangers interested in the topic gave me confidence in the input I had contributing to the essence of this research. It is worth noting that as I advertised for the need of interviewing interested interlocutors, I had no idea that I would receive over 100 interview requests from people of different classes, different backgrounds some who were total strangers to me and not everyone was athletic. The diversity gave me rich field notes to work with in my research.

Conceptually, when discussing the multiple discourses of women athletes in Egypt, seeing how space is defined, limited at times and gendered make a significant impact on the perceptions of their accessibility and development in the social spaces around them. Henri Lefebvre says that social space is a social product, or a complex social which affects spatial practices and perceptions. Combining LeFebvre's work on social spaces and Daphne Spain's work on gendered spaces talking about the gender stratification and how this has progressed and regressed within different eras and countries relates much to what limits women's accessibility in the public spaces in Egypt. Space is everything; it determines who we are as humans. As a woman living in Egypt, seeing how space defines my existence as well as my life choices, this

concept relates completely to the topic at hand. Going to Spain's work, "gendered spaces" in homes, schools, and workplaces reinforce and reproduce dominant status divisions that are taken for granted. Women's position within society, whether measured as power, prestige, economic position, or social rank, is related to spatial segregation insofar as existing physical arrangements facilitate or inhibit the exchange of knowledge between those with greater and those with lesser status. These broad concepts among others outlined the mainframe of my fieldwork and research tools.

Among my fieldwork finding was two very distinctive interviews that are of relevance to highlight in this presentation. Against the developmental discourses, which I personally stand critical of, I interviewed an uneducated cleaning lady who although apparently comes from a less fortunate working class yet was adamant on training both daughters martial arts to invade the public spaces with confidence to be able to face the aggression and hostility they usually encounter within their social circles. On the other hand, I had an interview with an upper class AUC Professor who although is an avid athlete himself with ample western exposure and is well-respected among his colleagues here, firmly believes that women are empowered through their domestic roles and not through invading the public spaces. Prior to doing my fieldwork, as a researcher, I had my own prejudgments and deliberations that were swiftly ripped apart as I progressed through with this thesis.

In my point of view, this research has succeeded in accomplishing its main purposes, it shed the light on the intersections of how patriarchy, public spaces accessibility and acceptability politics as well as the effect on women's bodies limiting their access to sports came together, however the main accomplishment for me personally, was the opportunity to share as a woman athlete myself, our collective narratives on how our bodies are perceived and our restricted

mobility is represented with our passion for sports bringing us together as we negotiate our accessibility to public spaces and the sports arena in Egypt.

This thesis looks at the effects of social spaces, femininities, masculinities, and gendered power relations surrounding Egyptian women athletes through exploring the daily challenges of a selection of amateur and professional women athletes residing in Egypt as they embark on changing the various social stigmas, stereotypes and limitations facing them in the everydayness of their lives in Egypt as athletic women. Neither patriarchal notions, nor interpretations of Islam are static, consistent nor are they monolithic entities. However throughout this thesis what is meant by both terms will be highlighted in relevance to the repercussions with respect to my interlocutors' experiences.

The thesis argues that the interplay of the heavily gendered social structure in Egypt along with the patriarchal and cultural conformities defining gender roles in our society significantly affect the everyday lives of Egyptian women athletes. The analysis and fieldwork executed in this research aim to uncover the notions surrounding what defines femininity and masculinity in the lives of these women. Looking at the pre-existing gender roles assigned to women in Egypt across different social levels in addition to the various social conformities and ideologies embracing our society that heavily stem from a myriad of cultures, traditions and religious beliefs inherently affect how athletic women lead their lives in Egypt. My fieldwork revealed how these women chose to defy years of social stigmas and different cultural mindsets laced with religious predispositions not necessarily on par with the level of exposure needed to lead and maintain an athletic lifestyle in Egypt. My analysis will be founded on broader concepts of the understandings and interpretations of social spaces, gendered bodies, power-gender

relationships and discourses of patriarchy and masculinity complexes governing women's lives as they choose to incorporate sports into their lives whether professionally or not.

Chapter 1

Conceptual framework and the literature review

Introduction

This novel choice of research deliberation and the motivation to discuss the entailed literature analyzing its many perspectives stems from personal experiences in my life as an athletic Egyptian woman in Cairo. Growing up I learned how to uncover the various evolving non-static patriarchal notions surrounding women in every aspect of their lives and as per my area of interest which is sports. Being the athletic character I am, I chose to discuss the moral and cultural discourses surrounding women as they choose to become professional or even amateur athletes throughout the various points in their lives. Growing up I often dealt with various cultural constraints or stigmas as I strived to make sports a crucial part of my life. Athletic women are commonly viewed as women of a westernized mentality and of a certain perhaps elite social class. This statement is fortified by the readings displayed as well as the fieldwork done. This in turn is thought to drive a rift for women between their cultures and traditions and in some cases their religious values. I explore how Egyptian women are identified in our society and how being athletic can challenge these definitions at times.

The contemporary social construct we currently have in Egypt took several turns as the political scene's dynamics evolved especially if we take a closer look from the 1950's up until now. The political agendas and religious power granted by Abdel Nasser in the 1950's & 60's to the formal religious governmental institutions like Azhar and Dar El Iftaa differed a lot from Sadat's presidential period in the 1970's up until his assassination in 1981. Another dramatic turn also took place especially post the 25 of

January 2011 revolution when Morsy from the MB took reign of Egypt. How the state chooses to politically use its religious institutions like Azhar and Dar El Ifta to play up or play down how women lead their lives by manipulating various religious texts will be discussed at the beginning of chapter three. Accordingly, what can be defined as social spaces that include both the public and private spaces have also altered for athletic women. The social concepts defining what masculinity and femininity in Egypt are regarding sports and women were crucial to discuss and certainly added depth to my analysis throughout the thesis. This proposed thesis aims to discuss, understand and analyze how Egyptian culture, religion and social construction affect women's choices to pursue an athletic lifestyle or career in Egypt. I cannot deny that the public scene has somewhat taken an enabling turn for many women in athletics in Egypt in the last five to six years despite the many negative discourses around them as this thesis hopes to trace and analyze.

Overview: Thesis Questions

Given the research purpose in the introduction above, this thesis explores several questions surrounding the given topic. How is femininity and sports interpreted in Egypt? How does the interplay between definitions of masculinity and femininity affect athletic women in Egypt? The effects of gender segregation in Egypt is explored trying to uncover if this enhances athletic women's lives in Egypt or not. The limitations and challenges as athletic women decide to balance or defy the social constructions are questioned in this thesis. The interplay of what defines culture and religious beliefs

impact women athletes in Egypt in multiple ways, however these effects vary for many reasons, this thesis aims to explore and analyze these reasons.

How do the politics of the shame affect the possible hostility towards athletic Egyptian women navigating the public spaces is questioned as well. My thesis also aims to discover how the gender roles in this neoliberal context has altered across the years and what were the main factors triggering this change. Pursuing socially gendered sports in Egypt may have certain impacts on women who choose to proceed with playing these sports despite their male dominance. I am interested in uncovering these repercussions and analyzing the change in them across the different social levels within women athletes.

Islam (as broad and as localized as this religion is defined in Egypt) is the prevailing religion. As the several readings and fieldwork analysis show, the mostly rigid doctrines and teachings of Islam have heavily influenced how women lead their lives in Egypt. Many considerations that are put into women's life choices often stem from pure religious texts or their interpretations by religious clerics. Others evolve from traditions and culture that inherently are affected by this prevailing dominant religion. I aim to find how deep do religion and culture affect women's choices athletically in Egypt. Is there a consistent pattern perhaps? How far do state politics interfere in this regard? I also aim to analyze how contemporary forms of patriarchy plays a role in reinforcing the limitations surrounding women athletes in Egypt. However, I am also interested in finding out how social classes and western exposure affect the degree of social conformity in that sense.

The introduction in chapter three will particularly discuss what I mean by references to religion, the state and patriarchy since these definitions are neither rigid nor

static and constantly evolve. How religions influence cultures and societies depends on several factors. State politics are one of them. Between 1950 and up until now, how the state used governmental establishments that formally represent Islam in Egypt like Azhar and Dar El-Iftaa will be displayed in chapter three with examples to verify how this inherently had some effect on the culture surrounding women athlete's lives in Egypt.

The ideologies of power relations and the literature discussing female body ownership plays a significant role in shaping the mindsets of athletic women. Do women believe in having any control at all of their bodies? If not, what factors contribute to this lack of ownership? This issue relates heavily with the some of the patriarchal aspects of Arab cultures. I am interested in analyzing how the dynamics of these complex discourses surrounding gendered bodies alter the power relations within the lives of athletic Egyptian women.

Conceptual Framework:

My thesis attempts to explore the dominant gender and spatial ideologies produced within and through aspects of Egyptian culture that in turn affect the various topics witnessed in the everydayness of Egyptian athletic women. I base my analysis on three major themes: social space, gendered bodies as a social construction, and the interplay of social class and power. The selected literature and ethnographic fieldwork informed by the discussed concepts in this thesis are based on the work of several prominent social scientists. The first theme would be the sociology of space. The sociology of space observes the social and material constitution of spaces. It is concerned with understanding the social practices, institutional forces, and material complexity of how humans and spaces interact. When discussing the multiple discourses of

women athletes in Egypt, seeing how space is defined, limited at times and gendered, these considerations make a significant impact on the perceptions of their accessibility and development in the social spaces around them. Michel Foucault defines space as “The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space.....we live inside a set of relations.” (Foucault, 1967). Referring to his renowned essay *Of Other Spaces* in particular, we see how space, unlike time, Foucault argues, has yet to complete its process of secularization, and sanctity still plays an important part in the way we divide space (ibid). These "other places" are according to Foucault was utopia, places that don't really exist, or heterotopias. A heterotopia is a real place which stands outside of known space. Foucault argues that heterotopias are a part of every culture, though they are manifested differently in different places and times.

Culture is one of the main aspects shaping the spaces around us setting the functions, boundaries and uses of it. It is the culture governing the gendered spaces around women in Egypt that interests me most and through this I discuss the impact of public spaces in Egypt and its impact on athletic women in Egypt.

Henri Lefebvre says that social space is a social product, or a complex social that affects spatial practices and perceptions. He explains how space embraces a multitude of intersections in his book, *Production of Space* (1991). That means that we need to consider how the various modes of spatial production relate to each other. This particular idea defines much of what limit women’s accessibility in the public spaces around them in Egypt. According to Lefebvre, when regarding space, the French philosopher was not interested in simply opposing structure and agency, discourse and practice in his texts but instead he suggested a division of space into: 1)

perceived space 2) conceived space and 3) lived and endured space, or spaces of representation. Lefebvre points out, how that space is *not* a container that simply needs to be filled but itself an active designer of our social relations. With time passing, the reign was given to ‘abstract space’, together with the new means of quantification, and to those who determine it. Space for Lefebvre is a politically disputed field. Space is everything; it determines who we are as humans. As a woman living in Egypt, seeing how space defines my existence as well as my life choices, this concept relates completely to the topic at hand.

To further elaborate on the relativity of space and women, it is important to look at the work of Daphne Spain in *Gendered spaces and women's status* (1993). Spain argues how although women's status is a result of a variety of cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors, the physical separation of women and men also contributes to and preserves gender stratification by reducing women's access to socially valued knowledge. In fact, "gendered spaces" in homes, schools, and workplaces reinforce and reproduce dominant status divisions that are taken for granted. Women's position within society, whether measured as power, prestige, economic position, or social rank, is related to spatial segregation insofar as existing physical arrangements facilitate or inhibit the exchange of knowledge between those with greater and those with lesser status. Thinking about gendered spaces meets a goal of feminist theory-that is, to reveal "how gender relations are constituted and experienced and how we think or, equally important, do not think about them" (Spain, 1993).

Other theories contributing to building my literature in my analysis is patriarchy, femininity and gender social conformities. In light of this mentioned framework, the work of Judith Butler in *Undoing Gender* 2004 relates to this discussion. Judith Butler asks how we can undo the restrictive norms of gender and sexuality and considers the various ways in which we

are all undone —by grief, gender, desire, and the ‘Other’. Butler agrees that social norms are necessary and yet must be exceeded in the name of the future of the human, which according to my analysis, is one of the key aspects affecting how women’s quality of life can evolve in Egypt. Undoing Gender asks what makes a gender livable? Throughout my analysis and fieldwork with both genders, I cannot help but see how the problem mainly coincides in the definition of space and gender roles in magnifying the issues with the topic at hand. How Judith Butler calls for a more or less genderless society diminishing the stress on the constant debate about the different forms of patriarchy could contribute to an evolution of a society that aids women to opt for different lifestyles, namely athletic ones without much regard to their gender.

As for the theory on the effects of social classes in my research, I chose the basic conceptual work of Karl Marx when discussing effects of social classes on pursuing athletic lifestyles for women in Egypt. My interlocutors are mainly socially classified as middle and upper-middle classes, bourgeois if you may. In Marxist philosophy the bourgeoisie is the social class that came to own the means of production during modern industrialization and whose societal concerns are the value of property and the preservation of capital, to ensure the perpetuation of their economic supremacy in society. Indeed, this particular social class enjoyed more privileges with regards to choosing an unorthodox lifestyle in Egypt within my fieldwork when compared to women coming from other social classes, namely the “petite bourgeoisie” or “workers” as per the Marxist theory.

Lastly in her influential 2006 book, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*, Judith Bennett argued for the importance of feminist approaches to history and the role of *longue durée* perspectives in understanding the patriarchal equilibrium that has defined the history of women's experiences over multiple historical periods. Bennet explains this

patriarchal equilibrium as a lack of transformation in women's status in comparison to that of men, despite changes over time. As a longstanding patriarchal country, a major part of how spaces are prioritized and gender roles are defined revolves around how the realms of patriarchy and masculinity have rooted themselves deeply across history in Egypt. Throughout my ethnographic journey with my interlocutors, seeing the everydayness of these women athletes gives more elaboration to these concepts.

Literature Review:

The literature chosen for my thesis here revolves around several concepts. I chose literature relevant to the cultural and social concepts existing in contemporary Egypt to support my fieldwork in the construction of this thesis. Granted that the research conducted in the selected work does not consistently reflect the reality of how athletic women lead their lives in Egypt, yet they do provide a guideline and relevance as per what my fieldwork revealed.

The book by Rabab Kamal published this year in February titled “*Women in the Realm of Islamic Fundamentalism*” basically takes the reader through different eras in Egypt showing the delicate interplay between religion and politics and the social effect this had on women in various domains. This Arabic book serves as the historical, social and factual summary of how women’s rights were manipulated in Egypt by the state and its religious establishments like Azhar and Dar El Iftaa to serve a myriad of purposes, least of all, to improve the lives of women in Egypt. Almost every chapter seemed relevant to my thesis and research questions. It is a book I hope to see translated in several languages. The richness of Kamal’s critique of the material portrayed provides ample information to the reader. How Kamal arranged the chapters tells the tale of the everydayness of the lives of the women in Egypt in the most entertaining yet informative manner.

In the book *Muslim Women and Sport* (Benn, Pfister, Jawad , 2011), referring to *Chapter 17 - The Role of Islam in the Lives of Girls and Women in Physical Education and Sport* the authors examine the global experiences, challenges and achievements of Muslim women participating in physical activities and sport, this important new study makes a profound contribution to our understanding of both contemporary Islam and the complexity and diversity of women's lives in the modern world. The aim of this discursive chapter was to enter a discussion on the role of religion, gender and physicality in the lives of women in physical education and sport internationally. The significance of religious belief in people's lives should not be underestimated, and revivalist movements demonstrate increasing numbers of people searching for religious and spiritual fulfillment globally in the twenty- first century. In many societies, sport-related activities can be regarded as 'non-serious', low status pursuits rather than serious, life- and health-enhancing pursuits for all people.

Paradoxically, sports may also be considered a luxury activity reserved only for the rich as access to fitness and sports clubs can be costly. Moreover, sports are often not high on the agenda in countries, for example, where there is risk to personal safety or where poverty and illiteracy are widespread and basic human needs are not met. These considerations apart, those who disregard the rights of children to physical education in schools fail to recognize its significance in holistic human development and the part that it plays in the physical, cognitive, social and affective development of the human being. The book presents an overview of current research into constructs of gender, the role of religion and the importance of situation, and looks closely at what Islam has to say about women's participation in sports and what Muslim women themselves have to say about their participation in sports. It highlights the challenges and opportunities for women in sport in Muslim countries in a general sense, utilizing a series of

extensive case-studies in various countries which invite the readers to make cross-cultural comparisons. Muslim Women and Sport confronts many deeply held stereotypes and crosses those commonly quoted boundaries between ‘Islam and the West’ and between ‘East and West’.

In the article titled “ *Muslim female athletes in sports and dress code: major obstacle in international competitions*” (Qureshi, 2011) the reader sees how sport and physical activities in Muslim non-secular nations are believed to be a male dominated institution. Girls are often confronted with considerable challenges, depriving them at instances from taking part in International competitions and Olympics Games. Most of my women interlocutors expressed this challenge to be the most dominant. Prohibition is mainly because of dress code and some restrictions laid down in our culture , some of them trace back to religion.

Disclosing literature covering gender discrimination within the athletic world for women in Egypt plays a significant role in my analysis. Since the first Olympics featuring women for the first time in 1900 commenced (and only in tennis and golf), gendering sports had begun simultaneously as well at the time and although it is now 2017 this idea is still very much existent in several cultures socially if not theoretically or practically speaking. The literature I target focuses on the dissecting the ideas behind these limitations regardless of the culture or religion impacting them. The UN Women Report published in 2007 in the segment titled “*Women, Gender Equality and Sport*”, expresses how women’s participation in sport has a long history. It is a history marked by division and discrimination but also one filled with major accomplishments by women athletes and important advances for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The benefits for women and girls with disabilities are also well established. Sports provides a double benefit to women with disabilities by providing affirmations of self-empowerment at both personal and collective levels. Apart from enhancing

health, wellness and quality of life, participation in physical activity and sports develops skills such as teamwork, goal-setting, the pursuit of excellence in performance and other achievement-oriented behaviors that women and girls with disabilities may not be exposed to in other contexts. Interesting findings throughout my fieldwork reveal how using other societal ‘targets’ like being a healthier ‘bride’ could perhaps encourage women of certain classes to take on an athletic lifestyle. This may apply to a social class where marriage is not only their way out of their relatively confined lives within their families’ homes, but it is also their lifelong dream and benchmark of social success. The positive outcomes of sport for gender equality and women’s empowerment are constrained by gender based discrimination in all areas and at all levels of sport and physical activity, fueled by continuing stereotypes of women’s physical abilities and social roles. The value placed on women’s sport is often lower, resulting in inadequate resources and unequal wages and prizes.

In the media, women’s sports are not only marginalized but also often presented in a different style that reflects and reinforces gender stereotypes. Violence against women, exploitation, and harassment in sports are manifestations of the perceptions of men’s dominance, physical strength and power, which are traditionally portrayed in male sports. Chapter four of my thesis dedicates a major part of its content to the effects of sexual harassment on the lives of women athletes in Egypt. Given that sports were traditionally a male domain, the participation of women and girls challenges a multitude of gender stereotypes, not only those related to physical ability but also those regarding women’s role in local communities and society at large. By directly challenging and dispelling misconceptions about women’s capabilities, integrated sport programs help to reduce discrimination and broaden the role prescribed to women. An

increase of women in leadership positions in sports can also have a significant influence on social attitudes towards women's capabilities as leaders and decision makers.

From the journal article "*You throw like a girl*" (Hively, 2014) the effect of stereotype threat on women's athletic performance and gender stereotypes is also discussed. Physical education teachers at times also have gender-biased performance expectations in sports that are inconsistent with real group differences. Even in federations in Egypt, as shown in my fieldwork, the 'weaker coach' is handed the girls' team to train, it is never the opposite, unless of course this sport has no male team to begin with like rhythmic gymnastics or water ballet. Parents displayed the same general patterns, favoring boys both in perceptions of athletic ability and in encouragement of their children's involvement in sports within my fieldwork. In addition, setting boundaries regarding sports differed between siblings of the same family of different genders of course. The set limits were mainly governed by the social norms and constructs around these families in a given social class. It is not surprising, then, that boys have better perceptions of their athletic and greater motivation to participate in sports. The article discusses how people seem to equate athleticism with masculinity rather than femininity in a vivid scream of gender discrimination in the field of athletics.

In Arab cultures, regardless of the religion in question, there are much patriarchal conformity women need to live with. Again, I need to stress that concepts like patriarchy and religion, namely Islam since it is the prevailing religion, evolve and mature into different notions which are inconsistent and vary widely across the different social classes as well as according to the governing political parties in Egypt. The selection of literature chosen to discuss the many perspectives surrounding women and sports in Arab culture in Egypt mainly aims to unravel how

these inherited teachings that are heavily influenced by patriarchy and our masculinities affect the everyday lives of athletic women in Egypt.

This journal article printed in 1985 titled “*The Status of Muslim Women in Sport: Conflict between Cultural Tradition and Modernization*” is particularly interesting due to its relatively old date compared to the recent work done on that topic. The article expresses how the situation varies from country to country, from rural to urban areas, and depends on impact of Muslim resurgence, secularism, nationalism, Westernization, and socialism. Physical education is officially compulsory in schools but, partly due to traditional attitudes and lack of facilities for segregation of the sexes, often neglected in practice. This is explained in several instances in governmental schools throughout my fieldwork despite this idea still exists thirty years after that article was published. A change is taking place, but very slowly. Women are constrained by traditions and customs, and social attitudes limiting their access to the world, and to sports, too. Our society places a high value on women’s bodies, purity and decency. Social restrictions are set up to protect women’s virtue; the most obvious are seclusion, the wearing of the veil, and the segregation of the sexes.

In the journal article *Gender, sexuality and patriarchy in modern Egypt* by Robert Fernea published in 2003, the author sheds light on how there here are a plethora of reasons for patriarchy in the Arab world. However, on a large scale, the Arab world was largely at the disposition of outside forces, a condition that became even more pervasive with the development of oil production in this region. The kind of peripheral capitalism of these countries from pre- to postcolonial times made the development of a full-fledged bourgeoisie and a genuine working class impossible. What resulted instead was a petty bourgeoisie, the hybrid, dominant class characteristic of a neopatriarchal society. Neopatriarchal society as ‘modernized’ is essentially

schizophrenic. Its characteristics include a pattern of dependency and subordination, vertical social relations, stratified families, clans, and sects. Neopatriarchal sultanates rely on the rhetorical language of religious and allegorical truths, myths, and beliefs that constitute the crux of traditional patriarchy (Fernea, 2003). The author's take on Egypt's case in particular resonates with the typical challenges of athletic Egyptian women in their everyday lives.

As for gendering spaces in Egypt, the article titled "*Gendered Space and Middle East Studies*" (Sawalha, 2014) discusses how the Arab elites' urban gendered spaces became the main framework of analysis of Arab and Muslim societies. Spaces where men and women coexisted—for example, open spaces in rural agricultural areas where women worked alongside men or the mixed spaces of nomadic communities where gender segregation was not practiced—were left unmentioned.

Harvey's text titled "*The Right to the City*" resonated a great deal to the topic at hand. Harvey defines the right to the city as being far more than the individual freedom to access urban resources: it is a right to change the city inhabitants' behavior by changing the city itself. It is moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this change certainly depends upon the exercise of a communal power to reshape the processes of urbanization. In other words, how women choose to lead their lives in Egypt as athletes may prompt the change in our cities to better accommodate to this public lifestyle through different means. How women through my fieldwork struggled to access the public spaces around them athletically is analyzed in conjunction with the literature featured to produce significant findings in the conclusion of my thesis.

These writings join emerging theories of the production of social space with feminist applications of space theory while responding to the myopic stereotypical representation of

Muslim women in earlier writings. Through participant observation and engagement with people using private spaces, women scholars have closely described and analyzed the private sphere of women, challenging the trope that Muslim women are the victims of a patriarchal system and instead presenting them as capable agents who have some control of their own space. These writings have centered on agency in the private sphere and on the lives of women in the public domain.

The literature choices for this thesis all ultimately deliberate into the debates concerning the accessibility and mobility of athletic Egyptian women in the society we live in, how some have successfully overcome these limitations set by cultural norms, religious interpretations or both and how some women do not recognize the existence of these alleged limitations at all. They also discuss the roles women are stereotypically framed in Egypt across several social classes and how this affects pursuing an athletic career or even taking up sports for leisure. The readings also engage in discussions about the gender segregation and different boundaries compelling women to play certain sports apart from others in efforts to conform to several social attributes trying to balance both their inherent cultural or religious values as well as their personal aspirations. Whether these boundaries are successfully crossed over or not over time in Egypt is also discussed and displayed in the ethnographic fieldwork for this thesis.

The literature also deliberates into what comprises the public and private spheres of women in Egypt and how religion affects them in relation to athletics, if it has any effect at all. The constant struggle I observed as a researcher with the Egyptian athletic women I interviewed was between abiding to the religious or cultural constraints within their social spaces, along with the moral and cultural struggles in the public spaces around them and living up to their own athletic dreams is displayed in the readings from several viewpoints with interesting outcomes.

Methodology:

Executing interviews for a random selection of interested interlocutors of both genders was my main methodology to collect the needed material for my ethnographic fieldwork in my thesis research. I began by posting an introduction about my research topic on several social media outlets like the public pages and groups on Facebook as well as within my own circle of friends and acquaintances with no regard to any conditions or participation requirements at all; hence this was a random selection of interlocutors. The used ethnographic methods were compatible with both the nature of the material and social contexts of the field I am interested in as well as supported the questions asked by applied research agendas within the field. In my research, using ethnographic methodology is an indispensable tool to be able to truly grasp the topic from several angles and different trajectories. The thesis aims to deploy a set of methodologies that should help guiding the research questions highlighted above. This includes:

1- Interviews:

My findings for this thesis primarily depended on collecting information through individual semi-structured interviews from approximately twenty five interlocutors. The type of interviewing that is part of participant observation is usually informal and is usually more like a casual conversation among acquaintances. As a researcher, I was typically looking for new insights into the point of view of the participants.

The basic rule in carrying out interviewing or conversing is that the researcher is intent on following the lead of the informant, applying only minimal impact on the topic and flow of the interaction (Sobolewski. 2009). The goal is to get out of the way of the participants or informants and let them talk. In other words, the researcher is likely to be directing

conversation and asking many more questions that would usually take place in a casual conversation among acquaintances. Interviews of open-ended structures were conducted with many professional as well as amateur female athletes, some were my friends and acquaintances, and others were complete strangers. This diversity to me ensured that I would get honest answers to the research questions I had. I successfully interviewed both female and male athletes in several sports as well as club and gym managers.

However government officials at both the Ministry of Youth and Sport as well as the Police Academy in addition to the Azhar officials refused to meet me. I was informed that mainly their refusal was due to my affiliation to an American educational establishment. Hence I deduced that my mere desire for an interview was immediately a threat to these institutions. I successfully interviewed male professional athletes and founders of mixed public athletic groups like Cairo Runners or The Hiking Club which are open to both sexes at no or minimal expenses.

The social effects of these self-sustained public athletic groups are astounding as the findings reveal within the chapters of my thesis. The main advantage of semi-structured interviews in such a context is the flexible nature that helps build rapport with the interviewees. Another advantage of such semi-structured interviews is that it provides a major opportunity for the interviewees to be more engaged in the conversation.

2- Participant Observation:

Working out myself in different kinds of both public and private spaces influenced my fieldwork to a great extent. Defining participant information can be subject to several perspectives. Every one of us has had the experience of being a stranger in the midst of a

new crowd. We walk into a room or join a large cluster of people all of whom seem to know and understand one another. As we nervously approach some part of the chattering crowd, we look for individuals to make eye contact or to shift their position to allow us to join the group. Our senses are on full alert. We observe the people present, how they are dressed, their relative age, who seems to be doing the most talking, and how each individual responds to what others are saying. We listen to conversations taking place to try to gauge the pace of the conversation, the degree of formality or informality of the language being used, and what it is that is being discussed. We look for ways in which we might begin to contribute to the dialogue.

In such situations, each of us is engaging in something akin to ethnographic fieldwork, and using the method that anthropologists call participant observation. In my case, I immediately picked up on many differences in atmosphere around me once I decide to make my research field for example an “Islamic Gym” where no Christians are allowed, no music either and even, despite it being only for women, no revealing clothing is allowed, also at Islamic prayer times, everyone usually stops exercising and prays. It was a unique experience given the upbeat nature of the gyms where I usually workout. The duration of these observations through practical exercise took around three months, where the main purpose was to examine myself and observe different behavior patterns within both sexes in an athletic environment of somewhat different social classes.

Working the Field:

The fields chosen for my interviews and the pool of people who contributed to my findings came from several athletic and non-athletic affiliations and more importantly different

social classes. Inevitably the exclusive gym inside the Sports Complex at the American University in Cairo in the elite part of New Cairo where I regularly workout myself was where I started my field work. Miscellaneous gyms (both mixed gender and women only gyms) in New Cairo (Slimnastics, Gold's Gym), Nasr City (Hero Gym, Smart Gym), Heliopolis (World Gym) and El Haram (H2O Gym) were also targeted. These neighborhoods represent where I had access to and I tried to go to gyms where a diversity of people could be found and not all neighborhoods were incredibly classy. I found that it was unsafe for myself to wander into the governmental youth centers without a male escort which wasn't available at the time of my fieldwork. Furthermore, venturing into gyms in perhaps less fortunate neighborhoods was not a viable option for me.

Through my fieldwork, I observed how gyms in Nasr City were less fancy than the ones in Heliopolis and certainly New Cairo. Working out to certain 'new, trendy' sports is very 'in' now. New fitness workouts like pole-dancing which I also attended in Rehab amused me very much as an athlete and a researcher. How veiled girls went to pole-dancing classes to unleash a very exotic and feminine side in the safety of a closed villa for women only to access was worth analyzing. Most of the girls there come from elite social standards. Not only are the classes expensive, but I saw that the girls who approached this kind of workout had a rather open-minded mindset. For example when I tried to advertise about that place on a women's only Facebook group known to have members of lower social classes, I was instantly attacked for proposing something so outrageously indecent and the post was taken off. What not a lot of people know is that pole-dancing requires significant strength, muscle control and flexibility. It is a very challenging workout. Also the ladies only gyms had a lot of pink colors and feminine decorations. I certainly saw that not one of these gyms had a weightlifting room for example.

When I compared the weight training machines in mixed gyms versus the ladies only gym, I significantly saw less equipment. The ladies only gyms emphasized the importance of having Jacuzzis, steam rooms and dance classes over having weight-lifting rooms or even weight racks. I also saw how women dressed rather modestly while working out in areas like Al Haram or Nasr City in contrast to areas in New Cairo, despite both of them being ladies only. I couldn't figure out if it was due to a financial issue or more out of conservatism like the Islamic gym I also went to.

Founders and members of the public amateur mixed gender clubs like The Hiking Club – Egypt where trips are mainly hiking trails and/or mountains in South Sinai as well as across Egypt, the founders of the Nile Kayak Club, and employees of Cairo Runners were all interviewed. Owners of cross-fit and other privately owned fitness businesses in Cairo, like Monkey-bars Cross-fit Egypt located in Katameya Heights New Cairo were also interviewed. I chose to interview and engage in public mixed groups for many reasons. First of all, these groups do not require any membership fees, so basically it's unrestricted to a certain social or financial level like private clubs. Secondly, I personally believe that the emergence and growth of these unstructured, unrestricted groups is one of the most important factors to change our culture's mentality about girls playing sports.

Private expensive spaces like gyms or clubs provide a controlled environment of options, so to say. Public mixed groups engaging in athletic activities have more access to touch base with a wider range of people thus making a bigger cultural impact. This was perhaps the main reason why I wasn't excessively enthusiastic about interviewing squash or swimming champions (although I approached them, but their schedules were too busy for me). Being a champion in a sport like weightlifting stemming from working out in a governmental youth center differs a lot

from having an expensive committed personal trainer in the safety and convenience of the expensive private spaces of a club like Heliopolis for example where even the equipment used in squash for example is quite pricy. Weightlifting for example can be done with much cheaper equipment. Throughout my fieldwork as shown in the rest of my thesis, having ample financial abilities paved the way to being a champion in many sports.

Choosing what sport to embark on had a lot to do with financial abilities apart from any cultural restrictions. Government officials at the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Police Academy were inaccessible to me despite numerous trials from my side. The Azhar University for Women and the Dean of the Faculty of Athletics there for women that just recently opened also denied access to me as a researcher at AUC. I can confidently say that I conducted my fieldwork without any personal biases evident on my side since I was mainly interested in an honest answer of all my interlocutors to truly add essence to my research yielding fair outcomes in my quest. To protect the privacy of my interlocutor's identities, I have changed their names in my research.

Chapter Two

Women's Bodies and the Politics of Navigating Public Spaces in Egypt

“Women are prevented by the threat and reality of male violence from entering public space on equal terms with male citizens.”

— Sheila Jeffreys, *Unpacking Queer Politics: A Lesbian Feminist Perspective*

“The prostitute was a “public woman”, but the problem in the nineteenth-century urban life was whether every woman in the new, disordered world of the city, the public sphere of pavements, cafes and theatres, was not a public woman and thus a prostitute. The very presence of unattended—unowned—women constituted a threat both to male power and a temptation to male “frailty”

— Emily Wilson, *The Contradictions of Culture: Cities, Culture, Women*

Chapter Introduction:

When I embarked on this topic for my thesis, I needed to put decisive starting points to base my research questions around. From my personal experience as an athletic woman in Cairo, I found that learning about the acceptability and accessibility to public spaces in Egypt was crucial, from both a gender oriented perspective as well as an athletic one. Throughout my fieldwork investigations, the dynamics of public spaces in Egypt comprised a significant concern for my interlocutors as I interviewed them for my topic more than the social stigmas or other cultural or religious constraints around being an athletic woman in Egypt.

The Discourses of Public Spaces for Women in Egypt

When the participation of women in communities is discussed, the terms "public space" and "private space" are usually used. This chapter presents a general framework for the definition of both in order to be able to look into the policies and frameworks adopted by the state to govern and distinguish the two spaces and how they directly affect women, athletically or not. It could be said that the idea of public space was born in the heart of political modernization. This is due to that the concept of public space is considered one of the branches of modern thought. Public space can be defined as the field in which participation is activated. It is the space in which individuals and groups gather to discuss things that matter to them, and thus could be considered the main space in which public opinion, made of various opinions and parties, is formed.

In other words, public space is supposed to be a free space that is not confined to one faction or segment. It should be a place for human gatherings and collective participation in which political and social rights and duties of citizens are equal. Nevertheless, the dynamics of public space may not be understood except through the understanding of two other spaces, which are the spaces of public authority and private space (Nazra, 2013). During my fieldwork, one of the questions was "Do you know what public and private spaces are?" To my surprise, most of my interviewees did not know the answer but to my utter delight, Radya, a working class cleaner, without having the opportunity to get basic education knew the answer to the question and expressed it as follows:

Yes I know what that is. Women are not welcomed at all in the public spaces. Most men see that women are not entitled to the right of existing in the public space, even if we are household breadwinners. Mixing genders is not welcome. We should stay home. It's just out of spite. Men cannot do what we women are able to do, so this culture of hostility towards women is just out of spite.

Actions in public space are controlled by the general laws of the state, which are theoretically meant to work for guaranteeing the security and safety of individuals participating therein without interference in their private affairs. On the other hand, the public space is based on individuals and groups where main part of their intellectual patterns and value systems are formed in a separate space which is the private space. In light of the perceptions in use here, private space is not outside the reach of the state or is it outside the scope of its sight (Nazra, 2013).

Public space became monopolized by one division of the society, mainly men, and then turned into a stage for authoritarian conflicts between different groups of people with different attitudes instead of being a free space in which discussions, intellectual activities and different ideologies are formed. This aggression prevailed especially for women striving to gain equal access to the public space for any reason at all.

Similarly to the restriction of public space, the laws governing private space have still been the subject of clear attack since the purpose was to pass through discourses that increased the control of women's chances in education, work and living in a family environment where husbands and wives are equal. Feminists and women's groups and organizations fought long battles through which they managed to change some of these governing civil laws. Achieving such equality makes women capable of finding greater freedom to engage in the public sphere as citizens who have equal rights and responsibilities towards their communities.

One of the most important approaches to understand this process of interaction may be via understanding the relation of women to public space. Studying such a relation reveals the collaborative relationships between cultural patterns, political orientations, and legal

disagreements as part of the social and political reality and mobility in which women of this country live on a daily basis.

There is no better example to demonstrate the violation of public spaces of women in Egypt and show the feminist discourses of nationalism in Egypt other than discussing the Egyptian society's encroaching cancer called sexual harassment. Sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence in public spaces are an everyday occurrence for women and girls around the world—in urban and rural areas, in developed and developing countries. Women and girls experience and fear various types of sexual violence in public spaces, from unwanted sexual remarks and touching (which immediately makes the offense an assault instead of harassment) to rape and femicide. It happens on streets, in and around public transportation, schools and workplaces, in public sanitation facilities, water and food distribution sites and parks.

This reality reduces women's and girls' freedom of movement. It reduces their ability to participate in school, work and public life. It limits their access to essential services and their enjoyment of cultural and recreational opportunities. It also negatively impacts their health and well-being. Although violence in the private domain is now widely recognized as a human rights violation, violence against women and girls, especially sexual harassment in public spaces, remains a largely neglected issue, with few laws or policies in place to prevent and address it. Yet, ironically there has been more discussion and laws passed in Egypt about public space harassment than it has dealt with the issue of domestic violence.

Sexual violence in public spaces is an everyday occurrence for women and girls around the world – in urban and rural areas, in developed and developing countries. Women are particularly vulnerable to being excluded from visiting public spaces due to increased sexual harassment and perceived danger. According to a UN Women study in 2013, 99.3% of women in Egypt

experience sexual harassment, with the incidents increasing in number and severity during holidays. The effects and limitations caused by sexual harassment in Egypt on athletic women will be discussed in chapter four of this thesis.

Public spaces are the “front porches” of civil society, social spaces that are open and accessible to the public such as roads, squares, parks, and beaches. How people use public space contributes to the creation of a city and neighborhood narrative. Egypt’s dense urban areas are in desperate need of more public spaces, especially in the informal areas of the city to socialize, express opinions and ideas, or to simply take refuge from the fast-paced life we all lead. The need for open, accessible public spaces is necessary for sustaining the public spirit that dominated Egypt during the 2011 Revolution. For decades, the State has depended on the control of public spaces to maintain security and “order,” a practice adopted wholesale by the current regime, best exemplified by the new “The Right to Protest” Law that restricts the freedom of assembly and protests without the prior consent of authorities. The law differs from global counterparts that require prior notification to the state and not prior consent to organize a peaceful protest.

Public space should be used as a medium of public expression and idea exchange even when individuals or groups disagree with each other or with the state. It is through this use of public space that people can gain acknowledgment and legitimacy for their social, economic, and political demands. Public parks have the potential to be one of the most inclusive sports-friendly public spaces; almost free of charge, no membership required, open to everyone, citizens and visitors alike, people from different ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, political/religious affiliations share the green space and peacefully coexist. Much like a neighborhood café, public parks organically create a community of regulars, as well as the occasional visitors, among

whom a social contract is created. Limited accessibility to public space increases the social divide within a city, where only those who can afford it get to enjoy leisure activities in “fortified” semi-public spaces in gated communities, sporting clubs, amusement parks, shopping malls, etc...

Public green spaces where people can freely and comfortably enjoy the city are extremely limited in Egypt, especially Cairo, and as a result, there is a great demand for them among residents, hence the appeal of gated communities which will be discussed later in this chapter. Statistics show that Cairenes have 0.8 square meters of green space per capita (sqm/cap). Al-Azhar Park in Cairo – built by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture – illustrates the demand for green space perfectly (Tadamun, 2014). The park is popular with Cairenes from different walks of life and socioeconomic backgrounds and is one of the few spaces in the city that attracts such a diverse base of visitors. Despite having an entry fee, which some may say excludes it from being a “public” space, in a city where most leisure activities and spaces are exclusive to certain classes of society (private sporting clubs, clubs for professional syndicates, army/police personnel, etc.), Al-Azhar Park offers people in the city thirty hectares of green space and facilities that is open to anyone as long as they can pay the modest entry fee (ibid).

The Park’s popularity is indicative of the great demand for quality public space in our cities. Vibrant and publicly accessible spaces are indicative of a city or nation in which the public has a say in land use decisions. Instead of working with communities to decide how to use available land in dense, urban areas, the Egyptian government often gives preference to private developers and, in general, there is a lack of transparency and accountability in government decision-making in this regard. This is exceptionally clear in the many gated communities in both New Cairo and 6th of October. Oddly enough, none of my interlocutors, while complaining

about the endless challenges entailed in using the available public spaces of Egypt as a workout venue, mentioned Azhar Park as an athletic venue.

The lack of proper advertising about it and the facilities inside as well as a limited choice for public transportation to reach it constituted most of the problem. Similarly, this also applies for the newly opened Family Park in New Cairo off the Suez-Cairo road. Although slightly smaller, and certainly more expensive, Family Park has more facilities inside and more activities fit for children. However it is mainly accessible to the residents of the elite, already green compounds in New Cairo being significantly far from the rest of Egypt with an entrance fee classified as 'expensive' relative to the salaries of most Cairenes.

Privatizing leisure spaces excludes certain activities or people as the profitability of the space takes priority over its social and environmental functions. For instance, the vast majority of waterfronts along the Nile are inaccessible to the general public; they are mainly comprised of upscale restaurants and hotels, or clubs for professional syndicates (judges, engineers, doctors, etc.), or army and police personnel. This prevents the majority of the public from enjoying this national resource. Outings along the Nile bridges are sometimes the only way to enjoy the river free of charge, since sidewalks with even a view of the river are also surprisingly rare.

In efforts to make this spectacular view accessible to the public and make use of it athletically, Cairo Runners along with other public mixed running groups occasionally arrange for different runs along the Nile and through Dokki and Zamalek on weekends at 6:00 am or 7:00 am when the streets are usually void of traffic and accordingly pollution rates are less than usual and more importantly sexual harassment can be contained. The runs along the Nile are usually the most enjoyable ones for most of the regular runners says Abdulla one of the Cairo Runner's managers. Having professional groups like Cairo Runners makes enjoying this

significant and unique part of Egypt possible for men and women athletes alike. Exclusion from public spaces is not only due to privatization, but also because these spaces are not adequately developed. An empty lot that is fenced off and disinviting with no seating, shade, lighting, and limited accessibility for the disabled certainly discourage public usage.

Any resident or visitor to Cairo is familiar with the green metal barriers surrounding most public spaces, squares and main roads that invoke a sense of entrapment and not belonging, furthermore it creates an inherent code of inclusion and exclusion within the city. However as further proof to the non-existent athletic culture in Egypt in public spaces taking a look inside a gated compound like Madinaty located shortly after the boundaries of New Cairo, across from Sherouk City validates this claim. Madinaty which was shortly created after Rehab, is also an elite gated compound, both were built to target upper middle class and elite classes as residents there. Although there are many beautiful abundant green spacious areas inside, there are no specific tracks built for cycling for example. Even the sidewalks between the garden areas are damaged, made of bumpy tiles that are not friendly to pedestrians nor cyclers who choose not to cycle beside cars on the asphalt roads inside the compounds. Even how trees are planted indicates how investors did not consider how joggers or pedestrians could make use of the sidewalks athletically. The trees are planted right in the middle of the sidewalk, not on the sides as logic and common sense may suggest.

While these simple observations might seem too detailed or insignificant, yet they give an indication of the cultural mindset of the investors governing the infrastructure of this area. The green wide spaces provide beautiful relaxed scenery to attract buyers, but no athletic culture is imbedded although executing that could actually score more sales points from a marketing perspective with potential buyers, especially if they were expats. The only place respecting the

right of cyclers to exist safely was inside the vast AUC campus, which is by far the most elite private space in Egypt. After bringing in my own bike to campus and used the beautiful track to cycle around it, I found that it was mainly used by the expats within the AUC community, students and professors like. This demonstrated to me how undertaking an athletic approach to life in Egypt stems from Western origins. It constitutes a significant part of the Western identity.

The idea of ‘relaxing’ usually within my non-athletic friends, or ‘treating oneself’ was never to buy fancy sports gear, or purchase an athletic or adventurous vacation package, it was usually to smoke in an expensive upscale cafe, wearing the trendiest clothes on the market. Granted, people are different in how they choose to spend their leisure time and excess funds, however the culture of sports does not seem to be part of many Egyptians’ lifestyle.

Ahmed Nayer, aged 35 and one of the founders of the Nile Kayak Club had this opinion about how this culture started:

We saw this happen abroad and thought of implementing this here. I spent time in Nottingham UK and there I found a recreational kayaking club where I practiced there, I kept thinking of how we do not have any kayaking clubs in Egypt so I thought of starting one here in the Nile. It was just an idea. I tend to do challenges every once in a while. My next challenge at that point was to kayak from Aswan to Luxor across the Nile and I had two partners, Sherif and Noran. We did it and once we turned back we found great encouragement from the media, authorities, government and everyone really which was great and easily encouraged us to start the NKC.

Ahmed is a successful engineer who belongs to the upper class in Egypt. His family spent some time abroad in the UK with both his sisters. Ahmed’s sister works at NASA in the US now and has been independent since her graduation. Ahmed explains to me how his family never really discriminated between himself and his sisters. His family was adamant one encouraging both himself and his sisters to not only pursue the finest education possible, but also to follow their passions in life.

Also K* who is a former AUC faculty member aged 40, has an interesting take on this idea of Western exposure:

It has to do with how society frames the normality of how women should act and behave within a particular class. Embracing traditional oriental culture vs westernized elite norms could be the reason for this. The more upward mobility a person has, the more exposure they would have to other cultures and mindsets through travel and perhaps foreign education or any pattern of socialization, so ultimately how they perceive the interpretation of gender becomes more westernized.

K* is one of my most interesting interlocutors. He has been bodybuilding for over 18 years, is also an upper class Egyptian citizen. He was brought up in the US, Saudi Arabia and then in Egypt. Kareem holds a Ph.D. in Political Science where his thesis dissected in awe the Islamic Iranian Revolution. Throughout my thesis K's opinions were quite interesting to me. I assumed that given his extremely high level of education and western exposure, he would be more lenient towards cases where women's rights could be compromised. Ironically, I saw that he firmly believed in gender inequality. When I asked why? He replied that it's just how our social construction always was and it is due to how Islam portrayed women. Women have certain role to abide to, it is a major issue to try to broaden these roles or equate women to men in our society. He believes that the roles complement each other. Knowing K* rather well for over 6 years now, I can relate to how he is stating his opinion regarding women. Growing up in a Salafi, highly conservative, country like Saudi Arabia where women have very limited rights certainly impacted his mindset, despite his exquisite level of education and ample western exposure. K* takes pride in Islam from what I saw both in our relationship as friends and during my interview with him as an interlocutor.

Public spaces are further limited by the fact that government officials often save public spaces of historical significance mainly for tourism, commodifying the space, and even occasionally restricting access to citizens of the country. Protecting historical sites and encouraging tourism are important for sure, but conservation and public use are not mutually exclusive and a balance between the two should be negotiated. The apparent deterioration of public spaces is a result of poor management and an increase of uncontrolled vehicular traffic at the expense of green and pedestrian spaces. Poor management is strongly linked to the complex administrative system that is responsible for public areas; where one entity is responsible for

collecting waste, another for sewage management, a third for road infrastructure, a fourth for lighting the streets, and it goes on. This would be fine if these entities communicated with each other and coordinated their efforts, instead of what happens more often than not; a street is repaved only to be excavated yet again to install gas pipes. Even in new areas like Madinaty, the administration keeps demolishing and rebuilding the same street, each time for a different purpose. However not once was it for an athletic purpose despite the rather large existence of an athletic community in Madinaty.

The prioritization of private vehicular transportation has also done a great deal to restrict the amount of public space in the city. The quality and feasibility of public spaces are closely tied to shifting city planners' priorities from vehicular traffic to bicycle and pedestrian mobility as well as providing a widely accessible public transportation system that can reduce the need for public space to accommodate cars (Tadamun, 2014). In Mumbai, being it an overpopulated city like Cairo, using a bicycle for both genders is normal. However here in Egypt despite how much this solution is desperately needed, it is a different challenge. For the first time ever, in the 6th of October area just outside of Giza, in October 2017 it was decided that a 17 km bicycle track will be built. This track was funded solely from the private investors in this industrial area, not from the government despite the urgent need to encourage civilians to use bicycles instead of their cars. This project along with the emergence of over five nation-wide bicycle-training initiatives in 2017, namely *Pink Bicycle* which trains women specifically to ride bicycles in the street emerged this past year. Nada Farghally, one of the Pink Bicycle trainers who is 24 yrs old, expressed how the initiative got immediate responses from many women who thought of the cost-effective benefits as well as the incredible practicality there is to learn how to use a bike in the unequipped streets of Cairo to get around easier versus having to use the abysmal means of

public transportation available in Egypt. They were willing to withstand the sexual harassment and assault that will probably be subjected to on a bicycle. From their perspective, they had a right to using this public space even though riding a bike may not conform to traditions here, but they do not clearly defy religious texts and therefore can be encouraged.

However, Sherouk from Dakahleya governornate who once took upon herself to start teaching girls living in her humble neighborhood how to ride a bicycle had a different experience:

One day a young runner actually about 17 yrs old came up to me and told me he had read an article in a newspaper condemning riding bicycles for girls for virginity issues. He came to me now since I was teaching other girls how to ride one. The boy didn't even bother read the entire article. I looked for the article and the title just questioned if it's ok for girls or not. He decided to come up to me without even reading the article.

Sherouk to me was also a very interesting interlocutor whom I considered myself lucky to encounter. Sherouk comes from the lower middle class in Egypt. I have never met her except for my research. Sherouk received Azhary Islamic education in her school years as well as college. She met me wearing a very simple veil, not a khimar (full length wide veil) or a niqib (full face cover) as some Azhar women would wear. Sherouk tells me how as a child and until after college all she wanted to do was sports, any sport. She thought of running because it seemed the cheapest sport that didn't require any fancy gear or special areas. It wasn't until her early divorce and as she told me for very special reasons that she was able to actually run in the streets.

Sherouk lives now in Dokki since she is financially independent now, however she began running in the modest traditional neighborhood in El Dakhaleya. She told me how her family finally granted her access to 'do what she wants' right after her divorce. She didn't know where to start or how to start running alone all of a sudden given this newfound freedom. She decided to start a social athletic group in Ramadan where people would gather up to eat then run. She

called ‘Lamitna Saada’ which translates to ‘Our gathering is happiness’. Throughout my thesis I discuss how this project started and ended. Sherouk surprisingly has very interesting ideas about how to engage sports, culture and Islam. It is further proof to me how religion cannot be directly blamed for all the restrictions around women and sports. Sherouk believes that Islam is a forgiving and lenient religion that encourages women to do many things sports included. However she does believe that many sports could be Islamacized.

Talking to Sherouk made me realize the huge distinction between the different kinds of religious interpretations despite having somewhat uniform religious texts. Also I was further convinced that even though our culture is affected by religious interpretations, yet how the state chooses to direct these interpretations is merely part of a political agenda. Religion cannot be fully blamed in a broad uneducated sense.

After President El-Sisi’s appearance on his bike with an entire entourage of security men on bikes early one morning shortly after his election, bicycle prices have significantly risen due to the higher demand on them, about 20% says a representative from Besceletta, one of the prominent Egyptian Companies selling bicycles (Senger, 2017). Certainly the president’s emergence that day on the bicycle in the streets of Cairo encouraged many people to use it as means of transportation. At least it is gradually not becoming a cultural taboo anymore.

Hadeer Samy whose passion for bikes started by joining the *Go Bike*, the public athletic group, is now an organizer there as well as the group’s media representative. Hadeer took it a step further apart from the early weekend cycling trips organized by Go Bike for the public to join at a relatively cheap expense (which is the entire point of this project) to use the bike regularly to and from her college and other destinations. Hadeer started this in 2014. Of course getting her father to agree to this was her biggest challenge. He aggressively objected that she

even buy a bike for herself. However, she was adamant in convincing him and showed him how this initiative is supported via all media outlets and now he goes himself to help her fix the bike when she needs it. Hadeer has been riding bicycles since she was seven years old, however around 13, when she hit puberty, she was forced to stop since it was not appropriate at all for her as an older girl to still do this in the streets of Cairo. Most definitely public mixed affordable athletic groups like Go Bike, Global Bicycle Initiative-GBI, Cairo Runners, Nile Kayak Club and The Hiking club have significantly changed this country's culture across so many levels. Undoubtedly the girls/women joining these privately self-funded initiatives face incredible cultural, religious and social stigmas from their parents, their social circles and the wider community around them. This is due to the fact that they are defying unfair cultural norms that have existed for years, trying gear women's lifestyle choices, gender roles and mobility to serve the dominant masculinities in our society as well as patriarchal norms that exist in Egypt.

Despite the existence of several outdoor active groups, I honestly have to applaud Ibrahim Safwat, Cairo Runner's (CR) founder, in particular for bringing in the virtually costless public running culture into our country all the way from France. I personally believe that CR and the undeniable role of how fast news and especially novelties spread online like wildfire via social apps like Facebook have caused this positive athletic turn among the youth of Egypt.

I remember purchasing a book which was one of its kind regardless of how incredibly simple it was, yet certainly impacted my life as an athletic woman in Egypt striving to make sports a crucial part of my everyday life Egypt despite the unwelcoming culture around me. The book "*The Diary of a Civilian on a Bicycle*" by Walaa El Hawary published in 2014 tells the tale of the daily struggle of the author and what she had to go through from every aspect of her life just to be able to ride her bicycle everywhere in Egypt and the immense challenges she had to

overcome and find solutions within her own family and the unforgiving streets of Cairo. The sweet simplicity of the book not only makes it an easy sincere read, but it sends several messages with every page you turn as reader. The passion to ride the bicycle, how many chords it struck with many Egyptian girls and the despair about all the challenges Walaa went through on a daily basis made it a bestseller in no time after its release. After the launch of this book and its widespread success in all media outlets and especially among athletic women like myself living in Egypt, the understanding of how important it was to continue to strive to immerse an athletic lifestyle in our public lives in Egypt for women became a passion more than a goal. It simply was a necessity to claim this basic right from our society. It was high time we added significant other options on how to lead our lives. We needed to change the culture, gender roles, and dynamics of our everyday lives and to defy the stigmas shackling us for being women.

All through my fieldwork, through interviewing my interlocutors of both sexes, I have concluded that if it weren't for these originally western based initiatives emerging in Egypt, there would be an extremely slim chance that girls and women especially would have to explore these life-changing options in Egypt.

Delving into one of the most prominent issues affecting the accessibility of the public spaces in Egypt, I would like to discuss the effects of gated communities on public spaces in Egypt. The expansion of gated communities began in the early 1980s along the beaches of the Northwest coast as holiday villages. Gated tourist villages spread along the coast of the Red Sea and the beaches of the Sinai (Morsey, 2012). Since the mid-1990's, a similar development has been observed in the new cities around Cairo. Private investors have been establishing luxurious gated settlements in the new cities for elites who wanted to disengage themselves from the capital city's problems. Egyptian gated communities (GCs) are dominant reflections of the

progressive trend towards privatization of housing and urban services. GC's have privatized public spaces such as streets, parks, squares and services by allowing only residents to use them. It includes private property and common private property that is collectively used. Egyptian gated communities represent the socio-political result of economic "neoliberalization" (ibid).

Shaimaa, professional hiker aged 30 spoke of how neighborhoods certainly affected her previously athletic lifestyle:

If I have an already busy schedule, adding sports late at night will not be an option for girls due to the curfews at home plus no running in the street at night alone will be welcome or even feasible. Accessibility of public spaces are limited with women. When I lived in tagamoa I was able to wake up early go for a run or cycle a bit in the area then go home to shower and go to work which was also in the same neighborhood. It is an elite clean neighborhood that somewhat accepts this.

Shaimaa who is a veiled professional hiker also comes from the upper middle class in Egypt. Both she and her sister suffered equally with their parents regarding hiking activities especially. Shaimaa played many sports like martial arts and cross fit. Hiking however was a problem with her family. Hiking meant travelling with strangers or friends in groups with no male family member since she has no brothers and staying overnight in a camp in the desert with no supervision or phone connections. It wasn't until a certain personal incident that took place that she was grudgingly given permission to travel alone and hike. The first time she hiked, her family insisted that her male cousin go with her and her sister. It was 'more appropriate' that way and 'safe'. Shaimaa later negotiated her right to travel alone, unsupervised and now her husband who is also a professional hiker co-founded The Hiking Club with her. They both manage trips separately and lead groups through various remote areas in Egypt. Shaimaa firmly believes that Islam cannot be blamed for the restriction she faced from her parents. She believes that religious texts are twisted and interpreted to taint our culture regarding how women lead their lives in Egypt.

The concept of gated communities is a new urban trend that grew quickly in the new suburbs around Cairo. Living in private, enclosed compounds has recently been associated with a distinctive and elite lifestyle. The prices for property purchase or rent even ensures that only a certain social class can have access to these areas. The trend in gated apartment complexes for the middle and upper middle classes has gradually increased and has greatly contributed to the possibility that renters will live behind gates. In the early 2000s, many GCs have been constructed and were spreading very fast all over the city, which was a result of selling large plots of state-owned land to the private sector and investors. More than forty luxury, gated communities were established within the city with different masses, styles and areas.

Applying a gender perspective to GCs reveals how women's public spaces have drastically been altered versus living in the older, downtown neighborhoods. The constant attempts to limit women's public spaces and confine her ability to migrate from the rural to the urban or provide employment opportunities in the urban equal to men has shaped the forms of urban development across the years in different regions. How the urban has become more welcoming or not to women is studied in contemporary urban theory. Associating the study of urban development with gender sheds light on many feminist issues in this regard. Throughout my interviews to women mostly, I can confidently say that I had unanimous agreement that for women especially who wanted to enjoy outdoor areas for any activity can best do that in the GCs of Cairo. Living in a GC provides many daily luxuries and certainly encourages women in particular to seek untraditional lifestyles given the privacy of these residential areas and the vast wide spaces in them versus the old crowded tightly packed neighborhoods of Cairo. Certainly riding a bicycle, jogging or walking within the safety of these areas is a significant factor to consider when comparing the same acts in crowded downtown Cairo almost any time of the day.

Many factors will affect women accessing these areas for sports. Unfortunately, sexual harassments and other safety issues are on top of the list.

The questions of women's accessibility to public spaces and discourses about safety can be researched through several angles in the context of GCs. From Harvey's text titled "*The Right to the City*", he defines the right to the city as being far more than the individual freedom to access urban resources: it is a right to change the city inhabitant's behavior by changing the city itself. It is moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this change certainly depends upon the exercise of a communal power to reshape the processes of urbanization (Harvey, 2008).

R*, who is a 22 year old professional female archery player, told me the following about the right to claim the streets:

As a young girl, I always felt that I did not have the same rights as boys like why wasn't I allowed to play in the streets since I was very outgoing. My family noticed that I was different from most girls, always wanting to play, outgoing and questioning what were my rights as a girl. I always noticed how boys can run around and play but girls must remain calm, collected and poised, dainty; not running around. Hence, I always had problems at school where my parents had to come meet the teachers. Sexual harassment happens because of this unacceptability of women in the public spaces. I deliberately walk between the tables and chairs of the local cheap street cafes, the *kahwa balady*, mostly dominated by men, while my mom avoids them altogether and walks on the other side actually, just to prove my right to exist on that pavement that they have blatantly decided to take for themselves. I feel very violated already. I feel that I am constantly teaching men in the street to show manners. I deliberately express that I am not intimidated. Every night I come home physically exhausted and drained from being aggressive in the streets just to retain my basic rights.

R* a graduate of the faculty of Political Science in Cairo University is one of the few professional athletes I had the pleasure of interviewing. I immediately was attracted to her ideas and her enthusiasm about my research during our two hour interview. R* comes from the middle class in Egypt. She is a hardworking student who earned herself a semester abroad in Washington. R* told me how this experience was basically groundbreaking for her. It changed many ideologies she always believed in and culturally made her question many things she never

really thought of. This experience made her more of a feminist and also encouraged her to read more about why our culture is rather restricting towards women if we compare to the majority of women living in the US for example. Her readings into religion, culture, philosophy and politics gave her the confidence to assure me that it is through religious texts, the different doctrines and interpretations that culture has been shaped into such an aggressive issue towards women in Egypt. Athletically she easily linked it to several texts and opinions she had read that made her want to change the cultural mindset in Egypt regarding women and sports. One of the reasons she wanted to participate in my study was for that specific purpose. At the end of our interview, she asked me why I took off the veil years ago. As I explained why, I could see her contemplating on if it was worth keeping it on or not. During our interview she told me how she wore it quite young and now she wishes she didn't wear it. The more she read about it, the less it made sense to her. R* despite her young age is a very accomplished young lady. I could see how she will certainly make a difference in how our culture views athletic women.

Nada a gymnastics instructor aged 26 comments:

My biggest challenge as a professional woman athlete was the curfews at home since staying out late is neither safe nor socially acceptable. This includes the mothers who drive their daughters back and forth from clubs at night after practice. The streets are unsafe for women attempting to use them for exercise or even simply roam them, especially at night.

Nada comes from the middle class in Egypt as well. She has been a sports enthusiast since her childhood. Interviewing her, she told me how her family and friends would constantly criticize her sport of choice and telling her how this would affect her future 'as a wife'. Nada had the needed self-confidence to pursue her dreams anyway, creating a goal perhaps different from the stereotypical idea of marriage and children. She told me that unless she finds a man who applauds what she does, she will gladly stay single.

The urban process has undergone a global transformation of scale. Quality of urban life has become a product, so has the city itself, in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge-based industries have become major aspects of the urban political economy (ibid).

The right to the city is too narrowly limited, restricted in most cases to the small political and economic elite who are in a position to shape cities more and more to suit their own needs without much regard to the rest of the population.

The book chapter from *Marginalizing Women* titled “Sexual Control of Women in Egypt’s Public Space” emphasizes how the government acted as if the only way to contain this perceived source of chaos was to punish and subjugate women, and restrict them – rather than those unable to control their desires – from public spaces (Dyer et al, 2013). It is the classic example of patriarchy in Egypt and how patriarchy and masculinities affect women athletes in Egypt that will be discussed in detail in Chapter three.

Introducing Women to the Athletic Scene:

In the journal article, *Outsiders: Muslim Women and Olympic Games – Barriers and Opportunities*, by Gertrud Pfister (2010), the text argues how the participation of women in the Olympic Games mirrors the development of women’s sports and women’s roles in society in general. In 1896, women were excluded from the games, which were considered to be a male domain, as they had been in ancient Greece. In the 1908 games in London, the percentage of female athletes was 2 per cent. Since then, the proportion of women rose slowly but steadily to reach over 42 per cent at the Beijing games in 2008 (Pfister 2010). However up to 1928, women were excluded from sports that involved visible exertion, physical strength or bodily contact. Thankfully this changed positively in the decades to come. The first team sport in which women were allowed to take part at the Olympic Games was volleyball in 1964. Team handball and basketball followed in 1976, football in 1996 and ice hockey in 1998. In 1984 cycling and the marathon were included in the women’s program, in addition to rhythmic gymnastics and

synchronized swimming, events in which exclusively women compete (ibid). Since then nearly all sports and disciplines, even those considered male domains such as wrestling, weightlifting, pole vaulting and hammer throwing have been opened to women. Especially in sports that have long been men's domains, the number of women participants is relatively small and therefore the chance of success is relatively high, so that it is not really surprising that federations promote their female athletes. This was a historical overview to how women were internationally introduced to sport irrespective of religion, culture or race.

The admission of women to sports, that almost a decade ago was quite out of the question for them, points to the change in women's roles and ideals of womanhood that has taken place in Western countries. Women are increasingly taking over responsibilities in sport, as well as in other areas of society, that a few years ago they would never have been either trusted or burdened with – and areas to which they were not admitted anyway. The 'feminization' of sport is multi-faceted, and also ambivalent (Pfister 2010). On the one hand, top performance requires the utmost exertion of women without any regard for their gender; on the other, the commercialization of sport has led to an increasing sexualization of media sports, as well as to the willingness of many sportswomen to sell themselves profitably with the help of their femininity and erotic attractiveness (Pfister 2010).

There are various reasons for the relatively low numbers of athletes from an Islamic background competing at the Olympics, among them the roots of modern sport in Western cultures, the lack of sporting traditions and the shortage of sporting infrastructure in Islamic countries, which is partly due to the economic situation (Pfister 2010). In areas of the world where the majority of the population struggles to survive, there is no surplus of resources to be dedicated to sport. While male athletes were more or less socially accepted in most Islamic

countries, women participating in sports competitions were a contradiction in terms for most of their rulers and more or less religious leaders, as well as for a large part of the population (Pfister 2010). Up until 1980, only women from secular countries, like Turkey, Indonesia and pre-revolutionary Iran, were given the opportunity to compete in elite sports and the Olympics. The first female Olympians from an Islamic country were two fencers from Turkey who participated in Berlin in 1936.

The number of female Muslim Olympians increased only slowly at the following games: five competed in Moscow in 1980, and 13 participated in the 1984 games, for the first time with women from Jordan (one) and Egypt (six) (Pfister 2010). Three Egyptian women had already qualified for the Olympic Games as early as 1960, but for uncertain reasons they did not participate. In 1984, six female athletes represented Egypt in diving, swimming and synchronized swimming. In 2008, 380 men and 127 women from Islamic countries competed in Beijing, representing respectively 6 per cent of all male and 3 per cent of all female athletes.

These figures are very low considering the large population of these countries. As already mentioned above, the overall percentage of female athletes at the 2008 Olympic Games was 42 per cent; the percentage of women among the athletes from Islamic countries, by contrast, was only 25 per cent. Three delegations (Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait) consisted of ‘men only’ teams at the Beijing games in 2008 (ibid).

Cairo Runners Project manager Abdulla Hussien aged 26 speaks about how this idea came across in Egypt:

Sometimes sports isn't accessible in Egypt, some people may be too timid to show their interest in sports. We try to create a welcoming environment for that purpose. For example, sometimes girls could be too intimidated to decide to go on a run solo in the streets. There are several factors for boys or girls that could affect the decision to run in the streets alone. There are no proper road/track for running, sports isn't part of our culture yet, accordingly people who decide to play sports look weird in the street. CR is

trying to break this taboo. There are some sports in the streets in Cairo popular for walks or runs like around the children's park in Nasr City making use of its vast pavement circling it, even as a man, the last time I decided to run there I was harassed. At CR we felt that people had become too dispersed and alienated from each other with nothing to hold us together, so we wanted to create a common ground with no particular biases, not religious, political or social, nor will we ever have anything to do with any other cause but running. On the contrary, we wanted to bring the community together despite our differences in a single passion. This was our goal. Also we wanted to make sports part of our culture, to make it not look so odd anymore. Maybe harassment will lessen, more support will be given. The way we organize our runs hopefully provides a safe zone for people especially girls to run in the street.

Abdulla an upper class young athlete is one of the people I highly respect in the athletic field. Abdulla a graduate of Misr International University has two sisters, both not athletic but without any influence from himself or his family. Actually one of his sisters has a medical condition that prevents her from playing most sports. During the Cairo Runners runs Abdulla motivates everyone to truly do their best, surpassing their abilities and provides an upbeat spirit that cannot be denied. During our interview Abdulla is careful to stress that religion has nothing to do with how our culture looks down on athletic women. His explanation is that the texts are twisted because it's a patriarchal society, but Islam does not forbid it. Abdulla also believes women should dress modestly in accordance to Islam and our conservative culture in the streets especially during running. He saw that it is a girl's responsibility to dress appropriately especially during running in the streets.

The journal article '*Veiled Women Athletes in the 2008 Beijing Olympics: Media Accounts, The International Journal of the History of Sport*' (Amara, 2012) also tells the tale briefly of how women were introduced to the athletic scene globally. The first Summer Olympic Games was held in 1896 in Athens, but women competed for the first time in next games in 1900 in Paris. An Egyptian woman made her first appearance in 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, 88 years after the first tournament, to become the fourth Arab woman to take part in the

Olympics after Algeria, Libya, and Syria. Since then, Egyptian women have taken part in every Summer Olympic Games (ibid).

The number of female Egyptian Olympic participants varied from their first appearance in the 1984 Summer Olympics which witnessed the participant of 6 women, which was the highest (6 sportswoman) till 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney (15 sportswoman). Since then, the number of participants increased at each tournament until it reached 37 women in the 2016 Summer Olympics.

Egypt did not have any female Olympic medalist for 120 years. In 10 August 2016, the Egyptian weightlifter Sara Ahmed became the first Egyptian female medalist by winning the bronze medal in the weightlifting 69 kg event by lifting total of 255 kg, she was also the first Arab woman to win an Olympic medal in weightlifting. The 18-year-old is also the first Egyptian woman to win an Olympic medal in the country's 104-year history at the Games. She lifted 112 kg in the snatch and 143 kg in the clean and jerk (ibid).

Sara Ahmed competed wearing a full-length spandex unitard and sport's hijab after the International Weightlifting Federation changed its rules in 2011 to allow women to compete in the longer garments - a move benefiting Muslim women. How the veil affects athletic women or not will be discussed in chapter three of this thesis.

As her podium finish was confirmed, she was seen breaking into tears and hugging her coach. This small well-deserved burst of emotion was heavily criticized in the local media outlets. After all, as per Islam, her coach was a 'stranger' not her brother or husband, how could she ever hug him?

O* a professional 37 year old rower spoke of her experience regarding this note.

The problem is that we actually do get attached to our coach and we might hug and kiss him after a victory. Apparently this gesture, this small moment of triumph where

emotions are shown was an issue with the clubs and federations. As absurd as it sounds, coaches would fight over us for that small moment; they would get to kiss and hug us.

The journal article by Martha Brady, 2005 titled '*Creating Safe Spaces and Building Social Assets for Young Women in the Developing World: A New Role for Sports*' discusses the emergence of athletics for women in the public sphere from another perspective. Brady stresses how the society is witnessing the convergence of two important trends: the international women's health and rights community's appreciation of sports as a legitimate field of action and inquiry, and the interests of women's sports advocates to reach beyond their traditional scope to incorporate broader health and development objectives into their agenda (Brady, 2005). This union provides a timely moment to reflect on the role sports play in creating safe spaces and building social assets for young women in the developing world. Egypt would be an adequate example of this. Simultaneously, it is important to unravel the bundle of both validated and alleged benefits of sports and to acknowledge their differential relevance and impact on girls' lives in diverse cultural and economic settings (ibid).

Although there are many similarities, yet important differences between the developed and the developing world still exist; thus a more customized analysis of the role of sports in young women's lives is needed at this point.

The Dynamics of Accessibility of Public Spaces on Athletic Women

Egyptian culture, regardless of the religion of choice, does not encourage women to equate themselves to men; this is empowered by ever-dominant Islamic values of course and the patriarchal state (Zaman, 1997). Women's participation in sport has raised the question of conditions for women and the struggle over their bodies in Muslim Middle Eastern societies as a

dominant research topic which is the crux of this thesis; the ownership of women's bodies in Egypt. Furthermore, it is also now a trend to become athletic and 'exposed' within upper class women. Sports started as a high class westernized demeanor hence it was easier to flow through the upper classes. Social awareness about the benefits of sports is slowly but steadily seeping through most social levels even the financially less fortunate ones. How social class intertwines with sports in Egypt will be deliberated in detail in chapter four.

Women and sports as a cause was used also not as a marker for secularism or conservativeness in a nation, but also used politically to symbolize the liberation of some women from oppressive regimes. Women's participation in sport is being used as an indicator to judge the level of progress and secularization or conservatism in Muslim Middle Eastern societies (Amara, 2012). 'Sport' as it is made available to Muslim women is largely perceived as both Western and masculine (Zaman, 1997). It is clear that a major problem surrounding participation is the ways in which sport, physical activity and physical education are organized and made available and not necessarily the activities themselves. If this society genuinely wants to increase the participation of young Egyptian women, then Muslim values, which unfortunately control most of the cultural norms in Egypt, need to adapt to embrace modernity and help these young girls integrate athletically in the public spheres instead of confine and hold them back in the name of religion or traditions.

The concern of parents has partly developed because physical activity is presented in a westernized leisure form which falls outside of religious and cultural activities (Zaman, 1997). Thus even with women-only sessions, there is a belief that physical activity is a Western activity and whose daughters may lose their traditional Arab values as perceived by their parents (ibid). This explains why the older generations frown upon sports for women especially in rural areas

where sports for women is considered upper-class, westernized and ‘un-Islamic’. In the west, sports were introduced as a means of looking prettier, sexier and more appealing to the opposite sex, not for the purpose of general health (ibid). This very notion represents exactly the opposite of what most Egyptian girls/women are brought up to believe or embrace. Our culture unfortunately demands modesty and asexuality from the girls/women living in it (ibid). Seeking to look publicly ‘sexy’ is certainly off limits. Hence, perhaps if promoting sports as a means of keeping God’s temple (one’s body) cleaner, or to become better, healthier, more attractive brides, or to prove that a girl/woman comes from a westernized upper social class, undertaking sports as a lifestyle might actually be more accepted.

K*, aged 40 shares his perspective on how sports is demonized mainly for being part of westernized culture:

It has to do with how society frames the normality of how women should act and behave within a particular class. Embracing traditional oriental culture vs westernized elite norms could be the reason for this. The more upward mobility a person has, the more exposure they would have to other cultures and mindsets through travel and perhaps foreign education or any pattern of socialization, so ultimately how they perceive the interpretation of gender becomes more westernized. There are no set roles for both genders in that case. An exposed person gains a more flexible understanding of how women should behave versus the more traditional norms assumed at their origins in Egypt. This applies to both genders. Enough exposure causes this to be routinized, a different mindset and point of view is adopted due to that exposure. The accustomization of seeing women lead their lives very differently than women in Egypt especially within lower classes leads to this adaptation. It becomes normal. I think if people got exposed to more and more westernized approaches, the stereotypical gender roles will also differ. They will view the ‘different’ roles of women as normal. Also. the younger generation (ours) has zero tolerance towards these inconveniences and injustice as our previous generations have endured. The mothers taught their daughter to fight back and rebel. Public spaces do not exist for either gender in Egypt. No respect for privacy anyway. No demarcation of what private and public spheres are in Egypt for both genders. As Egyptians this just doesn’t exist. But the reaction towards women tends to be more aggressive than for men. The lower classes would feel more inclined to judge harsher than upper classes, due to lack of western exposure and education at times. Society has been become more exposed, westernized, is more globalized with more internet penetration. Internet exposure has significantly risen in the entire MENA region. Consumerism as increased, desires for more active lifestyles has increased encouraging

this trend to grow in the recent years versus the past 10 or 15 years. Sports are certainly a westernized notion. Single independent women now are seeking to prove themselves through a variety of different things, adopting these sports is one of them.

As mentioned before K's diversified upbringing between The US, Egypt and Saudi Arabia makes his opinion unique and highly critical in my point of view.

Certainly when comparing not only the figures concerning women's participation from Egypt in the recent years, but also the type of sports they are competing in regardless of their attire, it would be safe to say how many stereotypes and gender-related norms are literally being crushed to the ground despite the religious clerics and relatively conservative society in Egypt. This in itself serves as a very promising future for athletic women of all social levels.

Although there is evidence in support of the many theories related to sport in Western contexts, not many of them have been empirically tested in the developing world. Moreover, as important as these benefits are for girls and women in developed countries, their meaning and relevance in the developing world are less clear or coherent.. For example, in much of the developing world young women are often very physically active by virtue of the heavy work burden they carry domestically or distances they walk, and at the same time chronic diseases are not typically considered major public health problems in many developing countries (Brady 2005). Aside from the newly emerging obesity phenomenon that is affecting mainly middle-class urban populations as they shift toward more western patterns of consumption and dietary habits, physical fitness in and of itself has not been a convincing argument for sport in the developing world unfortunately. What is perhaps much more important, and potentially more powerful, has to do with access to and use of the public space and girls' and women's visibility in the public sphere.

The accessibility and acceptability of women to share and make use of the public spaces in Egypt athletically has been and still is a major issue hindering girls from being athletic. For a girl to pursue sports in Egypt, she certainly must be a member in a private safe space like a gym or a club. To simply decide to go for a run can easily compromise her life in Cairo. Adolescence is a time when the world expands for boys and contracts for girls in many cases around the world, especially in patriarchal cultures, and gender inequalities in opportunity and expectations become particularly distinct (Sawala, 2014). Adolescent girls have narrowed social networks and few shared usually private spaces in which they can gather to meet with peers, receive mentoring support, and or acquire special skills. Girls' lives become increasingly restricted to the domestic sphere, adding curfews and excessive rules to abide to within households. These rules differ according to class sometimes. This is done to supposedly protect these young girls from dangers outside the home and to prepare them for future conventional social roles of wife and mother. This discrepancy between girls' and boys' access to their peers and to public spaces begins in childhood and unfortunately is aggravated in adolescence.

Cultural norms and conditions determine that it is unsafe or unacceptable for girls to go out in public, limiting girls' physical mobility. Although parents are concerned about the well-being of all of their children, they tend to control their daughters' movements more tightly than their sons' - in some instances for good reason. Fearing the watchful gaze of males, the temptation of unapproved or illegal activities, as a simpler solution no matter how unfair that may be, parents tend to protect their daughters by isolating them at home (ibid). The result is that girls' mobility is restricted, narrowing their options for full participation in public life. Some parents go to the extent of depriving girls from getting a proper education, and opting for an

early marriage, regardless of how harmful it will be for her. She will now be ‘someone else’s problem’ to deal with. Her whereabouts will not taint her family, only her husband.

Shaimaa, a professional hiker aged 30 says:

It’s really easier for boys to be athletic and physical in any way in the street since they are not sexually harassed, they are accepted in public spaces doing anything really. The risks they face and precautions they take (if any at all) are far less than what girls do if they wanted to do the same thing. It’s even way cheaper for them, they can just play football in the street vs going to an expensive gym. Very few public spaces welcome women due to prevalence of sexual harassment, it is unsafe, and too much stress. So for women private spaces are much more convenient. Most of our society sadly believes that women have no place other than their homes in the end. Furthermore concerns like traveling and curfews make it harder for women to pursue the same or even different life goals in our society.

The masculinities and patriarchal dynamics of women’s mobility will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

Back to the limitations of public spaces for women, the safety of the girl participants is important to prevent them from being sexually assaulted or harassed. Security measures are necessary to provide safety in stadiums, gyms and playing grounds during coaching and training, and competitions (Sawala, 2014). And for this reason the majority of my interlocutors refused attempting to work out in public spaces in Egypt and sometimes some women were afraid of training individually with male coaches not within groups. Like the idea of Cairo Runners, GBI, Go Bike and the like, groups provide safety. Public spaces in Egypt do not ensure a woman’s safety nor are they properly equipped for safe workouts regardless of the gender. However the issue of safety for athletic women although was the primary concern within my interlocutors and their parents, has also proven to become an issue in the US which is unarguably classified as a first world country, not a developing country like Egypt.

In the US, a company launched a self-defense tool specifically designed for female joggers called *Go Guard*. ‘As much as we hate having to think this way, it’s reality that women are the victims of sexual assault far more often than men. Although the U.S. Department of Justice does not have available statistics for attacks on runners, we do know that women out on their own face dangers their male counterparts simply do not. Just this past summer (2017) saw the murders of three female joggers in the space of nine days, sparking fear in women who typically enjoy running by themselves’ claimed the website advertising this product. The creator of the product is a runner herself and decided to invent a self-defense option for women who run solo. She said, “It is not my intent to incite a culture of fear for woman, but the sad truth is that horrible things do happen, and I truly believe we need to take whatever steps possible to keep ourselves safe.”

It is certainly a clever way to market such a product and I cannot claim myself that this statement is untrue regardless of the available statistics on this topic here or abroad, however when I read about it, I kept thinking how useful this tool would be just for walking in the streets of Cairo in broad daylight, not at night and not necessarily jogging. When I suggested buying this device to my interlocutors, the majority of them saw what a brilliant idea it was to further protect ourselves in the public spaces of Egypt where sexual harassment and sexual assault happens to over 99.3% of women (UN Women, 2013). Furthermore this is merely a stiff sharp plastic ring shaped like a large claw worn on the index finger with a razor sharp plastic tip and a silicone cover on top of it so the person wearing this ring would not be accidentally harmed, so it’s technically not a ‘weapon’, it’s an innocent piece of plastic in the eyes of the law, yet sufficient enough to cause permanent damage to an attacker’s eye or even let him bleed to death if the neck is punctured.

On safety and women playing sports in Egypt, here are some of the comments during my interviews regarding this issue:

Jessie, a 36 year old professional motor bike rider and a single mother commented:

I can confidently say how without Cairo Runners (CR) no girl or girls would dare run the streets of Cairo on a regular basis. CR changed a perception the society had towards the existence of women in public spaces running or walking. Even the health interest took place, also safety of course which is a huge factor. Plus all kinds of women dressed differently join the runs. We needed an initial push for this to happen. What made you feel safe is that there are organizers to go to; you are supported and not alone. Plus we run in well-known public streets early in the morning on a weekend. Furthermore most definitely women are not welcome in the public spaces of Egypt. And this certainly affects the ability of women to play sports in the street. We only have the option to play in private spaces. This also discourages parents to let their daughters use the streets as a space for sports. Most of the parents who called to ask about biking for their kids asked if people harassed or assaulted us and we dealt with it. Safety was the biggest concern, safety of the streets and the people's reaction towards us. What extent is the harassment? And this was a very valid concern. One of my very serious accidents happened because four guys in a car decided to close up on me on my bike once they found out I was a girl and I made a horrible accident because of that as they ran away in their car laughing, I was literally about to die. This was the scariest experience ever. This was almost a year ago at around 10 pm. I was carefully abiding to my own lane, then unfortunately they saw a tip of my red hair beneath my helmet so they stuck to my back tires, opened the bright light, I was trying to avoid them, I tripped, got a concussion and spent months recovering physically and mentally. Also class and western exposure play a significant role in the acceptability of the athletic woman in Egypt. People exposed to the west are usually are of higher classes are far more accepting of this change so social class certainly makes a difference.

Jessie is a close friend of mine who is a very strong and unique woman as well. Jessie also strives to break the cultural stereotypes around women in Egypt choosing to live their lives away from social norms and traditions. She is a single mother who not only is a professional motor biker, she is also a professional make-up artist. Jessie is unveiled, but very religious. She believes that it's the culture not really the religion that is the reason behind this aggression towards women in Egypt. Her experience with public spaces was very interesting and enlightening to me. Being a woman who publicly rides motorcycles is not only unorthodox but it dangerous given the infrastructure in the streets of Egypt.

O*, a veiled 37 year old professional rower tells her experience as an athlete in Egypt:

I went through a lot to be able to swim in the swimming pool's women hours only. I had to wake up extra early, get on horrid means of transportation (I had no car and could not afford taxis) to get the club just as the women's hours started in the pool, and I would stay until it was time to close up. These hours were sacred to me. Cairo Runners definitely changed the social perception in Egypt and I could personally kiss them myself for that. I used to run in the streets of Cairo since 1996, to warm up since the rowing clubs are too tiny for mass warm ups, the only solution was to run in the streets. We were a group of girls at 7 am who ran the streets around the clubs which are not gated communities, high class areas, on the contrary. And we ran the streets wearing spandex or tight pants because that's what we rowed with. It was hell. And this applied to both the higher and lower ends of Cairo. Even the soldiers guarding embassies along with all the passersby, people waiting for the bus, merchants...everyone harassed us, even girls in the street would make fun of us. Once we were rowing in a narrow poor part of the Nile (Kasr el Ainy), suddenly stones were thrown at us and we were cursed just because we were girls rowing! This is why I know what I am talking about when I say the Cairo Runners changed the perception of women playing sports since I used to run in the streets of Cairo for years (2 decades) before their emergence. My friends used to beg me to join the runs, but because of the s**t I endured for years, I just loathe running in the streets. It is something I hate because I've seen the ugliest side of running in the streets. I ran everywhere around the Nile. Downtown Cairo was a nightmare. Our streets mostly have men lingering in them not women, and we were fair game to anyone in it. I had to tailor special pants that were lightweight, athletic, fit for running and rowing as wide as I can possibly endure just so I don't feel the guilt of perhaps sexually appealing to anyone and so I feel less guilty about existing in the street. I did not want to feel like I was seducing anyone. My existence in the street is not an invitation to be inspected in the street from head to toe. I did not know that harassment is wrong; I thought it was the norm, so I had to take my own precautions. Apart from the kind of verbal harassment we endure as we row is horrendous, the kind of people who exist under the bridges of the Nile are mostly thugs, drug addicts and scum of the society basically. The verbal harassment we got implied that our coach wanted something sexual from us. We are rowing to go to a destination to have sex basically; this is how low it got. This came from kids and men who harassed us. Egypt has no knowledgeable access to public spaces but in my opinion for both genders. If you do not comply with the social conformity around you, the public space will not tolerate you regardless of your gender. Furthermore the Islamic speeches encourage women to stay at home, this certainly encourages having no public spaces for women.

O* is also one of the few senior professional athletes I had the pleasure of interviewing.

Throughout our long two hour interview I could see her struggle as she told me her story of how she defied her middle class community, her friends and family as she chose to take on rowing professionally. I could see how the more aggression she faced in her life; the more it fuelled her to become better athletically. O* believes from all her heart how religion is the main reason our

society has developed a hostile culture regarding women in general and especially ones who choose to take on different untraditional paths in life like sports. O* told me her plan to take the loose relaxed veil she was wearing off once she migrates to Canada with her husband in May of this year.

When speaking about the gender differences in use of public space and freedom of mobility, typically, the kinds of public spaces that are seen as legitimate venues for females are markets, health clinics, tailors, basically those that confine females to fulfilling their domestic roles as homemakers and mothers (Brady, 2005). In contrast, appropriate public spaces for males are less narrowly defined and are not necessarily linked to their gender roles in any sense. Often females can only enter some public spaces if they are accompanied by a male family member. I remember how my husband looked at horror to me when I suggested going to a governmental youth center in Giza. He was not mocking me at all; he just couldn't believe how I naively thought I could access such a place alone, unveiled as a researcher at AUC, an American establishment. In this way, "public space" de facto becomes "men's space" (Brady, 2005).

Because of male scholars' preoccupation with women's "prohibited spaces," which they could not observe or access, they failed to see the ways in which social spaces were divided by other markers, such as class, the kind of activities taking place in them, or rural, urban, and nomadic differences (Sawala, 2014). The Arab elites' urban gendered spaces became the main framework of analysis of Arab and Islamic societies. Spaces where men and women coexisted—for example, open spaces in rural agricultural areas where women worked alongside men or the mixed spaces of nomadic communities where gender segregation was not practiced—were left

unmentioned. But then again for the majority, it is still unfortunately only the upper middle class to the elite that have access to sports in Egypt.

Through participant observation and engagement with people using private spaces, women scholars have closely described and analyzed the private sphere of women, challenging the rhetoric that Muslim women are the victims of a patriarchal system and instead presenting them as capable agents who have some control of their own space. Reading Lila Abu Lughod's "*Do Muslim Women really need saving?*" (2002) was one of them. As much respect as I have for Abu Lughod, throughout this essay and a few others, I could not help but think how unrealistic her analysis is; especially after my extensive fieldwork in this domain. The comment I heard the most from my interviewees was how they wished the state had more means of welcoming women into the public space just as legitimately as men do. Even the current set laws regarding sexual harassment and sexual assault until now are very difficult to implement, let alone report to the existing authorities. It is very important for young girls whose parents need to understand the benefits of sports allowing them to participate in and out of school activities and feel comfortable ensuring that the environment is safe for physical activities and sports (Sawala, 2014).

Certainly the text titled *Gender, Public Space and Social Segregation in Cairo: Of Taxi Drivers, Prostitutes and Professional Women* by Anouk De Koning, 2009 relates heavily to the topic at hand. For many middle-class women the car had become an indispensable, if for some unfortunately an unachievable, item. The privacy and seclusion of the car allows upper class women to dress in their preferred way and protected them from unwanted encounters. Taxis presented a favorite, but expensive option for many non-car owners (De Koning, 2009). In contrast to the stories of danger and defilement that surrounded public transport, the car thus

became the symbol for and guarantor of a perfect world of professional life, self-representation and respectable socializing (ibid). The public lifestyles of young upper-middle-class women depended on the financial means to sit in certain places and to take certain modes of transport—in short, to move exclusively in upmarket Cairo (Armbrust 1996). The same applies to athletics for women. Many conditions need to be considered. If a woman chose to work out alone in a public space in Egypt, she would basically have to endure the endless inconveniences and nuisances of public transportation in addition to considering carefully what to wear, what time it was and how long will the dreadful commute be, and of course suffer from sexual harassment and sexual assault, hence then staying at home to work out to a Youtube video maybe or seek the comfort of an expensive gym or club seems like a more convenient ‘safer’ option.

Muslim women's participation in sports is furthermore seen as an indication that they are becoming more liberated and Western. For example, when Afghan sprinter Robina Muqimyar competed in the 2004 Summer Olympics, Western media sources praised her for exchanging the burqa, which they saw as inherently oppressive, for sports attire. Mahfoud Amara labels this type of coverage as "culturally imperialistic", as it measures Muslim women's freedom and wellbeing by whether or not they conform to Western athletic norms and expectations. On the other hand, Muslim female athletes often face criticism and scrutiny when they do not conform to Western athletic ideals (Amara, 2012). The underlying formation of patriarchy has not changed but instead has been gilded and disguised (Fernea, 2003). As with the ‘westernized’ concept of physical activities in Egypt prevalent in certain upper social classes for both genders, however across the mainstream public sports with women is still problematic. Women’s bodies and public visibility are a central concern in Islamic culture (Benn et al, 2012). Basically women’s participation in the sporting arena is disputed because the dominant western sporting culture can

lead to high visibility of women's bodies and public mixed sex arenas which directly objects to how Islam views women's bodies. The effect and impact of religion and culture in Egypt on athletic women will be discussed in detail from several perspectives in chapter three of this thesis.

Concluding Notes

After displaying the relevant texts for this topic and engaging with all of my interviewees, I can confidently express how the challenges facing women as they struggle to maintain a healthy athletic lifestyle has certainly taken a curve towards a better future. However the hardships still remain to pose as a significant hindrance to most of them. To access the public spaces in Egypt, mixed public athletic groups like Cairo Runners, GBI (Global Bicycle Initiative), Go Bike and other groups serving the same purpose was mainly how women got access and an extent of acceptability within our public spaces. I honestly cannot see this happening without the much valued and respected intervention of these groups in Egypt.

These self-funded initiatives mainly based on the exposure of the founders of them to western cultures serve as a main gateway for our society to now gradually start accepting women athletes take part and claim their right to exist in the public spaces of Egypt. It is because of these groups, that girls/women in Egypt across several social levels along with the consent of their somewhat apprehensive parents are further encouraged to embark on the discovery of the beauty of outdoors activities instead of having the single choice of working out in closed private areas where some girls do not have the needed financial leverage to even make possible for themselves.

Chapter three

The Interplays of Patriarchy with Women and Sports in Egypt

“The misapprehension about gender performativity is this: that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning, that there is a 'one' who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will be today.”

— [Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"](#)

“Some women being empowered does not prove the patriarchy is dead. It proves that some of us are lucky.”

— [Roxane Gay, Bad Feminist](#)

Chapter Introduction:

This chapter in my thesis has many references to how our culture laced with religious references impacted the everyday lives of women athletes in Egypt. Defining our culture is neither absolute nor of high relevance to this thesis, however knowing that cultures evolve in nations according to several rubrics including factors like global exposure, economic development, religion and state politics would make a difference in understanding why a reference to religion's role in the restrictions surrounding the lives of women athletes in Egypt is made here within this thesis.

When looking at how religion, namely Islam affected the social norms in a non-secular country like Egypt, the scene differs tremendously across the years. The “Islam” during Abdel Nasser in the 50's and the “Islam” during the Sadat in the 70's and the years after that are very different, although the religious texts never really changed. I am concerned about what Islam

meant to both the state and the Egyptian people across several social levels within the different eras. It is how the religion was defined and presented that has affected the cultural heritage surrounding women's lives in Egypt.

So what actually changed?

Rabab Kamal's book, published in 2018 titled "*Women in the realm of Islamic Fundamentalism*". goes through the many details defining how Islam influenced how women lead their social lives in Egypt from the 1950's up until now. Islam is formally represented in Egypt through the moderate representation of Islam named Al-Azhar Al Shareef and Dar El-Iftaa. Both are well-established Islamic governmental institutions that have played integral roles in Egypt socially and politically. Al Azhar was established in 960 and Dar El Iftaa in 1895. Not that I need to point out how each presidential era dealt with both institutions, however the political motives behind reinforcing them or stripping their powers away must be mentioned. These political agendas and motives prompted each president to use religion to serve their own purposes yet in the process women's lives were impacted socially.

When I interviewed my interlocutors about why do they think women athletes might have restrictions or issues as they choose to lead this lifestyle in Egypt, most said 'culture', others said 'religion', and the majority said 'culture that is influenced by religion'. These deductions need to be analyzed. When I asked, what the distinction between culture and religion was, most interlocutors saw that religious texts do not state clearly anything anti-sports for women, rather it is how our society sees women in certain roles, outfits and public demeanor through the interpretation of the religious clerics blessed by the governing state. The texts itself are not totally condemning towards women. Reading through fatwas from Azhar and other religious institutions in Egypt, I saw what my interlocutors wanted to convey. There were clear cut fatwas

forbidding sports for women fortifying these restrictions were indeed sunnah and quranic verses that were carefully interpreted to validate these fatwas. The problem with religious interpretation is that it depends on the cleric's own ideologies, his social class and which Islamic doctrine he is personally following among other issues. The ideology of the clerics in religious institutions differs from one presidential era to the other. Perhaps it could be that these numerous religious interpretations and fatwas that have influenced the public to view women athletes negatively? It certainly could be.

Examples of how Azhar was given leverage or halted in its tracks by the political scene in Egypt across the years can be shown in many cases. For example it was Gamal Abdel Nasser who called for the establishment of the Azhary education in 1961. This was done since he wanted to control this eminent religious entity to serve his own political agenda and not because he was in favor of Azhar's teachings. Gamal Abdel Nasser highly encouraged all sorts of arts and culture to flourish in Egypt at the time caring more about a sense of 'nationalism' in the country rather than a 'unity in the name of religion'. During Abdel Nasser's era there was hardly any Islamic social symbols like the veil for example. Even pictures of girls in Azhary classes were unveiled in that era despite being inside an Islamic institution. It should be noted that now no women are allowed inside Azhar without a headscarf. Nasser made sure to tighten his grip on Azhar not letting this establishment socially intervene in depth with the social scene in Egypt (Kamal,2018). Nasser sought to form a unity among the Egyptian people during his presidency, men and women alike. He believed that women were needed in his national project as well, he did not want to undermine them in the name of religion. Accordingly Azhar would be more lenient towards women's religious issues in efforts to be Nasser's ally. Nasser wanted to maintain a modern version of Islam. He refused to enforce the veil as well. Then the total

opposite happened with El-Sadat in the 70's. This is the era where the Gulf's petroleum lured many Egyptians to migrate there, make more money than they would in Egypt and adopt the extremely conservative Salafi Wahabi version of Islam along the way. Money talks in the end. Sadat, on the other hand had a different plan to Abdel Nasser's agenda. Sadat first and foremost needed to win over the Egyptian population since Nasser had an unprecedented popularity that would be hard to surpass. To do that he needed to abolish any supporters for Nasser. Accordingly he resorted to the Muslim Brotherhood radical Islamic group. It should be noted that Nasser had imprisoned many of the MB members and were heavily fuelled against him. Sadat began to 'islamacize' Egypt legally and socially. It was Sadat that gave a direct order to Islamicise all the personal laws in Egypt. Armoured with the Gulf countries Wahabi approach, Azhar was given much more liberty than when Nasser was president. Sadat was nicknamed 'the pious president'. It was El-Sadat that made the constitutional amendment in the second article that paved the way to many laws that stripped away women of their rights under the broad umbrella of Islamic Sharia (ibid).

Egypt knew the term "constitution" around 1882, however the first and most famous was the 1923 constitution, this was one of the most liberal constitutions in Egypt, article 2 (in our current constitution) was written down in article 149 in the 1923 constitution, stating that Islam is the state's religion and Arabic is the official language. This remained unchanged throughout the various political & social chaos and events since then up until 1971 when El-Sadat drafted a new amendment causing an abrasive non-secular turn in the Egyptian constitution, this very seemingly general article was moved from being number 149 to become article 2 giving it unprecedented importance and adding to that move the following text as well: "And the Islamic Shari'a is one of the main legislative sources in the state".

El Sadat had this done to score points with the political Islam parties at the time as a counterattack towards Nasser's Supporters. By having the political Islam groups as allies, El-Sadat could easily silence Abdel Nasser's supporters. Elsadat's plan was to have the political islam groups at the time influence the public opinion to be on his side especially since his policies were completely different from those of the late president which did not appeal to most of the Egyptians at the time.

Then another constitutional amendment was made by el sadat in 1980 aiming to prolong the presidential periods in the country. Once again he sought to please the political Islam groups since they started gaining ample momentum thanks to his imminent support for purely political reasons just to influence the public positively with this amendment. Needless to say, El-Sadat paid dearly for trusting the political Islam groups so naively. Furthermore this very article was given yet another amendment this time fortifying the role of the Islamic Sharia. The amendment read: **Islam is the religion of the state and the Islamic sharia principles are the main legislative sources in the state** (taking out the phrase "is one of the main"), making the sharia the only powerful single main source of legislation. And this was the beginning of the discriminatory issues women face every day in several domains yet within a legal frame since it's now "constitutional" to refer to the sharia in all matters governing all civilians including women of course.

As if this amendment wasn't powerful enough, later around 2007 some political Islam groups called for yet another amendment, they asked that article 2 states that Islamic Sharia's governing provisions rather than principles be the main source of legislation. The many detailed, controversial, debatable, uncertain, intricate provisions in Islam are extremely patriarchal and heavily biased against women. This call was particularly made after Egypt signed the CEDAW

agreement (signed in 1980) incriminating all types of violence & discrimination against women. The CEDAW considers forcing young minor girls into marriages and performing FGM procedures which are not condemned in any sense in the Islamic Sharia to be a major serious violation. If this article was amended in the proposed way, literally all violations and discriminations against women from the slightest to the most severe could be deemed as “lawful” & “constitutional”. Needless to say, this proposal was later rejected. And FGM was legally incriminated in 2008.

Consequently, the Muslim political groups claimed that this legal incrimination was “unconstitutional” since it does not comply with even the principles of the Islamic Sharia, again, the supreme constitutional court dismissed the case in 2013, stating that it is not unconstitutional, since relying on principles differs from provisions in Islam. However, this gives you an idea of how the political Islam groups sought to strip women of every legal right for incrimination in case of violence or discrimination, all under “Islam”.

Having religion’s role be highlighted in a nation by the governing authorities consequently has an accumulative social effect. It is this social effect that is my concern when interlocutors expressed how ‘religion and culture’ had a role in why they were restricted to play sports.

Needless to say how far Azhar used its given political power from the governing state interfered with issuing social fatwas especially the ones pertaining to women’s reached its height in the 70’s once Sadat was president then again after the 2011 revolution when Morsey was president. Up until now President El-Sisi is being heavily challenged calling for a ‘religious reform’ from Azhar to work on the many decrees and fatwas that hinder the nation’s social progression, whether it pertains to women or not.

Dar El Iftaa in 2004 declared that Yoga is haram (forbidden in Islam) because is evolved from pagan and hindu rituals. Therefore using it to meditate or pray is forbidden in Islam. In 2015 Azhar declared that women should not perform sports in the presence of males and whatever sport she decides to do must not compromise her femininity as well as show sacred parts of her body meaning anything other than her face and hands (Kamal, pp138-139, 2018).

As vague and foreign as these fatwas may seem, however it was declarations like these and other more restrictive fatwas that have helped shape a culture not particularly tolerant of athletic women in Egypt.

As displayed above, it would not be fair to suggest that Islam, as broad as it is, as diversified and as localized as it is, is the main reason for the hardships women go through in Egypt. Rather, it is how much power the political parties in our nation decide to grant to the representations of religion in Egypt . Furthermore the Islam practiced locally in Egypt in 2018 differs from what took place in 1950, in 1980 as well as other Islamic countries, secular countries or even non-arab, non-secular Islamic countries. Time, political agendas and location makes a world of a difference when analyzing how Islam affects women athletes in Egypt.

Objectively speaking, some of my interlocutors view Islam, as they choose to define it, as their identity, their sense of pride, despite any hardships they go through due to some restrictions from the religion like wearing the veil while working out for example.

Accordingly, they attribute their hardships to ‘culture’ rather than the religion. How intertwining both are vary & evolve heavily across time, locations and social classes as well.

Through multiple sources in this chapter, I aim to discuss the main challenges confronting athletic women in Egypt regardless of their faith, as they face society, religion and culture in a hegemonic context adamant on defying them and their athletic skills and lifestyles

through the different perceptions of patriarchy, feminism and gendered roles in Egypt. However, the available literature discussing the various patriarchal and social discourses surrounding Egyptian women athletes in Egypt are mainly concerning Muslim women. Yet, it would be fairly naïve to discuss the various rhetoric of patriarchy and masculinities complexes women athletes in Egypt learn to deal with without discussing how Islam, the dominant prevailing religion in the country, affects that rhetoric. Save the issue of the veil, I argue that most social and cultural restrictions instigated towards athletic women in Egypt stem mainly from the at times patriarchal and misogynistic cultural heritage laced by religious interpretations. Even Christian minorities in Egypt surround their daughters with the same traditional patriarchal restrictions as a means of fitting in culturally with the rest of the community around them. In some cases, as I found, the Christian Orthodox in particular retain many practices similar to the confinement of the Islamic sharia. Accordingly, hereafter referring to how athletic women defy society's patriarchal social norms is meant to portray how the general pool of Egyptian athletic women within the different social classes manage their athletic lives amidst the prevailing patriarchy in Egypt irrespective of their faith.

Speaking of women's rights regarding sports, Al Azhar which supposedly represents the beacon or a minaret of 'the moderate version of Islam in Egypt' as described above, handles this issue just as severely as fundamentalists (Salafits) do, devising Islamic based Sharia laws for Muslim women to abide to, just to play sports. To begin with, it must be done in a women-only environment (2015). This fatwa came after many girls who wanted to embark on sports however were concerned about the religious aspect of it. Furthermore, a Muslim athletic woman should not deter from her feminine boundaries and must not reveal her awra (the sacred parts of her body).

And then we dare ask how after these religious fatwas, why do religion and the society negatively affect athletic women? This is basically a backdoor for forbidding or banning women from playing sports, using several religious justifications. Furthermore, who sets the definitions of femininity for Al Azhar? It's an extremely broad & vague concept to issue a fatwa upon. Would then weight-lifting for women be Islamically forbidden (haram)? This is where negative aggressive public attitudes and resentment towards international Egyptian champions like Farida Othman or Nour El-Sherbiny stem from, since both wear revealing clothes according to certain interpretations of Islam. The religious hostility towards Egyptian women athletes encourages women to seek private gyms, choose feminine sports in indoor closed areas, even sometimes at an Islamic gym, too (Kamal, 139, 2018). Conforming sports to Islamic sharia rules was a major concern with most of my interlocutors, oddly enough, regardless of their actual faith. It is a matter of conforming to social appropriateness that is mainly derived from Islamic contexts rather than a certain religious text per se. If it's not *haram* (forbidden by Islam), then it's certainly *aaaib* (inappropriate, ill-mannered). B*, a 20 year old female student tells an interesting story at her girls only school in one of the governorates concerning her Christian classmates:

Even in high school, again segregated of course, Christian girls who are supposed to wear whatever they wanted, at least not a veil like us, were not allowed to wear half-sleeves or trousers and Christian girls were asked to pull their hair back in a ponytail or a bun. If our rigid principal who put these weird rules could cut their hair off, she actually would have. Although, luckily, Christianity does not set a certain outfit for women, however the Muslim principal we had did. And of course all Muslim girls must wear the veil. Even when once a Christian girl complained about having to wear long sleeves in the summer, the principal told her that in her churches you portray the Virgin Mary all covered up as well as the nuns, so you must abide to them anyway as examples of piety and common decency. And there were a lot of Christians at school with it being the only secondary school for girls in the city. All of our parents actually were happy to enforce this restriction regarding clothes, regardless of the religion, out of society norms rather than religion. It taught us discipline and responsibility concerning our own bodies they told us.

B* is an undergrad AUC student on a full scholarship program. B* comes from El-Menofeya one of the Egyptian governorates. B* comes from the middle class and has been in governmental schools all her life. Her English is neither fluent nor like most AUC students who come from rich pre-college education. Coming to AUC has changed a lot in her. B* met me wearing a full veil with loose baggy practical clothing. She is a feminist. She spoke very passionately about how and why she joined the varied student initiatives that support women at AUC and immediately asked to contribute to my research once she heard about it via Facebook. Despite residing on campus right across from the lavish gym at AUC, she never really went there. When I asked her why she wanted to do this interview since she's not athletic, she replied how she has always encountered situations with both her friends and family that classified her body as sacred, making sports unappealing and inappropriate. When I asked where she thought this was stemming from, she did not hesitate to reply that it was because of our cultural heritage that is heavily endorsed by Islam in its many broad definitions. B*a told me of her plans to take off the veil once she becomes financially independent from her family. She told me that although her father didn't care much about her actions or whereabouts, the veil is a totally other different issue.

Sports as described in chapter two is westernized, un-Islamic, un-Arab and frowned upon since it is deemed 'not within our identity' as an Egyptian culture, regardless of the faith. The needs of athletic women in Egypt often conflict with the contexts of our cultural heritage, the prescribed gender roles for women and the Egyptian social norms which all mesh easily into each other with little distinction between them, more importantly, they all share the common trait of being patriarchal and misogynistic towards women in certain aspects. Additionally, it would be necessary to acknowledge how each person's relationship with religion and culture is

unique and therefore a broad generalization in this analysis of my thesis regarding the social, moral and cultural discourses of athletic women in Egypt would deem the studies made inaccurate.

Patriarchy, Islam and the Impact on Athletic Women in Egypt

When looking at the number of female athletes competing in 2016 Olympics in comparison with the previous years, there is a significant change to the better definitely. This could attributed to the fact that the level of women's awareness and education has risen enough to change a lot of the male mindset in Egypt regarding women. Perhaps adult males may be losing their massive domination in the contemporary Middle Eastern world, or at least we hope. This in turn, has given more power to women to appear and excel in many domains, namely sports.

Looking at Robert Fernea's article titled "Gender, Sexuality and Patriarchy in Modern Egypt" (2003) the author explains how there are a plethora of reasons for patriarchy in the Arab world. However on a large scale, the Arab world was largely at the disposition of outside forces, a condition that became even more pervasive with the development of oil production in this region. The article delicately tries to analyze the beginnings and the logic of how this patriarchy started to creep up on the Arab world. 'The kind of exterior capitalism of these countries from pre- to postcolonial times made the development of a full-fledged bourgeoisie and a genuine working class impossible. What resulted instead was a petty bourgeoisie, the hybrid, dominant class characteristic of a neopatriarchal society' (Fernea, 2003, 142).

Neopatriarchal society as 'modernized' is basically schizophrenic. Its characteristics include a pattern of dependency and subordination, vertical social relations, stratified families, clans, and sects (ibid). I especially admire how Fernea explained how different both the east and

the west are: 'Neopatriarchal sultanates rely on the rhetorical language of religious and symbolic truths, myths, and beliefs that establish the crux of traditional patriarchy. In contrast, modernity is scientific and democratic; its characteristics include an analytical language and horizontal social relations' (Fernea, 2003, 143). 'Modernity' is fetishized, it enforces itself directly, as in consumerism, without critical self-consciousness. Even ideas do not arise out of native experience, or through reflective transformations, but are adopted from outside sources and have little relationship to local practice. This analysis typically explains the emergence of the public mixed athletic groups featuring cycling, running, kayaking, adventure sports and hiking, they all adopted by their founders from Egyptians living abroad. The underlying formation of patriarchy has not changed but instead has been gilded and camouflaged. As with the 'westernized' concept of physical activities in Egypt prevalent in certain upper social classes for both genders, however across the mainstream public sports with women is still problematic. I argue that the lack of creativity and the urge to constant imitate the west stems from a variety of reasons, one of them is how as a culture, modern Arabs are not educated to question information, like religious texts for example, questioning them for the purpose of criticizing them is considered a step towards apostasy rather than critical thinking. The concept of critically thinking is not even adopted within our educational system in Egypt, save some of the ridiculously expensive international schools offering strictly 'foreign education'.

When addressing the subject of Women and Neopatriarchy, little sign of growing equality between men and women is witnessed. 'Indeed, both reformists and conservatives reflected in their discourse the dominant ideology of a neopatriarchal society: a conservative, relentless male-oriented ideology, which tended to assign privilege and power to the male at the expense of the female, keeping the latter under crippling legal and social constraints all under

the safe umbrella of religion, namely Islam' (Fernea, 2008, 146). Islam suffers from boundary problems, invasions by the West, trespassing, and changing authority thresholds. The insecurities of identity are taken out on women (ibid). Throughout my fieldwork, this was very evident in my interlocutors' responses.

When discussing women and sports, one cannot underestimate the power family has on women athletes in Egypt. The family is relentless in its authoritarianism. The child is brought up to become an obedient youth, submissive to those above him/her, his/her father, older brother, clan chief, president, s/he is driven to view him/herself negatively and to lose self esteem—to the extent of self punishment at times. There is a deep, structural relationship between the dependency and obedience of the child and the patronage system (ibid). The male child learns to accept a subordinate position all the while longing for control and domination, it is the natural step. It is the mother unfortunately who teaches him the art of finding a facilitator, like her, to deal with the supreme authority of his father or patron. The child of the neopatriarchal family is prepared for the dependent position of Middle Eastern society in a global context of neocapitalist dependence (Fernea, 2008). The father or husband's permission is needed in order for his daughter or wife to play sports, if not, that's where it ends. Several stories from my fieldwork shown here portray the essence of this article in the athletic sense.

N*, a 44 year old female AUC instructor had a story that definitely shook me the most:

I also used to do rhythmic gymnastics at the Shooting Club. My mom basically encouraged me and used to take me to the practices but my dad never knew...he was a businessman, and wasn't home much, so he didn't know. I trained heavily because I had entered the nationwide championship. My training was three hours every day as the time of the championship approached. Later out he found out how intense my schedule was, I was in second preparatory at the time, about 13 or 14 years old. I will never forget this. It was right before the day of the championship, I had been training for years, I bought my glittery bright outfit, did a hair and make-up rehearsal session and also we rehearsed at the Cairo Stadium one last time, I decorated my hula hoop which I dance with and on that night, right before the championship, my dad decided that I will not go tomorrow to

compete. And true to his word, I was forbidden to go the next day. So basically I was forced to stop the horseback riding, then the gymnastics then even the bicycle, so ultimately I stopped sports altogether. I had not even gone to secondary school yet. And as a result I got involved in other issues. I remember my trainer was stunned and thought I was lying to her. Then my dad at third preparatory thought that I should be married off, I was about 15 or 16 years old. My mother was basically helpless since she was an unemployed housewife with four kids in school and my dad was the one with the money and power as well, she could not afford to stand up to him.

Even concerning how her father controlled the veil, she had this to say about it:

I am aware of the scam concerning women and Islam, yet why am I still veiled? Currently I am 100% convinced that it is not a religious requirement at all, my husband knows that too and of course I want to take it off. I can't because of my father even at my age now (44). I was able to divorce myself, remarry on my own, get an apartment on my own, but I cannot take the veil off at all. Appearances are considered above anything else. When I travel abroad I take it off, but my father will never tolerate this to happen all. As far as his family is concerned I had already shamed him, even though I was veiled, but my divorce and remarriage shamed him and even his business suffered since he had many Muslim Brotherhood affiliations who considered that I had disgraced him. The veil is extremely stifling and although my husband has no problem with me taking it off, my father just will not agree to it at all, it is out of the question. The veil is a tool used for social acceptance and nothing else, a uniform, to belong to this society. Within five years, I believe this will change. Now it is a social requirement. My father once told me to do anything wrong I wanted, even while I was married but to keep it on. I knew a woman whose husband did not want to divorce her, he told her to bring her lover home instead and do what they want with each other, she was veiled of course.

My interview with N* was extremely passionate and moving. She is a 44 year old part time adjunct AUC instructor with an M.A. in Women and Gender Studies at AUC. Her thesis talked about how women were Islamacized in Egypt. N* began by telling me that her father was not only a member of the MB but had blood relations to the founder of the clan Hassan El-Banna. She told me tales and tales of how her father would abuse her under the name of culture and religion and how her mother fought her father so she wouldn't be circumcised. She told me about what it was to live under the social rules of an MB father. She told me how being divorced brought utter shame to her family and until now although she has remarried, her father insults her saying her actions brought him shame. The interview was very emotional, she poured out her heart to me telling of how religion impacted her life and her choices. She had no doubt

that our cultural heritage was heavily controlled by the Islamization of women in Egypt since El-Sadat. Most definitely her early trauma with the rhythmic gymnastics scarred her deeply. It proved to her how both herself and her mother are powerless in front of the wealth and power of her father. She is a mother of two now and does everything to break every stereotype she saw. I saw her eye my long red hair as I casually played with it during our interview. She told me how she wants nothing more than to take the veil off.

Sherouk whom I presented in chapter two, dreamed of running, just running all her life. The only time she was granted access to any sports at all was after her brief marriage and divorce nothing more. B's university being far away from her family in a different governorate and in a very special privileged environment like AUC gave her unprecedented accessibility to many activities, she is even encouraged to now finally take the veil off, however she tells me if she does in fact do that, until she is financially independent, in front of her father, she still must be wearing it. She told me that regardless what she does, in front of her father she still must be veiled.

It can be perceived that non-Western societies are based on different models, which do not focus on achievement and competition within the context of sports and women athletes (Pfister 2010). Modern sports, given its westernized origins, may not be in accordance with their values, beliefs and mentalities. This may be particularly true of women since for various reasons taking up sports is scarcely reconcilable with women's roles in many traditional societies, especially in patriarchal cultures with religious references (ibid). The chances that women in non-secular countries with cultural heritages that have been influenced by religious narratives have for practicing sport and taking part in competitions are dependent on numerous interrelated factors too many to be discussed in a single chapter. Orientation towards the West

and being a secular society have always created fortunate conditions for sports in general and women's sport in particular (ibid). This is made clear, for example, by the medal count of Islamic countries at the Olympic Games. Countries that have adopted Islam as the ideological foundation of the state have achieved relatively little success at the Olympic Games, although it must be pointed out that not only religious orientation has played a role here but also culture and economic conditions (ibid). Only where sports is generally accepted and supported do women have a chance of taking part in sporting activities and participating in competitions. Furthermore, the roles, situation and rights of women, i.e. the extent of gender equality generally, have a crucial influence on the development of women's sports. 'Women's sports was, and still is, a representation of secularism and modernity, and this explains why the participation of women in sport sparks off disputes over influence and the power of interpreting right and wrong' (Pfister, 2010, 2942).

The book chapter *The Role of Islam in the Lives of Girls and Women in Physical Education and Sport* from the book *Muslim Women and Sport* (2012) concluded by how 'Islamic feminism is a theological approach to the reinterpretation of Islamic religious texts from a woman-friendly perspective, seeking new meaning while upholding Islamic adherence and identity. The key approach is to focus on textual analysis of the Quran and Hadith and to use hermeneutic reinterpretation of the texts to establish a new understanding of women's rights in contemporary situations, for example, their role in public life and participation in making fuller contributions to societal progress, including in the areas of sport and education' (Benn et al, 2012).

Throughout my fieldwork this rhetoric came up significantly. As stated in the beginning of this chapter, Islam has been in Egypt approximately since 640 AD, so the texts did not

change significantly if at all. It is more about who has the political power to interpret and enforce their own religious interpretations on others.

Despite the different interpretations of Islam, there is a prevailing interpretation of Islam in the Egyptian Muslim society saying that men should have a dominate position over women (Walseth, Fasting, 2003). This interpretation is mainly based on the following verse in the Qu'ran: "Men are the managers of the affairs of women for that God has preferred in bounty one of them over another, and for that they have expended of their property. Virtuous women are therefore obedient, guarding the secret for God's guarding. And those you fear may be rebellious admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them. If they then obey you, look not for any way against them; God is All-high, All-great" (sura 4: 38). Based on these verses, a central question was whether Islam legitimates men's control over women. In the end, it is up to the husband to decide whether his wife or daughter can participate in sport or not. Islam says that the man should decide in this way. This is a primary barrier for many girls as per my fieldwork research. Most of the barriers referred to seemed to be directly or indirectly related to Islam's general view of women and their sexuality. Compared to men, women are more often viewed as less moral, because they are believed to have less control over their sexuality (ibid). She is therefore seen as a seductive being, at the same time she is easy to tempt. Due to this idea, women can easily create fitna (chaos or temptation) in the society. Participating in sport with men would be an example. Since women are seen as less moral than men in some religious contexts, they are at the same time seen as less capable of making decisions, including deciding about their own leisure activities. In this way the control of women, including their own body movements, is legitimized by saying that women have a tendency to be immoral.

The social order, i.e. the hierarchy of gender, is a product of religious and cultural ideas about sexuality, and an opinion of how sexuality best can be organized and controlled. The body can in this way be seen as an elongation of women's sexuality. To run or scream is a body language reserved for men only in a Muslim society. In the western world competitive sport has for a long time been looked upon as a hegemonic masculine activity dominated by masculine values (ibid). The barriers the informants met, in regard to which kind of movements they could perform in front of men, can be interpreted as Egyptian society's attempt to control women's self-determination, opportunities and power. The debate about Egyptian women's sport participation is certainly provocative. There were, for example, disagreements among the informants in relation to the gender segregation nature of the sport venues, which sports conform with 'approved' body movements so they are non-sexual movements, so Egyptian women can participate in sport. The multiple ways Egyptian women, regardless of their faith, do participate in sport has shown to be influenced, directly or indirectly, by different interpretations of Islam (ibid).

Patriarchal cultures direct most women into certain domesticated roles where time management can be very challenging resulting in them being not physically active. A working mother for instance under a patriarchal culture and religion is bound by certain priorities pre-set for her by family and society that makes an idea like exercising not feasible and in many cases absurd. How some men control women's life choices and interest in pursuing sports or anything else for her sole own benefit reminds me of Cinderella, 'if' she finished her 'duties' other options could be considered. Family responsibilities, cultural values, and a lack of understanding of and respect for Muslim women's views and needs in local leisure and physical

education provision are pertinent considerations which can inhibit their involvement in physical activity.

Many aspects of Egyptian culture socialize and encourage girls to be domestic and motherly, not strong, challenging, outdoorsy and athletic. That would be fit for boys. Most of my interlocutor's parents prioritized what made their girls attractive brides, not strong happy women.

Generally, the field of sports is considered to be a 'man's world'. It is only in the recent years due to a dramatic change in our society that girls have forced themselves onto the athletic arena mainly dominated by men as a sign of masculinity.

Many parents see a girl's interest in sports as 'unfeminine'. The opposite could not be said about an interest in cooking or teaching children for example. As per what my research revealed, not only sports, but occupations as well are gendered in Egypt within certain social classes.

Some aspects of Egyptian culture does not encourage women to equate themselves to men; this is empowered by Islamic values of course and the patriarchal state. The concern of parents has partly developed because physical activity is presented in a Westernized leisure form, which falls outside of religious and cultural activities (Zaman, 1997). Thus even with women-only sessions, there is a belief that physical activity is a Western activity and those women taking such classes may lose their Egyptian values as perceived by their parents. Furthermore, in the west, sports was introduced to women as a means of looking prettier, sexier and more appealing to the opposite sex. This very notion represents exactly the opposite of what most Egyptian girls are brought up to believe. Our culture demands modesty and asexuality from the girls living in it. Seeking to look 'sexy' is certainly off limits. This explains why the

older generations frown upon sports for women, especially in rural areas where sports for women is considered upper-class, westernized and not Egyptian.

Asking my interlocutors about this thought, I usually got this answer: No it's not Islam, it's the culture actually. It's the culture. People want to say it is religion, they would just say it. They [parents] get Islam confused with culture, that's what I think. That's why we tend to get the wrong end of the stick and [people] misunderstand Islam and make Islam look bad. Parents twists things around to suit themselves rather than what it [Islam] actually is saying. They might not allow girls to go out, so they just say Islam says this. They don't really know the facts, they just have their own opinions and tell us it as Islam.”

In reality Islam with its holy texts, multiple interpretations and misconceptions are very relative. A pious person could seem like the ultimate sinner to someone else. It truly is a matter of perception and state power. As explained earlier, the government controls how to infuse religion in a given society. Many of my female athletic interviewees did not wear the veil, travel with a *mihrim* (guardian) or other Islamic principles women should abide to, yet ferociously defended the religion claiming that ‘their Islam’ has no contradiction with sports in any way.

Feminine Discourses of the Gendered Body on Athletic Women in Egypt

The work of Emily Dyer in her book *Marginalizing Women*, (2013) explains how isolating women from the rest of society in Egypt and most of the Arab world in an increasing number of public places risks widening the gap in communication and understanding between the sexes. This in turn can lead to further sexualization, misunderstanding, and abuse of women. By cutting levels of contact between both genders in the public space, segregation helps to sexualise and, to a degree, de-humanise women in society (Dyer, 2013). As a result, they cease

to be human beings, and instead become objects of sexual gratification – made all the more desirable by being removed from public life and (by extension) forbidden. Some of the Azhar clerics have unfortunately compared women to raw meat or uncovered candy, so, if food is thrown in the streets, animals and insects inevitably will attack it but, if it is covered it, nothing can harm it. As absurd as it may sound; this joke of a ‘theory’ has been debunked by the 2013 UN Women discussing sexual harassment in Egypt. Outfits had little to do with sexual harassment (UN Women, 2013).

Accordingly, now we have segregated gyms, transportation, schools, universities, classrooms and even some restaurants now have ‘family areas’. Without working on a change in the deep realms of the Egyptian social culture with the blessings and encouragement of religion of course that has led to a belief in applauding this segregation, all efforts in further segregation will result in utter failure. Only further sexualization will prevail. Since sports requires usually gender integration not a separation within training areas, many families would object to having their daughters play sports unless it was gender segregated. O* a 37 year old professional rower describes an incident showing just how unwelcome a mixed gender environment is:

At the clubs during our training, the clubs were asked to have the girls done with their training and out of the water before any soldiers or the male rowing team would come and see them. They acted with us like we were a plague. Quickly shoving us into the lockers, and quickly getting us out of the club, we could not stay and chat or interact at all, they wanted us out ASAP. Our mere existence in the club was very problematic for the club despite orders from the federation. This attitude was not unique to the army clubs only, no, even the Arab Contractors club had the same issue with the girls. Up until recently one of the coaches in one of these clubs expressed out loud that he didn’t want any girly nonsense during the practice. Both sexes at a young age will definitely result in unwanted talk around the practice areas. What if teammates liked each other, dated then lost their concentration in the races? He automatically assumes that a girl walking into a practice session means she is looking for fun, she is not serious and is just being playful, and that’s all. He could not see that girls want to be athletic and serious about this sport, not at all. He saw that the practice time provided a valid reason for a girl to leave her home, and he didn’t want to be held accountable of such a sin.

O* has another story about the extent of how masculinities once took over her friend's father after her diving practice:

I had a female diver friend whom if her father saw her as much as speak to a man after or during her practice he would slap her in front of everyone at the club. To him, it was already hurting his male pride and masculinity that he is "letting" his daughter wear a swimsuit well after puberty, deep down inside he knows how wrong this is for a girl in Egypt...he will not tolerate a swimsuit AND socializing in any way with the opposite sex. He will not allow boys to leer at her body as she chatted with them in her swimsuit or out of it even. She had already gone to his limits as a man.

As extreme as these reactions may seem, gender segregation in Egypt is quite customary, not only with practice sites athletically, but also in all governmental schools after primary stages and some forms of public transportation like the underground metro where there are women only cars along with the other regular unsegregated cars. It is worth mentioning how Islamic daily prayers are also gender segregated; while other Islamic rituals like hajj or omra are not. On the other hand Christian prayers inside churches are also unsegregated. It is not very clear how or why this culture segregation started, but women's mobility is already limited within some Islamic doctrines. I cannot help but wonder if this inherently affected the general public's obvious disdain regarding gender integration. B*, a 20 year old student tells how her class was segregated during a P.E. class in her governmental school in one of the governorates:

Yes all through primary stage at school there certainly was segregation in P.E. class. However, we, the girls were clearly instructed not to move from a bench in the playground while the boys played football. At most we were allowed to play hide and seek quietly on the side. If for any reason we needed to cross to the other side of the playground, the boys would complain that we disrupted the soccer match and the teacher would actually scold us. The boys get the balls to play with, do any exercises, but the girls? No we just sit to the side and watch. We had no right to be in the playground. It was taken for granted that we just had no right to be in the playground at all. We were only 8 and 9, puberty had not hit us yet. Preparatory school was gender segregated as with all experimental governmental schools, so it was a girls' school only yet P.E. almost never existed for us still. Even private preparatory schools in governorates are segregated and of course we have no foreign diplomas, just language schools. Still the female P.E. teacher we had implied several times not to move too much...in P.E. class. Why? Because

although there were no boys at school, there were male teachers, so again, our moving or jiggling bodies at the age of 12 and above was an issue, and it was our duty not to move a lot in P.E. class. And most of us were veiled too, as a uniform more than religion, we had no idea at that age why the hijab should be worn anyway, it was pure social culture. I think that had we been in a mixed school at this age, maybe parents would have sent notes for us not to move at all. This attitude growing up made us think indecently of a girl running every time we saw it. That would make her ill-mannered automatically. Even in high school, again segregated of course, Christian girls who are supposed to wear whatever they wanted were not allowed to wear half-sleeves or trousers and Christian girls need to pull their hair back in a ponytail or a bun. If our rigid principal who put these weird rules could cut their hair off, she would have actually. Although Christianity does not set a certain outfit, however the Muslim principal we had does. And of course all Muslim girls must wear the veil. Even when once a Christian girl complained about having to wear long sleeves in the summer, the principal told her that in her churches you draw the Virgin Mary all covered up as well as the nuns, so you must abide to her anyway as an example. And there were a lot of Christians at school with it being the only secondary school for girls in the city. All of our parents actually were happy to enforce this regardless of the religion, out of society norms rather than religion. It taught us discipline and responsibility they told us.

Further onto discussing the issue of gendered bodies and notions of patriarchy in the athletic world, as per the work of Dr. Sanabel Khalf (2014) female athletes that display traditional masculine traits through sport are often considered “culturally deviant” and are subsequently labeled a “tomboy.” Furthermore, they are also sometimes subject to homophobic taunts that function to constrain female participation and enforce heterosexuality (Khalaf, 2014). Tomboyishness is acceptable in childhood, as it does not threaten patriarchal power; yet, in later life, it is rejected for fear that the woman will not be considered feminine. Women will often find themselves needing a strong sense of self-esteem in order to be happy with the body they require in order to be top athletes. This type of body will often contradict how society pressures them to look in order to be viewed as attractive women. Generally, the Egyptian female body is at the very heart of the theological struggle between Islamic and secular ideologies, whose impact is increased by global politics, signaling the profoundly complex and unstable nature of the female Muslim body in sport (ibid).

According to the definitions that prevail in the our society, the representation of the female body has many aspects, but the veiled body has become the Islamic and locally accepted standard of public womanhood in some countries, although others have adopted more Western standards. This confirms the link between the personal and the socially appropriate, and is an example of the ways in which very private bodies can be socially constructed. All throughout my fieldwork, women opting to play mostly male –dominated sports were at one point or another harassed for ‘giving up her femininity in exchange for a masculine figure’, little if not no regard was given to any athletic accomplishment attained in her sport of choice. Maintaining socially accepted feminine bodily attributes are certainly more valued.

K* a 40 year old bodybuilder for over 18 years now and a former AUC professor comments on this as follows:

How men perceive women embarking on these male-dominated sports differ within the different social classes. Sports like bodybuilding work on images of masculinity, they make men actually look like men, if women start doing that, the gender gap falls. This is not really accepted in lower classes as opposed to its acceptability in other higher classes. Lower classes would be more concerned about the image of a female. It is not just the image or how she looks like, it is the activity of lifting weights itself. In lower classes she would be seen as a masculinized female, a tomboy. It would take a lot out of her ‘female’ image. Her femininity would be compromised or even lost. The more intense the women do sports, the more she will be seen by others as defying her femininity and taking up a role that does not belong to her. Men lift weights to be strong. It is a fixed gender role, it is how it is supposed to be. It is seen as not only taking up on our role as men, but encroaching on our space, which is not welcome. If that happens, gender roles dissipate. If we are both doing each other’s roles, what is left for us as men to do? How can I distinguish myself as a male if she gets to do both my part and hers. It is part of male identity. Male gender role. It is expected of me to do, and now it’s being encroached by women as well. Women are taking what makes men, men. Men are the protectors as per culture & after years of socialization as well as religion and reinforced media, education, parents (patriarchal notions) and culture, they are social expectation. So typically men are strong dominant protectors while women are more docile, fragile and it is her duty to be more emotional while men become more rational and men are the main bread-earners who struggle with society and its daily problems. Women are supposed to be the main home care-giver, her role is domestic, his role is outside the home. She is delicate and emotional, he is rational and physical. Strength in the physical sense is the domain of men, whereas docility and emotional aspects are attributed to

women. So when the border is crossed, it becomes problematic. Take for example a male ballerina. It is a scary concept for males including myself. To me this act diminishes his manhood. It is weird and loathing to me (movements and clothing). Unless males here are exposed to westernized notions, I would assume they would agree with me about how I would resent this. Like a man acting like a butterfly, well then that makes you a butterfly. Perhaps queer or gay, there must be something wrong with you then as a man. Across all classes. It is condescending to men and the concept of belittling his manhood to feel emasculated that way willingly. A male ballerina is automatically doubted concerning his sexual orientation. He gave up his manhood. Personally, I believe women should not pursue these sports to the extreme, it retracts from her femininity to do so. A regular physical workout program is one thing, and going extreme with these sports is another thing. Same for males who decide to abuse a sport like bodybuilding to the extreme and look monstrous. It just looks worse for females to do so. I know many bodybuilders who will not accept bodybuilder women as wives. It has a lot to do with certain social standards. He would accept that she might join him in the gym but to stick to cardio more than weights for example, not be his equal. He would not dare be seen with her in public doing this, it would diminish how he looked as a man. He would also be disturbed by how the other males look at her with such disdain. It is not her space, he should not encourage her to enter this male space.

Coming from a highly intellectual athletic friend and fellow workout partner, I was genuinely taken aback to hear his judgment on women who lifted weights. However given his mixed background between the US, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, I do understand where this gendered perspective is stemming from. Personally I remember how I was mocked at one the elite gyms in Heliopolis area when I decided to undertake bodybuilding for a year. I could not understand what the problem was. I was looking more toned, was certainly stronger, looked younger, felt healthier and oddly enough felt more feminine since my skin looked tighter. I was proud of how heavy I could lift. And it was quite noticeable how I was usually the only girl in the free weights section. One man dared tell me how I ‘was defying my femininity’ lifting these weights. I did not even know him and was stunned at both his perception of women who lift weights and audacity. Why is he putting limits on my own body and my own lifestyle? He was not the patriarchal figure in my life, just a stranger at the gym. I remember attempting to try out dancing classes in efforts to ‘explore my femininity’ and seeing many people criticize my

masculine sports of choice. I hated them all. Somehow I lost my self-esteem trying dance; I felt that I just didn't belong there. I felt defeated to have wasted my time and energy just to try to fit to social conformity. The same thing happened to me at when I used to buy my whey protein powder stock. Just walking in the supplement shops for bodybuilders I always notice how I am usually the only women inside and instantly heads turn looking at me and thinking 'why does she want to bulk up?' In reality, scientifically bulking up depends on male hormone injections more than anything else. Men or women who do strength training exercises or lift weights need to replenish damaged muscle tissue with protein after working out. It is also noticeable how the packaging on these protein powders reeks of masculine graphics. It is very unnecessarily sexist.

In considering the bodies of women in Egypt, there is an interesting inter-relationship between personal bodies and culture. The body of a woman in Egypt, irrespective of which faith she believes in, is regarded as sacred and holy. This means that in different societies, women are made to live according to the rules they are born into. For instance, a Muslim female born in Kuwait is not mandated to use the veil, but if she were to be born in Saudi Arabia, she would be expected and required to use the veil. If she did not, she would be criminalized and thought upon as being a disgrace without morals. This is part of the reason why some Muslim women are concerned about participating in sport in public, and in some countries they are banned from taking part in mixed sporting events such as the Olympics because of Muslim modesty, whereby the use of the veil is very important and precious to many Muslims. This is contrary to the views generally held in the Western world, where women's participation in sports is believed to reflect freedom of choice, gender equality, and the democratic values supposedly inherent in their culture. However, again I beg to differ concerning that this desire for seclusion and gender segregation regarding performing sports is tabooed only within some Islamic

contexts. My father, Dr. Hany El-Ghazaly, aged 68, and the former Dean of the Faculty Engineering in Fayoum University had an interesting incident that happened a few years ago over there during his term as the Dean for two years. It must be noted that Fayoum has a considerable number of Christians living there among other governorates in Egypt. Dr. El-Ghazaly is known to heavily endorse athletics as a means of leading a healthy life and constantly preaches about the benefits of sports for both genders.

As Dean during AY 2008-2009 I decided to suggest that the faculty endorse a simple running competition where students in the entire faculty, which is about 2000 students (women are about 20%) can register for free and the winner within both sexes shall collect a monetary prize of about 200LE. I started this initiative myself for two consecutive years. My ideology was to enhance the physical well-being of the students and encourage sports using the humble track available on campus. To my utter surprise, not a single woman dared register her name even, Muslim or Christian. Not even to walk instead of run. I even mentioned that if only one woman registered and ran or walked she would actually win this competition since she would be the only one in her group. The women refused unanimously and suggested that they could enroll if it were a closed area, not in front of the men, even if they were just walking. They suggested women only ping pong tournament in a closed classroom perhaps.

My father was talking about this incident with utter dismay. After spending over ten years in Canada as a professor and being an athletic person himself, he was disturbed to see how confined women were in our society athletically, even within the safety of a governmental university.

Looking at the text by Gertrud Pfister (2010) titled *Outsiders: Muslim Women and Olympic Games – Barriers and Opportunities*, the author asks to what extent it is possible to achieve a balance between global values and cultural diversity? Islamic feminism has been helpful in showing ways in which space can be created and discussed for positive change in this domain. This knowledge, and the opportunity it created for women's participation in physical activity, was important in understanding the positions of those Muslim women whose most essential layer of identity was religion and for whom the demonstration of this identity through

devotion to modest dress codes was fundamental to sustaining that (Pfister,2010). However, choice should also be possible for those women who re-interpret Islam, adapt its rules to modern life and combine their religion with Western apparel and elite sports. The emergence of Islamic gyms like “Hero Gym” in Nasr City conforms to such an idea. During my fieldwork investigation, I used this gym few times to observe how ‘Islamic’ it was. For starters no music is allowed, only personal music headsets, TV screens were set on Islamic channels broadcasting sermons or reciting Quran, aerobic classes were performed using clapping hands not music, no weightlifting machines existed for women, mainly cardio machines only, non-Muslim women are not welcome however there is no written or verbal policy saying that explicitly, furthermore I noticed a significant amount of niqabis (total face cover in all black dresses) coming out of the gym every time I went. Another thing was that although it is a women’s only gym, no revealing clothing for women was allowed INSIDE the gym. It was certainly an unpleasant experience to me compared to the vibrant, friendly atmosphere of World Gym, Gold’s Gym and the wonderful fully equipped gym at the AUC Sports Complex where I usually go. However the existence of such a gym should be applauded since it caters to a certain kind of women with perhaps more conservative views based on religion, yet with athletic tendencies. Sherouk is a 32 years old Al Azhar graduate who started the social,/religious/ athletic local running project Laminta saada, ‘our joy is in our gathering’, in Dakahleya governorate had an interesting opinion about how all sports could one way or the other conform to Islamic values:

To my understanding, religion should not interfere at all with sports, theoretically. I am not God and cannot judge anyone. So it’s not religion, it is culture mainly. It is socially inappropriate, but it is not religiously forbidden. I believe everything can be done in an Islamic context. Islam is not against sports. People criticize anything anyway, regardless of the gender. Why not have clubs made entirely for Muslim women only? That way sports like gymnastics and ballet could be practiced within the Islamic framework. The only drawback is that these girls will not be allowed to compete outside such clubs. Still, I believe that ideas like this are bound to happen in the future.

Sherouk, although an Azhari graduate, does not apply Islam in any of its customary rigidity. She conveys a more civilized and lenient definition of the religion. This proves how diversified the term “Islam” really is. Application of the religion in Egypt withstands many conditions. Sherouk has been exposed to many experiences that made her evolve in her understanding of Islam and its practicality in our contemporary world.

Dena Anwar, a feminist writer aged 34 tells me her experience inside a women’s only Zumba class in one of the elite clubs of New Cairo:

I have a negative personal experience with this issue. At one point like many people, I sought to try a zumba class at the elite Wadi Degla club in New Cairo to relieve some stress especially that the instructor was my personal friend. I went to the gym and saw that it was totally gender segregated, the room for the dancing exercise routine was very small with little to no ventilation, with sweaty people it stank within the first few minutes. They would not open up any windows or doors to protect the privacy of the women wearing the hijab there. Furthermore, these women wearing the higanb and niqab decided to treat this gym class like an exotic bedroom, they came wearing all sorts of exotic outfits not even made in athletic dry-fit material. I was totally appalled. When I tried to take my own picture inside that gym, it created chaos and terror. They demanded that I do not do that just in case I capture another woman from behind and cause a ‘scandal’ if I posted them. Zumba is originally a mixed gender dance, even abroad. These women only dancing classes stemmed from the idea that women were objects of enticement and must be covered or hidden away. I felt humiliated and left that activity. I believe that this gender segregation is the reason for this social mess we are in, which of course stems from Islamic teachings and doctrines. I believe women are men’s equals. There should not be any priorities given or segregations made in any public spaces to favor one gender over the other.

Dena’s experience although appalling to her, yet fits other women wearing the hijab with conservative families who will perhaps not allow sports to be done in open areas where men may be present or that they are scared that their much valued ‘covered’ bodies might shake or jiggle. Dena is a feminist that defines feminism through the ability to control one’s body without the fear of body shame. She suffered a lot growing up in Fayoum governorate with a traditional strict mother and married a man affiliated with the MB. She struggled through a lot,

given the support of her father to evolve into the feminist she is now. She is now a single mother who took the veil off a long time ago and decided to take pride and ownership of her body in several ways. Dena used to perform folkloric dances at a young age. She is still very passionate about dance now as well and has several videos available to the public with her dancing in them. Dena faced several threats and insults due to her opinions yet she faces them courageously hoping to change the cultural heritage stained by religious references for the future one day. Throughout my fieldwork, one consistency remained valid, defining and classifying the 'Egyptian athletic woman' in a single profile in a country like Egypt is close to impossible. The definitions, aspirations, limitations and understandings of what defines an athletic Egyptian woman varies due to several reasons like education, westernized culture exposure, social class, intellectual and financial levels as well. Within each category, a certain set of 'social conformities' arise. However, one thing was mainly common, patriarchy, its many forms and definitions in one way or another governed these women's lives through their families. It was a matter of to what extent was this executed more than anything else.

The interesting text titled *You Throw Like a Girl: The Effect of Stereotype Threat on Women's Athletic Performance and Gender Stereotypes*, delves into an intriguing perspective that I have seen repeatedly throughout my fieldwork. The authors discuss their researched thoughts about the negative gender stereotype that may cause the woman to worry that her performance, if poor, would reinforce the negative stereotype of her group. Subsequently, she may become particularly motivated to disprove that particular stereotype (Hively, El-Alayli, 2014). Unfortunately, this excessive concern about performance can sometimes impair actual performance outcomes, the article concludes. Stereotype threat research has been extremely inconsistent, with the effects emerging in some circumstances but not others. The same seems

true within the context of sports (ibid). Apart from telling women that there is no gender difference in performance or deemphasizing the relevance of natural athletic ability, these stereotype threat effects can be reduced by educating female athletes on the developing phenomenon, training them to think about outstanding women who have succeeded in a male-dominated field, or having them think about themselves as athletes, rather than as women, before sports competitions (ibid).

Two of my interlocutors came into mind once I read that article, Aya, a 37 year old certified multi-fitness trainer at Heliopolis Club and several other gyms and Riham, A 32 year old a certified Level 1 Crossfit coach who has a passion for sports, music, and dance. She is also the founder, managing director, and head coach at Crossfit MonkeyBars Egypt, she is a part of HERs Gym instructors team, and ELFIT challenge 2014 first winner. Riham claimed the title "Egypt Fittest Woman" of 2014. Both extraordinary women share many attributes of course, however two issues mainly are of relevance here, their petite small body frames and despite the numerous athletic challenges and achievements they were both immediately stereotyped for being 'too delicate' to be 'fitness trainers for men'. Here are their comments regarding this issue:

Riham: One of my challenges was as a business owner since it was perceived as weird that a "girl" would open this kind of business, such an aggressive sport. And this was told to me by one of the male coaches in my first place teaching cross-fit, which is my number 1 enemy now. I was asked in surprise: "how are you going to train in kick-boxing when you are a girl? Lifting weights and stuff, nobody will take you seriously!" I was appalled and immediately argued that both genders are equally capable of training anyone in any sport and started defending myself by saying how many female coaches already exist.

Aya: I was told that I was very young. Plus I am petite already. Particularly when I started to train men, I was immediately judged as incompetent and fragile just from the looks of me, they looked at me and thought 'who is this little, young girl who will train us men?'. The first time the men were really disappointed to see me thinking that I will not be able to wear them out properly because I'm a young petite woman. Now they see me and they actually fear my gruesome difficult workout instead of thinking the latter. It

takes time to prove this idea especially to the opposite gender. Not being bulky does not mean that I will not be able to work out just as efficiently as a bulky bodybuilder and being petite does not mean I am fragile either.

Gender stereotypes are also evident in media coverage of sports and the funding of athletic programs (ibid). They are also evident in teachers' and parents' views and treatment of girls and boys at school. Physical education teachers also have gender-biased performance expectations in sports, which are inconsistent with real group differences (ibid). B's story about how P.E. classes at school was basically the girls watching the boys play football on a bench in silence, or sometimes they were allowed to play hide and seek, but not be given any balls to play with nor were they allowed to use the playground even. Even parents display the same general patterns, favoring boys both in perceptions of athletic ability and in encouragement of their children's involvement in sport. It is not surprising, then, that boys have better perceptions of their athletic ability and greater motivation to participate in sports than girls. Just thinking about the common rather offensive expression, "You throw like a girl," raises a general impression of women as being not athletic. People seem to equate athleticism with masculinity rather than femininity (Hively, El-Alayli, 2014). O*, a professional rower told me how she personally had to basically gather all the info needed to join an international rowing competition abroad, make contacts herself and provide basically everything so that when the federation received an invitation in her name, she could go without issues. D.E., 29, also describes how her parents blatantly stifled her athletic tendencies and automatically favored her older brother since it was more important for 'the boy' in the family to be more athletic than the girl. Ironically, her brother showed no interest at all in being athletic. This discrimination only fueled her to challenge this stereotype and prove later on after she became financially independent from her parents how athletic she really is.

I wanted to play sports all my life, but my family never allowed me to. The closest I got to sports was to play at the beach, as a child, even then this stopped as I started to grow older, even before puberty. Since I was younger than 10 years old I wanted to play sports like my brother who was 5 years older, but I was not allowed to (not swimming, not soccer). I was very active, I used to wake my friends up at 7 am to run along the shore in Alex. Running along the shore with friends had restraints because of the sexual harassments and the fear of getting mugged/raped/hurt from the street. I loved being active. I was never allowed to go to swimming practice although I was desperate to. My family let me wear a swimsuit at the shore, but not to be a part of an official swimming team and be committed to a daily practice routine, although my brother won championships. Until now I do not know where this segregation came from (beach yes, club no) but I guess that as a girl, I should not get used to stripping down to a bathing suit, I need to learn to automatically cover up, also at the beach I am under my parents supervision or the maid maybe, not by myself. Even at 7 or 8 years old I was not allowed to wear a regular swimsuit, it was more like a gymnast's outfit with half sleeves & a small skirt on top or a pair of shorts too that looked ugly. Thank God now I wear a bikini proudly in front of whoever I wish swimming whenever I want.

D.E. is a girl I watched personally fight for her own freedom and evolve in the past five years. She was a friend of my husbands who was in dire need of his legal consult since she was struggling with inheritance issues as well as issues in her workplace. When I first met her and she started tell us her story, I could see how terrified, confused and frail she was talking of what her family is putting her through making her life incredibly difficult. Five years later in our interview I saw a confident strong woman whose battles made her stronger and whose scars she shows proudly. She was able to be financially independent and lead her life exactly how she wanted to. It was such a proud moment for me as her friend to see her blossom this way.

Statements of athletes and sport officials generally show that women in our culture often live in a double predicament since it is difficult to combine being a good woman and a good athlete in our society (Pfister, 2010). Egyptian wrestler Hayat Farag knows very well, for example, 'that society expects women to do no more than finish school, marry, and start a family'. 'I wanted to break that rule,' she told the magazine Egypt Today (2008). On the other hand, she does not want to abandon her faith and destroy her future socially. For her, it is not

the physical contact of the sport since she competes with women not men, but the wrestling outfit is a clear violation of the religious rules, accordingly she had decided to give up her sport after the Olympic Games in 2008 in order to live as what she believes to represent the model of a good Muslim woman. ‘Mohamed Ibrahim, president of the Egyptian Weightlifting Federation, mentioned in an interview

That women’s sports careers are short-lived due to our Egyptian culture’. Athletes may be forbidden to continue weightlifting by their families at any point. Hence, it does not make any sense for sports federations to make great investments in female athletes since one cannot be sure whether they will have a long career (Pfister, p. 2945,2010,).

Both quotes here refer to the gender hierarchy and the role of women in the family as well as in society at large, both of which in our cultures are somewhat regulated by the Sharia doctrines, a legal system based on religious rules (ibid). Age and sex determine one’s position, duties and privileges within the family, it’s as simple as that. According to the Islamic Sharia law, the husband is the head of the family who makes any major decisions and is obliged to maintain his wife or wives who, in return, is/are committed to total indisputable obedience (ibid). ‘The husband has the right and the duty to control and ‘protect’ the family members, especially the women and girls, whose modesty and – in Islamist contexts – ‘covered’ bodies signalize and guarantee gender differences and hierarchies’(Pfister, p. 2946, 2010).

Gender hierarchies, as well as the social and cultural superiority of men, are based on the concept of honor and the regulation of sexuality in a given household. Sexuality is mainly controlled by gender segregation, meaning that women should either not appear in public or must be dressed in modest decent clothes that fully cover their bodies. Women’s participation in sports leaves them uncontrolled by the family, but the family’s reputation may also be

threatened if its female members engage in activities that are seen as unfeminine, immoral, or of course against common culture or perhaps harmful to the female body (ibid). One interlocutor told me that her father in the 1960's used to give her a 'note' to present to the P.E. teachers at school that she is too weak to join the class based on absolutely no medical evidence whatsoever, it was just a precaution so she would not hurt her 'delicate' female body.

It is exactly these offensive and superficial stereotypical concepts surrounding the female body that presents the main fuel for today's emergence of defiant athletic women. Women are actually challenging their 'feminine bodies' and excelling at normally male-dominated sports. K* a 40 year old bodybuilder and a former AUC professor had an interesting comment regarding that:

Society has been more exposed, westernized, is more globalized with more internet usage. Internet exposure has significantly risen in all of the MENA region. Consumerism has increased, desires for more active lifestyles has increased encouraging this trend to grow in the recent years versus the past 10 or 15 years. It is a westernized notion. Single independent women now are seeking to prove themselves through a variety of different things, adopting these originally male-dominated sports is one of them. I also think there another hidden element with regards to the choice of sports like martial arts, kickboxing, bodybuilding which is self-defense due to sexual harassment where Egypt has one of the highest rates globally. Also the sense of self achievement especially given the high rate of single young women who want to prove they are capable of doing whatever they set their minds to and have no husband or children to tend to thinking 'I am not married, but I am capable of doing whatever any man does'. It makes these women more capable, more resilient, more physically strong and intellectual. Religion of course has a significant effect on women and sports, in terms of perception, the nature of the sports that they could do without the social stigma associated with them. Religion would pose a certain perspective on gendered roles and complementarity. If in fact she engages in it, the dress code is an issue. She needs to be covered up as per religion. As long as it does not expose certain body parts and the spandex up and down is the available form of veil found in Egypt fit for sports, it could work. There are unfortunately lots of cultural traits setting what is appropriate and acceptable or not when women decide to invade the public spaces for sports or anything else stemming from the religion. But I think the severity of applying this changed dramatically across all social levels. It is not done by fathers though to demean their daughters, it is done out of protection. These restrictions are related to protective measures. Religious restrictions could be seen as a means of emancipation of how women are being protected not confined from males. Like in Iran,

the veil was a symbol of resistance against the westernization of the Shah and fearing the loss of culture. So it was a form of emancipation from the shackles of western liberation.

K's constant referral to how men are meant to protect women who should focus on their domestic roles reinforces the values he was brought up to witness especially in Saudi Arabia where this sort of patriarchal conduct is most common.

The journal article *Creating Safe Spaces and Building Social Assets for Young Women in the Developing World: A New Role for Sports* by Martha Brady (2005) provides an appropriate conclusion to this topic. For girls in developing country settings like Egypt, participation in sports is a dramatic and historical departure from the traditional characteristics of femininity. The concept of being an athletic woman defies given male privilege and cultural myths about what is deemed acceptable behavior for girls and what not then begins to change norms and expectations regarding girls' competences and gender roles. It is through this that a transformation can be observed in the ways girls carry themselves and the ways in which their families and communities recognize them. 'Importantly, sports opportunities for girls may also useful in helping transform gender norms' (Brady, 2005, 47). By seeing girls in this new action-oriented role, boys can learn about the strengths, capabilities, and contributions of girls and women, which in turn may begin to reshape male perception of appropriate roles for females (ibid). Although it is defined differently in cultures around the world, sports appears to have fundamental value to the different communities around the world. Egypt although has significantly progressed in creating safe places for playing sports, however most efforts are sponsored by the private sector or the army sometimes, not the Ministry of Youth & Sports for example. Until now, walking into one of the relatively cheap and supposedly non-gender biased

youth centers in Egypt represents an immediate risk of at least sexual harassment for any woman.

Furthermore, these small 'athletic' centers are usually equipped with a humble football Pentaball field (a football game with only five players on each side rather than the traditional eleven players) and a few free weights if at all. On a final note for this section, through my fieldwork observations I would like to analyze two situations I observed that in my opinion explains the various factors governing the bodies of women athletes in Egypt. One is in AUC New Campus, the other happened in Cairo University. The young graceful student was dancing so confidently with a bright beautiful smile on her face in the middle of the AUC New Cairo university campus campaigning for an initiative meant to help psychologically disturbed students who went through social hardships in their life called *My Story Isn't Over Yet*.

I stood there among the friendly crowd observing how nobody at all even thought of harassing the young dancer even by leering at her graceful body. The audience at AUC saw her art not her sex appeal. People were filming her on their mobiles proud of how she danced with ease in efforts to draw attention to the noble cause of the campaign. Watching both her own facial reactions as she was so immersed in the uplifting beats of the music playing and how the audience perceived her art made me wonder how this scene would totally change had she been performing in the public spaces of Cairo.

There was also a video online on Facebook featuring a young Lebanese woman perhaps the same age of this student or slightly younger in the streets of Paris as she was encouraged by her father to dance to a street performer playing a classic tune on the violin. When I run across these posts featured on Facebook in Egypt, I immediately go to the comments section where both people from the Arab world comment and so do the westerners. The girl was apparently a

practicing ballerina seeing how she gracefully moved, she did not look like an amateur. She was also wearing a casual practical outfit and flat shoes, like the AUC student who was wearing jeans and a white t-shirt, so both were not wearing anything fancy, provocative, no make-up on and hair tied back neatly.

Seeing the video whom her father filmed himself was incredibly uplifting. As a male Arab, he was extremely proud of the beautiful delicate art his daughter was capable of showing through her dance routine. Then to have it go viral on social media in a part of the world where women's bodies, do not belong to them, rather to their families, is a major accomplishment. Women's bodies are basically sacred and directly proportional to family honor, however wrong and unjust this notion may be, but it is the sad fact for the majority of girls in this part of the world. It is not common to find male Arabs who would not only approve their daughters dancing after puberty, but publicly too as the proud father literally had to push her asking people in the street around the violinist to clap and encourage her to dance. The comments on the post came as no surprise to me. The father was accused of being a pimp, with no morals or ethics, unfit to be a father. He was accused of 'selling' his daughter's 'honor'. He was labeled a *dayouth* which means a man of no shame or honor with the women of his family, he is a man with no jealousy over the women in his family. It is the most offensive insult a Muslim man could be labeled. Of course, there is no proof that the man and his daughter in the video were Muslim, but from how abrasive the comments were, I did not see how it mattered. Both women were dancing feeling safe, happy, at ease, joyfully and with confidence in themselves. Had they been doing this in the unwelcoming streets of Cairo, the results would have been catastrophic if not life-threatening.

From the varied opinions shown in the conducted fieldwork the common note observed is how women's mobility is simply not welcome in the public spaces of Cairo, regardless of any precautions taken in efforts to conform to the society. The existence of women in the street is directly linked to the male figure in her life. Any social misconduct brought shame to the dominant male in her life, even if it is her son where she is supposedly his guardian. The difference between the very elite class private spaces like AUC and common public spaces like the streets of Cairo is very clearly reflected in how women are accepted, able to move and act in them.

I remember having a humble five-a-side football or a pentaball field (a small football field made for 10 players only versus the regular 22 players sport) at Ain Shams university where boys and only boys played football there all day, girls were allowed to either linger at the sidelines to watch, not cheer (unless she was the liberal 'loose' free type of girls) and sometimes because there was a mosque right beside this field, having girls hang around there was totally unwelcome. Sometimes bearded pious young men would shout at us to move away from the 'sacred area of prayer'. However going into the mosque you would find girls fleeing away from boring lectures, sleeping, eating, applying make-up, laughing and gossiping actually leaving very small room for actual praying. But nobody complained since the boys upset with the girls hanging out beside the mosque and football field could not see or interact with them, regardless of the fact that using the mosque like that is forbidden in Islam versus just standing in a public space with friends or colleagues is not. But nonetheless, their existence beside the mosque was a *fitna*, a cause of moral problems, to the pious religious boys who wanted to pray all day.

Looking at AUC and how the sports complex has just as many girls as there are boys if not more, scantily dressed in athletic wear too, I have to wonder, is it just the fact that there are

both mixed and gender segregated top notch facilities here or is it also about the different social classes in both universities or is it the fact that most elite classes take pride in westernization and how they are able to adjust their lifestyles to that notion. Sports in the end are perceived as a westernized culture. I remember that the girls waiting and watching the boys play along the sidelines were seen as either girls who have emotional connections or feelings towards the players or just ‘loose’ girls with no shame. This culture does not remotely exist here at AUC. Girls go to the gym to workout, full stop. This is of course apart from having a female American football and soccer team here at AUC, while in Fayoum, as shown before, the girls refused to even register for a simple race fully endorsed by the faculty of engineering for a monetary prize in a governorate not known for being inhabited by rich elite upper classes nor is the university itself an expensive one to enter. Regardless of religion, not a single girl signed up. If only one girl decided to power-walk even, she would have won since she had no women competitors.

The idea of what is defined as ‘shameful’ varies greatly across the social classes of Egypt. This is very much observed through the idea of physical activity for women (if existing at all in the Egyptian governmental universities) in both premises.

Furthermore looking at the ‘dance routine’ performed by Muslim veiled girls at the public Cairo university in celebration of the new academic year 2017-2018 to honor the formal visit of the Minister of Higher Education many observations and analysis could be driven from this incident. The dance routine was done by an all-hijabi group of students wearing tight spandex workout clothes and a headscarf, some wore big black sunglasses. As per all Islamic doctrines women publicly dancing are not permitted, and is heavily condoned furthermore their outfits of choice are not considered a ‘hijab’ in Islam., yet as per Egyptian society which apparently is valued more than the religion itself, they were veiled, tight clothing or not.

Dancing around the world is not a shameful act, on the contrary it is a joyful form of art that in many cases if not most represents the culture and folklore of the country or region.

In Egypt specifically, oriental belly-dancing as erotic as it might seem to some and of course is stigmatized among the majority of people in Egypt itself, oddly enough pertains specifically and exclusively to Egypt despite its existence in other countries in the Arab world. How this kind of dance became a source of stigma and shame can be portrayed in a series of political, social and gender-oriented concepts too large to be discussed in a single thesis. Back to this dance event done in September 2017 in Cairo University, we see that the girls are basically frowning, looking quite apprehensive, not looking at the audience at all, more to the ground beneath them, and you can see them struggle to finish this ‘performance’ and end this awkwardness as men and boys mostly gather around them to videotape them from various angles, the girls on the sidelines who are mostly if not all hijabis are looking them in total awe of the audacity taking place. They are dancing to a western hip-hop song with basic aerobic-like jumping routines quite far from any folkloric Egyptian or even Arab traditions, especially that belly dance routines in the hijab not only is not acceptable, it is considered at utmost insult to the hijab and the beauty of this kind of dance will not show in a hijab. This point also proves how ‘foreign’ the hijab is to the Egyptian culture. Looking at the bedouin dances for examples, it is observed how closer it is to the demeanor of the hijab. The dance ends at Cairo University, nobody is clapping in encouragement, most mainly stunned that this happened to begin with. The minister himself along with his accompanying entourage are all frowning. This is a welcome dance in an event welcoming the New Year. The reactions to a dance ending is usually appreciative and joyful, as with the AUC performer, but in this case not at all. This event was of course the first of its kind especially in an Egyptian public university where due to its relatively

cheap tuition fees, mostly lower and middle social classes enroll there and from them you may easily find many conservative young people admitted there including fundamentalists and even extremists of both genders and both religions. Accordingly it was broadcast to all media outlets and the video online went viral.

The public's audience and how the media discussed this video was too harsh and degrading for words to describe. The girls were accused of being ill-mannered, a disgrace to their parents, to Islam, to the veil of course, to the Egyptian society and to art as well. The dance which was formally introduced as an 'athletic event' in the day's program, was seen as inappropriate in every way, distasteful and lacks any beauty or creativity in addition to it being not only irrelevant to the Egyptian folklore, the social norms and culture of the Egyptian society. Looking at this dance routine as an Egyptian Arab will differ a lot from the viewpoint of any westerner. The viewers in Egypt saw utter shame and disgrace in this 'athletic performance' as well as severely sexualizing it. It was not nearly successful or appropriate in the reflection the culture nor respected the dominant religion Islam, and how it severely genders the female body as a patriarchal religion. Furthermore it had nothing to do with the original non-Muslim non-Arab local folklore dances in Egypt.

A westerner perhaps might admire the synchronization of the dancers, their ability to pick movements that went well with the tune, their somewhat good physical condition or for example their upbeat choice of music fit for teenagers on their first day of university. Media on TV joined this now public bashing stressing on the fact this shameful act that took place in a respectable educational public establishment not only humiliated the girls themselves, the university and Islam, but it is also irrelevant to our own Egyptian folklore music and dances like 'ferket Reda' back in the 50's up until the 80's where they suddenly vanished. I tried to look for

details about whose idea was it to try to welcome the minister this way, but did not find much to report.

As if abiding to our rich non-bedouin folklore music and dance routines would make any positive changes at all in how dancing is viewed and perceived in the Egyptian society now, the French Lycee El Haram school, which is affiliated with governmental institutes celebrated the academic achievements of its students by hosting a celebration that featured dancing on the stage. They hosted three oriental dancers wearing rather conservative *shaaby* local outfits, not exotic authentic Egyptian belly-dance outfits even to perform a simple dance on stage as part of the day's program. Again, the rage from the parents and surprisingly some of the students themselves describing their school as a 'nightclub' made the video go viral on social media channels resulting in a public outrage, again. There were several allegations and judgments that do not differ from what was said concerning the Cairo University event but the school was accused regarding students who snuck inside the designated changing rooms to look at the dancers as they changed into their outfits. Why weren't the male students blamed for their actions sneaking into the changing rooms violating these women's privacy? Nobody knows.

From their perspective, the school 'allowed' such circumstances to happen since they 'brought' these dancers to school full of teenage boys with raging uncontrollable hormones. A formal investigation took place after that incident and the principal immediately issued out a formal apology letter to the parents and the Ministry of Education, pending the results of the investigation she might be suspended from her job. Oddly enough, almost every private, language school in Egypt (not governmental) has year-end shows featuring several dances in several outfits where the girls perform to different types of music. Rarely do these shows have both genders but since male dancers are stigmatized, mostly girls perform. The public

comments on the YouTube videos and on Facebook as well as the talk show how severely women's bodies are gendered and restricted in Egypt. This in my opinion can be majorly blamed on the misogynistic cultures and social norms derived in origin from the patriarchal realms of Islam which will be discussed in the next segment.

Politics of the Veil and Women Athletes in Egypt

It would be in my opinion unrealistic to discuss challenges facing women athletes in Egypt without discussing one of the most controversial issues facing many women athletes in Egypt: the hijab or the veil. I would like to begin this section quoting Göle, "*Women's visibility, women's mobility, and women's voices are central in shaping the boundaries of the public sphere*" (Göle, 61, 1997). Historically, the hijab has not been entirely controlled by religion, but by the government. The hijab affects public spaces, social behavior and gives privileges but also influences discriminatory conducts in Egypt within all social levels; however the lower, poorer social levels and in many cases the middle class levels suffer the consequences of the politics surrounding the hijab in Egypt the most. The origins and emergence in Egypt will be discussed briefly before delving into the social discourses surrounding the politics of the hijab in Egypt starting 1967 until the present date.

This sub-chapter will expose how some women who wear the hijab are caught in a paradox between actual claims for women's rights including the right to being athletic and conflicting with the cultural and patriarchal norms set by the men of the State (Abu-Lughod, 1998). My main argument resides in the fact that the hijab to some women and men alike, represents other ideas and labels conforming to society's discourses rather than religion or any holy significance at all since the idea itself has strayed to represent other ideals of virtue, respect

and freedom to act within public spaces rather than religious piety. Being veiled and joining the majority of the Egyptian society gives a woman more moral privileges and more freedom to move in wider public spaces with less condescending judgments about her (Harassment Map in Egypt, 2013; Fraser, 1990). The truth of this statement applied heavily to many of my mostly veiled interlocutors regarding accessibility to sports and guardianship approval to do so.

The urgency of this endeavor in my thesis is heightened by the fact that more and more families are allowing their daughters to play sports, if and only if they conform to the veil, and mostly out of social and patriarchal reasons rather than religious regions or piety. Ironically though, there is no single definition to what constitutes ‘a higab’. This is valid especially when observing debates around theories of feminism and the veil. Muslim scholars argue that hijab is required to be worn by all Muslim women according to Quranic verses, bearing in mind that the Quran (holy book of Muslims) was revealed in a disconnected fashion over a period of about twenty three years (Ezzat, 2010). According to narration, The Prophet Mohamed received the first revelation in 610CE and newer revelations kept on being sent like small messages whenever the circumstances of the newly born Muslim society in the Arab peninsula needed divine guidance. This understanding of the historical aspect of how this book was presented then enforced is an indispensable prerequisite to sharpen the true meaning that lied behind every verse in the Quran. What most scholars do is interpret those verses literally and neglect the causes of the events behind them and thereby reaching the conclusion that a Muslim woman should cover up in hijab. Muslim clerics and scholars usually miss out on the crucial point that the Quran — like the Bible — is primarily a book of history. By stripping away the holy aspect, then only a textbook of historical events worthy of analysis will be found (Ezzat, 2010). This sub-chapter

will stress on the effects of the hijab on athletic women in Egypt from various angles and perceptions.

The word “hijab” varies from culture to culture. In the Christian West, the term “veil” is used to mean a covering of the face, but in Arabic the term “hijab” refers to a barrier or curtain (Blakeman, 2014). The history of veiling (covering hair only is meant here) is large and complex, as there are many different cultures that practice Islam and have different requirements for veiling. Most people think of the veil solely in terms of Islam, but it is much older. It originated from ancient Indo-European cultures, such as the Hittites, Greeks, Romans and Persians (Dashu, 1970). Hair-covering had class as well as gender implications; thus, the ancient Assyrian law required it of upper class women while punishing commoners for it. The strong association of hair-covering with class rank, as well as an urban/peasant split, persisted historically up until the last century. Then more privileged women began rejecting the hijab, as did Egyptian feminist Huda Sharawi, while poor women increasingly adopted it as a ticket to upward mobility (Dashu, 1970). Peasant and working-class women who did not cover in these ways were considered "loose" and fair game for assault. This non-respectable and therefore vulnerable status of non-hijabi women also plays out in the Muslim context, going back to a Quranic passage which specifically designates wearing the hijab as marking out Muslim women not to be molested on the streets.

Ironically, provocative clothing is not the main reason for harassment in Egypt according to the statistics from The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women which published a report in 2013 showing the most recent statistics of sexual harassment in Egypt. The study which was conducted on women aged between 10 – 35 years showed that 99.3% of Egyptian women have experienced some form of sexual harassment

where only 2.1% of the harassers linked obscene outfits and extreme make up to be as reason for assault while a whopping 75.7% of the assaults happened to conservatively dressed females with little or no make-up (Harassment Map in Egypt, 2013). Almost every female gets harassed of all ages and dress codes in Egypt. This issue will be discussed in detail though in chapter four of this thesis. However, the Quranic verse that the hijab is bound to, as per the holy book itself, is interpreted in several ways which is believed to be the main cause for this dilemma (Bullock, 2010). One interpretation was that this verse was meant for the Prophet Mohamed's wives only. Another interpretation was that it was meant for all Muslim women (Ezzat, 2010). What most fundamentalist Islamic scholars do is interpret those verses literally and neglect the causes of the events behind them and the context and thereby reaching the conclusion that all Muslim women should cover up in hijab.

The interpretation of any religion can make or break it for many people. Viewing a certain religion as oppressive and tyrannical or peaceful and forgiving has a lot to do with the interpretation of the holy books and the appendixes to follow them. This is the area by far that until now creates a huge turmoil in the Middle East on many levels both socially and politically even straying far away from the debates around the hijab whether it being a mandatory act for any Muslim female who reached puberty or not.

The Quran itself is very imprecise about what exact clothing "requirements" are mandatory for women. Each woman interprets the Quran in her own way and bases her attitude toward her desire to wear the hijab on that interpretation. Also the Sunnah/ahadeeth which is the legacy Prophet Mohammed left as an appendix to the Quran heavily contributes to these interpretations. It is worth mentioning that the recordings of that legacy in writing started about one hundred and ninety three years AFTER the Prophet's death (Ezzat, 2010). The credibility of

a lot of the ahadeeth (which are stories, interpretations and rules and guidelines of Islam recited from Prophet Mohammed to complete or rather further explain the Qu'ran) have been proven invalid over the years within many Muslim scholars further raising more debates about what should be considered absolutely correct and what not. However, the Quran itself never references the hijab as a part of a woman's dress code, and nowhere does it state how much of a woman needs to be covered. All this is based on how the Muslim scholars interpret the supposedly holy verses and the relevant Sunnah (Blakeman, 2014).

Other perhaps tougher Muslim scholars prefer the more conservative perhaps tyrannical interpretation of the ahadeeth and deem the hijab as mandatory. This is the area where the hijab is seen as a means of oppression to women and a means of demeaning them since it is done because men cannot control their sexual desires (Diffendal, 2006). While there is nothing that clearly states in the Quran a head cover, only a bosom cover and modest dress. Women do not share a common style nor have the same reasons for wearing hijab. For many, it reflects the belief that they are following God's commandments, and are dressing according to the correct standard of modesty, or are simply wearing the type of traditional clothes they feel comfortable in (Bullock, 2010). Socially, it is a different matter. The need to conform to social norms about behavior in public spaces appropriate for women in Egypt is not always clear and well-known in comparison to the holy verses that may be asking to do so. Every woman wearing the hijab knows the benefits and consequences of wearing the hijab or not, however not everyone knows the exact religious verses behind it. Furthermore, as per the experience within my fieldwork the rhetoric surrounding 'free will' to take the veil off at any point just is not true or acceptable to every veiled woman in Egypt. Many families will not tolerate this for their daughters as would husbands with their wives regardless of the circumstances driving these women to do so.

On a political note, during their reign in 2012-2013, the Muslim Brotherhood's attempt to combine a broad reform agenda with a specifically religious vision has caused confusion and contradiction on issues relating to gender and the family. As a result, the Brotherhood coalition became preoccupied primarily with defending the religious rights of Muslim women—such as the right to wear the hijab and niqab protesting against government-introduced legislation “incompatible” with Sharia requirements, of course from their point of view. After all interpreting religion in any State according to “Sharia” depends on the perspectives of the rulers rather than the Holy books themselves. Brotherhood leaders have generally resisted calls for a greater role for women in public life, but they have grounded their opposition in fairly cautious terms.

One important point of argument between those supporting the June 30th, 2013 coup, and those against it, centers on the position of women and how Egypt's short-lived Islamist government under President Mohamed Morsi, sought to roll back the legal gains that Egyptian women had made in the past decades. Supporters of the June 30th coup often singled out women (along with Egypt's Coptic minority) as groups that stood to lose most if the Islamists remained in power. The actions undertaken by the Muslim Brotherhood-led government seemed to lend strength to this argument. The 2012 constitution lacked any mention of gender equality, referring vaguely instead to “equality and equal opportunities for all citizens, men and women.” (Egyptian Constitution, 2012). Furthermore, issues like FGM would not be eventually recognized as a crime under the constitution they drafted. While this was seen by some as indirectly referring to legal equality between the sexes, many women's rights advocates saw it as the worst Constitution in Egypt's history regarding gender quality, since it was literally silent on the issue. Public debates on the 2012 Constitution and whether it represented a continuation

or a break from earlier constitutional traditions in Egypt, echoed earlier debates on women's status stretching all the way back from the 1920s and 1930s. According to historians writing on this topic, debates on state feminism in Egypt ended in a conservative approach to the question of women's presence in the public space, and in a continuous avoidance of the thorny issue of the state's responsibility in promoting gender equality in the private sphere, resulting in giving a chance for issues like harassment to thrive in the recent years (Piquemal, 2015).

Another aspect of the hijab is in how it looks, this differs across the different Islamic countries in the Middle East where each has different commandments on how women should wear the hijab (Bullock, 2010). The Islamic Republic of Pakistan does not require wearing the hijab, but in the Islamic Republic of Iran, even tourists are required to cover hair up. Both of these countries are considered Islamic; however, their governments determine the restrictions on women's clothing (Blakeman, 2014). Thus not all "Muslim" countries by law in this definition mandate wearing the hijab. Enforcing the seemingly religious practices yet preserving free will for women contradict in several countries. It is a similar struggle to women who wear the hijab yet strive for women's rights. However, many of these women aim to acquire the "right" to not be judged or labeled for wearing it and others disregard it completely since they are totally convinced that wearing it is a necessity sent from God and does not contradict with their work in the feminist field (Abu-Lughod, 2002). The reasons women wear the hijab varies considerably though. In some Islamic countries, as per the religious interpretations, women start wearing the hijab as soon as they hit puberty. Being a good Muslim is an important part as to why a woman wears the hijab. Some women believe that not wear it seems to indicate a bad Muslim and they wear the hijab out of obligation. The veil forms a Muslim identity for a

woman. Wearing the traditional Islamic dress allows a woman to reflect her commitment to Islam and connect her to the Muslim community (Blakeman, 2014).

Furthermore, the Islamic revolutionary movements in countries such as Iran and Egypt employed the hijab as a tool of protest against colonialism by confirming traditional values. The hijab came to stand for the retrieval of cultural and religious “purity.” Just as Europeans had engaged in the stereotyping of Muslim women as the oppressed exotic other, 19th century Muslim men stamped European women as the evidence and source of Western immorality. Again, we see that ‘western’ practices like sports, are basically demonized, and here so is uncovering. Therefore, in many ways, the reclamation of the hijab arose in response to the perceived immorality and sexually corrupt behavior of uncovered “exposed” Western woman. However, over the years several notions straying away from that conformity have risen.

Some women feel a social pressure to conform to wearing the veil in order to maintain their public reputation. In many social levels in Egypt it has become a label of “acceptance”. Policies of shame and being shunned from the family can be easily avoided by wearing the hijab. Social and peer pressures within a women’s society, mostly in lower to middle classes, can indirectly force the hijab on to her to gain new found levels of respectability and sometimes even more freedom to roam within the public spaces around her with little or no feelings of guilt or shame from the community or God. There is this growing feeling among Muslim women that they no longer want to associate with the West and their style of clothing, and the hijab is what sets them apart and confirms their Muslim identity.

While many in western societies may see the hijab as a symbol of oppression and patriarchal rule, some Muslim women see the hijab as a symbol of pride and unique culture. This clearly defines their identity and allows them to wear their hijab with pride (Blakeman,

2014). Solidifying this notion socially conveys ideas of informal coercion in Egypt. Furthermore, it is also sometimes used as a “behavioral check” on a woman. By wearing the hijab she is not tempted to do things that would be outside the moral standard of the Islamic faith. The hijab functions as a reminder or behavioral “brakes” that women need to guard their behavior so that they please God. It also prevents bad conduct like trying drugs or drinking alcohol, which are strictly forbidden in Islam. It is also a reminder for a woman to not go to places where sexuality is on display, for example, to night clubs.

Women monitor their behavior when they wear the hijab because they are representing Islam to everyone else. It is regarded as a tool of pride for many women who wear it rather than a means of oppression. Women may wear the hijab to facilitate their movement in the public sphere, but in doing so they subscribe to the notion that this space belongs to men. They must adjust their dress to avoid criticism, unwanted attention and even sexual assault. Yet contrary to the claims about protection, the hijab has actually become a symbol of eroticism in certain contexts (Göle, 1997).

Because Muslim cultures uphold modesty and obedience as the highest virtues of womanhood, women will inevitably desire to represent these ideals to achieve status and respect (in theory the ideals of modesty and obedience apply to both women and men; however in practice, women are subject to them far more strictly). And this is exactly how social control works, through the colonization of desire and will it not only coerces individuals, but redefines such coercion as freedom and choice thus denying individuals to see the control they are subject to, and making them instruments of their own oppression (Diffendal, 2006). That some women vigorously defend the hijab as their own choice does not mean their choice somehow occurred

in a vacuum, free from coercion. Social norms and extreme interpretations of the religion contribute as forms of indirect coercion.

Ultimately the law colonizes subjects, it is there to control lives (Merry, 2003). Sharia is a most vivid example of this. It is “God’s” law, a very powerful non-negotiable tool. After all, in Egyptian culture, it is not seen as a removal of a garment, it is seen as a removal of morals, religious virtues and bringing shame and dishonor to families. It is the methodology of linking the female body to honor and religious virtues that encouraged this culture to thrive in the Middle East.

On the other hand, protesting against certain attire seemed highly discriminatory to some. And recently there have been several cases reporting discrimination against allowing women wearing hijabs to enter certain places like nightclubs and pubs serving alcohol. The notion seen was that they were being treated like pets where some signs said “no pets allowed”. The women who complained simply stated that wearing the hijab does not necessarily mean drinking or dancing is prohibited and choosing a certain type of clothing is deemed “free will”. Accordingly, there should be no grounds for forbidding women in hijab to enter certain places. It is discriminatory to not permit a women to wear the hijab nor to prohibit women with hijabs to enter certain places, and it is also unconstitutional, but it only proves my point that the hijab is sometimes worn to conform to traditions, social norms and gain more freedom and wider access to public spaces dominated by men mostly while “covered” rather than reasons of being modest, religious or virtuous. In Egypt, it gives social, ethical and moral privileges to the women wearing it.

The same logic was applied up until recently at the Olympics for athletes of wear the hijab. London 2012 was the first Olympics where women competed in all 26 sports on

offer (although still in 30 fewer events in total), and FIFA is just one of several international bodies to relax clothing rules and to allow more Muslim women to compete in the Games. It is impossible to know how many women will be competing with their head covered this year, but they include judo player Wodjan Ali Seraj Abdulrahim and Saudi Arabian runner Sarah Attar, as well as footballers (Khaleeli, 2012).

In 2011, the International Weightlifting Federation also began to allow female weightlifters to cover their arms and legs, which led to the UAE female team being the first to compete in hijab, represented by 17-year-old Khadija Mohammed. Reports suggest that the ruling has opened up the sport for Muslim women (ibid).

Narratives about the veil in general and in sport in particular have been created from a sociological viewpoint around questions of the body, gender equality/inequality and women's emancipation/oppression. (Amara, 2012).

As mentioned previously in chapter two and from a social class perspective ahead in chapter four, one could argue that the issue of the veil and Muslim women's participation in sports in the West is becoming a key focus at the center of the debate on the integration/assimilation of Muslim communities, in order to measure the level of their deculturation from their culture of origin, and therefore their acculturation to Western values (ibid).

The Olympic Games are also witnessing a relative increase in the number of veiled Muslim women athletes. For some critics, this is a sign of regression in relation to women's struggle for liberation in sports in general, and in the Olympic Games in particular. For others, this is a positive sign of the increasing cultural variety of the games, not only in sporting terms

but in organizational terms too. This is also a means of conforming Islam to sports and the contemporary woman.

To sum up this section, generally speaking Muslim women did not much to do establishing the official parameters of Islam. One cannot deny though the role of Islamic feminists and their efforts to interpret this religion to better the lives of Muslim women around the world. However, mostly men have had access to positions of power and influence within the tradition; they have interpreted religious texts, laid out and enforced instructions and exclusions they have also created social construction frames for women to abide to. One can and should call attention to women's agency within this context, but must not lose sight of the fact that their choices and actions remain bound to this context. Wearing the hijab seemingly affords women a degree of autonomy and respect, but it fails to challenge the norms that work toward their overall disadvantage. Muslim women often can only legitimately declare themselves by adhering to the androcentric construction of a good Muslim woman (Diffendal, 2006). They must conceal themselves if they are to be taken seriously, accept responsibility for male sexuality, and deny their own sexuality in the process. Unfortunately, the Muslim athletic women who do demand equality on their own terms are often accused of being sympathetic to Western, and therefore un-Islamic, ideals. In many Muslim contexts, women can defend and accommodate themselves to, but not create or criticize, norms. The hijab today has no universal meaning. Its meanings are always local depending on where it is found and within which social level (O'Donnell, 2011).

While some women wearing the hijab are given the privilege directly or indirectly simply to roam freely in public spaces, others do it as an act of defiance or thinking of the hijab as a nonnegotiable tool of obedience to God, regardless of social conformities, perhaps giving a

feeling of superiority, despite the various dubious debates around the interpretation of the Qu'ran and sunnah on that issue. Regardless of the reason, and as per the conducted research, wearing the veil greatly affects women's accessibility to sports and the acceptability of their families as well to adopt an athletic lifestyle. Sara Ahmed is not the only female Egyptian athlete to benefit from changes to sporting uniform regulations at the Olympics. Doaa Elghobashy, who competed against Germany with her partner Nada Meawad in the beach volleyball tournament at the Rio Olympics, wore a hijab, long sleeves and trousers during the match after the International Volleyball Federation relaxed uniform regulations before the London Olympics to allow full sleeves and trousers.

“I have worn the hijab for 10 years,” she told the Associated Press. “It doesn't keep me away from the things I love to do, and beach volleyball is one of them" (Independent, 12, Aug, 2016). In 2016, Egypt's Sara Ahmed become the first Arab woman to win an Olympic weightlifting medal. The Nike Pro Hijab has been a year in the making, but its impetus can be traced much further back to Nike's founding mission, to serve athletes, with the signature addendum: If you have a body, you're an athlete. Nike's most breathable fabric, the lightweight polyester features tiny, strategically placed holes for optimal breathability but remains completely opaque, with a soft touch. The mesh is also stretchy, so when combined with an elastic binding it allows for a personalized fit that adapts to both the wearer's head and her sport. Ice-skating, for example, requires a tighter fit for twirling. The back of the hijab is also elongated to ensure it does not come untucked. Fluff threads were used at the neck to eliminate the rubbing and irritation that can occur when an athlete sweats. At the request of the athletes, the designers placed a signature Nike Swoosh just above the left ear to highlight the hijab's pinnacle performance nature. The hijab's debut colors: black, vast grey and obsidian, were

similarly based upon consulting the athletes' desire for dark neutrals. By providing Muslim athletes with the most groundbreaking products, like the Nike Pro Hijab, Nike aims to serve today's pioneers as well as inspire even more women and girls in the region who still face barriers and limited access to sport: Fewer than one in seven girls participate in locally recommended sport activities for 60 minutes or more.

According to the Muslim clerics though, a skin-tight small piece of fabric does not identify as a hijab, however it is any veiled athlete's legitimate 'way out' to pursue her dreams of having an athletic career without giving up a crucial part of both her social acceptance standards and faith. She would be still called a 'hijabi' as well as an athlete. It is the best of both worlds based on several accounts.

On that same topic and as a former hijabi myself who experienced its impracticality on tennis courts and during karate practices, in my personal opinion, I believe that religion and obedience to God could be shown in other ways away from confinement behind a garment causing unnecessary discomfort, discrimination or social pressure in my community. And I fully adhere to Joan Scott's argument about moving the classification from women's issues to be seen as gender issues, since this segregation contributes in seclusion and a weakening of the entire case. This usage insists that the world of women is part of the world of men, created in and by it. This usage rejects the idea of having separate spheres, maintaining that to study women in isolation keeps the false notion that one sphere, the experience of one sex, has little or nothing to do with the other (Scott, 1986). Furthermore, I believe that the patriarchal governments in reign have purely political motives behind promoting the hijab or not that stray far from Islam or any religious notions even if some women do it purely out of devotion to God. I do agree that any and all discriminatory actions against women athletes who wear the hijab should cease to

exist whether these women wear it by free will or coercion. I also believe that in Egypt the labels and holiness surrounding the hijab were created by the community itself to avoid the politics of shame and disrespect which remain superior motives for women to embrace it, more so than the notion of it being a tool of obedience to God.

I quote Göle again for my conclusion in this section “*Secularism denotes a modern way of life, calling for the emancipation of women from religion signified by veiling and the segregation of the sexes. Women, as they move from interior to exterior space, acquire public roles to participate in the making of the modern individual*” (Göle, 67, 1997).

To analyze and understand the numerous dynamics inflicted by Egypt’s patriarchal society and masculinities governing athletic women’s lives in Egypt. The ideologies behind gendering bodies in Egypt must be discussed first which will be done in the next two sections of this chapter.

During my fieldwork, many girls expressed both their ease playing sports with the veil saying it posed no problems at all while others expressed their extreme irritation playing sports with it. This equally balanced conclusion came as a surprise to me since I used to hate playing sports wearing the veil myself. Perhaps out of guilt to criticize an act of religion did my interlocutors refuse to object to it? This is just my personal assumption.

The Effects of Media Channels on Egyptian Athletic Women

While every culture has its own meanings linked to sports, in many nation-states, female sports are often disregarded and trivialized in comparison to male sports (Khalaf, 2014). In Muslim countries, the underrepresentation and even the resentment of women in sports in the media is particularly problematic (ibid). The reality of there being top sportswomen who are

powerful and fit is still being denied and hidden from general view in most Arabic countries. In many Muslim countries, the government exercises control over Muslim female athletes through the media, preventing other Muslim women from seeing or knowing about the performance of their female athletes. For instance, during the Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004 Olympics, some Muslim countries instructed their television networks to keep the coverage of women's events to a minimum (Hargreaves, Vertinsky, 2007). To display how the media in Egypt plays a significant role in how an athletic woman is portrayed and how male-dominated this domain is, I will attempt to analyze some specific movie scenes and also give a full review of the movie *Youm lil Settat (A Day for Women)* by Kamla Abu Zikry (a production of 2016) in particular do to its direct relevance to my thesis topic. It is certainly important to distinguish which kind of media is being examined when discussing media reflections in this context. The regular TV shows, sports broadcasts and mainstream newspapers discuss Egyptian women athletes' accomplishments with a sense of pride and respect, which is expected of them given how emergence of several women athlete champions in the recent years. Thankfully, it is not an alien concept anymore. The report featuring the most prominent women Egyptian athletes in the appendix of this chapter is truly a proud reflection of how far Egypt has come, professionally regarding women and sports. Nevertheless how far Egypt has progressed socially in this regard is not only a different matter, but it is also my main concern. Surfing through Facebook, the most popular social media application I am careful to spread awareness about any athletic women I see conquering a certain challenge or winning any athletic competition in any sense.

One of the main drivers towards choosing this topic as my thesis was the amount of hostility I saw with almost every post featuring an athletic girl gleaming with pride about any given athletic accomplishment. I truly was stunned. Those women are my absolute idols, many

are my close friends, and the comments from the general public were beyond appalling. It is 2018 and we still have to endure comments about how Farida Othman, Egypt's absolute pride and glory is reduced to a masculine-looking semi naked body with no ethics and whose parents failed to raise her! Or when both Nada El-Sherbiny, Nour El-Tayeb, and Nour's champion husband were all publicly bashed for being a 'disgrace' to Islam and our Egyptian culture, because of their bare thighs. Until when will the Egyptian public continue to reduce women to appearances? Why is it always ONLY about how they look and how far they conform to the patriarchal norms called 'culture'? The tone of the public commenters on Facebook revealed a sickening sense of fear in my opinion. A fear that confirmed how women of Egypt were defying this ancient meaningless submission to patriarchy, a fear that maybe their daughters would dare be like that and 'disgrace' them too. Even for veiled champions like Hedaya Malak Wahba, the Egyptian taekwondo practitioner who won a bronze medal in 2016, some comments were about how she would be more useful as a homemaker and mother instead of acting like a man. Same for veiled Sarah Samir who won a bronze medal in the women's 69 kg event at the 2016 Summer Olympics, an unnecessary sense of hostility instead of a sense of pride filled the comments of the men on the posts.

Also my friend Hamsa Mansour who decided to take a 777 km journey sponsored in part by CIB across Egypt on her bicycle, again, ridiculed by the public on Facebook when she needed every ounce of encouragement possible. However, there certainly is a silver lining to every cloud. It is only because of how these posts have multiplies in number along with both positive and negative feedback that seeing athletic women, covered or not, is not as condemned as it was years ago. I vividly remember the unnecessary fuss constantly made over Egyptian former swimming champion Rania Alwany years ago in the 90's every time she appeared

wearing a swim suit for any competition despite making record time and winning in the name of Egypt. I remember how the public was suddenly ‘satisfied’ once she retired from professional swimming to get veiled and start a family, then the rage began again on social media when she decided to take off the veil. How the public is careful to subject these magnificent girls who are adamant on defying the meaningless shackling stereotypes to endless scrutiny is astounding. However, I give most of the credit to Cairo Runners for getting the public to be more and more accustomed to the sight of athletic women than ever before. At least now, if the mainstream public is not beaming with pride about seeing an athletic woman ecstatic about a certain achievement on a public post on Facebook, they remain quiet and abstain from insulting them or posting negative comments. The key is in exposure I believe.

The public now is more accustomed to seeing different types of women leading different lives other than starting a family. It is not as alienated as it was before. If it were not for the significant impact and intervention of social media in my opinion, the general public would have remained backwards and insulting to athletic women. Jessie, 37, shares her opinion about this issue as the President of the Egyptian Female bikers club:

Facebook was a perfect tool for awareness with certain messages. Plus the photos of female bikers on the page went viral for whatever reasons. Still it was an exposure that we needed. Needless to say at the beginning the comments very extremely negative and hostile, they really got on our nerves. Accordingly we were very careful to reply very respectfully to cancel out the notion that female bikers are disrespectful wild girls. Furthermore, we were on a mission. We needed to reply to these awful comments to actually explain any misconceptions or prejudgments. We saw it as a sight of ignorance. We need to educate these people. Right now, there is a significant change in the mentality. Say we had about 100 negative comments before, now we have like three or four versus the rest of the very encouraging comments, since 2013, even on the streets, not just Facebook. Before, cars would close up on riders to see if it is a female to instantly harass and take photos even, now this does not happen nearly as much. It is not a freak show anymore. They got used to how this looks. In 2016 even some companies (Etisalat and some real estate companies) decided to feature female bikers in their TV

advertisements and that comment did not go unnoticed, it went viral on social media pages. This is a huge reflection of our success as Egyptian female bikers.

Jessie's long standing passion to change this society's stereotypes about women who choose to ride motorcycles in particular is astounding. Jessie is careful to highlight the 'normality' of this sport for women every chance she gets. Her 12 year old daughter hopes to be a professional rider one day and Jessie although fears for her safety fully encourages her to follow her dreams.

A famous Egyptian comedy called *El-Tagriba el Danimarkeya* (The Danish Experiment) produced in 2003 certainly caught my attention and is worth deliberating in this section before moving on to the beautiful movie *Youm lil Settat*.

Adel Imam, a well-known respected actor, stars as Qadri, a widower and newly appointed minister of youth and sports, whose four grown sons live with him. The Lebanese singer Nicole Saba plays the buxom-blonde role of Danish student Aneta Henry Gothenburg, visiting Egypt for the first time to pursue her studies. She stays with Qadri and his family. The movie highlights the cultural differences in comedic approach but what caught my attention was a particular scene where 'Aneta' is casually doing her morning aerobics routine in her host's home and the entire scene is mocked and heavily sexualized as his sons watch her lustfully bending and twisting. The director portrayed her as if she was performing a lap-dance not simple morning warm ups. It was meant to be comical but in my opinion, such media exposure fortifies the false 'sexual' aspect of athletic women and the westernized notion of sports for women as opposed to normalizing it within the Egyptian society.

To me, it was a major faux –pas. It is this kind of rhetoric that encourages families to discourage their daughters from being ‘sexy’ and ‘western’ by playing sports. The link is very simply made that way through these small messages in our movies. Egypt has a high illiteracy rate so much of the intellect and cultural norms people unfortunately receive is through our movie production. For example, why did the director have her work out in scantily dressed outfits with full make-up on and perfectly airbrushed hair? Why not have her for example do a karate routine looking like a serious athlete instead of a sexy barbie-doll? The message both ideas convey are quite unlike and resonate differently with the receiving audience.

As for *Youm lil Settat*, a proud production of 2016, the movie’s setting is in an extremely underprivileged area of the outskirts of Cairo, often forgotten by the government where most people there are illiterate, yet there is a local youth center there. The center is extremely basic, yet it has a functioning pool. However, no women set foot in that center at all, which happens in most of these governmental centers across the country. There are elections going on for some sort of politician who wants to win their humble votes so a day for women in the pool once a week is introduced via huge microphones as a means of support from that politician. Who the politician is, or what is his role is completely ignored and undermined in the movie directed by the multitalented Director Kamla Abo Zikry.

The entire focus revolves around the sudden availability of the pool to women when it has always been for men or mixed, which of course is never an acceptable option within such a social class. The director’s choice of heroines and their stories unraveling linking it to that pool is absolutely mesmerizing. The pool is where they literally wash away their pains, find solace,

or even find agony, find liberation, find humanity and get a sliver of the taste of what it feels like to have male privileges, even if only for a day.

One heroine's son & husband drowned in a boat accident, suddenly the pool symbolizes this drowning, but then she learns to heal her grave wounds inside that pool. Buying a regular one piece swimsuit is the highlight of one girl's life looking at her in literally rags all through the movie, but that swimsuit feels like a princess's dress to her, the idea of wearing and buying a swimsuit is surreal to these women. The heroine looks at the swimsuit longingly in the shop dreaming of buying it. They describe our elite areas through what they see on TV calling it the 'New Egypt' where fast food flows freely, green heavens and a complete whirlwind of imagination. This part in the movie shows how unaware these people are of the social diversities in Egypt and how incredibly wide these social gaps are. They are living in slums of no relevance whatsoever to those who live in the villas in the new residential areas in gated communities, just as much as these new areas are totally disconnected from what can be defined as Cairo.

Another heroine is a virgin naked model. Everyone thinks she is the local slut because her job is to pose nude for painters but no man has ever touched her, again another message about stereotypical prejudgments surrounding the female body. Of course, most of the women in the movie are veiled, including the naked model. The director is careful to show how the veil in that social level is just an attire not done out of religion.

Then there is the extremist who reacts very violently towards this newfound 'right' given to women to use the pool one day a week exclusively away from the eyes of men, but in the end he is banished from this neighborhood and the 'voice' of religious fundamentalism loses. Kamla

Abu Zikry is clever to portray how unnecessarily stifling and controlling religious interpretations can be towards women if allowed to govern a society in that scene.

As I watched the movie, several instances arise giving off hidden messages from the insightful director. Here are a few observations. The pool is a very festive place, it is not only about the water only, the women treat that day like the weekly picnic where they can wear what they want, disengage from stifling social norms and act any way they please, freely away from the eyes of men. Music blasts out loud, singing, dancing, veils are immediately thrown to the ground beside the pool, women of all shapes and sizes without body shaming decide to wear swimsuits of all styles, the older women and enjoy the sun, the festivity and the water. Kamla Abu Zikry is careful to depict the scene of the falling thrown black veils quite dramatically signifying the release of oppression or perhaps sadness in my point of view against the shimmery cheerful blue water in the background, truly a genius simple scene.

Suddenly as they change into their regular dark, loose, long, unattractive clothing and put their veils on the smiles and laughter disappear, the joy fades away almost immediately. This scene contrasts sharply to the scene of taking off their veils and throwing them beside the pool, where the liberty & festivity begins. The viewer gets an idea of how conforming and stifling this attire can be to some women.

Also when the neighborhood first hears about this one day for women, they are all skeptical of the government's intention and assume beforehand that surely something horrible will happen if they dare use that suddenly bestowed upon them this 'right'.

Then the scene of how the men of the area are screaming and fighting in utter objection to giving away a single day a week for women. This signifies how unwelcome women are in public spaces and how men see them as an intrusion even when the government allows it. Socially, they have invaded their space whose ownership is based solely on their gender in this community. The scene reeks of patriarchy and the unexplained, unreasonable sense of entitlement pertaining to the men.

The pool represents liberation. They need no men to rejoice, the movies stresses on that fact contrary to the common belief in Egypt.

Also the immediate comment from the neighborhood men and women when they first heard of this new pool was that ‘they should have built more food outlets for buying loaves of bread better than this nonsense’. Where poverty exists, these luxuries have no place, or so it seems. By the end of the movie, the importance of this dedicated day in that pool is close to holy to these mostly poor illiterate women who still have the basic problems of earning their daily bread and butter.

Women also tend to be more sympathetic towards each other’s stories and normally stigmatized actions when they are together versus when being around their husbands in the movie. This halo of conservatism and an illusion of perfection arises in the presence of their men. The pool serves as a form of group therapy for these women who share their stories and laugh and cry together sympathizing more than judging.

Their interaction is more sincere together alone without men around them. It is like their actions and thoughts alter to conform to what may please men. They cannot sympathize with sins or social misconduct in the presence of the men in their lives.

The pool's coach is 'Bahgat' , which means joy in Arabic, again the genius Director is careful to choose a name that attributes to his role in the movie, he spreads 'joy' being the pool coach. The comment circling the neighborhood as the women grow accustomed to this weekly event is how women are happier, look prettier, feel more feminine, even got healthy tans and ultimately felt better about their lives despite their daily hardships.

When their clothes were stolen by the men who wanted to 'teach them a lesson' and retaliate at their given freedom, they were locked up all day unable to move an inch in their swimsuits outside of the youth center. Then when their clothes are smuggled back in, they rejoice in being given freedom and dignity again to be seen in the street again.

Truly this movie I must say contributed to reinforcing the importance of sharing public spaces, the joy of sports and athletic achievements with women. The reasons men work out are not much different for women. Media in all its forms has a significant role in spreading more awareness about the importance of athletic achievements for Egyptian women. It is through the advertisements on TV, or the different movie productions as well as the miscellaneous posts on various social media outlets that will force this patriarchal society to embrace women who choose to live their lives differently than the generation before us. The role of media must not be neglected when assuming how societies change over the years. The more this idea is presented in various formats, the more mundane it will become to the society and ultimately women will

have the opportunities to explore different dimensions of life without worrying about conforming to a certain rubric.

Concluding notes:

For some, the hijab in the Olympics is invasive (a threat) and runs counter to the values of women's emancipation and the long history of women's resistance (at least in the West) to male hegemony. For others, the hijab in the Olympics should be celebrated as a form of cultural plurality and an example of the West's openness towards diversity. For some, wearing the hijab while competing in the Olympics is a personal choice, while for others it is imposed either by state ideology or by male domination.

Throughout my fieldwork whether I was interviewing a man or a woman, the undertones of subordination and male dominance were always present. Granted, not everyone acknowledged religious interpretations to be the main reason, but almost all interlocutors agreed that some of the Islamic doctrines played a fundamental role in how this culture turned out and further confined athletic women. None of the women I interviewed were able to decide to become physically active if the male head of the household or the male guardian at home disapproved. Much coaxing and reassurance was needed. An issue like traveling alone for a sport like hiking for example where girls and boys camped overnight, unsupervised away from their parents, against social conformities, in a mixed gender setting was significantly problematic. One friend of mine who is 30 years old literally goes through serious fights with her family every time she attempts to go on a hike.

Her family accused her of insanity and demanded that she see a therapist to attend to her psychologically since they assumed she was hiking to 'run away' from her feelings of jealousy

of her married sister since she is still not married. This is a fully grown financially independent woman yet because this is a culture with tight family relationships and subordination to one's parents is absolutely fundamental regardless of how old a person is, she is forced to withstand living with them under the same roof and 'fight' her way to hike until she gets married and she is 'unloaded' onto someone else. A woman here is a heavy burden to bear. Her body and her actions are a constant source of shame to her family. She has no ownership of her own body.

Other women I interviewed chose to play certain sports behind their parents back because it was a male-dominated sport originally or it was in a mixed gender environment for example. Many of my interviewees were seen as 'odd' women by their social circles. 'Odd' had several definitions, they differed with every interlocutor's story with me but at no point was getting married, leading a sedentary life, wearing a veil and having a baby was considered odd. Most of the women I interviewed struggled to claim ownership of their body and their own choices. Some women still were not allowed to do what they wanted with their lives, they were tied to the classic line the majority of parents say in Egypt to their daughters 'You may do what you want once you are married not now. Ask for your husband's permission, not us.' I personally remember how I, at 32 year old, a divorced, salaried, totally sane and supposedly independent woman had to lie to my own father to go to hiking and camping or even to go out with friends and defy my 'curfew'. To me the curfew at my age while I was financially responsible for myself completely was one of the most humiliating ideas in the world. Every time I hiked, my father would raise hell with me. To my father's frustration yet also his relief, even after I had remarried and my husband expressed no objection to my athletic lifestyle in any way including traveling for any reason at all, my father started to question his sanity for 'approving' that.

However, now I was not his problem to bear. My actions and lifestyle will 'taint' my husband more than him. His burden was thankfully unloaded off his shoulder.

Chapter four

The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion for Women Athletes in Women

“Men have been adjudicating on what women are, and how they should behave, for millennia through the institutions of social control such as religion, the medical profession, psychoanalysis, the sex industry. Feminists have fought to remove the definition of what a woman is from these masculine institutions and develop their own understandings.”

— [Sheila Jeffreys, *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism*](#)

Introduction:

This chapter serves as the binding chapter demonstrating the impacts of the previous analysis in chapters two and three. In this chapter, I discuss the complex dynamics of social classes in Egypt, namely the middle & upper middle class, and how this affects athletic women on a number of levels. I also discuss sexual harassment in Egypt and how this is reflected within athletic women in Egypt showcasing examples collected during my fieldwork. How the state acts towards athletic women in their everyday lives in this issue is also discussed in this chapter. In this chapter, I aim to magnify the impacts of the various limitations women athletes deal with on a regular basis as they carry on with their athletic lifestyles in Egypt.

The Everydayness of the State and Support to Women Athletes in Egypt

The everydayness of women athletes in Egypt can be reflected through the work of Michel De Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). De Certeau argues that movement

through the city can be analyzed in terms of the spatial strategies of the powerful, which operate from an “own” space, and the ephemeral spatial tactics of the powerless, which can only momentarily materialize in what he calls pedestrian speech acts (1984:37). His reflections on space and power resonate with the urban trajectories discussed in this section as well as analyzing the work of De Koning (2009) from the text *Gender, Public Space and Social Segregation in Cairo: Of Taxi Drivers, Prostitutes and Professional Women*. However, lines between the powerful and powerless, between those who can develop spatial tactics and those who have to rely on momentary tactics are not as clear as De Certeau seems to suggest (hence the expensive exclusive gym i.e. a private space versus the public streets). The urban trajectories of Cairo’s young upper-middle class women defy clear dichotomies of elite versus dominated and dominant strategies versus momentary spatial tactics, and thereby allow for a more complex understanding of the workings of power in everyday micropolitics of space (De Koning, 2009). This text shows the significance of gender in the elaboration of social class in contemporary Cairo. The article mainly argues that the public presence of women is central to the explanation of what defines a new upper-middle-class culture, and, in turn, becomes the focus of class conflicts.

As my field work would show, what most clearly distinguishes these upper-middle-class women athletes from other middleclass ones is cosmopolitan capital: familiarity with Western demeanors and standards—for example, fluency in English—as well as the ability to participate in evidently cosmopolitan lifestyles that have become the privilege of Cairo’s upper middle class and elites (ibid).

This is demonstrated within sports as well. Women playing sports are classified as individuals with a more westernized, perhaps culturally exposed and powerful mindsets. It gives

them class leverage and social power. It is ‘trendy’ to workout. Being athletic falls under the classy upper-class westernized category. It means this woman can afford to create a safe exclusive workout space, which is a major concern for almost all of the women I interviewed as well as their parents or spouses. Cairo now has an ever-growing number of private schools, institutes, clubs, gyms and universities, as well as private hospitals; all offering exclusivity, segregated expensive yet safe spaces to conduct daily lives within a well-controlled bubble away from the inadequate ‘others’. Buying your own safe private space has become a dominant trait in upper social classes.

How social class and other limitations like sexual harassment affects athletic women in Egypt will be discussed in the section to follow this one. Here we deliberate how the state supports or intervenes with the everydayness of women athletes in Egypt. When comparing how women in Egypt decide if they would like to embark on athletic lifestyles, throughout my fieldwork several domains need to be discussed. To avoid redundancy I will not further establish the cultural constraints inflicted from the society, rather I would like discuss how the government handles this entire profile from several angles.

For example regarding infrastructures, building sports friendly establishments, facilities or even roads was almost never on the government’s list. As mentioned in chapter two, the first recreational bicycle track was built in 6th of October area by private investors in this well-known industrial area as a means of publicity for those businessmen. Furthermore, even in newly built gated communities, the culture of working out still does not exist in how the roads and sidewalks are designed. For example when I travel abroad, usually within the US or the UK, it is very common to see a communal playground with bicycle tracks and a tennis court every few blocks. They are free to be used by anyone, and free of charge as well. They are mainly built by tax

payer funds, which makes perfect sense. Here for example even in most gated privately funded communities this does not exist. Either the residents are members of the equally elite club inside those gated communities or are already members of other elite expensive sporting clubs nearby. There are no communal open spaces fit for working out in Cairo that may be free of charge, nothing here resembles for instance Central Park in Manhattan where it is common to see joggers there around the clock. This athletic ‘culture’ is not encouraged by the government here. Open unsupervised free of charge spaces pose a threat to the government. Shorook lives in Kuwait and tells me:

Public spaces do not exist in Egypt, for example: I can go for biking, walking, jogging, exercising or working out by the beach opposite to my house here in Kuwait, but I cannot do this in Egypt because simply I will be harassed verbally and physically. And by the way, here in Kuwait in every block we have a big park with some equipment to be used while working out and exercising.

Kuwait of course is a wealthy country and post the Iraqi invasion in 1990 where the US helped rebuild the country again, such athletic cultures were adopted despite some conservative trends in the society. However due to the existence of a high number of European and American expats as well as in the UAE and Qatar, these countries armed with their massive amounts of oil-based funds are able to cater to a ‘westernized’ infrastructure to cater to the comfort of the expats residing there. Usually these facilities are not used by the natives of the country, it is considered ‘too common’ for their stature, totally unlike the US and Europe. And here in my point of view is the true difference reflected.

Public transportation is mainly for the working class, the expats even, but not wealthy among its citizens. Comparing this to when I went to Cambridge in the UK and naturally the hotel we resided in did not have a gym (which again is different from the arrangement we have in the Middle East at expensive five star hotels), I immediately searched for the nearest park to

jog or simply workout in the morning. It took me less than 1 minute on Google maps to find several public cycling, hiking and walking trails plus an adult workout space adjacent to a children's playground all within a convenient five minute walk from my hotel. I remember how bewildered the concierge was when I asked for directions on how to get to the park I saw on Google maps. His reply was 'Ma'am, there are parks for running all over the area, which one do you want to go to in particular?' Sure enough, I would see people walking, jogging and cycling in safety away from the cars in the street feeling a sense of entitlement to have the government 'worry' about pedestrians or cyclists. It is the total opposite here. Cycling in the streets of Cairo is truly at one's own risk. When I tried to figure out a way to cycle from Madinaty, all the way to AUC New Campus, I found that the only way to do this was to risk my life and share the 20 km highway with all sorts of vehicles back and forth on a daily basis. I am speaking about a 20-30 drive by car and around 1.5 hours on a bicycle. The dramatic thing is that if I do that and get injured or even lose my life, the government will not be blamed in any sense; in fact, I will be blamed for my 'insanity'.

Oddly enough, given the crowded streets of Cairo, one would assume that the Egyptian government would devise means to encourage people to find alternative means of transportation other than cars; however, this is not the case. An interesting case showcasing the lack of governmental support is the story of Sherouk, an Azhar graduate, aged 32 who started an athletic and social initiative on her own in Dakahleya called "Lamitna Saada" (Our gathering is happiness). Since she wanted to run all her life and long before Cairo Runners was established, right after her swift marriage and divorce she decided to use social media to advertise her social/running project which was basically to hold Ramadan meals then run in groups. Needless

to say after losing her money, her patience and seeking governmental support to no avail, she shutdown her project. She had this to tell me:

To begin with I was unsponsored in my Lamitna Saada athletic/social project. I spent all of my money on it until I was broke. Furthermore when I tried to gain access to our fairly decent public stadium to do our warm ups and runs, I had to go through numerous bureaucratic hoops. The guards wanted bribes, they hated my 'initiative' altogether and thought it was either a silly waste of time or even ill-mannered and inappropriate spreading rumors about what we did inside saying we engaged in 'acts of a sexual nature'. Even when I managed to get the needed permits after speaking to someone with influence, the maintenance workers used to deliberately flood the grass fields with water just to stop us from training inside. They would also videotape us without our permission hoping to catch anything unethical on tape.

Sherouk tells me how alien-like both herself and the runners in the group were to the rest of the community. This is a rather poor governorate not as diverse as Cairo. She was taking on a huge challenge to try to start such a project. She told me that even though some of the runners' friendships got serious and turned into marriages, once the girls were married to their fellow runner friends, they were banned to run. She was now 'his honor' and no decent man can have 'his woman' run in the streets. This disturbed her greatly. Sherouk was also accused of making 'hook-up' projects in her community rather than an athletic project. This reflects a lot about the surrounding culture in that community.

Furthermore to discuss governmental support as an avid hiker myself, I was surprised to discover that all hiking companies as well as adventure travel companies are banned by law to possess a satellite phone. These phones literally save lives on top of mountains or inside caves or canyons where there is no cellular reception available by any of the three telecommunications companies.

In February 2014, four hikers lost their lives to sudden foul weather changes in St. Catherine in South Sinai. There were several allegations regarding their deaths. Some news claimed that they took to the mountains without a guide, others claimed that they had a guide

indeed but he was quite inexperienced and decided to ignore the weather and hiked with them anyway. In any case, had satellite phones been allowed with the hikers themselves or the Bedouin guides, these four lives may have been spared. The hiker's friends who managed to stay safe resorted to the army in the area to start a search and rescue mission for their friends. The bodies were then discovered and transported to Cairo via the army helicopters (Ahram Online , 2014). Kareem, the founder of the Hiking Club Egypt commented about this by saying:

We rely mainly on the Bedouin guides in the area for safety rather than the army. The army certainly would help us in a search and rescue mission but we rely more on the Bedouins. Not having a satellite phone may not be the optimal safety solution, but we have managed our own safety through other means.

Satellite phones were banned and taken from all adventure companies in Egypt for national security reasons despite the high traffic on these events due to the welcoming beauty that exists in the terrains of Egypt beyond the urban crowd of Cairo. I personally remember how hesitant I was to pursue my hiking passion given this ban that certainly compromises my safety as an athlete.

Furthermore, a recent ban was made to The Nile Kayak Club (NKC) regarding their weekly rides across the Nile also, again, for safety reasons. The NKC arranges several rides to and from Maadi's Platform area right on the Nile. Ahmed Nayer, the co-founder told me:

Despite having huge encouragement from the government and considering how smoothly establishing the NKC went, unfortunately we had to cancel our famous Maadi rides and take it up to El-Manial which is a less classy area. Maadi has a lot of expats and elite westernized people living there, as fun as it was to have full bookings every weekend, the police on the river told us that due to the existence of the foreigners, they wanted to escort us alongside the kayaks as a means to protect them, for security. Since this was not feasible, and will cause an unnecessary scene, the permits for kayaking in that area were taken away. Since then, we have been struggling to get them back since the Platform ride is quite a fun popular ride and this severely affects our business.

The permits issue is not only a problem with the NYK, the various existing hiking clubs also go through a lot of bureaucratic hoops to get safety permits all the time for every trip. These

permits could be very easily cancelled almost immediately before the trips which cost the organizers a lot logistically. This is understandable given the nature of Sinai and how the mountains have the potential to harbor terrorists in both the north and the middle of Sinai. Ahmed had another interesting remark about the newly booming sport tourism business starting to grow in Egypt on several levels. Ahmed has international kayak rides as part of a challenge for avid kayakers who kayak through Africa. They wait for this event and pay in hard currency vast amounts of money every year. Instead of having the government shut kayak points down for security reasons; embracing this sport and devising ways to secure the activity would make more sense.

Similarly with Cairo Runners and GBI (Global Biking Initiative), while these are until this very moment 100% non-governmental activities, the government makes no effort in fully endorsing these culture changing initiatives. However to be fair when Cairo Runners make nation-wide events now, the Ministry of Interior provides ample security and checkpoints throughout the event that draws Egyptian and expats alike to join these vibrant fun activities. Getting the needed permits to announce a certain public run is not the easiest task in the world and previously some runs have been canceled due to security reasons after being advertised for.

Although how the government views these activities has not really changed a lot and it does not offer any financial support in any way, yet it is beginning to succumb to the need to provide security to these events now given the rise in their popularity. Abdulla, one of the Cairo Runners managers, told me that their biggest challenge yet is getting full governmental support for these volunteer based initiatives.

This is one of the reasons why it is just truly easier to hold these athletic events in the new areas of Cairo like New Cairo and Sheikh Zayed. If anything the gatedness and the distance

away from the crowd and cars in addition to the mostly elite residents facilitate the problem of security permits versus trying to get a marathon or a cycling event arranged in the streets of downtown Cairo.

Another new athletic trend is beginning to pick up momentum in Egypt that yet again, with proper governmental support and adequate marketing could have a significant mark in the Egyptian economy, the triathlons. Triathlons are competitions for running, cycling and swimming all in the same course. Although there is a triathlon federation in Egypt, because of inadequate marketing, not many people know of it and it does not target the general public. However the privately founded sports companies, TriFactory founded by Ayman Hakky, is well known to most athletes. TriFactory arranges miscellaneous marathons, triathons and other athletic events and, most importantly like Cairo Runners, GBI, Go Bike, The Hiking Club and The Nile Kayak Club, they target the public including the amateur athletes as well as the professional ones as well as the master athletes who have grown too old for international competitions like the Olympics. Not to belittle the importance of having athletic federations, but through my experience with the fieldwork done, in the recent years in Egypt's social pattern it is these public mixed athletic groups who target amateur athletes like the groups above who are responsible for creating positive dramatic changes in the social patterns governing the lives of Egyptian aspiring athletes.

Speaking of federations, I was not extremely interested in getting extensive information regarding how they operate with professional athletic women in various sports. Being a professional woman athlete in Egypt requires a lot more than a federation's support; it requires social power and wealth to be able to afford practicing adequately every day. However, O* a professional rower aged 37 had the following to say about the rowing federation:

I can say with absolute proof out of first-hand experience that there are so many challenges we face as athletic women and there must be some sort of legal enforcement or governmental support for these challenges to diminish. For example, if it weren't for the federation insisting on having rowing teams for women, why would any club actually create them on their own? At the clubs during our training, the clubs were asked to have the women done with their training and out of the water before any soldiers would come and see them. They acted with us like plague. Quickly shove them into the lockers, quickly get them out of the club, we could not stay and chat or interact at all, they wanted us out ASAP, our existence in the club was very problematic for the club despite orders from the federation. This attitude was not unique to the army clubs, not even the Arab Contractors Club had the same issue with the women. Up until recently, the very coach in one of these clubs expressed aloud that he did not want any girly nonsense during the practice. Both sexes at a young age will definitely result in unwanted talk around the practice areas. What if teammates liked each other, dated then lost their concentration in the races?

Furthermore, the lack of support from organizations, I think this matters more than the social dynamics. I am proudly the first woman in Egypt to represent women in rowing internationally at the Elite World Rowing Championship. I went because the International Rowing Federation sent an invitation in my name and they paid money for me to go. I used to browse online and my English was good allowing me to communicate with them until I pushed for the chance to go there and then the international federation asked our federation to invite me to go. I preferred to row rather than work at the time. I proudly went to the first women's rowing championship. It was my priority at the time. I was so very excited and I wanted to know everything there was to know about the federation there. I got my name known there. We need a budget to support women travelling abroad for sports with excellent coaches. Mind you, the federation and clubs here assign weak coaches for the women's team, if the coach was good, he would train the men, not the women. Women need to be empowered by the governmental organizations.

In my point of view as much as our glorious women athletes provide huge encouragement to other aspiring women athletes in our society, the social impact made is not as significant as these public amateur groups who are basically funded from volunteers and sponsors from the private companies. Looking for example at how neglected the 'youth and sports' government subsidized centers that are supposedly open to both genders with several athletic options that are almost non-existent reflect how sports is just not part of our culture. Unfortunately, these appalling centers are not suitable to any athlete not even some of the lower classes in Egypt, since unfortunately these social classes are too poor to afford expensive decent club memberships, yet they try to make use of whatever the government is able to provide. A

wonderful example of this was portrayed in the movie “*Youm lil Settat*” discussed in chapter 3 and with one of my interlocutors whom I hold the highest respect for, Radya.

Radya, is an illiterate cleaning lady in her thirties who tells me about her stunning experience as she decided to give both her daughters and her son karate classes in her very humble informal neighborhoods in an informal neighborhood of the wealthy suburb Maadi, a neighborhood called Kafr El-Elew, just beside Helwan.

We live in a very local poor area. My husband was and still is my main problem. He was afraid of people’s mockery, social stigma plus more than anything he hated the idea of the karate classes being mixed gender at the local youth and sport center *markaz shabab*. To my delight, I saw that karate is available for girls and at a reasonable monthly fee (50 LE per head) apart from the karate exams and in my residential area too, very convenient. As long as my children are doing a positive activity that benefits them and I can pay for it, I will certainly always maintain this. I told my husband when he complained that it is just like the electricity bill, another household expense nothing more. The cheap governmental center does not segregate the karate team. I convinced my husband by telling him she was in a mixed gender school in primary stage and is bound to mix with boys anyway since we will enroll her in college, which is mostly a mixed gender environment. It would be better for her to learn how to deal with boys and defend herself now anyway. She needs to have enough self-confidence to deal with boys, not fear them and to defend herself as early as possible. We will not be able to defend her forever and we are a working class, it is not an option to not work. She will encounter many men in her life through work or education, we cannot protect her forever. After a lot of arguments I managed to convince him and took all my three kids plus my nephews as well to practice. When I did that I encouraged my neighbors to join us with their daughters as well. I was the first woman to bring her daughters to this center at all. When my neighbors would see me in the street with my daughters in the karate suit, they would be surprised that the center even trained girls, nobody had a clue. So this encouraged them to enroll their daughters too. I endured A LOT of mocking and negativity from the community around me for doing that especially at the beginning. Also, the trainer is a pious man of God who could be trusted with the kids especially the girls. Every time I took my kids there, people would stop me in the street and ask me about the logistical details for this training. I saw that my daughter was a better, more active and enthusiastic person after she joined this training. I definitely saw a positive change in both her physical and psychological condition. I believe that sports are a very healthy outlet for anyone and I am very happy that I have this option, as humble as it is where I live. Furthermore, I knew that she would be better psychologically anyway and indeed I saw a positive change in her. Now the karate practice day is a day they all eagerly wait for. Although it is physically very exhausting but still they come home relieved from stress, happy and relaxed.

Seeing how Radya is somewhat satisfied with governmental center where she told me although it's convenient still she would not trust that her daughters change clothes or even go to the bathroom versus the incredibly posh private gyms funded 100% by private entities tells a lot about how high on the list creating a healthy athletic society is for the government. Largely throughout my fieldwork asking the athletic business owners, amateur athletes and professional athletes of both genders, seeking governmental support was the most popular answer I got. Changing clothes for women outside the safety and privacy of their homes is not widely accepted in some social classes in Egypt. It is considered highly inappropriate. In the early 90's there was a specific incident once about cameras being installed gyms and sometimes fitting rooms to collect videos of women undressing for any reason. Even now, I have some friends who refuse to strip down to the base essentials when trying out clothes in stores.

Another seemingly futile yet relevant challenge reported during my fieldwork was the unnecessary propaganda done regarding the senior year of high school. Sara Samir despite winning a bronze Olympic medal was given no excuses and was forced to repeat an entire academic year. Many households in Egypt immediately drop sports from their children's lives to study for this academically useless yet crucial test. Many students have a very hard time bouncing back to their athletic lives later on in college. The government certainly is unforgiving and relentless regarding this issue. Surely special considerations could be given to athletes during their senior year of high school. Again, the government is unsupportive regarding young athletes of Egypt, males and females alike. Hoda, a master swimmer, aged 36, shared her opinion about this:

Generally because of the education system in Egypt does not allow you to focus on sports, we lack having more athletes in our culture. Specifically for females some parents hinder their daughters from pursuing their sports of choice (especially if that sport requires a swimsuit, gymnastics outfit, tennis skirt, or squash skirt) and they see that

women above certain age should be covered. The biggest challenge for athletic women in Egypt in my opinion is not having supporting families (parents and/or husband). Furthermore, not all facilities cater to the different needs of athletic women.

Nadia, an amateur runner aged 28 and a previous player in the women's soccer team also said:

Regarding state support, most athletes are affected by their high school studies, especially the thanaweya amma; they quit sports at that point. It also has to do with the educational system that does not support sports or champions. Of course it is more difficult for girls/women because they do not receive the same support as the male athletes in our society.

Challenges and Limitations of Athletic Women in Egypt

Throughout my research and fieldwork I have discussed the various limitations and challenges that faced my woman athlete interlocutors in Egypt. Having discussed the impact of our neopatriarchal society, impact of accessibility policies and the impact of the gendered bodies and gendered roles on athletic women in Egypt, focusing on how social class and the cancerous phenomenon of sexual harassment affect athletic women will be highlighted in this chapter.

Regarding social class and accessibility, throughout my fieldwork I noted how most sports requiring a rather non-conservative outfit usually attracts women from upper classes. The women from these classes usually have the liberty to refuse to follow our conservative culture. These are also sports that require wealth to provide decent safe training areas like major expensive exclusive sporting clubs. AUC for example is by far the most expensive type of education in Egypt and the social classes in it are majorly upper class. The sports complex at the AUC is, by and large, is of the best across Egypt and the trainers using it are certainly equipped to train professionally. Tuition fees at AUC now surpass 300k per year, this is compared to an average public university where fees range anywhere from 2k to 30k per year. Many female Egyptian AUC athletes stand out across Egyptian contemporary athletic history. In the 2016 Rio

Di Janero Olympics, there were six AUC students and Alumna competing in various fields. Leila Mohamed Abdel Moez, an architectural engineering junior competed in synchronized swimming (technical and free teams), Samia Hagrass Ahmed, a business administration junior competed in synchronized swimming, Reem Kassem, an architectural engineering junior competed in the 10k open swim, Reem Mansour class of 2015 alumna, an economics graduate competed in archery, Dina Meshref a business administration senior, competed in table tennis and Yossra Ashraf an accounting junior competed at table tennis. The following readings deliberate how social and status and financial wealth dictate mostly the future of many women athletes in Egypt. Higher levels of social classes usually entails having western exposure and less social conformities to abide to in addition to having the finances to facilitate moving around in Cairo's public spaces safely and conveniently to reach the privacy and luxury of elite expensive training centers or clubs that can easily groom stars out of their players.

The text *Gender, Public Space and Social Segregation in Cairo: Of Taxi Drivers, Prostitutes and Professional Women* (2009) by Anouk de Koning explores how class and women's accessibility intertwine in Cairo perfectly. It is through this text and a selection of others including my fieldwork that I am able to link this limitation with women athletes in Egypt. Women's physical public presence had become one of the most significant markers of the young upper-middle class culture that had developed in Cairo's new leisure spaces in the 1990s, as well as, more generally, of Cairo's upmarket spaces with global ambitions (De Koning, 2009). This public presence was, however, delicate and evoked severe anxieties about the possible harm that can come to female upper-middle-class bodies in the city's public spaces. It is not very difficult to capture the intensity and bodily felt character of interactions in Cairo's public spaces, or the intense self-awareness of many women when they move through public space. Women are

established as clearly embodied, located subjects unlike most men, in contrast, enjoy a masculine illusion of freedom from the body and its inevitable locatedness (ibid).

Gillian Rose in *Urban Pollution: Cultural Meanings, Social Practices* articulates the specific dynamic of ‘the gaze’ given to women invading Cairo’s public spaces quite precisely (Rose, 1993:145–146).

The threatening masculine look materially inscribes its power onto women’s bodies by constituting feminine subjects through an intense self-awareness about being seen and about taking up space . . . [I]t is a space which constitutes women as embodied objects to be looked at’.

The issue of accessibility truly intersects with social class dynamics as well as sexual harassment, which are both mainly deliberated in this chapter. The consumption patterns and lifestyles of young upper-middle-class Cairenes have contributed to the emergence of new public spaces for consumption and leisure, as well as shifting axes of centrality in the city at large (De Koning 2009). Memberships in lavish gyms can start from 5000 LE now. Like most of my interlocutors, these young professionals were among the most visible advocates of Egypt’s neoliberal age: young, classy women, relatively fluent in English, who were employed in the internationally oriented segment of Cairo’s economy and claimed knowledge of global trends and cosmopolitan fashions, and of course understood how ‘trendy’ it was to be athletic.

Their presence in both professional and social public life had become normalized, even critical to upper-middle class lifestyles, which were marked by the mixed-gender character of contacts and places (ibid). Their presence was a critical part of a claim not only to the elite status

of such work, sport and leisure spaces, but also their modernity and global suitability. They have been a central arena for contestations over modernity and authenticity the presence of women in public leisure spaces has been a major marker of cosmopolitan or “westernized” elite practices, which have long been taken to indicate modernity and sophistication, and have legitimized elite status and prerogatives (Abaza 2001). Examples would be jogging or walking even in the streets, which both remain only for the elite reserved in specific portions of Cairo that would tolerate such exposure.

In Cairo such cosmopolitan referencing has never been an unproblematic marker of elite class membership and sophistication; it could also be taken as a sign of alienation and rootless Westernization, evoking associations with moral looseness. I always wondered why women had no cheap practical outlets like men had the *kahawa balady* cafes and of course why walking or God forbid, running in the streets for women in efforts to workout could only be defined as a nightmare. Women have no cheap cafes or even public soccer fields to rent out like that, which tells a lot about how public spaces are mainly a male entitlement.

Nora who comes from the middle class aged 32, spent months trying to find information about available squash courts to learn how to play since she was not a member in any of the elite expensive clubs that had fancy squash courts, by complete coincidence she stumbled onto courts made by the army in El-Nessor club, basically a military club open for civilians at an affordable fee. I personally knew that club but had no idea that it catered to squash reservations from non-members. It is remarkable how poor marketing could negatively affect a perfectly functioning venue. The streets of Cairo evoke the sense of an unpredictable urban jungle sheltering various threats towards women. There is a constant sense of a dangerous urban jungle focused mainly on

the sexualized threats it presented to the female body. Anxieties about the propriety of being in public were displaced by, or perhaps translated into, fears of pollution and defilement of the highly fragile and vulnerable upper-middle-class female body (De Koning, 2009). It is as if women's bodies of other classes are not as important. After all, not every woman is able to file a sexual harassment/assault complaint in police stations. The social power, level of awareness, education and prevalence of the victim blaming culture varies greatly across the social levels in Egypt. On the street, every woman is fair game.

Maybe upper and upper class women are more able to get around without having to be on the street. However, this has recently changed due to several factors including the widespread campaigns educating both men and women about sexual harassment and the various implications it has on the victim and her family. We now frequently hear of several girls responding back to harassers violently in an attempt to contest the constant cat-calling or to express their objection to being assaulted in every way, form and location. Previously as a sign of 'respectability' most girls were told to keep to themselves in the street, not respond to these 'thugs' in any way even if they insult them. Watching how men and women even walk in the streets, the physical dynamics are quite impressive. Take a look at any random hour in downtown Cairo and you'll notice that girls do not walk alone, usually in small groups. Girls walking alone, walk rather fast, lowering their gaze, frowning, not really enjoying any scenery around them. They do not linger in the streets or go for a 'stroll'. Going for a rather safe, casual stroll would probably be done in malls, where it is closed, secure and filtered. This is especially accentuated in the mundane older neighborhoods of Cairo, not very likely in the booming elite areas of New Cairo or 6th of October areas. After all, most of the residents there usually reside in the safe gated communities and roam the public spaces in the safety of their own cars. Cairo's streets are largely typically

branded by male entitlement. The street is a space for men to inhabit freely, with little restrictions. It is a space where they could spend time, observe and interact with passers-by, comment and flirt. Unaccompanied young women, in contrast, had a liminal and ambiguous status as marginalized, and potentially illegitimate and disreputable, passers-by (Ghannam 2002). They were supposed to be on their way somewhere, have a clear destination and not linger for too long. Hanging around in the streets, especially on their own, was taken as an open invitation for men to make contact. Again, this pertains more to areas of a lesser social standard.

Throughout my fieldwork, I have come see how my interlocutors avoided lingering in the streets having to spend time waiting alone in a public space for any reason at all. Waiting alone in open public spaces was the equivalent to inviting sexual invitations, and thus opened women up not only to physical abuse, but also the symbolic tarnishing of being seen as open for sexualized contact. B*, an AUC student tells me how she was told to ‘move’ in the street by her father once:

My reputation will be tainted if someone saw me running in the street since this will mean I am disrespectful. My father once also told me to walk slowly in the street, I normally have a rather fast pace. I was told that girls should not walk so fast from my dad when I was just 12 years old so my newly developing body would not jiggle inappropriately. I have a fast pace because I am usually late and am in a hurry to get to places that is all.

The women who were the object of flirtations and harassment were dubiously seen to carry part of the blame for the cat-calling. The sad logical to this deduction is that a woman might be seen as someone one who invites this kind of attention since she decided to move alone through public space and attracting the male gaze by her clothes or behavior. Such a segregation of blame also resonates with views about the potential danger presented by a woman’s contact

with men other than her mihrim (the Islamic word interpreting a husband, father, uncles and brothers).

The presence of women in public was not seen as problematic, but the kind of dangers that being in public presented alternatively was. Concerns focused on the numerous dangers of harassment that were seen to accompany such being in public. These were invariably sexualized dangers that threatened a woman's sexual purity and respectability (Phadke 2007, 1516). Cairo was generally said to be safe, yet fears of sexual violence are unfortunately common. The need to take public transport or move on foot in the streets exposed women to violations on their established routines and preferred lifestyles, as well as the numerous sexualized dangers Cairo's cityscape was seen to have.

Taking for example the setting of upscale coffee shops and how they had created a protected niche for non-familial mixed-gender sociabilities in contentious public geographies of leisure (De Koning, 2009). The rather exclusive context of the coffee shop helped frame a woman's appearance and demeanor as upper-middle-class and thereby guaranteed a certain interpretation of her presence in that space. Upper middle class women can be easily branded in these places. These assumptions implied that women (and men) from a high social level knew how to conduct mixed-gender interactions properly, since it constituted part of their cosmopolitan, yet respectable class normalcy. This is an extremely class-oriented perspective that is crudely true. Again the parallel with similar spaces in liberalizing Mumbai is striking. As Phadke notes, "As long as they dress class-appropriately, the presence of couples and even their displays of affection are not looked on in askance but in fact constitute part of the message these spaces are striving to convey: that these are global spaces with global rules where one can leave behind the city and its parochial cultural contexts" (Phadke 2007:1514). Many of these places

have a 'door inspection policy' despite prior reservations. Many places forbid headscarves, casual wear, or even people who look like they come from lower social classes. No explanation is given at times, yet the visual segregation is clear. Class and wealth need to show on people entering these exclusive places as the fear of the presence of 'others' in these elite places implies that these others might not abide by the understood rules of gendered sociability. This is portrayed athletically in the form of having elite gyms and clubs that cater to just a certain class of the Egyptian society. Finding a safe workout space was a main concern to most of my female interlocutors. Looking at the social dynamics at the AUC's mixed gym for example versus a gender segregated gym in a local low-scale part of Cairo tells a lot about how social class impacts the athletic scene for girls/women in Egypt.

When I would work out inside the AUC gym for example, I did not put much thought into what I wore or the kind of exercises I chose to do. Bending or doing any physical movements in front of males was not a concern for me. Furthermore, the mixed gender sociabilities differed enormously versus other middle-class gyms. For example 'hitting on' a woman or a girl working out or cat-calling was out of the question, not necessarily out of ethics or morals, but more out of social class eligibility. To be elite, means that you do not harass women, that is it. These mixed gender sociabilities were assumed to be normal and respectable only for a certain class of people and they certainly vary according to class. Accordingly, venues were primarily judged on the "level" in terms of social class. Therefore the culture of 'working out' is deemed an imported westernized culture as discussed in chapter three, foreign to the Egyptian society. This is more of a cultural class-oriented issue rather than a pure religious one.

To maintain this elite upper middle class equilibrium, most safe, well-equipped workout spaces require high membership fees to access them and to ensure the other 'vulgar' citizens of

lower classes cannot enter to disrupt the customized social demeanor taking place as the women athletes safely work out. People entering expensive gyms or clubs need to abide to a certain rubric. Looking trendy, clean, stylish and expensive comes high on that list.

One of the issues facing my interlocutors was finding suitable workout clothes that satisfied both their faith, sport of choice and the surrounding atmosphere. Fitting in is crucial in these elite parts of Cairo. Gyms for women in particular need to be kept clean, safe, comfortable, very private (no cameras allowed or photography) with of course all female staff working there. Only a certain standard of women must be allowed in. Any suspicious looking girls/women that come from a different class can easily 'taint' the place causing it to be not preferred to the mainstream of upper middle class women who usually use these workout places. A similar ambiguity, reflecting an apprehensive relation between morality and visibility, continues to provide the central backdrop to women's negotiations of public space in numerous settings, among others in contemporary Cairo. Public visibility could suggest immoral availability, and had to therefore be carefully managed (De Koning, 2009). Furthermore, the work in *Marginalizing women* stresses on how the ability of many upper-middle-class women to engage in their preferred lifestyle, modes of sociability and self-presentation depended on such class closure and control over their environment (Dyer et al, 2013). Moving around with elite women, you would see how the map of Cairo seemed to shrink to include only those areas where their distinctive lifestyles were the norm: the upmarket districts of Mohandiseen, Zamalek, Maadi, Heliopolis and now New Cairo and Sheikh Zayed in 6th of October area. Due to the progression of sexual harassment and the need of exclusivity and elite class orientation, Cairo has contracted to literally a few areas that have the potential to welcome women to safely navigate them whether for working out or even just existing. Ideally, the relatively new gated communities

growing on the outskirts of Cairo regardless of how pretentious or unsustainable they might seem for certain people, seem to have provided to many upper class women what the rest of the country lacks: the basic right to navigate a public space. Elite norms increasingly clash with those of other city dwellers, thereby confirming the impossibility of “going out in the streets”. Since Cairo’s upper middle class and elite represent a minority in the cityscape that, moreover, cannot command respect in Cairo’s more mixed public spaces, their privileged lifestyles and spaces are secured through closure. This is extremely evident in the gated communities.

N*, a 44 year old AUC Faculty member said:

Social class is everything related to sports in clubs, even now there are vicious fights to keep lower classes out. If you come from a lower social class, you certainly have no outlet for sports nor the social mentality that accepts women playing sports. Actually the lower class women who do weightlifting and Olympic lifting, the equipment used are inexpensive, also a small room is needed at a markaz shabab مركز شباب. There are girls/women who are veiled but perform sports without it. In Egypt, most of us have a social image to keep up with: a veil, a marriage and kids.

Esraa, a P.E. student aged 21, living in Arish north Sinai says:

Mostly Egypt’s elite social classes have more awareness about the importance of sports for women and how positively this affects her lifestyle and health. This class usually engage in elite sports like tennis, squash. Golf and other expensive sports that require social power and a high financial ability and both are not accessible to everyone.

Hoda, a professional master swimmer aged 36, said:

Speaking about swimming, I would say some women prefer open door ladies only pools, and this is not available in most pools in Cairo. Of course, women from higher social classes engage in sports more because they are more open to the idea of it, because they are more likely not to suffer from any restrictions from their families. Women in higher social classes know well the health benefits of sports in both physical and mental aspects so they go for it, however families coming from the lower social classes are more strict regarding women’s clothing and social behavior so they disapprove of women’s athletic outfits, so the whole idea of sports goes to the bin.

K*, a former AUC faculty member aged 40 and a bodybuilder for 18 years had an interesting take on how social class governs the dynamics of athletic women in Egypt:

In addition to the regular male challenges, women athletes in Egypt have to counter a lot of harsh and negative stereotypes. She needs to balance out how her body turns out because if she looks more masculine, it will be very hard to find a mate for herself since she will be viewed as less of a female by prospective suitors. They can be easily intimidated. Unless she finds someone with a similar lifestyle who understands and appreciates this sport, it will be very problematic for her to find someone suitable. Most males will never accept this lifestyle especially if they lead sedentary lifestyles of their own. Lots of the cultural traits setting what is appropriate and acceptable or not when women decide to invade the public spaces for sports or anything else stems from the religion *صوت المرأة عوره* *زى اسلامى* *متشبهات بالرجال* *بيوتكن* *و قرن فى بيوتكن*. But, I think the severity of applying this changed dramatically across all social levels. It is not done by fathers to demean their daughters, it is done out of protection from sexual harassment. These restrictions are related to protective measures. Religious restrictions could be seen as a means of emancipation of how women are being protected not confined from males. Like in Iran, the veil was a symbol of resistance against the westernization of the Shah and fearing the loss of culture. So, it was a form of emancipation from the shackles of Western liberation. The emergence of public mixed athletic groups like Cairo Runners is a reflection of the rebellious trends going on now. Women in particular are put under enormous amounts of stress so these are logical outlets for such stresses & challenges

Competitive sport is mainly practiced through sport clubs, which are expensive and therefore mainly reserved for the middle and upper classes. Due to the secular organization of sport in Egypt, competitive sport is not gender segregated so men can be present when women play, such as during a basketball game. Egypt does send female athletes to the Olympic Games, while they do not participate in the Solidarity Games, which are games for Muslims who believe that female participation in Olympic Games is not in accordance with Islam. Egypt does however have committees for 'sport for all'. Through 'sport for all' it is possible for women to do aerobics in gender-segregated arenas. There exist no statistics of women's participation in sport in Egypt. The information available indicates that the pattern is the same as in most countries, i.e. that more men than women participate in sport. However, religion cannot be blamed in content for this lack of women's participation since the physical rituals of Muslim pilgrimage involves both genders unsegregated doing a variety of activities all physical. Furthermore, in Islam and during pilgrimage, covering the face for women is actually prohibited.

There are also other limitations residing in cultural rules that have been laid down that affect women in general. One such rule is that against men and women working together or carrying out activities together; this has also affected women's participation in sports, which has now affected their featuring at international competitions. Therefore, this lack of gender integration is a major problem (Khalaf, 2014).

Today, the field of physical education and sport provides evidence that there are Muslim girls and women who choose to participate in sport-related activities with head, arms and legs covered, others in Western sporting outfits and some who choose to participate only in sex-segregated environments. All identify themselves as Muslim and most are satisfied with the private and public ways in which they adhere to their faith and resolve their faith/athletic identities (ibid).

For some women, however, there can be issues regarding the culture of sports participation environments and religious requirements like modesty in dress and separate gender relations. Modesty, as a concept in the broader definition of Islam, relates to moral values of what is right and wrong with regard to personal conduct, particularly with regard to sexual relations outside marriage. In the Qu'ran, requirements for such values are the same for both men and women. In reality, due to culture more than actual religious texts, many Muslim women continue to shoulder the responsibilities of sexual propriety and family honor related to social conduct in heterosexual relationships. Women's bodies and public visibility, then, are a central concern in our generally conservative culture. It follows that women's participation in the sporting arena is contested because the dominant (Western/secular) sporting culture in and beyond schools can lead to high visibility of women's bodies and public mixed sex arenas (ibid).

Many people enjoy the Olympic Games as a peaceful venture of elite competition and goodwill. Reality shows there is a darker side to the Games a Muslim cleric in Iran interpreted, – a history of violent politics, doping, child abuse, removing people from their homes to build arenas, and much more – all for the worship of the medals and what they symbolize in the global arena. The extreme absorption into the sport that is necessary to produce an elite athlete, absent of a purified intention, is possibly a form of Shirk (polytheism). The true difficulty and dilemma to address is that Muslim women all over the world are forced to choose between three courses of action: observing the requirement to wear the hijab and not exercising and enjoying sport; observing the hijab requirement while struggling to find ways to be physically active which are not too uncomfortable and impractical; or simply taking off the hijab to achieve their athletic potential and enjoy good physical exercise (Amara 2012).

Before moving from the limitations of social classes, I would like to quote Radya, an illiterate cleaning woman in her thirties training all three children in karate at 50 LE per head per month in a local youth center in her informal neighborhood:

No not at all. I am proof that this (social classes) is not necessarily true. It is a matter of determination. I hope my daughter becomes one of the Olympics champions one day.

The final limitation I would like to tackle does not only affect athletic women in Egypt, it affects almost all women in Egypt, exactly 99.3% according to the latest statistics (HarassMap in Egypt, UNWomen, 2013). The final limitation is the pandemic called sexual harassment affecting Egyptian women athletes. It is due to this social plague that in Egypt, girls'/women's mobility is restricted and closely monitored. In addition to that, family honor is closely linked with daughters' reputations, thus a superiority is placed on her dignity and social behavior; venturing out into the public sphere is perceived to carry considerable threat to that. Sexual

harassment of adolescent girls in the public space is of course a significant problem. This harassment takes a number of forms, ranging from verbal teasing and "unwelcome compliments" to physical touching and hair pulling which transforms immediately as per the Egyptian law to sexual assault. More often than not girls/women are held responsible for boys'/men's behavior, it is unfortunately a gender privilege granted to boys. While parents expressed a desire to give their daughters greater freedom and new opportunities, they are also extremely conscious of not pushing boundaries too far because the price of disobeying social norms can be very high (Amara 2012).

Contrary to what some might believe, the latest harassment map in 2013 by The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women reported that out of 99.3 % of harassed women, only 2.1% were harassed because of inappropriate dress codes in Egypt (Harassment Map in Egypt, 2013). In that sense, revealing or inappropriate clothing usually means non-veiled women. Concerning the veil, by wearing the hijab, women accept responsibility for their own sexual victimization, instead of placing the blame squarely on their possible attackers. They must broadcast their honor, moral integrity and religiosity at the expense of their sexual agency which has encouraged harassment in Egypt and endorsed concepts about placing the blame on the woman, further victimizing women. The values that define proper Muslim womanhood require a denial of sexual identity, while granting men the privilege of an unquestioned overactive sexuality (Diffendal, 2006). As my fieldwork will show shortly not only have there been some sexual harassments and sexual assaults that happened from both coaches as well as passersby in public spaces towards athletic women, during the interviews not a single interlocutor knew the legal difference between what is defined as sexual harassment and sexual assault. Ignorance about this issue just adds insult to injury.

Unawareness about the distinction between both definitions stems from several sources. The distinction between both violations is key in terms of awareness about this phenomenon since there are different legal implications that the victim should be aware of. One way to investigate this is to access is how well did the Egyptian cinema industry in the past decade portray and promote awareness against sexual harassment and sexual assault in the movies produced. I certainly cannot think of a movie to better present this issue other than the top prize winner of the 2010 Dubai International Film Festival Egyptian movie “678” by director Mohamed Diab. This movie was controversial in many ways, namely some attorneys wanted to block the film from the Festival due to its poor portrayal of Egypt (Eskander, 2010). The filmmaker denied any intent to smear Egypt’s reputation or encourage violence against men, the harassers in any way. The movie is simply portraying how a serious epidemic like sexual harassment evolved in the Egyptian society and how women were advised to overcome it and defend themselves against it. There was no intent from the director to purposely frame Egypt in an unjust insulting way. The movie deals with women from the upper, middle, and low classes all dealing with sexual harassment in various situations. This movie deals with how women are brought up in Egypt and the many unjust representations that frame their lives, as they must live by these representations every day. By far the movie 678 is the only Egyptian movie to discuss sexual harassment so openly from many angles. After my own analysis of the movie, there are two main critiques to be noted from my perspective as a researcher in this domain. The first of them of course is that both sexual harassment and sexual assault are two very different matters, yet the distinction is not even mentioned not once throughout the entire movie. All three women were subjected to sexual harassment that quickly jumped to sexual assault in the events of the movie, yet not once have any of the characters in the movie said “sexual assault”, even as they

tried to file a complaint at the police department. Apart from it being legally incorrect, this movie's goal was to expose this phenomenon from several angles and raise ample awareness about the gravity of this issue on women in Egypt. It has done so quite well from a social perspective; however, it does not tackle the legal perspective, which is a rather important one.

Hearing the words "sexual assault" has a more significant impact rather than "sexual harassment". The director and scriptwriter should have focused on the distinction instead of deciding that all the sexual violations that happened were sexual "harassment". The instant the victim is touched, sexual harassment becomes sexual assault. Throughout the movie, this is not highlighted not even once.

The second critique in my point of view is that the director did not care to discuss how this phenomenon all started in Egypt. I believe to analyze how this started; one would need to look at how women are represented in the Egyptian society and how traditions have condemned women from my perspectives. But, perhaps due to the heightened sensitivity of this matter in Egypt, Diab could not afford to highlight the importance of this point in the movie.

As commonly defined from several generic sources, sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual advances, sexual gestures, actions of sexual nature, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when the compliance to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly either privately or publicly (UNWomen, 2013). Why this distinction is deemed important is a good question to ask. In the eyes of the Egyptian law, there is a clear distinction between touching which is legally defined as sexual assault and any other act of non-touching sexual harassment. Quite simply, the law in Egypt defines the crime of sexual harassment, which is a misdemeanor, as motivated by the sexual desires and fulfillment of

the offender. Sexual violence in Egypt can also serve a political purpose: to discourage women from political participation (Al-Rifai, 2014).

Sexual harassment is a prevalent social problem that harms women both physically and psychologically and violates their basic rights to safety and mobility. How women were viewed, perceived and represented in our society, movies, and culture helped cultivate this image of vulnerability and fragility of women in Egypt. Women are brought up to learn how to hide from the public, never talk back to harassers, to avoid all eye contact. Women are brought up to fear the public, to limiting their existence out on the street for any reason at all whether it is for work, education or leisure which translates to being athletic at times.

And because of the shaming culture and the idea of “blaming the victim” sexual harassment is underreported all over the globe, especially in Egypt where family honor is tied to women’s demeanor. Stigma and shame prevent many targets of sexual harassment from talking about or reporting these crimes. New technologies and social media platforms open up possibilities to overcome some of the barriers to data collection on sexual providing women with an alternative way to report sexual harassment, has enjoyed great success in generating debates and discussions around the issue. Moreover, it has provided a venue where both women and men can share experiences and stories as well as their reactions and positions on sexual harassment of technology in addressing sexual harassment in public space. It examines the use of technologies in reporting incidents of sexual harassment and provides insights into the perceptions and experiences. The public bus can be easily used as a metaphor for extreme instances of uncivilized harassment, thought to typically occur on this cheap type of transport. While buses were part of the daily routines of most Cairenes, men and women, most upper-middle-class reported that they had never and would never enter even a public bus, especially women. I

personally remembered the first and last time I decided to try that bus with my friends I was terrified and apprehensive the entire time almost extremely sure that I will either get sexually assaulted or mugged on the bus. My parents were both quite upset with me for pulling a stunt like that. This is how stigmatized riding public transportation is in Egypt. The two acceptable means of public transport were the new service lines of luxury air-conditioned buses (2 LE; €0.50) and the subway which still is not the cleanest safest means of transportation to use however where the first two compartments are reserved for women only.

Transportation serves as one of the limitations for women embarking on sports. It's hard enough without a car to crowd people and get harassed in every way almost every second of the day while women go to their schools, universities or workplaces, when asked about what discourages them to be 'athletic', unless the interlocutors lived in extravagant gated compounds where there are either exclusive sporting clubs to workout in or spacious safe gardens with security personnel guarding the place, attempting to use the available 'public' means of transportation to pursue sports was seen as a very heavy burden.

Most women I interviewed either opted to walk on treadmills at home or use YouTube videos. Some of them also saw this as a convenient option especially because of the veil. Working out with the veil after crowding through Cairo's public transportation just is not the most appealing vision to a lot of my interlocutors. Eman an AUC student spoke about her sexual assault incident that she reported to me as sexual harassment, as expected, not knowing the distinction:

I want to share my experience regarding my coach and my parents when it came down to me doing Olympic lifting especially that I experienced sexual harassment from my coach at 21 years of age. Well usually he coached my younger brother and myself while my father was always present. It was all nice and fun, he was super nice. However once both

my father nor my brother could come to practice and he wanted to show me a certain maneuver or stance at the table so he held me waist in a manner I felt and knew was inappropriate and made me very uncomfortable. I kept thinking of why he specifically chose to do this when both my father and brother were not there. Also there was no one else training in the room, just the two of us. I told my dad later when he picked me up and he was very frustrated, however my dad is a little bit passive yet being a really good person. He likes the idea of girls revolution, but since he believes it is not going anywhere then why bother with actually doing anything? Let's just keep a low profile and mind our own business in life without much hassle. Especially that in this case I have no evidence, so it is my word against the coach's plus a scandal that I would pay the price for. All we could do was cancel the training, and that was the end of it. This was his reaction. So I had to give up playing the sport, the reaction was on me, not the coach. He was not reported anywhere. I was confused, disappointed and shocked really since I actually liked my coach and I trusted him to teach my how to actually train well. It is all I wanted, to do this sport well. Although I loved table tennis, after this experience I kept asking myself if I actually still love it at all. It has scarred me deeply although I was playing it since I was seven when my father first taught me.

Eman told me this experience with much anger and bitterness at both that coach and her father's reaction. She understood why her father was passive but still couldn't understand why he didn't stand up for her. Instead, he told her not to go anymore.

O* a 37 year old professional rower also has experience with what she falsely named sexual harassment when in fact it was an incident of sexual assault:

Mind you, the federation and clubs here assign weak coaches for the girls'/women's team, if the coach was good, he would train the men, not the women. And the coach cannot be young, or else he would sexually harass the girls, and it actually happened. He would give single girls/women appointments for training privately, we had no idea. Another coach, a senior actually, used to touch girls a lot during training. Then they decided to get us a very rude coach, at least he won't harass. The problem is that we actually do get attached to our coach and we might hug and kiss him after a victory. Apparently this gesture, this small moment of triumph where emotions are shown was an issue with the clubs. Coaches would fight over us for that small moment, they would get to kiss us. After our coach died, another coach came along who wanted to either be part of the "successful" girls' team or to be emotionally attached to us. So he used to butter us up. Being the eldest rower, I found out that he wanted to be close to us girls not for the sake of the game, rather to sweet talk us. I discovered that and ratted him out. Naturally, he fought to get me off the team accusing me of being a bad rower and the federation refused to believe me and the rest of the girls. He was openly harassing me and other girls and at one point I was going to hit him at the national championship. I left the team after

the federation officially disbarred me. He is still a trainer until now. He was a retired major and had that authoritative attitude. I felt singled out as a sexual object and a weak woman. Women need to be empowered by the governmental organizations.

O* also tells me of her running experience in the streets of Cairo as part of her warm –up for the rowing practice and the amount of sexual harassment she and her team mates endured:

Cairo Runners changed the social perception in Egypt and I could personally kiss them myself for that. I used to run in the streets of Cairo since 1996, to warm up since the rowing clubs are too tiny for mass warm ups, the only solution was to run in the streets. We were a group of girls/women at 7 am who ran the streets around the clubs which are not gated communities, high class areas, on the contrary. And we ran the streets wearing spandex or tight pants because that's what we rowed with. It was hell. And this applied to both the higher & lower ends of Cairo. Even the soldiers guarding embassies along with all the passersby, people waiting for the bus, merchants...everyone harassed us, even girls would make fun of us. Once we were rowing in a narrow poor part of the Nile (kasr el einy), suddenly stones were thrown at us and we were cursed just because we were girls rowing! This is why I know what I am talking about when I say the Cairo Runners changed the perception of women playing sports since I used to run in the streets of Cairo for years (two decades) before their emergence. My friends used to beg me to join the runs, but because of the s*** I endured for years, I just loathe running in the streets. It is something I hate because I have seen the ugliest side of running in the streets. I ran everywhere around the Nile. Downtown Cairo was a nightmare. Our streets mostly have men lingering in them not women, and we were fair game to anyone in it. I had to tailor special pants that were lightweight, athletic, fit for running and rowing as wide as I can possibly endure just so I do not feel the guilt of perhaps sexually appealing to anyone and so I feel less guilty about existing in the street. I did not want to feel like I was seducing anyone. My existence in the street is not an invitation to be inspected in the street from head to toe. I did not know that harassment is wrong, I thought it was the norm, so I had to take my own precautions. Apart from the kind of verbal harassment we endure as we row is horrendous, the kind of people who exist under the bridges of the Nile are mostly thugs, drug addicts and scum of the society basically. The fishermen were actually quite polite and supportive, they never harassed us. The verbal harassment we got implied that our coach wanted something sexual from us. We are rowing to go to a destination to have sex basically, this is how low it got. This came from kids and men who harassed us.

O's frustration during our two hour long interview as she carefully took her time to remember every single detail in her athletic career that has negatively impacted her truly touched me. Her experience as a senior athlete coming from a middle social class enriched my field notes and added some much needed perspective to me as a researcher.

Dena Anwar, a writer aged 34 and an avid woman's rights activist also interprets this phenomenon to the following:

The mere idea of a girl playing martial arts is mostly to defend herself, and her honor against rape or harassment, not because she actually wants to or to be a strong woman. It is about preserving her virginity or her honor until someone legitimately takes it via a marriage certificate.

Abdulla Hussien a Cairo Runners manager aged 26 tells his own perspective concerning harassment as well as the impact of social levels on athletic women:

Talking about the acceptability of sports in the Egyptian culture, I was doing interval training sprinting then jogging, so a guy in a car decided to mock how I was running out loud from his car publicly ridiculing me. He really hit my nerves and anger was about to build up in me, I really could not understand why he did that. Why did he not encourage me or just remain silent instead of do something to kick me out of my positive mood. This only a week ago. It was at about 10 am. I was offended than surprised. This is not the first incident as a guy being harassed. Many male runners have experienced the same thing. Now this is what happens to guys, can you imagine how it is for a girl/woman, where it looks even further odd. Culture makes it a taboo for a girl to be running in the street. We are not accustomed to see anyone become athletic in Egypt, especially girls. It is weird to us as a culture. Acceptability of people walking or jogging in the streets is very localized in Egypt. Some areas have streets famous for that, others do not. Like for example five or six years ago seeing a group of people run in the streets was extremely weird, highly unorthodox, now, not so much, it is actually a fast growing trend now. Even cycling, especially on weekends. So the point is we just need to break the stereotypes. Furthermore the degree of harassment, sexual or not for both genders will vary according to the social level of the area used for sports in Egypt. It will not cease to exist I believe, but the severity of it depends on the social level of the community in these areas. People in less fortunate areas are even less accustomed to see girls being athletic in the street. It could also be associated with her outfit. It might provoke a guy to mock her for being athletic, or just that she exists alone in the street, like she is defying him. It also has to do with his upbringing. Some homes raise boys to respect others, religion sometimes helps restrain boys from harassing others, even by catcalling. Education and family have a huge effect on how we act towards others in the public space. It is more of a social class issue. Higher social classes are not expected to conduct in this behavior as often as the lower social classes too. Also compounds with security personnel are less prone to harassment. Furthermore, definitely women have more obstacles to face more than men. Like pregnancy that can severely slow down or halt their athletic progress. Or the monthly period once a month. At CR we try to maintain gender equality as much as possible (equal number of winners in both genders). To encourage more participation from women, we want the mothers to join too not just young women. Even the running themes were targeting certain female groups like "women's day" or "breast cancer awareness

day'. The purpose of these events is to prompt more girls to join runs in the street. These ideas came from CR as team, both genders.

Concluding Notes:

The limitations featured in this chapter attempts to explain some of the hardships many women need to go through within themselves, their families and the social circles around them to pursue athletic aspirations. Throughout my fieldwork and analysis of the relevant texts I could not help but think of how hard women have to fight and the amount of precautions that need to be taken to do something globally seen as 'simple' as playing sports. The dynamics about women's bodies, the shaming and blaming culture, and the vulnerability even the social class segregation play intricate roles in this predicament. I marveled at an illiterate woman's determination to use every ounce of meager hopes of a sports facility to bring up athletic daughters while other high class , better educated women would not even think of her entitlement to pursue sports just like them. Radya was surprised and glad to discover Cairo Runners. Of course, her Facebook circles do not coincide with these westernized cultures, yet she expressed how she would be the first woman in her humble poor neighborhood to run with them if they came.

Interviewing Radya to me by far was not only enlightening to see how a total different class than the ones I typically saw and interacted with thought. It was also extremely uplifting to see different levels of awareness develop in our society. This is outstanding woman, who should a role model in my opinion, was basically brought up to conform to the worst traditions ever. Being without wealth, without education and ultimately with very little social power, she does not afford to defy these norms either figuratively speaking or physically as in to enroll her children to elite sport centers where they could at least find decent bathrooms to use or where

drugs would not be done. Her name “Radya” means ‘to be content’ And she truly was as she spoke of her life and her girls. Radya is a woman I wish I could see more like, in all social classes. She is a woman determined to succeed with whatever she has available. Out of the many stories I heard from my interlocutors discussing the hardships women go through with their families, Shaimaa, the Hiking Club co-founder aged 30 had a story that left me stunned:

As a co-founder of the THC, I have not had to speak and convince parents myself but one of our female friends had a rather extreme issue with her parents and hiking. They urged her to seek psychological help because they were convinced that she hiked because she was mentally unstable. Because she was jealous of other people getting married including her sister and she is still not. This was the most bizarre case I have encountered so far. She was seen as a crazy person. Every single trip was a nightmare to her. At that point, my friend and another friend decided to go to her parents and try to convince them since they saw us as a bunch of ‘unethical/immoral’ women who are certainly not marriage material, also I am married to the THC founder whom I met while hiking myself! This was a 30 year old financially independent woman.

The state needs to devise ways to make sports more accessible through providing services funded by taxes. It is unrealistic and unfair that mainly the elite get to choose between the different sports to play. Public spaces of an athletic nature should exist within all neighborhoods across the country, playing sports freely should not be tied to the luxury of gated areas only or how probable or not sexual attacks on women may happen, physical education must be taken seriously in educational establishments, children need to learn about the effects of malnourishment and not making sports a crucial part of their everyday lives. Girls in particular need to be encouraged from their parents and their teachers to play sports of their choice without any boundaries and considerations. Girls need to be educated that it is their own bodies not the entire family’s or society’s to control. Girls need to learn to play sports for pleasure not only for self-defense in case their ‘honor’ is compromised. By far the number one reason I heard from my female interlocutors who played martial arts is to learn how to defend themselves. The very next reason was to ‘relieve stresses’. Seldom did I hear to ‘enjoy myself’, as if dedicating leisurely

time needs to be justified. The boys I interviewed would usually express 'to boost my self-confidence' or to 'have fun' on the contrary to girls. Men have little to fear in the streets, women have everything to fear on the other hand.

Dena Anwar , a feminist writer aged 34 shares her opinion on the effects of these various limitations:

As for people who encourage girls to pursue more delicate dainty feminine sports, I interpret them as people who want the girl to remain in a fragile weak state to be submissive and dominated. In order for men to remain powerful and dominant, women must be docile, vulnerable, and fragile. This is accented especially with the kind of men we have in Egypt. Internally these men are rather weak, they are not brought up correctly by their mothers. They are already privileged and hence do not work hard in life, the best way to maintain this dominance and masculinity complex is to keep women weak and submissive. A strong athletic woman will certainly intimidate men. My own limitations regarding sports were after puberty. My uncles from my mom's side made a huge deal about every breath I took especially if involved anything against the social norms, so did my older brother. My father may he rest in peace was the only true supporter and he would force my brother not to interfere with my life choices. I was his equal not his guardian. My mother was an employee at the ministry of youth and sports and so was quite enthusiastic about sports for myself, but still, her limits was what society would allow for a girl. She had several reservations on my athletic and lifestyle choices and she still has. Classically, after my early marriage and divorce I was able to regain my personality again and pursued my favorite two sports swimming and tennis again, regaining my personalities and qualities all over again finally after giving it all up for a man who fears the social norms more than anything else. I also returned to dancing, which is also my passion. After my divorce I decided to do everything I was forbidden to do. Social standard makes a big difference with women athletes in Egypt. Simply because the mentality of most lower classes do not believe that girls can have dreams or objectives of their own. Girls are brought up in that social standard to become domestic with a flare too to become wives and mothers regardless if it fits them or not. They are not given any other alternatives, maybe education and a simple career can be on that list but the priority goes to being a wife and a mother, so definitely sports is not even an option. A husband is the person who will come and relieve the family of this 'burden', plus marriages bring money to girls' families at that level, sports do not. No use to encourage an activity that not only will further slim her chances to get married off, no financial outcome as well will come out of it. Being a dedicated athlete or even leading an athletic lifestyle requires having a supportive family, a club or gym membership, safe means of transportation, flexible schedules, time planning, certain nutrition plans, and athletic outfits. This costs money and time, money that parents of these girls at that social level will not spare. They would rather spend their time and money bringing up domestic girls to make wonderful wives instead. Now that would certainly increase their chances to get married, not becoming athletic.

I believe while the gender segregated gyms provide private exclusive outlets for some women to be athletic yet it reinforces the idea that women cannot access public spaces freely. They may have solved a problem for one segment but in my point of view, created a bigger problem for all women who fight every day to prove their right to claim their existence in the public spaces around them. Even if these gyms cater to a certain religious segment of athletic women in Egypt, they are detrimental to the majority. I can say the same concerning the veil which according to Dena Anwar one of my interlocutors is a label to religious privileges and superiority, as if the bearers of it possess more piety than others. It is just another means of segregation affirming the sanctity and 'holiness' of women's bodies. In her point of view the veil is one of the most important tools used to objectify women's bodies.

The state also needs to put its attention and funding to governmentally funded youth centers that do not cater to any sport other than football in abysmal conditions and certainly more males than females dare enter these centers. Many of these centers harbor drug abusers and drug dealers. Families need to encourage the women in them to follow their athletic dreams instead of closely monitor their moves and clothing as well as their social demeanors. Adolescence for a girl is just as disrupting and upsetting as it is for a boy and the body needs to figure out a way out for these newfound stresses. Biologically women's bodies go through more changes requiring more adaptation skills, sports would be one of the healthiest ways out for that. Young women cannot be brought up to only view 'success' in the form of a marriage and children just because society applauds this. Girls cannot wait to either be seen as spinsters, or get divorced or widowed or orphaned just to gain basic human rights of governing herself by herself and not through everyone else. Federations need to push for more women interactions, coaches must be assigned with equality, it is unfair to keep assigning the weaker coaches to girls and the more qualified

coaches to boys. All forms of media should raise ample awareness and highlight the various limitations women face in their everyday lives from various angles in efforts to educate people on how limiting and stifling this is with negative impacts on the quality of women's lives. The government should work on cooperating with the existing athletic initiatives in a manner that encourages their businesses to boom. A supportive boost from the government will inherently positively affect the country's economic profile from several aspects namely concerning international tourism for sports which is a hot growing trend globally and that will ultimately force changes on how this culture accepts or even presents athletic women.

Finally when I asked my interlocutors despite these hardships, so we are we still doing this? Some women told me that eventually they stopped because the fight was too hard, like N*, the AUC professor. After her father forbade her to perform after a year's practice of gymnastics, she lost interest. Eman's sexual assault incident made her shy away from table tennis and seek to feel stronger and more confident at Olympic Lifting. Shaimaa and my other hiker friends are determined to keep hiking and advocating for our right to do this extreme sport just like men. Jessie despite almost losing her life on her motorbike because of a sexual harassment incident still rides until today to show her own daughter how what doesn't kill you, makes you stronger. The main answer I got was the sense of euphoria, liberation, strength and accomplishment sports gives women. Defying social norms in our culture as women isn't an easy or pleasurable task. But doing that through what we love as athletic women conveys our message with passion and pride. One of the most positive outcomes after almost every interview was to see how my research topic sparked a sense of strength, pride and determination in my interlocutors' eyes. It made me as a researcher more confident to dig deeper into the topic to make the voices of these wonderful women heard and respected.

Chapter 5

Conclusive Thoughts

Ultimately data collected during fieldwork showed that all of the factors influencing the exclusion of females from the athletic scene on both professional and amateur levels had adverse effects on women. They have limited the level of encouragement provided from their families as well as the government through the portrayal of cultural norms as well as through failing to establish of women's institutions that support and encourage women's sports in Egypt in order to promote and develop the current status of women's sports. As a result of this, there are no explicit organizations that encourage women's participation in sports; the affordable governmental subsidized facilities are not suitable, and there is a lack of modern facilities even within some expensive gyms for women. For example, most women only gyms do not have the same equipment the mixed or men only gyms have, nor do the gyms staff themselves care to maintain the existing equipment there either. Finally, the equipment that women need to use to train in some sports is either not available, insufficient, or it is inadequate. It is true though that on a bigger scale female athletes in Egypt receive much support from their parents and society in general compared to women of the Gulf countries for example and other parts of the Arab world. This is mostly due to the acceptance of gender integration relative to other parts of the Arab world, it was brought to light that some also had support from their male counterparts, which has propelled these women to experience positive results at competitions in the Arab nations and across the world (Khalaf, 2014).

The negative views upon women's sport remain however prevalent among many modern societies although mostly in the lower less privileged classes mainly due to the lack of exposure to western cultures and for a fear of loss of identity or the possible compromise of cultural or even societal values. Even from a unifying perspective, individuals disagree on the role that females should play – one stating that they do not “prefer mixing between boys and girls.” In addition, “It is not allowed to mix between genders within the majority of the Islamic society”, results in the general opinion that allegedly Islamic individuals should not “support that” when discussing female sport (Khalaf, 2014). In reality, Egyptian women have not had the opportunity to develop religious notions of what the physical education curriculum should consist of, neither from an ideological nor a practical perspective (Zaman, 1997). Therefore, for some of the young women I interviewed involvement in physical activity and sport was a difficult struggle on several levels. It was problematic for them or their families to embrace mainly since Western societal values where athletic lifestyles and values stem from have divorced physical fitness and health from the non-secular reality which cannot be ignored in a country like Egypt.

While secular Muslim feminists are seeking to separate religion from the state and to secure freedom of religion, Islamic feminists are pursuing the possibility of operating within an Islamic paradigm in accordance with the Shariah law (Badran, 2005). As a result, in certain countries the infrastructure has been established for girls' and women's sports (Khalaf, 2014). However, while this is a good start to affording females equality in sport, great differences still remain between these countries regarding the resources available for boys and girls. In addition, for men and women who participate in single-sex settings or in public venues, wearing what identifies as Islamic clothing can make the situation more complex and widens the issue of equality much further than in the sporting world alone (ibid).

Diverting my attention to women athletes in our culture, 'sport' as it is made available to these women is largely perceived as both Western and masculine. It is clear that a major problem surrounding participation is the ways in which sport, physical activity and physical education are organized and made available and not necessarily the activities themselves (Zaman, 1997).. Local authorities need to work in conjunction with educational establishments to develop means that would enable young women to become positive role-models as sports coaches within the entire community. If people are educated enough to overcome their common deep-rooted prejudices and encourage young women to take leading positions in sports development and careers within the P.E. field, then some headway can be made in meeting the needs of young women and girls in sport, physical activity and physical education (ibid). This solution which further encourages gender segregation in my point of view may not provide optimum results in the entirety of the current situation across all social levels in Egypt, however based on the perceptions I have witnessed in my fieldwork, it might serve as a first step towards integrating sports on a higher more sustainable level in the lives of women in Egypt, especially within middle to lower social classes where western exposure is limited nor non-existent. Apart from changing the cultural mindset within the Egyptian community about athletic women, looking at how public spaces are being privatized now poses a more significant threat. In Egypt, being able to 'buy' your own private space is becoming a number one priority in almost every aspect of life. Public spaces are either diminishing or become inadequate.

On the point of how influential or controlling religious values with women and sports are, blaming religious texts is certainly not the main concept here. As briefly analyzed in the beginning of chapter three, the definition of religion lies heavily on the voice of the governing state. How high or low the voice of religion is in any given community lies on a political agenda

set by the state. The religious texts in Islam have been around since the year 640. How the cultural norms in Egypt took several turns for women differed greatly not due to the religious texts, but rather due to the recruitment of specific religious texts and interpretation from the state to serve a specific political agenda. Based on this argument, blaming religion exclusively for changes in our cultural heritage loses context. Studying the political agenda and the financial effect of the gulf countries for example behind how the religious establishments in Egypt were either reinforced or silenced across the years would reveal much more in this domain. This is not to deny how some restrains in Islam has certainly affected athletic women's lifestyles in Egypt. However through my research and my fieldwork I was able to investigate how religious values affected some women of certain classes, and how other women chose to interpret these same restrictions differently. Not everyone believed that religion was to blame for their lack of sportsmanship. Islam poses certain restrictions for women playing sports, however they can be overcome by several means. It is the cultural heritage that poses a bigger risk for most of my interlocutors. This heritage is a build-up of many factors, religion included.

It is important here whether we disagree with these needs or not to respect the differences in our diverse society. The solutions offered as a 'liberation' from religious shackles could very much be seen as disrespectful and violating to others (Aboul Loghoud, 2002). The fact that sports as a culture is already foreign to our society does not need to be further alienated by completely adopting it as is, a need to customize this lifestyle is vital in order to be able to properly integrate it in our society across all paradigms.

A range of actors should be involved in and collaborating on promoting increased access, involvement and benefits for women and girls in all areas of sport (UN Women, 2007). These include governments, public authorities, sporting organizations at the local, national and

international levels, research and training institutions, women's organizations and networks, and development agencies. Individuals who are involved with promoting, conducting, researching, reporting on and in any way influencing sporting activities such as coaches, trainers, managers, other officials, journalists and athletes themselves should also be actively involved. A major challenge which remains inadequately addressed is identifying means of developing accountability of these key actors.

On another reflective note, it is not only gender and culture that determine our relation with sports. Insurance companies also have control over our bodies and athletic choices. The different kinds of sports are categorized by their health hazard to accordingly set a financial insurance scale. Also lifestyle habits like smoking has the same effect. There other biopolitics involved with sports, the human body and the state.

My thesis attempted to capture the challenges, limitations and experiences of a number of Egyptian women athletes on both an amateur and professional level discussing an array of dynamics existing in our society and culture that certainly have an effect on the way these women lead their lives following their athletic inspirations. It is also through my own personal experience having been forced to cease all athletic activity for a period of about 12 years due to common cultural fallacies laced by religious influences represented in a foul choice of a spouse in my early 20's that has prompted me to choose this topic now and truly appreciate the hardships athletic women in Egypt go through as they attempt to stand their grounds and gradually steadily change these dynamics surrounding them to create a more promising future for themselves and the future generations to come.

Egypt has come a long way concerning the dynamics that govern how women choose to lead their lives. It is through this research and many more to come that awareness will hopefully spread wide enough to enhance the quality of their lives in Egypt across all social and economics levels.

References:

- Abu-Lughod, Lila.** (1998). *Remaking Women - Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*. Princeton University Press.
- Aïna Chalabaev, Philippe Sarrazin, Paul Fontayne, Corentin Clément-Guillotin, & Julie Boiché.** (2013). The influence of sex stereotypes and gender roles on participation and performance in sport and exercise: Review and future directions. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 14*(2013), 136–144.
- Anouk de Koning.** (2009). Gender, Public Space and Social Segregation in Cairo: Of Taxi Drivers, Prostitutes and Professional Women. *Antipode, 41*(3), 533–556.
- Aseel Sawalha.** (2014). Gendered Space and Middle East Studies. *International Journal Middle East Studies, 46*(1), 166–168.
- Badran, M.** (2005). *Feminists, Islam, and Nation Gender and the making of Modern Egypt*. Princeton University Press.
- Blakeman, H.** (2014). *The Muslim Veil in America: A Symbol of Oppression or Empowerment?*. University of Maine, Honors College , paper 150. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1149&context=honors>
- Bullock, K.** (2010). *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil*. International Institute of Islamic Thought.
- Butler, J., & Judith Butler.** (2006). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Diffendal, C.** (2006). The Modern Hijab: Tool of Agency, Tool of Oppression. *Annual Review of Undergrad Research , College of Charleston, 5*, 129–136.
- Emily Dyer.** (2013). *Marginalising Egyptian Women - The restriction of women's rights under*

the Muslim Brotherhood. The Henry Jackson society.

Ezzat, A. (2010, October 30). Hijab: The Politics and History behind the Veil. *Dissident Voice*.

Retrieved from <http://dissidentvoice.org/2010/10/hijab-the-politics-and-history-behind-the-veil/>

Gertrud Pfister. (2010). Outsiders: Muslim Women and Olympic Games – Barriers and

Opportunities. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 27, 16–18.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2010.508291>

Ghannam, F. (n.d.). *Remaking the Modern: Space, Relocation, and the Politics of Identity in a*

Global Cairo. University of California Press, 2002.

Harassment Map in Egypt. (2013). Retrieved from [http://harassmap.org/ar/wp-](http://harassmap.org/ar/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/UN-Women-Sexual-Harassment-Study-Egypt-Final-AR-c.pdf)

[content/uploads/2013/03/UN-Women-Sexual-Harassment-Study-Egypt-Final-AR-c.pdf](http://harassmap.org/ar/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/UN-Women-Sexual-Harassment-Study-Egypt-Final-AR-c.pdf)

Hargreaves, & Vertinsky. (2007). *Physical culture, power, and the body*. London & New York:

Routledge.

Hasina Zaman. (1997). Islam, Well-being and Physical Activity: Perceptions of Muslim Young

Women. In *Researching Women and Sport* (1st ed., pp. 50–67). MACMILLAN PRESS LTD.

Homa Khaleeli. (2012, July 23). Sports hijabs help Muslim women to Olympic success. *The*

Guardian. Retrieved from [https://www.theguardian.com/sport/the-womens-blog-with-jane-](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/the-womens-blog-with-jane-martinson/2012/jul/23/sports-hijabs-muslim-women-olympics)

[martinson/2012/jul/23/sports-hijabs-muslim-women-olympics](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/the-womens-blog-with-jane-martinson/2012/jul/23/sports-hijabs-muslim-women-olympics)

Kamal, Rabab (2018) “*Women in the Realm of Islamic Fundamentalism*”, Dar Ibn Roshd

Publication

Kimberly Hively, & Amani El-Alayli. (2013). “You throw like a girl:” The effect of stereotype

threat on women’s athletic performance and gender stereotypes. *Psychology of Sport and*

Exercise, 15(2014), 48–55.

Koning, A. (2009). *Global Dreams: Class, Gender, and Public Space in Cosmopolitan Cairo*.

American Univ in Cairo Press, 2009.

Kristin Walseth, & Kari Fasting. (2003). Islam's view on physical activity and sport: Egyptian Women Interpreting Islam. *SAGE Publications - INTERNATIONAL REVIEW FOR THE SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT*, 38(1), 45–60.

Lefebvre, Henri. (1991). *The production of space*. Oxford, OX, UK: Blackwell.

Lila Aboul Loghoud. (2002). Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others. *AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST*, 104(3), 783–790.

Lila Aboul Loghoud. (2010). The Active social life of “Muslim Women’s Rights”: A Plea for Ethnography, not Polemic, with cases from Egypt and Palestine. *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, 6(1), 1–45.

Mahfoud Amara. (2012). Veiled Women Athletes in the 2008 Beijing Olympics: Media Accounts. *Routledge - The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 29(4), 638–651.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2012.658194>

Martha Brady. (2005). Creating Safe Spaces and Building Social Assets for Young Women in the Developing World: A New Role for Sports. *The Feminist Press at the City University of New York*, 33(1/2), pp. 35–49.

Michel De Certeau. (1984). *The Practice of the Everyday Life*. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS Berkeley and Los Angeles. California.

Mohamed senger. (2017, April 9). Report: 20% increase in bicycle prices at Bescletta bicycle exhibitions. *Vetogate*.

Morsey, M. (2012). Safe city free of violence against women and girls is a safe city for everyone Egypt's experience. Retrieved from <https://ema.revues.org/3026>

Murray, J. (2007). *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*. Judith M.

- Bennett. *Speculum*, 82(4), 961–962. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0038713400011416>
- Nazra.** (2013, July 28). Nazra Feminist Studies. Retrieved from <http://nazra.org/en/2013/07/analytical-paper-right-women-public-political-space>
- PHADKE, S.** (2007). Phadke, S (2007) “ Dangerous Liaisons: Women and Men: Risk and Reputation in Mumbai” ; *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 8 2007(1500-1518).
- Piquemal, L.** (2015). *New gender-related Struggles in Egypt since 2011* (Vol. 13). EGYPTE: MONDE ARABE.
- Priscilla Offenhauer.** (2005). *Women in Islamic Societies - The Neopatriarchal Family and the Role of the State* (Social Science) (pp. 58–63). USA: Library of the Congress - Federal Research Division.
- Robert Fernea.** (2003). Gender, sexuality and patriarchy in modern Egypt. *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies - Taylor & Francis Group*, 12(2), 141–153.
- Sanabel Bader Hamad Khalaf.** (2014, August 1). *Arabic women’s participation in sport: Barriers and motivation among Egyptian and Kuwaiti athletes* (Ph.D). University of Wales, Bangor, UK, UK.
- Scott, Joan.** (1986). Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis. *American Historical Association*, 91(5), 1053–1075.
- Shahnaz Taplin-Chinoy.** (2012, October 22). Is Islam Compatible With Women’s Sports, Fitness and Health? *The Huffington Post*.
- Spain, Daphne** (1993). Gendered spaces and women's status. *_Sociological Theory_* 11 (2):137-151.
- Susan J. Bandy.** (2014). Gender and sports studies: an historical perspective. *Movement & Sport Sciences – Science & Motricit’*, 86(2014), 15–27.
- Tadamon.** (2014, February 16). The Right to Public Space in The Egyptian Constitution.

Tadamon. Retrieved from <http://www.tadamun.co/2014/02/16/the-right-to-public-space-in-the-egyptian-constitution/?lang=en#.Wq4rLB1uYdU>

Tansin Benn, Haifaa Jawad, & Yousra Al-Sinani. (2010). The Role of Islam in the Lives of Girls and Women in Physical Education and Sport. In *Muslim Women and Sport* (p. Ch. 17: 255–270). Taylor & Francis, 2010.

United Nations. (2007). *Women, gender equality and sport* (Athletic) (pp. 2–30). UNITED NATIONS Division for the Advancement of Women Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Wael Eskandar. (2010, December 20). 678 unveils one of Egypt's taboos. *Alahmram Online*.

Walter Armbrust. (1996). Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt. *Cambridge University Press*, 275 pp.

Yasmeen Iqbal Qureshi, & Soniha Aslam Ghouri. (2011). Muslim female athletes in sports and dress code: major obstacle in international competitions. *Journal of Experimental Sciences*, 2(11), 9–13.